

**An Exploration of Collaboration Between  
Employers, Professional Bodies and Academics  
in Business Curricula in UK Higher Education  
Institutions: A Phenomenological Study**

**Angela Dalrymple**

**Supervised by: Professor Annette Fillery-Travis  
& Dr. Malcolm McLean**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of a  
Doctorate in Professional Practice**

**University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

**December 2023**

## **Declaration**

I declare that:

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed:

(Candidate)

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### **STATEMENT 1**

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed:

(Candidate)

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

### **STATEMENT 2**

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

Signed:

(Candidate)

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

I hereby give my consent that the thesis, if successful, may be made available for inter-library loan (subject to the law of copyright), and that the title and summary may be available to outside organisations. That once the thesis is deposited, the item and its metadata may be incorporated into public access catalogues or services, such as national databases of electronic theses.

Signed:

(Candidate)

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been encouraged by the advice and support provided by key colleagues and family members. I would like to express my particular thanks to the following:

Professor Annette Fillery-Travis, my Director of Studies, for her extremely helpful advice, topic guidance, kindness, and positive support.

Dr Malcolm McLean, my supervisor, for his wise methodological input and kindness.

The colleagues and respondents who participated in the research discussion guide for this thesis, and who provided views of significant interest.

My wonderful family, particularly my amazing husband and our two sons and dogs, whose support and encouragement have proved instrumental throughout the research process.

My dear late parents and aunt, who inspired me so much along my lifelong educational journey, and who were always so proud of my educational aspirations.

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to provide a phenomenological exploration of the practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education. This research is topical and significant, as it explores the professional practice of collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in UK university business curriculum design and delivery at a time when industry, government and education policy changes are increasingly driving industry-informed business curriculum development to improve graduate outcomes, employability, and knowledge transfer. The insights gained from this research can therefore benefit UK higher education institutions, employers, and professional bodies in designing models for collaboration in business curricular design and delivery in an increasingly complex UK higher education environment. Literature sources were reviewed relating to curricular collaboration, co-creation, co-production, and best practice in successful collaborative relationships. Primary research data was gathered from in-depth qualitative interviews with 8 employers, 4 professional bodies and 20 UK university academics in UK business school curriculum and graduate employability development roles. The study findings identified that effective business curriculum collaboration can have significantly positive impacts on graduate outcomes, student employability skills, future-proofed curriculum design, commercial and civic relationships between universities, employers, and professional bodies. The thematic interpretivist analysis of the interviews revealed a willingness to participate in innovative business curricular collaboration, tempered by a lack of structural and operational resources and

frameworks to implement this effectively in a connected manner. Key findings overall are that while there are pockets of highly successful business curriculum collaboration, real-world professional praxis concerning this phenomenon evidences several areas requiring improvement such as lack of resources, reward, systems, and processes to support collaboration effectively. This research provides evidence to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of UK HEI business curricular collaboration between academics, employers, and professional bodies, and puts forward a conceptual framework for more effective collaborative curriculum relationships. The research should therefore contribute to future knowledge, through more holistic and connective conceptualisations of curriculum collaboration between employers, academics and professional bodies in business and management subject areas to transform curriculum design, delivery, knowledge transfer, and successful graduate outcomes.

# Table of Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| <b>Declaration</b> .....  | ii   |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....   | iv   |
| <b>Abstract</b> .....   | v    |
| <b>Table of Contents</b> .....  | vii  |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....  | xiv  |
| <b>List of Tables</b> .....   | xvi  |
| <b>Abbreviations</b> .....  | xvii |
| <b>1 Introduction</b> .....   | 1    |
| <b>1.1 Overall Introduction &amp; Importance of Business Engagement in UK<br/>    Higher Education</b> .....  | 1    |
| <b>1.2 Background to the Study</b> .....  | 6    |
| <b>1.3 Linkage to My Own Professional Practice</b> .....  | 8    |
| <b>1.4 Research Aims and Objectives</b> .....   | 10   |
| 1.4.1 Aims.....   | 10   |
| 1.4.2 Objectives .....  | 11   |
| <b>1.5 Scope of the Research</b> .....  | 12   |
| <b>1.6 Significance of the Research</b> .....   | 13   |
| <b>1.7 Thesis Structure</b> .....   | 14   |
| <b>2 Literature Review</b> .....  | 16   |
| Literature Search Strategy.....   | 22   |
| <b>2.1 Introduction, Background &amp; Context: Business Curriculum<br/>    Collaboration in UK HEIs</b> ..... | 24   |
| 2.1.1 Overview of the UK HEI Environment .....  | 24   |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 2.1.1.1 HEIs, Business Professional Bodies & Graduate Employers .....              | 25         |
| 2.1.1.2 Business & Management Subject Areas & Skills.....                          | 34         |
| 2.1.2 Key Drivers & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration .....         | 40         |
| 2.1.2.1 Changing Role of Curriculum .....  | 45         |
| 2.1.2.2 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking & Accreditation Drivers            | 49         |
| 2.1.2.3 Graduate Skills, Frameworks and Models .....                               | 60         |
| <b>2.2 Collaborative Curriculum Design &amp; Co-Creation .....</b>                 | <b>76</b>  |
| 2.2.1 Curriculum Design & Co-Creation Context .....                                | 76         |
| 2.2.1.1 Initiating & Resisting Curriculum Collaboration.....                       | 77         |
| 2.2.1.2 Role of the Practitioner Academic .....                                    | 81         |
| 2.2.2 Formal Curriculum Co-Creation .....  | 83         |
| 2.2.3 Informal Curriculum Co-Creation .....  | 87         |
| <b>2.3 Collaborative Curriculum Delivery &amp; Co-Production .....</b>             | <b>92</b>  |
| 2.3.1 Curriculum Co-Production & Delivery Context & Approaches.....                | 92         |
| 2.3.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity.....                             | 106        |
| <b>2.4 Maintaining Effective Collaborative Curriculum Relationships .....</b>      | <b>118</b> |
| 2.4.1 Relationships with Academic Staff & Alumni.....                              | 119        |
| 2.4.2 Curriculum Advisory Boards & Qualification Validation.....                   | 122        |
| 2.4.3 Local & Civic Collaboration .....  | 125        |
| <b>2.5 Success and Improvement in Collaborative Curriculum Relationships .....</b> | <b>128</b> |
| 2.5.1 Most Successful Aspects of Collaboration .....                               | 129        |
| 2.5.2 Collaboration Areas for Improvement .....                                    | 133        |
| <b>2.6 Summary &amp; Key Gaps in the Literature .....</b>                          | <b>136</b> |
| <b>3 Research Methodology.....</b>   | <b>140</b> |



|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....  | <b>140</b> |
| <b>3.2 Meeting the Research Aims and Objectives</b> .....  | <b>142</b> |
| <b>3.3 Research Outcomes</b> .....   | <b>142</b> |
| <b>3.4 Research Methodology &amp; Philosophy</b> .....   | <b>143</b> |
| 3.4.1 Research Paradigms, Ontology and Epistemology .....  | 143        |
| 3.4.2 Phenomenological Approach .....  | 147        |
| 3.4.3 Rationale for Qualitative Data Collection .....  | 152        |
| <b>3.5 Other Methodologies Considered</b> .....  | <b>155</b> |
| 3.5.1 Action Research.....   | 155        |
| 3.5.2 Grounded Theory .....  | 155        |
| <b>3.6 Data Collection Methods</b> .....   | <b>156</b> |
| 3.6.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews .....  | 156        |
| <b>3.7 Ethics, Authenticity and Transferability</b> .....  | <b>158</b> |
| <b>4 Project Activity &amp; Data Analysis</b> .....  | <b>161</b> |
| <b>4.1 Introduction</b> .....  | <b>161</b> |
| <b>4.2 Participants &amp; Sampling</b> .....   | <b>161</b> |
| <b>4.3 Data Collection and Analysis</b> .....  | <b>167</b> |
| <b>4.4 Thematic Data Analysis &amp; Coding</b> .....   | <b>168</b> |
| <b>5 Project Findings</b> .....  | <b>173</b> |
| <b>5.1 Introduction</b> .....  | <b>173</b> |
| <b>5.2 Research Participants</b> .....   | <b>176</b> |
| <b>5.3 Qualitative Interviews – General Observations</b> .....   | <b>178</b> |
| <b>5.4 Summary of Themes – Qualitative Interviews</b> .....  | <b>178</b> |
| <b>5.5 Superordinate Theme 1: Factors Driving Curriculum Collaboration &amp; Relationship Building</b> ..... | <b>179</b> |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 5.5.1 Changing collaborative role of a university .....                            | 181        |
| 5.5.1.1 Academic Research Collaboration .....                                      | 182        |
| 5.5.1.2 Knowledge Transfer Partnerships .....                                      | 182        |
| 5.5.1.3 Subject Collaboration .....  | 183        |
| 5.5.2 Graduate employability & recruitment .....                                   | 184        |
| 5.5.2.1 Graduate Outcomes metrics.....   | 185        |
| 5.5.2.2 Graduate recruitment.....  | 186        |
| 5.5.2.3 Employability skills.....  | 187        |
| 5.5.3 Initiating curriculum collaboration.....                                     | 188        |
| 5.5.3.1 Ease of setting up curriculum collaborations .....                         | 189        |
| 5.5.3.2 Practitioner academic role .....   | 190        |
| 5.5.3.3 Personal connections .....   | 192        |
| <b>5.6 Superordinate Theme 2: Collaboration in Course Design and Delivery.....</b> | <b>193</b> |
| 5.6.1 Collaboration & planning in curriculum design .....                          | 194        |
| 5.6.1.1 Curriculum & qualification validation.....                                 | 196        |
| 5.6.2 Accredited & ranked courses .....  | 197        |
| 5.6.2.1 Apprenticeships .....  | 198        |
| 5.6.2.2 Executive Education .....  | 198        |
| 5.6.3 Collaboration in curriculum delivery .....                                   | 199        |
| 5.6.3.1 Guest lectures & talks.....  | 200        |
| 5.6.3.2 Employer projects, consultancy & case studies.....                         | 201        |
| 5.6.3.3 Work-based learning .....  | 203        |
| 5.6.3.4 Co-teaching & assessment.....  | 205        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>5.7 Superordinate Theme 3: Maintaining Long Term Collaborative Relationships .....</b>     | <b>206</b> |
| 5.7.1 Issues in maintaining collaborative contacts & relationships.....                       | 207        |
| 5.7.1.1 Long term relationships .....   | 209        |
| 5.7.1.2 Turnover of contacts.....   | 210        |
| 5.7.2 Contact capture and sharing.....  | 210        |
| 5.7.3 Advisory boards.....  | 211        |
| 5.7.4 Alumni role.....  | 212        |
| <b>5.8 Superordinate Theme 4: Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration</b>                    | <b>214</b> |
| 5.8.1 Student Value .....   | 214        |
| 5.8.2 Win-win common goals.....   | 216        |
| 5.8.2.1 Curriculum collaboration proactiveness.....   | 218        |
| 5.8.2.2 Curriculum collaboration effectiveness .....  | 219        |
| 5.8.3 Local, civic & regional collaboration.....  | 220        |
| <b>5.9 Superordinate Theme 5: Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum Collaboration .....</b> | <b>221</b> |
| 5.9.1 Removing barriers to collaborative relationships .....                                  | 224        |
| 5.9.1.1 Enhancing the experience of collaboration.....  | 225        |
| 5.9.1.2 Inauthentic collaboration approaches.....   | 226        |
| 5.9.1.3 Process improvements .....  | 227        |
| 5.9.2 Mismatches in mutual understanding .....  | 228        |
| 5.9.2.1 Perceived added value in partnerships.....  | 230        |
| 5.9.2.2 Diversity & inclusivity in curriculum collaboration.....                              | 231        |
| 5.9.2.3 Scheduling & timing challenges.....   | 232        |
| 5.9.3 Improving student engagement .....  | 233        |

|            |   |            |
|------------|---|------------|
| 5.9.4      | Overcoming academic negativity .....  | 234        |
| 5.9.4.1    | Reward & recognition .....  | 236        |
| 5.9.5      | Resolving resource & workload hours support.....  | 236        |
| 5.9.5.1    | Business development role .....   | 238        |
| 5.9.5.2    | Central careers & employability teams .....   | 239        |
| 5.9.5.3    | Systematic approaches to curriculum collaboration.....  | 240        |
| <b>6</b>   | <b>Discussion</b> .....   | <b>242</b> |
| <b>6.1</b> | <b>Introduction</b> .....   | <b>242</b> |
| <b>6.2</b> | <b>Analysis &amp; Discussion</b> .....  | <b>247</b> |
| 6.2.1      | Theme 1: Curriculum Collaboration – A Positive Response to Changing Structural Sector Dynamics .....    | 247        |
| 6.2.2      | Theme 2: Operational HE Barriers are Impeding Wider Curriculum Collaboration.....                       | 250        |
| 6.2.3      | Theme 3: Structural HEI Inhibitors are Blocking Longer Term Curriculum Collaboration Growth .....       | 251        |
| 6.2.4      | Theme 4: Current Curriculum Collaboration Praxis Framing Exerts Limited Impact .....                    | 254        |
| 6.2.5      | Theme 5: Applying New Curriculum Collaboration Relationship Frameworks Facilitates Mutual Benefit ..... | 258        |
| 6.2.6      | Theme 6: Lasting Curriculum Relationships – A Pathway to Long-Term Mutual Gain .....                    | 260        |
| 6.2.7      | Theme 7: Truly Connected Curriculum Collaboration Transforms HE Outcomes .....                          | 262        |
| <b>7</b>   | <b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b> .....  | <b>264</b> |
| <b>7.1</b> | <b>Introduction</b> .....   | <b>264</b> |
| <b>7.2</b> | <b>Response to the Research Questions</b> .....   | <b>265</b> |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 7.3 Recommendations & New Curriculum Collaboration Framework....           | 268        |
| 7.4 Contribution of the Research to Professional Practice .....            | 274        |
| 7.5 Limitations of the Research .....                                      | 275        |
| 7.6 Recommendations for Further Research .....                             | 277        |
| 7.7 Summary.....   | 278        |
| <b>8 Appendices.....</b>   | <b>280</b> |
| Appendix 1 - Coopers Taxonomy of Literature Review.....                    | 280        |
| Appendix 2 – Analysis and critique of research-based literature.....       | 282        |
| Appendix 3 – Analysis and critique of theoretical literature.....          | 284        |
| Appendix 4 – List of QAA Recognised UK Business & Management<br>PSRBs..... | 286        |
| Appendix 5 – Leading Graduate Employers of UK HEI Students 2021 ..         | 287        |
| Appendix 6 - Criteria for Research Participants .....                      | 290        |
| Appendix 7 – Invitation to Research Participants.....                      | 291        |
| Appendix 8 – In-Depth Interview Structure .....                            | 296        |
| Appendix 9 – Thematic Coding Concept Structure & Codebook.....             | 301        |
| Appendix 10 – Research Timetable.....                                      | 309        |
| Appendix 11 – Key Characteristics of Research Constructs Analysed .        | 310        |
| Appendix 12 – List of Main Research Journals Used .....                    | 313        |
| Appendix 13 – Further Detail on Confidentiality & Ethics .....             | 316        |
| Appendix 14 – Interview Themes: Detailed Description .....                 | 322        |
| <b>References.....</b>   | <b>326</b> |

## List of Figures

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1 - Literature Review Conceptual Framework Structure .....  | 21  |
| Figure 2 - Employability Skills for the Future World of Work.....  | 39  |
| Figure 3 - Psycho-Social Model of Employability .....  | 67  |
| Figure 4 - USEM Model of Employability .....   | 68  |
| Figure 5 - Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability .....  | 70  |
| Figure 6 - Graduate Capital Model.....   | 72  |
| Figure 7 - Connected Curriculum Framework.....   | 74  |
| Figure 8 - The Credentials Landscape.....  | 91  |
| Figure 9 - Model of Graduate Skills Transfer .....   | 101 |
| Figure 10 - Model of Modes of Enquiry-Based Learning.....  | 102 |
| Figure 11 - Career Enhancement Model of Employability for Part-Time Students<br>(CEME).....                  | 104 |
| Figure 12 - Model of Employer's Perspectives on Higher Education Internships.....                            | 108 |
| Figure 13 - Placement Experience and Graduate Outcome Theoretical Model.....                                 | 113 |
| Figure 14 - Model of Institutional Connectivity of Curriculum, Employability and<br>Enterprise .....         | 134 |
| Figure 15 - Key Elements of Research (Based on Crotty, 1998) .....   | 144 |
| Figure 16 - Four Paradigms for the Analysis of Social Theory.....  | 147 |
| Figure 17 - Comparison of Typical Phenomenological Research Methodologies.....                               | 151 |
| Figure 18 - Interview Thematic Map .....   | 175 |
| Figure 19 - Designation of Interview Respondents .....   | 177 |
| Figure 20 - Superordinate Theme 1: Factors Driving Curriculum Collaboration &<br>Relationship Building ..... | 180 |
| Figure 21 - Superordinate Theme 2: Collaboration in Course Design & Delivery .....                           | 194 |
| Figure 22 - Superordinate Theme 3: Maintaining Long Term Collaborative<br>Relationships .....                | 207 |
| Figure 23 - Superordinate Theme 4: Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration .....                            | 214 |
| Figure 24 - Superordinate Theme 5: Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum<br>Collaboration.....             | 223 |
| Figure 25 - Final Causative Research Themes.....   | 244 |
| Figure 26 – Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework .....  | 272 |



## List of Tables

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Table 1 - Student Numbers: UK HEIs 2021 .....                            | 29  |
| Table 2 - Non-Technical Skills Required in Business Graduates.....       | 54  |
| Table 3 - QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022: UK Universities ..... | 58  |
| Table 4 - Data Collection Types and Relevance.....                       | 154 |
| Table 5 - Interview Superordinate & Subordinate Themes .....             | 179 |



## **Abbreviations**

AACSB – Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

ACCA – Association of Chartered Certified Accountants

AMBA – Association of MBAs

APM – Association for Project Management

CABS – Chartered Association of Business Schools

CAH – Common Aggregated Hierarchy

CGIUK – Chartered Governance Institute UK & Ireland

CIM – Chartered Institute of Marketing

CIMA – Chartered Institute of Management Accountants

CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

CMI – Chartered Management Institute

DMA – Digital Marketing Association

EQUIS – European Foundation for Management Development Quality Improvement System

HE – Higher Education

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HEPI – Higher Education Policy Institute

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

KEF – Knowledge Exchange Framework

OfS – Office for Students

PSRB – Professional Statutory Regulatory Body

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency

REF – Research Excellence Framework

TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

WBL – Work Based Learning

WIL – Work Integrated Learning

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Overall Introduction & Importance of Business Engagement in UK Higher Education**

This research study provides a phenomenological exploration of the professional practice of collaboration between employers, professional bodies and academics in business curriculum design and delivery in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). This topic has been prioritised as the focus of this research study, as it has high currency and relevance in the delivery of professional practice and educational strategy planning for UK HE management departments and business schools (AdvanceHE, 2016).

Drivers for business school and management academics in UK HEIs to collaborate effectively with employers and professional bodies on curriculum co-creation and co-delivery have existed informally since at least the 1950s. During this period universities began to engage students in industry placements or blocks of work experience as part of their degrees, albeit in a fragmented manner, with former polytechnics and colleges leading the way in working with employers for the provision of work-based learning (WBL) experiences mostly interspersed rather than integrated with academic degree structures. By 1997, however, the Dearing report had advocated that UK universities should respond to employer needs by making work experience more accessible to undergraduate students in all subjects, including management, although this was still mainly implemented as a standalone placement experience level throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Atfield, Hunt and Luchinskaya, 2021).

Collaboration in this area between universities, employers and professional bodies became more strategic from 2011 onwards, with a stronger emphasis on work experience (WE) as part of the UK government's 'Get Britain Working' measures. However, underlying curriculum design and delivery was still not regarded as an equally important area of collaboration when set against the focus for universities of trying to place students with employers for skills-improving work experience (DWP, 2012).

By 2023, however, UK higher education in business and management subject areas reached a sea change in desires for collaborative relationships between academics, employers, and professional bodies in integrating employability into curriculum design and delivery, with practices including work-integrated learning (WIL) more woven into the fabric of business and management degrees. This trend was particularly heavily influenced over the last five years by groundbreaking transitions from 2018, moving from central government measurement of the employability-based value of a degree via the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) metric, to new role-based Graduate Outcomes (GO) measurements. GO measures track employment and salary metrics relating to graduate career path achievement after leaving university over 15 months, and have placed increasing pressure on UK higher education institutions to improve business student skills to meet GO targets, including hard skills such as literacy and numeracy, but also softer skills such as teamwork and business agility, as a revised condition (B3) of registration for UK HEIs focused on student outcomes (Morgan, J., 2022a). Condition B3 states that HEIs 'must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers and/or enable further study' (Office for Students, 2022) (p189).

The pressure on UK universities to improve graduate outcomes increased steeply in late 2022 with the publication of hard targets by the Office for Students (OfS), stating that universities must ensure that 60% of their students will have found graduate level work, further study or set up their own businesses within 15 months of graduating (Morgan, J., 2022c). Those HEIs that do not do so may face OfS sanctions, including inspections, interventions, or removal of course and curriculum content which cannot be shown to improve student career prospects. Currently, it is estimated by Times Higher Education that at least 2.5% of UK students already fall below this measure (Williams, T., 2022b). This growing focus on universities' ability to better prepare students in terms of graduate skills and employability, to improve their career paths and long-term contribution to the economy, impacts not only ad hoc work-integrated learning opportunities as part of degree courses, but also on the overall culture and process of how graduate skills and employability are interwoven into the fabric of business and management degree curriculum design and delivery, as discussed by academic researchers such as Fung (2017), Carlile (2016) and Jackson (2018).

Although there are many sources of research and collaboration between universities and employers into joint research, innovation and consultancy, joint collaboration around the key topics of curriculum design and delivery between university academics, employers and professional bodies appears to have received considerably less research attention to date, with only a limited number of research sources on this topic in published academic journals, particularly in UK business and management subject areas.

Research publications and conferences by academics and higher education bodies such as the Higher Education Academy, Advance HE and the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) show that although academics, employers and professional bodies frequently recognise the need to collaborate more closely in curriculum design and delivery for business and management subject areas to improve HEI metrics, hone student employability skills and meet changing employer workplace needs, such collaborations are not taking place systematically or in a truly connected manner. The phenomenon of professional practice of employer, academic and professional body stakeholders in such collaborations is still not evident as well-embedded in many UK HEIs (Cantafio and Ikoawaji, 2022).

This gives rise to a need for deeper research into this area, to analyse why this important collaborative concept is proving challenging for the stakeholders concerned.

The essence of academic curricular collaboration with employers or professional bodies has been summarised by the European Commission as:

‘The process of collaboratively creating a learning environment with members of the business community, creation of a fixed programme of courses or planned experiences.’ (Davey *et al.*, 2011) (p43)

Fung (2017), one of the leading recent academic writers on connecting the university curriculum with the working world, suggests that effectively designed programmes can provide connective storylines and learning narratives across the wider employer workplace:

‘Programmes of study should give students the chance to connect academic learning explicitly with knowledge, skills needed for professional work and society...developing capabilities for life and work in a changing world.’ (Fung, 2017) (p84)

In terms of achieving this balance, academic writers such as Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022) regard the concept and benefits of collaborative relationships in curriculum design as a positive development in preparing students for future employability and the world of work:

‘Looking at higher education, the primary goal of every business school or university offering business programmes is to design their curricula in such a way that will prepare business leaders who can change the world.’ (Cantafio and Ikoawaji, 2022) (p7)

Existing sources of UK academic research into collaboration between employers, professional bodies and academics around business curriculum design and delivery appear however to be sparse:

‘Promoting cooperation between higher education and business is core ... This has been explicitly developed in research and innovation... In contrast, promotion of business-university collaboration in education has been underplayed. This is unfortunate, it is through students and employees that knowledge exchange can be embedded in universities and businesses, relevant skills, future innovation, and economic growth laid.’ (Healy *et al.*, 2014) (p5)

The need for more research into such collaboration was further reinforced in December 2022 by the National Centre for Universities and Business in the UK:

‘Universities and businesses have an impressive array of expertise and capabilities...there is a time-bound opportunity to anchor much of the global economic advantage...This advantage will only be secured by continuing to support (research into) the growth of strategic collaborations between universities and business.’ (Jones, F., 2022)

The primary research purpose of this study is therefore to achieve phenomenological insight into the practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education.

The study should therefore provide greater understanding of this collaborative journey in both business curricula design and delivery amongst employers,

professional bodies, and academics, and of aspects which work most successfully in such collaborations.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

The concept of curricular collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies has existed for over 50 years in business and management subjects, most notably through work-based delivery of part of the curriculum such as a sandwich year or internship through work-integrated learning, as discussed in Section 2.3.2 of the Literature Review below, and through the launch of UK government defined “work experience” in business and management degrees in 2011.

With the development of UK Degree Apprenticeships in 2016, as discussed in Section 2.2.2 of the Literature Review below, both curriculum delivery and design started to involve deeper collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in UK business and management subjects.

However, more in-depth collaboration concerning curriculum design and delivery across a broader range of business and management subjects and non-apprenticeship courses has become increasingly important to UK higher education institutions since the move to more challenging UK Graduate Outcomes metrics in 2018, as discussed in Section 1.1 above.

This has prompted universities to respond increasingly urgently to a constantly changing and complex metrics-led culture of graduate employment, with business and management subjects receiving particular focus from HE regulators, and the OfS describing business and management as “a large subject area where there is significant variation in performance across the

sector, as shown in intelligence drawn from student outcomes data and national Student Survey responses that gives rise to concerns about the quality of business and management courses for some providers” (Morgan, J., 2022b).

The transition in 2018 by the UK government from measuring Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) to new role-based Graduate Outcomes (GO) measurement now means tracking graduate employment and salary metrics after leaving university over a longer term (15 months) than the DLHE survey (6 months), and in 2021, 86.4% of graduates responding to the Graduate Outcomes survey were in work or further study 15 months after leaving university, a benchmark which all UK universities are now measured against in the UK. This is set in a context where there are currently 170 higher education institutions in the UK, with combined income of £43.9 billion, 2.66 million students and 439,955 staff on academic contracts at these institutions (UniversitiesUK, 2021).

In the increasingly changing culture of drivers of change such as graduate social capital, skills development and employment in the UK discussed above, for practitioners in both academia and industry, preparing students to be highly employable is therefore playing an increasing role in business curriculum design and delivery amongst UK higher education institutions.

These drivers indicate a requirement for universities to collaborate with and engage employers and professional bodies more closely in business curriculum design and delivery, to ensure that the academic and transferable skills taught to business students align increasingly effectively with employer and professional standards body expectations.



### **1.3 Linkage to My Own Professional Practice**

For over 20 years I have held senior roles firstly in professional practice as a graduate employer in international consulting firms, subsequently as an examining board member of a UK professional body in marketing, and finally as a principal lecturer and Associate Dean of Education, Teaching and Learning in several different UK universities, both Russell Group and post-92, in England and Wales. My interest in the importance of this thesis topic is based both on the available knowledge base of literature in this area, and on my own professional practice including curriculum design and delivery for business and management students over the last 15 years. This has frequently thrown up the challenge that many UK higher education institutions, professional bodies and employers can prove slow and even reluctant to collaborate with each other in curriculum design and delivery, despite the significant benefits which accrue in my experience when this collaboration succeeds.

Part of my own more recent professional practice as a senior business and management academic has focused on engaging employers and professional bodies in the innovative co-creation and co-delivery of curriculum design and delivery. This has included employer and professional body input into academic subject knowledge, transferable skills, formative and summative assessment, and software capabilities needed for business students' future business career development. To date, I have found that closer collaboration between universities, employers and professional bodies in curriculum design and delivery can increase the social and cultural confidence of both academic staff and students, and of student capabilities in preparing for and securing graduate employment. This has also had the benefit of helping employers and

professional bodies to understand how they can proactively shape business curricula to influence the skills and standards that they require of the students for whom they provide employment and professional standards regulation (Healy *et al.*, 2014).

However, in my own experience and that of many others voiced at conferences hosted by Advance HE and CABS, where I have presented early findings of my research, a common view appears to be that UK HEIs can be perceived as lacking clear connectedness, context and understanding around which business and academic skills equip their students most effectively to improve their employability prospects. Despite the historical increase within UK universities of practitioner academics or “dual professionals” like myself (GuildHE, 2018), who started their careers in industry then move into higher education with a vision of applied and authentic learning, many UK universities can still appear reluctant to embrace the ability of employers to co-design and develop the business curriculum. As an example, a recent Times Higher Education article by Al-Majeed (2022) reported on research findings by the Chartered Management Institute that: ‘Employer involvement is crucial to embedding employability, but students, universities and employers find it hard to connect’ (Al-Majeed, 2022) (p17). Academics sometimes appear reluctant to foster strong business connections and develop real-world work experience for their students:

‘In some instances, higher education institutions seem to believe their fame precedes them and that companies should be grateful for any offer made. Sometimes university representatives are too busy or, in some cases, too shy to make contact.’ (Al-Majeed, 2022) (p2)

Many UK universities, including some of my own previous UK institutions, tend to limit their cultural, social, and academic engagement with employers beyond research or regulatory collaboration to guest speaker slots, case study

provision, advisory boards, placements, or other asynchronous activities at a relatively basic and disconnected level of collaboration in curriculum design and delivery.

This study therefore considers key aspects of what actually happens in the professional practice of collaboration between employers, professional bodies and academics in business curriculum design and delivery in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), from the point of initial structural and operational drivers and inhibitors to co-creation and co-production of business curricula, through to characteristics of maintaining such collaborative relationships over the longer term, and aspects of these collaborative relationships which work transformatively. It is anticipated that the findings of the study will prove valuable to UK HEIs with business and management courses, employers, and professional bodies, as well as dual practitioners like myself, who engage in and are passionate about enhancing the practical experience of connectedness and working together in the interests of graduates, universities and employers for effective curriculum and skills development in the future.

## **1.4 Research Aims and Objectives**

### **1.4.1 Aims**

As discussed in Section 1.2 above, one of the most challenging issues in contemporary UK higher education is the changing relationship between academics, employers, and professional bodies, in terms of increasing trends towards collaboration in areas such as graduate attributes, employability, and curriculum design. The design and delivery of UK higher education curricula is increasingly coming under pressure by the demand for more advanced employability skills amongst graduating business students, with tangible moves

towards employers requiring not only hard skills such as literacy, numeracy, and leadership, but also newer soft skills such as teamwork, business agility, and digital capabilities, as evidenced in academic research by Jackson (2010):

'Intellectual ability is still highly regarded by graduate employers, yet many now acknowledge that degree classification is no longer the principal indicator of graduate intelligence. The data highlights the growing importance of other indicators of capability and employability. Applied skills ... dominate employer requirements and are consistently ranked more important across empirical studies worldwide.' (Jackson, D., 2010) (p53)

New imaginings of collaborative relationships between UK university academics, employers and professional bodies reaching beyond research-based collaboration and into curriculum design and delivery are likely to become more frequent in UK higher education institutions according to Jackson (2010), although the slow pace of growth of such collaborations indicates that there are still collaborative challenges which warrant deeper exploration of the phenomenological manifestations of such collaborations. The primary aim of this research is therefore to achieve phenomenological insight into the practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

#### **1.4.2 Objectives**

Based on the research aim above, the supporting research objectives to be achieved are:

- To explore how the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed in designing and delivering business curricula in UK higher education institutions.
- To explore commonalities across UK higher education institutions in maintaining business curricula collaborations with employers and professional bodies.
- To examine what aspects work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

This research topic is timely, as the collaborative business curricular relationships that it explores between employers, professional bodies and academics which shape graduate attributes and employability are coming under increasing scrutiny from UK regulatory bodies such as the Office for Students (OfS), as discussed in Section 1.1 above. It is therefore anticipated to achieve from the research a greater understanding of how this collaborative journey in business curricula design and delivery is perceived by employers, professional bodies, and academics, and to explore commonalities in what works well or needs improvement in such collaborations in UK higher education institutions.

## **1.5 Scope of the Research**

This study has been designed as a phenomenological exploration of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions. The main scope of the research therefore includes key business and management subjects such as accounting, finance, economics, marketing, business management, project management, human resources, and corporate governance. Part-time, online degree courses and apprenticeship degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels are also included in the scope of this research study. The following topic areas are not however included in the main scope of this research:

- Non-UK higher education institutions and non-business or management curricula, as well as the overall purpose of business teaching in higher education in the UK. References to these topics are only made where these are relevant for comparative purposes with business and management subjects and UK HEIs;
- Student curricular co-creation and co-delivery. This is referred to in parts of Sections 2.2 and 2.3 of the Literature Review in conjunction with academics and employers, however this is not the main scope of the research focus;

- Specialist subject areas taught in business and management departments in a limited number of UK HEIs, such as healthcare, tourism, hospitality and leisure management, but which are more often grouped separately under social science or other degree subject areas at many UK HEIs, and are therefore out of scope for this research study, which focuses on CAH 17-01 (Business and Management) codes 1-5 and 7-8 as the most commonly used business and management classification CAH (Common Aggregation Hierarchy) codes by HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) in the UK;
- Microcredentials, modular lifelong learning provision and CPD (Continuing Professional Development), as these areas tend to represent short courses aimed at improving a specific skill set, rather than a higher education degree qualification involving business curriculum development;
- Foundation level qualifications and courses, as they are usually below Level 4 (undergraduate standard) in the UK and classified as Level S or Level 0.

## 1.6 Significance of the Research

Despite numerous recent conferences on the topic of university-business collaboration by UK higher education bodies such as Advance HE, there appears to be little published qualitative research on the understanding of the professional practice or benefits of business curriculum collaboration between academics, employers, and professional bodies in UK higher education institutions, as evidenced by academic researchers such as Healy, Perkmann, Goddard & Kempton (2014):

‘Despite the resurgence in business-university collaboration, research reports consistently find that cooperation practices are highly fragmented and uncoordinated, particularly when it comes to the educational offer. Evidence ... also suggests that cooperation in the field of education is much less common than levels of R&D collaboration... there is very limited literature on assessing the benefits of cooperation activity on the educational offer, with most attention focusing on cooperation and collaboration in research and innovation.’ (Healy *et al.*, 2014) (p6)

This research therefore situates the phenomenon of business curricular collaboration between academics, employers, and professional bodies in qualitative depth in terms of UK university academic research. The research is significant and important, as it aims to explore in depth the inspiration and

practice of collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in UK university business curriculum design and delivery, and aspects of this collaboration that work particularly well or ineffectively for academics, employers, and professional bodies. The insights gained from the proposed research are therefore likely to be of interest to UK higher education institutions, employers and professional bodies when considering their own models for collaboration in business curricular design and delivery, situated in an increasingly complex UK higher education environment.

## **1.7 Thesis Structure**

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides an overview of the background to the research aims and objectives, scope, and significance, and discusses the context and academic situation of the topic of business curriculum collaboration between universities, employers, and professional bodies in the context of growing interest in this area in UK higher education.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) provides an in-depth review of literature related to the thesis topic, including the background and context of key drivers of business curricular collaboration in UK HEIs, aspects of collaborative business curriculum design and delivery, characteristics of maintaining effective collaborative relationships, and aspects of collaborative relationships that work particularly effectively. This chapter ends with a summary of the impact of and gaps in the literature review in relation to the research aims and objectives.

Chapter 3 (Research Methodology) sets out the methodology used to research gaps in knowledge relating to the thesis topic, discusses the aims, objectives

and outcomes of the research, and the research methodology and approach to data collection and analysis. Confidentiality and ethical considerations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter 4 (Project Activity) discusses the activities supporting the delivery of the research methodology.

Chapter 5 (Project Findings) sets out the findings from the qualitative research interviews and the thematic analysis undertaken.

Chapter 6 (Discussion) reviews the research findings in conjunction with the results of the literature review, offers an interpretation of the results, and summarises the implications and limitations of the research.

Chapter 7 (Conclusions and Recommendations) presents the conclusions and recommendations from the literature review, data collection and analysis of findings, answers to the research aims and objectives, and suggestions for future research.



## 2 Literature Review

The following literature review chapter serves an important and pivotal function in relation to each of the other research stages in this study. The review evidences a central theme of increasing trends towards business curriculum collaboration resulting in win-win outcomes around knowledge transfer, graduate employability skills and student engagement for all collaborative partners, yet beset by challenges and hurdles relating to a lack of connected thinking, structures, reward, recognition, and support for such collaboration in UK HEIs and business schools.

Reviewing the available literature in the topic area of the experience and practice of business curriculum collaboration has enabled a deeper understanding of the research topic, and has ensured development and application of knowledge of this topic as a throughline to the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Firstly, an investigation of the research literature in this area has assisted in identifying gaps in knowledge and the subsequent creation of relevant questions for primary research to address those gaps. Secondly, exploration and critique of previous research methods relevant to this research topic through the literature review has enhanced the methodological approach to this study. Thirdly, critical evaluation of current research has driven further questions supporting analysis of the primary research results and answers to the study research objectives to contribute further knowledge to research in this field.

The focus of the literature review was to explore literature sources relating to the following stated research objectives:

- How the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed in designing and delivering business curricula in UK higher education institutions.
- Commonalities across UK higher education institutions in maintaining business curricula collaborations with employers and professional bodies.
- What aspects work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

The literature review therefore draws on a combination of research sources, including primary research literature such as academic journals, books, and peer-reviewed articles; secondary literature, including relevant non-refereed sources and books; and tertiary literature, including “grey” literature such as professional practice articles, government, and industry sector reports. To ensure a structured approach was adopted, the literature review process was aligned carefully with Cooper’s Taxonomy of Literature Reviews, which is evidenced in Appendix 1 of this thesis (Cooper, 1988). The literature review chapter takes the following conceptual structure, which follows the lifecycle journey of collaborative business curriculum relationship experiences, from initiation to success of outcomes.

Section 2.1 provides an introduction, background and context to UK HEI, employer, and professional body environments, by exploring key business curriculum collaboration key drivers in UK HEIs, including graduate outcomes metrics, accreditation, graduate skills improvement, knowledge transfer, and other key collaborative drivers. The findings of this section demonstrate a background and context of increasing drivers for UK universities to collaborate with employers and professional bodies more closely in business curriculum design and delivery, both to align with changing government metrics, and to ensure that academic and transferable skills taught to business students meet current and future employers and professional body knowledge and skills

expectations of graduates through their taught curricula. Section 2.1 demonstrates that UK HEIs are therefore actively aligning business curricula with relevant frameworks and models such as Fung's Connected Curriculum (2017) and developing more effective links with employers and professional bodies, although the pace and extent of such collaborative thinking is highly variable across UK HEIs and business schools.

Section 2.2 then explores approaches towards implementing these links and collaborations in more depth, through investigating formal and informal approaches to activities relating to initial business curriculum collaborative initiation, co-design, and co-creation. The findings of this section demonstrate that the degree of informal versus formal collaborative curriculum design and co-creation varies significantly according to both the level and subject area of business course under consideration, with degree apprenticeships and accredited degrees particularly well established here owing to regulatory drivers. More generally, however, this section demonstrates that curricular co-design and co-creation between UK HEIs, employers and professional bodies appear to be proving increasingly important for skills and quality assurance across all areas of business undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education provision.

Building on curriculum co-design and co-creation from Section 2.2, Section 2.3 moves on to examine approaches to and modes of collaborative co-production and co-delivery in business curricula between academics, employers, and professional bodies, including specific areas of co-delivery such as work-integrated learning, assessment, and projects. The findings of this section show that the key means of co-producing and co-delivering business curricula

currently revolve largely around guest speakers, case studies, and work-based learning, with more connected curriculum strategy around complex collaborations such as co-teaching and co-assessment less widely embraced by academics and universities who regard this instead as their own core role.

Section 2.4 explores the longer-term view of maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships, including qualification validation, curriculum advisory boards, and the importance of links with alumni, local and civic organisations. The findings of this section demonstrate that universities and business schools can benefit their own research and corporate relationships as well as their students if they collaborate effectively with alumni, local and civic employers to maintain long term effective collaborative curriculum relationships in business and management subject areas, but that connected thinking is not universal in this area, owing mainly to lack of motives and incentives for academics to maintain longer term collaborative relationships.

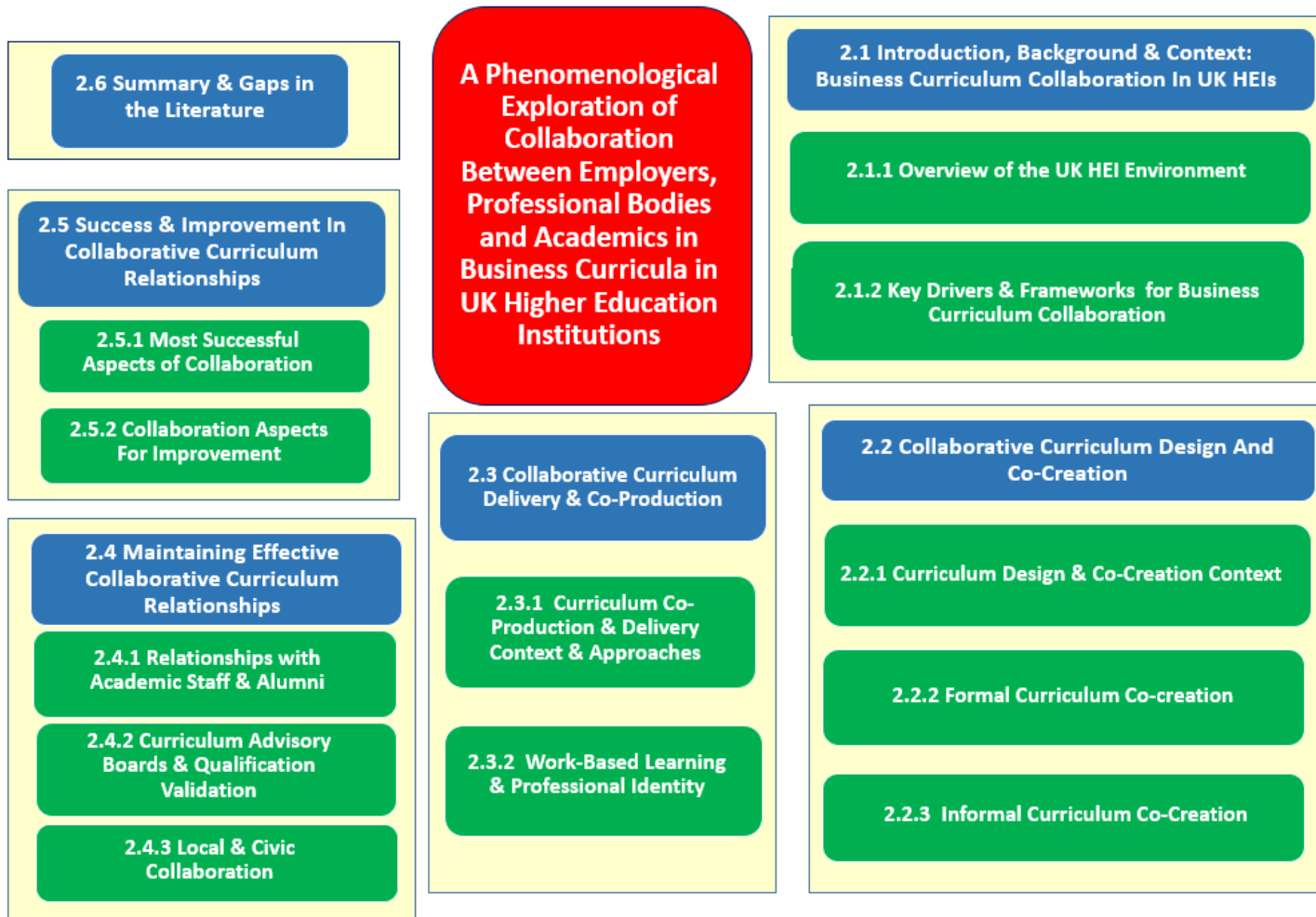
This finding impacts significantly on the content of Section 2.5, which provides a holistic exploration of both the most successful aspects of business curriculum collaborative relationships and those aspects most in need of improvement, including consideration of specific business subject areas and delivery modes. The findings of this section show that key areas of strength in the phenomenon of business curriculum collaboration appear to emerge from areas where academics believe they can benefit from the expertise of employers and professional bodies such as degree apprenticeships, work-integrated learning, and accredited courses, whereas areas for collaborative improvement often focus on the lack of joined-up and connected systems, processes, leadership and inward-looking barriers within UK HEIs.

Section 2.6 concludes by providing a summary of key findings and gaps in the literature review in relation to the research objectives, including gaps in the literature relating to a lack of research into the practice and experience of employer and professional body stakeholders in collaborations, and evidence of collaborative curricular delivery modes which could result in more sustained and impactful outcomes.

A visual conceptual framework of the flow and scope of the literature review structure is as follows, shown in a clockwise direction in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 - Literature Review Conceptual Framework Structure

### Literature Review Structure



The key characteristics of the literature review constructs analysed are shown in Appendix 11. The final part of this section provides a summary of the findings of the literature review.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To ensure that relevant information was effectively captured from the literature review, and to allow the identification of key themes and patterns in the literature in addition to any outlying or contradictory views, versions of the search forms set out by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) were applied to the literature search strategy as shown at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 respectively. The first form was used to analyse and critique research-based literature, and the second to analyse and critique theoretical literature.

The literature search strategy focused on key databases and literature sources which emerged from UWTSD library reviews and discussions with academic colleagues in similar roles to myself as representative of the body of knowledge around this thesis topic. These sources primarily included ProQuest, Sage Journals Online, EBSCO Host, Emerald, Directory of Open Access Journals for published academic research, peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed publications, academic dissertations and theses, articles, books, journals and professional body websites and publications.

For this literature review a purposive approach was taken, to offer the flexibility to pursue new insights, as the topic of business curriculum collaboration in UK higher education is not yet particularly widely covered in peer-review research. By contrast, systematic reviews tend to use rigorous methods of article selection and data extraction to result in an in-depth focus on a relatively narrow

body of research, so a purposive approach was selected, as in this case a narrower systematic review may have resulted in exclusion of potentially insightful works that fall around the margin of the predefined research scope (Cook, D. A., 2019). A variety of combinations of key literature search terms was adapted and applied for each database and literature source reviewed, including priority search terms such as curriculum collaboration, curriculum relationships, business and management employers, business and management professional bodies, graduate skills, curriculum co-creation, co-production, co-delivery, work-based learning, work-integrated learning, graduate outcomes, and graduate employability. All references used were imported into both an Excel-based personal research diary and into RefWorks, with source titles and abstracts reviewed and screened for relevance to the literature review sections. The full text of each relevant published study was then examined according to inclusion and scope criteria, and reference lists of studies in each reference were also manually searched to identify further articles for inclusion.

The list of primary peer-reviewed journals which subsequently contributed in significant terms to the literature review is shown at Appendix 12. “Grey” literature sources including reports, blogs, and non-peer reviewed articles from sources such as Advance HE, Guild HE, CABS, Universities UK and UK government policy documents have also been representatively reviewed and incorporated in the literature review, as this thesis topic is an area where both professional practice and policy are relevant to the topic under discussion. The year 2011 was generally selected as the primary earliest relevant time limit for the searching of relevant sources within the last 10 years of starting this research, although this was extended to include earlier articles where leading



peer-reviewed academic research highlighted specific thought leaders which were highly relevant to this research topic.

## **2.1 Introduction, Background & Context: Business Curriculum Collaboration in UK HEIs**

### **2.1.1 Overview of the UK HEI Environment**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the UK HEI environment is currently experiencing significant political, regulatory, and cultural change impacting on HE curricula in business and other subject areas. In cultural terms, recent UK political narratives and policy statements relating to the perceived value of UK university degrees have played a key role in focusing UK media extensively around the pejorative dysphemism of the ‘Mickey Mouse degree’, originally coined by a UK Minister of State for Universities in 2003 as referring to a degree ‘where the content is perhaps not as rigorous as one would expect and where the degree itself may not have huge relevance in the labour market’ (BBC News, 2003) (p1). This type of cultural narrative has contributed to many UK universities reviewing and redesigning degrees and curriculum content, with the aim of providing greater levels of content relevant to employers and the labour market, as well as to students and parents selecting a university at which to study.

In terms of political policy, much recent debate around curriculum has also focused on the value of recent expansion in participation in UK higher education. Here there has been significant debate between differing HE stakeholders as to whether this apparent massification of UK higher education is still driven by educational tenets of free academic inquiry, or as has become a more widely held view, more by employer and professional body desires for

better graduate skills, higher productivity, and more impactful innovation, particularly amongst business and management graduates (Husbands, 2022).

To set the growth challenges of UK HE in context, up to 2021 the UK experienced a record high level of participation in higher education, with 53.4% of the UK 17–30-year-old population participating in higher education in the UK in 2020, up from 51.9% in 2019 (GOV.UK, 2021). It is therefore important to review and contextualise the changing role of UK HE, to understand the drivers and trends impacting on the research topic of business curriculum collaboration, such as changing HEI metrics, graduate outcomes and skills, and accreditation. The following sections demonstrate that while government metrics may initially appear to be driving the need for greater business curriculum collaboration, it can be argued that deeper understanding of future graduate outcomes and skills by universities, employers and professional bodies is emerging as a longer-term rationale positively encouraging such collaborations in UK HE.

#### **2.1.1.1 HEIs, Business Professional Bodies & Graduate Employers**

In terms of the changing role of higher education institutions, pressure on UK HEIs to collaborate with industry in curriculum development has arisen not least from the increasing debate concerning the changing role of a university over the last 20 years or so. Much credence has been lent to the view that universities need to play an increasingly societal role by leading proponents of the concept of the societal purpose of a university, including Millican and Bourner (2014), who trace this view back to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in 1998, where the purpose of higher education for the new millennium was re-examined. The resulting declaration regarding the purpose of

higher education emphasised generation of knowledge for the benefit of society, the value of education in socio-cultural and economic development, and the importance of social responsibility as the third stream of the role of a university alongside teaching and research. Millican and Bourner (2014) claim that HE institutions have since then been regarded as creators of citizens of the world, capable of committing themselves to addressing global problems and valuing diversity, with social and economic engagement recognised as HE goals alongside teaching and research, which in themselves can also bring about tangible outcomes for society. Working with employers and civic communities alongside research has therefore become a key part of the mission of teaching and learning in many universities (Millican and Bourner, 2014).

This notion of UK universities having an extensive societal role has gradually become accepted compared with more traditional views concerning the research-based purpose of a university. Leading HE researchers such as Collini (2012), Fung (2017) and Dandridge (2023) advocate HE societal purpose aligned with teaching and research over and above a liberal university education alone. Whereas academics such as Newman, in his 1852 book 'The Idea of a University', endorsed universities as facilitating student development, enlightened free thinking, a liberal education, and exploration of ideas free from external interference or institutional measurement (Lanford, 2019), this view has been increasingly challenged by more recent perceived concepts of the purpose of HE. Concepts of marketisation, commoditisation and massification of UK higher education, as well as measuring employment outcomes, have in fact been criticised as potentially diluting the wider purpose of a university education by leading researchers such as Collini in his thought-provoking publication 'What are universities for' (2012). Collini questions whether the underlying role

of a university is still to create new avenues of questions, research, and interest, or rather to focus learning primarily on the acquisition of specific skills, attitudes, and behaviours (Collini, 2012).

Taking this discussion further, Sin and Neave (2016) debate whether universities who focus on the short-term needs of changing labour markets to teach employability skills to meet those needs, rather than on wider teaching and research objectives, thereby risk threatening the academic quality of their academic courses (Sin and Neave, 2016).

In UK HE, however, government and academic research currently appears to evidence the view that many students themselves are motivated in seeking a university degree to improve their life chances by preparing themselves for skilled employment, so UK HEIs therefore need to focus as much on this externally-facing third stream of employer and community engagement around the HE curriculum as on teaching and research, as discussed by leading research academics such as Callaghan (2022). Callaghan recommends in his article 'Graduate employment is not an ignoble pursuit for universities' that academics should therefore not feel uncomfortable when their courses become increasingly focused on improving graduate outcomes (Callaghan, 2022).

A further change in UK HE, which can impact negatively on business curriculum collaboration, has been the changing relationship between teaching and research, as discussed by HE thought leaders such as Dandridge, Fung, Shibayama and Lawson, a relationship which appears to be potentially bifurcating rather than integrating curriculum development. Although curriculum specialists such as Fung (2017) in her seminal work around the Connected Curriculum advocate a clear throughline between teaching and research-

informed curriculum development, the current relationship between research and teaching has instead appeared to have diverged across UK HEIs in which research and teaching compete for funding. According to Dandridge (2023), this is primarily owing to separate regulatory and funding regimes introduced in the Higher Education and Research Act of 2017, and to teaching and research being overseen by different UK government ministers, as well as the trend for UK government policy to focus on transparency and quality of teaching and research outcomes separately, and prospective students increasingly looking at a university's reputation in terms of teaching-related rankings such as TEF and NSS rather than research reputation alone. According to Dandridge, only nine of the 6,781 impact case studies submitted for the 2021 REF referenced the relationship between HE research and teaching, and most of the growth in UK HE academic contract volume is currently for teaching-only rather than research-based roles (Dandridge, 2023).

As a result, collaborative business curriculum relationships, the focus of this research study, tend to be mainly developed by teaching-focused rather than research academics, whose contractual incentives according to 2021 research by Shibayama and Lawson tend to focus them more on research publishing than teaching, learning or curriculum-related activities (Shibayama and Lawson, 2021).

To set recent growth in UK HE in context, by 2021 the UK accounted for 16 of the world's top ranked 100 universities, including four in the top ten ranking (Exeed, 2023). By 2021 there were 170 higher education institutions in the UK, with combined income of £43.9 billion, 2.66 million students, and 439,955 staff, of whom 237,576 (54%) are employed as academic staff (UniversitiesUK, 2021). Student numbers enrolled in UK HE during 2021 are shown in the table

below, demonstrating in particular the importance in volume terms of full-time UK-domiciled undergraduates in UK HE:

**Table 1 - Student Numbers: UK HEIs 2021**

| <b>Students</b>                | <b>Numbers</b>   |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Undergraduate                  | 1,940,000        |
| Postgraduate                   | 710,000          |
| Full Time                      | 2,100,000        |
| Part Time                      | 550,000          |
| Students from the UK           | 2,070,000        |
| Students from the EU           | 150,000          |
| Students from non-EU countries | 430,000          |
| <b>Total Students</b>          | <b>2,650,000</b> |

(UniversitiesUK, 2021)

By 2021-22, UK government research showed that student numbers at UK HE institutions had risen by 7.9% to a total of 2.86 million (House of Commons Library, 2023). This has posed increasing challenges to UK universities as student numbers have grown, alongside the pressure that since 2018 UK HEIs have been measured more stringently on the employment outcomes of their graduates. In 2021, 86.4% of UK graduates were in employment or further study 15 months after leaving university, with the median graduate salary at £36,000, worth £10,000 more than the median non-graduate salary of £26,000 (UniversitiesUK, 2021). However, there are also signs in studies by researchers such as Philpotts and the Association of MBAs that there are not enough well-paid graduate-level roles in the UK for the high numbers of students participating currently in higher education. Philpotts (2022) reports the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) as having concerns that the proportion of graduates in jobs classified as low or medium-skilled has

doubled over the last three decades, following the expansion of participation in higher education that has taken place, without a corresponding level of growth in the UK graduate economy. As a result, the CIPD believes the number of overqualified graduates experiencing lower levels of job satisfaction and work enthusiasm is increasing, with only 54% of overqualified graduates reporting satisfaction with their current jobs, compared with 72% of well-matched graduates (Philpotts, 2022). In business and management subjects, a study carried out by the Association of MBAs (AMBA) with 1,047 employers found that as many as 28% of employers believe that there are too many business and management graduates looking for too few jobs (Association of MBAs, 2020).

In summary, UK HEIs appear to be coming under increasing pressure to connect with external collaborative partners to meet the remits of their evolving societal role, because of changing relationships between research, teaching and knowledge transfer, to resolve perceived student and government value of HE curricula and courses, to respond to developing government narratives and policy, to meet increasing challenges of labour market graduate outcome demands, and to cope with almost annual growth in UK HE student numbers requiring robust graduate outcomes, skills and employment opportunities through effective curriculum design. Similar challenges relating to curriculum collaboration have been impacting professional body approaches to curriculum collaboration, as discussed below.

Professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) play a key role in UK HE curriculum considerations in business and management subjects, having grown alongside HEIs over the last 50 years or so to develop academic standards, curriculum content and routes to qualification in business and management

subject areas such as accounting and marketing (Kernohan, 2023). The changing PSRB role around curriculum development currently sits between viewing PSRBs as curriculum regulators, as emphasised by the UK QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education), and more innovative research by academics such as Kernohan (2023), Fillery-Travis and Davies (2022), who offer a fresher viewpoint around the additional advisory capabilities of PSRBs in UK HE. The future curricular role of the PSRB in business and management education is therefore increasingly regarded as more consultancy and advisory-based:

‘PSRBs bring professional credibility to higher education – as actual or effective gatekeepers to professional careers they are the way in which the promise of social mobility becomes real for students on more vocational courses.’ (Kernohan, 2023) (p1)

The assertion that professional bodies will in future exist both to assure the theoretical and applied focus of higher education qualifications, and to provide students with an experience of relevant professional practice in the subject area being studied, is echoed in research by Fillery-Travis and Davies, writing in Jacob, Kearney, and Meek (2022). This view demonstrates that professional bodies can exert a level of control over future degree subject curriculum content, as well as advising HEIs collaboratively on what an identifiable body of subject professional knowledge should represent (Jacob, Kearney and Meek, 2022).

However, one important challenge to the involvement of professional bodies in business curriculum collaboration is that many business and management subject areas, including marketing and project management, do not have mandatory degree qualifications overseen by professional bodies. This means that many university academics can take a somewhat lighter-touch approach to



needing to collaborate with PSRBs. Despite this challenge, however, the UK QAA recognises and works with a list of 130 PSRBs in UK higher education, of which the 21 PSRBs connected with business and management (QAA, 2020) are listed at Appendix 4 of this study. The key areas represented by business and management PSRBs include accountancy, insurance, finance, project management, marketing, management, human resources, and economics, via for example the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), and Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA).

Many business and management subjects in the UK are indeed regulated heavily by PSRBs, which engage with HEIs via the validation, recognition, and accreditation of HE programmes and assessment in business and management. In doing so, PSRBs frequently collaborate with HEIs to offer membership services and promote the interests of the professions that they represent. Other more specialist PSRBs representing niche professions also have curricular and collaborative impact on UK HEIs by influencing and inputting to curriculum design, for example the Digital Marketing Association (DMA Global), Chartered Governance Institute (CGIUK), Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE).

In summary, UK PSRBs play a key role in HE in terms of collaborating on setting curriculum and entry standards into their professions, and now seem to be increasingly seen as consultative, connecting with HEIs and collaborative on curricular issues, although this does not always extend to becoming invited into curriculum design and delivery with specific HEIs beyond highly PSRB-regulated subject areas such as accounting and finance. However, there is

evidence that graduate employers are invited to collaborate on business curricula by HEIs more frequently than PSRBs, as discussed below.

The third key participant group connected into business curriculum collaboration with UK HEIs and PSRBs in this study is that of graduate employers. In terms of contextualisation, leading researchers in HE trends such as High Fliers Research (2021), Kroon and Franco (2020) agree that collaborative relationships between universities and employers are now significant in both UK HE research and teaching. This is particularly since the introduction of UK Graduate Outcomes metrics for graduate employment measurement since 2018, and the growth since 2017 of Knowledge Exchange Framework collaborations focusing on joint research and knowledge exchange between universities and industry for the benefit of the economy and society, having grown out of a tradition of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) since 1975 (UKRI, 2023). In terms of graduate outcomes, over 1,500 employer organisations in the UK now have formal graduate schemes impacting on graduate skills and curriculum design, with many more employers offering graduate roles outside a formal graduate scheme. To put this into statistical context, the top 100 UK graduate employers between them recruited around 24,760 students in 2021 (High Fliers Research Limited, 2021).

The leading UK employers offering graduate schemes to business and management students are listed at Appendix 5 of this study, and include both public and private sector organisations, such as Barclays, NHS, and Unilever. The most generous graduate starting salaries in 2021-22 were from investment banks (median £50,000), law firms (median £46,000), consulting firms (median £45,000), and oil / energy companies (median £40,000) (High Fliers Research

Limited, 2021), demonstrating the commercial value of strong graduate employability skills arising from effective curriculum design.

However, although many leading graduate employers already have recruitment relationships with UK HEIs, it is difficult to ascertain how many appear to be directly connected into curriculum collaboration, with one in six employers in 2021 having given up targeting relationships with individual universities for recruitment completely, owing to the time and costs involved (High Fliers Research Limited, 2021). This lack of evidence relating to curriculum collaboration is, as researchers such as Kroon and Franco (2022) point out, possibly because academic research often focuses on the viewpoint of the university academic, with little published research on the viewpoint of the employer (Kroon and Franco, 2022). This thesis therefore seeks to address this issue by considering the viewpoints around curriculum collaboration of employers and professional bodies as well as university academics, at institutional and subject level, as discussed in section 2.1.1.2 below.

#### **2.1.1.2 Business & Management Subject Areas & Skills**

Business and management degrees in the UK provide significant income to UK HEIs according to Universities UK (2021) and the British Academy (2021) are also widely recognised as providing opportunities for students to develop knowledge and employability skills in key subject areas such as business management, marketing, and accounting (UCAS, 2019). To position business subject areas in the context of graduate employment, the top graduate career destinations for students studying business and management curricula in the UK are in wholesale and retail trade, followed by professional, scientific, and

technical industries, finance and insurance, administrative and support services (UCAS, 2019).

Contextually, the important contribution made to UK HE by business and management course curricula is demonstrated by this subject area representing the highest student numbers in the UK HE market with a total of 386,520 students, of which 263,965 (68.3%) in 2021 were undergraduates and 122,555 (31.7%) were postgraduates (UniversitiesUK, 2021). According to The British Academy (2021), as many as 1 in 6 UK undergraduates and 1 in 5 postgraduates were enrolled in a business or management course in 2020 (The British Academy, 2021). By 2021-22, business and management students accounted for 14% of all UK HE student enrolments (CABS, 2023b). UK league tables covered by the British Academy (2021) include 131 providers of university degrees in business and management subjects, with the largest providers of undergraduate degrees in business subjects by student numbers tending to be primarily post-92 institutions based outside London, although still in England, including Coventry University, Open University, Buckinghamshire New University, Anglia Ruskin University and Manchester Metropolitan University (The British Academy, 2021). The average age of a UK undergraduate student studying business and management curricula is 22.9, compared with 27.9 for UK taught postgraduate students, and 35.1 for business postgraduate research students (The British Academy, 2021). This is set in the context that 34% of business and management curricula offered are at undergraduate level, with 40.2% at master's level, and 25.8% at Doctoral level (AACSB International, 2017).

One key impact concerning business curriculum development arising from these growth figures, as reflected in recent academic research by leading policy researchers such as Lem (2022), Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022), is that of staff: student ratio change. Statistically, UK HE staff involved in business-related subjects are growing in numbers, but this trend does not appear to have kept pace with the growth of student enrolments in business and management subjects, resulting in challenging staff: student ratios in management departments and business schools (UniversitiesUK, 2021). UK full-time academic staff in business and management subject areas currently total around 17,745, but with a student-staff ratio of 1:22, which is statistically significantly higher than other subjects with high student numbers such as healthcare or social studies (UniversitiesUK, 2021).

A further challenge to the resourcing of business and management departments impacting on curriculum collaboration with employers and PSRBs is that of availability of funding for collaborative activities, with business subject funding under-resourced across UK HE, according to research by policy bodies in this area such as the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS, 2023) and London School of Economics (LSE, 2014). Recent research by CABS indicates that as much as 59% of average income to business and management departments is taken back centrally to cross-subsidise other parts of universities (Williams, T., 2023b), even though 81% of UK business schools reported an increase in their income for 2021-22 (CABS, 2023b). Research by CABS also shows that in the UK, business and management are amongst the lowest funded disciplines listed in the UK Research Excellence Framework, compared with longer established research-focused subject areas such as medicine (CABS, 2023b). Leading researchers in UK HEI subject income such as Lem

(2022) discuss how this trend appears to support the contextualisation of management and business departments as teaching-led rather than collaboration or research-led 'cash cows', whose student fee income from teaching is of higher strategic importance than research or collaboration income across UK HEIs (Lem, 2022).

At a more focused level, subject curricula classifications for business and management subjects have remained relatively unchanged over the last 20 years, and are generally grouped into specific key areas in line with HESA CAH subject groupings as discussed in Chapter 1 above, comprising of management studies, business administration, finance, accounting, economics, marketing, and human resource management (UCAS, 2019). This begs the curricular question as to whether business and management subjects should still be taught and researched in disciplinary silos, or now on a more cross-disciplinary basis to enhance more holistic graduate business knowledge and employability, which has emerged as a widely debated curricular issue. This topic is both current and divided in opinion between researchers such as Williams on the more discipline-focused side, and Cantafio, Ikoawaji, Clayton and Clopton advocating for change towards a more cross-disciplinary approach. On the one hand, the dominant hierarchy of business schools is still structured traditionally for reasons articulated by Williams of London School of Economics (2014), who states that the development of business and management subject teaching and research into narrow subject-based silos such as accounting and marketing has grown up for pragmatic HEI-focused reasons. These are for example to allow business schools to improve subject-based accreditation and rankings, to build up academic staff specialist research and teaching expertise, and to bring subject-based academic research into the classroom (Williams, S., 2014).

However, this reasoning contrasts with more recent academic research by Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022), who advocate that the discipline-based silo is now outdated, and that HEIs should now pursue more cross-disciplinary curriculum collaboration. While narrow subject categorisation can make sense for specialist professional bodies and employers, it can discourage cross-disciplinary skills work by students on business and management courses, according to Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022), who discuss that if UK HEI business curricula are too geared towards specialist functional areas, this can leave students unprepared for more cross-functional working, which is becoming more prevalent in an industry environment of increasing collaboration across different functions and departments in the real working world (Cantafio and Ikoawaji, 2022). This view is supported by Clayton and Clopton (2019), who echo the concern over the lack of cross-disciplinary skills curricula for business and management students regarding digital and data analytics skills. They recommend that universities should collaborate on curriculum more with employers to bring such future-proofed skills into the business and management curriculum. Clayton and Clopton (2019) also recommend that business and management academics should work with employer advisory boards to collaborate on curriculum redesign on a more cross-disciplinary basis, and look to the future of employment by incorporating digital and data analytics skills across all degrees, improving employability prospects for their graduates (Clayton and Clopton, 2019). To date, however, cross-disciplinary structures and curricula are still unusual in UK business schools and management departments.

Debates concerning future business graduate skills and curricula on which to focus business teaching and curriculum collaboration also tend to emphasise more cross-disciplinary and soft transferable skills in addition to specific

business subject skills, as discussed in Section 2.3 and Chapter 5 below.

External observers such as McKinsey and Company (2021) identified from research with employers the following 56 key skills areas essential for graduates to gain for the future world of work and business, shown in Figure 2 below, and amplified by other models of employability skills discussed in Section 2.1.2.6 below:

**Figure 2 - Employability Skills for the Future World of Work**



(McKinsey & Company, 2021)

In business and management curricula, while cognitive skills are often taught interwoven with subjects such as economics or finance, academics can



sometimes find it more difficult to incorporate the other skill sets shown in Figure 2 above, such as digital, interpersonal, and self-leadership skills. Co-creation of future business and management curricula together with employers and professional bodies could therefore prove instrumental in supporting academics to incorporate more employability skills into the curriculum across all business subjects to improve their students' preparation for the world of work.

To summarise, Section 2.1.1 has provided an overview of the current UK HEI environment, with evidence of increasing divergence between the need to set up narrowly specific subject disciplines and curricula in business and management departments for ease of teaching by universities and for statistical data classification purposes by bodies such as HESA and HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute), compared with employer requirements for more curriculum connectedness, to produce graduates who are able to work effectively in cross-functional teams, applying skills from both business and management studies, and from other functional areas and disciplines. This overview of issues in UK HE is therefore followed by deeper exploration of key drivers, models, and frameworks applicable to business curriculum collaboration in Section 2.1.2 below.

## **2.1.2 Key Drivers & Frameworks for Business Curriculum**

### **Collaboration**

The topic of what is driving academic-employer-professional body business curriculum collaboration does not yet appear from published research to be a universally accepted principle in UK HEIs, despite clear drivers for HE curriculum collaboration with employers or professional bodies as discussed in Section 2.1.1 above. Research by Times Higher Education, for example, shows

that the Ahelo (Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes) project by the OECD to involve employers in setting and assessing student skills at the end of their degrees was aborted in 2015, because several universities expressed concern at collaborating on information relating to their individual teaching outcomes, and employers questioned whether graduate skills could be assessed accurately across different HE institutions (Williams, T., 2022a).

There is however clear evidence in academic and grey literature from leading researchers into HE curriculum such as Carlile (2016), Hatt (2019), Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022) of fresh drivers and motivators arising for curriculum collaboration as desirable and beneficial for the future of UK HE, particularly in business and management subjects. One of the main drivers discussed by Carlile et al (2016) is that business schools now need stronger partnerships with industry to provide 'engaged learning, greater opportunities for job placement, and closer collaboration for the mutual benefit of education and enterprise' (Carlile *et al.*, 2016) (p5). Hatt (2019) similarly asserts that approaches such as the Team Academy curriculum design which originated in Finland's Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, whereby students gain their degree by building their own companies in collaboration with employers, is a creative and valid response to creating graduate employment opportunities collaboratively with real businesses (Hatt, 2019).

Graduate skills development is another key driver for curriculum collaboration put forward by the above researchers as well as Jackson, who writes extensively on curriculum collaboration, claiming that businesses work more closely with HEI curriculum development to effectively build key student business skills for the future (Jackson, D., 2013).

This view is echoed by Carlile et al (2016), who recommend that if businesses partner more closely with business schools on skills development, teaching and curriculum delivery, students will have a better chance of succeeding in the real world: ‘This isn’t just through case studies and theory, this is through partnerships with real-world businesses that helps us build what we need’ (Carlile *et al.*, 2016) (p5). A similar view is expressed by Cantafio and Ikoawaji (2022), whose primary research with employers found that academic staff in UK HEIs need to collaborate more closely with employers on curriculum design, to gain a better command of technology and digital skills and tools that are used in practice in a business work environment. Their view is that academic staff are often the first point of learning for business students in considering the world of work, so failure to role model such skills by not using teaching and learning methodology effectively could have a negative impact on students’ learning and skills transferability to their future employment (Cantafio and Ikoawaji, 2022). Entrepreneurial skills development motivators for collaborative curriculum working are also emphasised by Jackson (2010), who recommends that HEIs work together on curriculum design with employers to teach knowledge and skills that make a graduate employable:

‘Collaborative partnerships between HEIs and industry, and effective competency profiling processes, should appropriately identify the required outcomes of graduate education, with academic expertise defining the best pedagogical pathway to achieve defined learning goals and their subsequent transfer to the workplace.’ (Jackson, D., 2010) (p31)

Challenges and barriers to collaboration around business curricula between academics, professional bodies and employers are however still widespread, based on research by skills curriculum thought leaders Jackson (2013) and Chapman (2012), as well as UK HE policy body Guild HE (2018). Jackson

points out that even where academics and employers do have confidence to reach out and collaborate on business curriculum design and delivery, developing and delivering on such collaborations places a significant burden on staffing, time, financial resources, and access to facilities, as well as having the scope to build mutually beneficial and long-lasting collaborative relationships.

It is not always clear to UK employers or academics who should bear primary responsibility for developing non-technical skills in business graduates for effective workplace performance, with Jackson (2013) pointing out that employers believe the acquisition of student employability skills to be primarily the responsibility of business schools. Furthermore, academics often regard the incorporation of graduate employability non-technical skills development into the business curriculum as potentially detracting from the main purpose of teaching and learning of business and management subjects (Jackson, D., 2013).

A further challenge to curriculum collaboration is the speed at which this takes place, which is criticised by Jackson and Chapman (2012) as well as UK policy bodies such as Guild HE (2018). A recent study by JISC (2020), for example, found that employer-university collaboration on employability is often held back by the different pace at which each type of institution moves, as UK HEIs are not always set up to adapt their curricular offerings at the same pace that employer needs are changing, with a typical undergraduate course taking 12-18 months to develop and sign off with no subsequent curriculum refresh for 3-5 years (JISC, 2020).

Furthermore, a study by Jackson and Chapman (2012) found that UK business-subject academics often regard employers' wish lists of business graduate competences they would like to see built into the business curriculum as

unrealistic and ambiguous for an HEI level business curriculum, including leadership and political skills (Jackson, D. and Chapman, 2012). Guild HE (2018, p51) also points out the burden that bringing employers in to co-deliver the business curriculum places on HEI human resources, in authorising contracts, premises access, email access etc. As a result, many HEIs tend to over rely on a small number of academic staff to develop and maintain links with employers and professional bodies (GuildHE, 2018).

However, there is evidence in the literature reviewed that if challenges such as those discussed above can be overcome, then the concept of building effective collaborative business curriculum relationships between universities, professional bodies and employers can shift from being an ad hoc policy output from separate government initiatives, such as the move towards incorporating work experience into business degrees from the 1960s onwards, to becoming both urgent and critical since the move towards graduate outcomes metrics arose as a key factor in continuing university registration in 2018 (Lowe, 2023).

The discussion above demonstrates that universities can be reluctant to reach out and establish curricular relationships with employers or professional bodies, for reasons including lack of connected curricular thinking in HEIs and the difficulty of finding mechanisms or resources to establish such relationships.

However, research by academics such as Fung (2017) and Jackson (2016) show that business curriculum collaboration can indeed generate positive benefits for academics, students, employers, and professional body stakeholders, as discussed in more detail around curriculum specifics in section 2.1.2.1 below.

### **2.1.2.1 Changing Role of Curriculum**

While there are different viewpoints regarding the definition and purpose of a university curriculum in relation to discipline silos versus cross-disciplinary trends as discussed in Section 2.1.1.2 above, the current concept of curriculum in UK higher education remains broadly defined according to academic research by UK regulatory bodies such as the QAA (2020, Guild HE (2018) and researchers such as Hicks (2018) as a process for connecting and integrating university learning and teaching into coherent and meaningful educational experiences for students (Hicks, 2018).

In terms of curriculum scope and content, researchers such as Millican and Bourner (2014) point out that the HE curriculum has traditionally been narrowly viewed as subject-centred education focused on equipping students to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their specific subject of study, through research or teaching knowledge (Millican and Bourner, 2014).

However more recent academic research by Andrews (2023), and Cheng et al (2021) indicates that deciding what is in or outside a curriculum in UK HE has become more challenging and less discipline-specific since UK Graduate Outcomes measures came into play in 2018. Academics are now expected to include in HE curricula not only specialist knowledge content, but also to refer to stakeholders such as employers, professional bodies, alumni and students themselves, to include aspects of decolonised, inclusive and employable content and skills in business and management curricula, involving aspirations to make the student more important in curriculum creation, equipping students to live more successful lives, and to find suitable employment after they

graduate (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). As Cheng et al (2022) point out, curriculum design in HE is therefore not without significant challenges:

‘There is a discernible shift from provision of traditional education which is discipline and pedagogy oriented to vocationally focused provision which trains students to demonstrate instrumental values of knowledge-for-use. It has become a common practice for HEIs, especially teaching-centred ones, to incorporate employability skills development into their programmes. However, designing a desirable curriculum to meet the expectations of diverse industries and student cohorts can be challenging, requiring a considerable commitment of staff time and resources.’ (Cheng *et al.*, 2022) (p26)

The pressure on UK HEIs to pivot their curricula to improve graduate employment skills and outcomes is therefore a major influence on what is included or excluded in HE curricula, and the HE curriculum landscape is changing in influencing whether universities choose to collaborate with employers and professional bodies to design, deliver and maintain curricula with future currency and value to students as well as to the HEI itself, as discussed in relation to business curriculum value in Section 2.1.2.2 below.

In business and management subject areas the concept of effective curriculum design and delivery has particularly high importance, as curricula in these subjects are increasingly based on creating a shared understanding with students and employers of what the larger goal of higher education is for, and giving students an opportunity to reflect on the kind of person they hope to become through their learning (Andrews, 2023). Pressure to prepare business students to be more employable is therefore becoming a key driver for reviewing business curricula and collaborative relationships, design and delivery amongst UK higher education institutions, particularly from government sources such as the 2017 Industrial Strategy, for example, which identified assurance of the right high-level technical skills as a key challenge for the future success of UK industry, via assurance of curriculum value in higher education and

employer engagement (GuildHE, 2018). Furthermore, Advance HE (2016) advocates that employability is relevant to all UK business and management students, and should therefore be embedded into all learning and teaching policies, processes, and practices in the business curriculum, and leveraged throughout the student lifecycle, with a role to play for all stakeholders, including academic and support staff, students, careers services, students' unions, and employers, in embedding skills models resulting in improved employability (AdvanceHE, 2016). The impact of differing employment and employability influences on business curricula is therefore discussed in more detail below.

The distinction between employment and employability has a significant and potentially negative impact on business curriculum collaboration and design if the two concepts are intertwined too closely.

UK HE currently gives rise to differing interpretations of the linkage between the notions of employment and employability, with UK HEIs such as London South Bank University and HEI membership bodies such as Advance HE (2022) as well as researchers such as Pegg (2012), Hansen and Daniels (2023), Cook (2022) and Norton (2022) appearing to be more vocal than government policy makers that there is a significant difference in both the purpose and measurability of these terms. One key differentiation made by Advance HE (2022) in relation to curriculum design between the notions of 'employment' and 'employability', as stated by Norton in a recent report published by Advance HE and HEFCW (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales), is that 'employment' is essentially a graduate outcome measured through relevant surveys and employment statistics, and often published by universities, whereas 'employability' represents a broader perspective concerning the skills,



knowledge and attributes to support student learning and career development (Norton, 2022). Pegg et al (2012) had previously produced a similar definition by describing 'employment' as the graduate outcome measured by universities, and 'employability' as 'a range of knowledge, skills and attributes which support continued learning and career development' (Pegg *et al.*, 2012a) (p7). In more recent comparisons between employment and employability, however, Hansen and Daniels (2023) go further in pointing out that both concepts are now measured by the UK government, so both a university's embedding of employability in curricula to curate graduates' ability and their preparedness for employment is increasingly under scrutiny at national level (Hansen and Daniels, 2023). This can result in graduate employment outcomes being used as a proxy metric for graduate employability, even though the two constructs are not synonymous, nor is employability an employment guarantee.

This distinction is made even clearer by Cook (2022), who views employability as a process of lifelong learning and development, while employment is simply one of employability's many possible outcomes (Cook, E., 2022).

In terms of curriculum design and collaboration, potential confusion between employability and employment can therefore prove damaging to collaborative relationships between academics and employers, particularly as the focus on 'employment' measures by the UK government since 2017 may compel UK HEIs to address how to embed 'employability' into the curriculum more effectively simply to achieve improved 'employment' outcomes, potentially at the cost of other curriculum content. This trend is discussed further by Frankham (2017), who worries that universities are being increasingly driven to create employability curricula and strategies that fit with government policies, as

discussed further below, specifically for business and management subject areas (Frankham, 2017). This is despite the lack of power that HEIs themselves have over employment rates in any specific industry, as stated by the UK OfS (Office for Students) in their 2021 Insight Brief on place, employment, and the role of higher education. Here the OfS points out that differing employment rates stem more from disparities emerging in early education and the availability by place of post-university employment opportunities than from direct linkage to universities and HE curricula (OfS, 2021). This lack of HE power over employment rates therefore makes attempts at direct curricular linkages between measurement of employment and university curricula challenging and problematic, as discussed in more detail in Section 2.1.2.2 around HEI Metrics and Graduate Outcomes below.

#### **2.1.2.2 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking & Accreditation Drivers**

The influence of HEI metrics on curricular collaboration and design is significant, as whereas student success metrics in UK higher education were traditionally associated with academic success and achievement of intended learning outcomes, usually operationalised by grade measurements, in more recent years UK higher education metrics have focused more extensively on student satisfaction, outcomes and engagement. These include measures such as the NSS (National Student Survey) and PTES (Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey), as well as the LEO (Longitudinal Education Outcomes) survey on graduate earnings, and the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) metric, which has used NSS and other inputs relating to student outcome metrics in its calculations and HEI awards. In 2021, the Sutton Trust also established mobility rate metrics relating to student social mobility

improvements resulting from degree study at UK HEIs, and Universities UK now also measures the attainment of BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) students at UK universities. All the above measures connect directly to the influence of curriculum design and delivery in the universities where I have held professional practice and academic roles.

Government policy focus on graduate employment outcomes as a key measure of student success has profound implications for the way UK HEIs decide which programmes and curricula to offer or rescind, and how to design the curriculum and pedagogic approach offered in relation to the requirements of the contemporary workplace, including HEI management departments and business schools, as highlighted by leading HE curriculum researchers such as Fung (2017), Jackson and Bridgstock (2018). As a result, individual HEI success in employment outcomes has now become a significant battleground on which UK HEIs compete with one another and determine their curricular strategy (Jackson, D. and Bridgstock, 2018). However, research studies by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) have shown that UK students even in highly ranked HEIs have frequently scored poorly on questions about how their academic studies are preparing them for work. In a 2016 HEA national study only 20% of UK students surveyed nationally reported that they had interacted with HEI staff to talk about their career plans as well as their academic performance (Fung, 2017).

The above discussion demonstrates that although official metrics are driving UK HEIs towards engaging more proactively with employers and professional bodies in curriculum collaboration, the metrics landscape is still causing concern for UK HEIs in terms of curriculum design, and does not yet appear to drive truly

embedded external collaborative relationships across UK business schools and management departments, even in relation to very specific measures such as Graduate Outcomes, as discussed below.

One of the most current metrics linked to graduate skills development via curriculum redesign is the metric of Graduate Outcomes data, as acknowledged by current researchers into curriculum development such as Lowe (2023), Hansen and Daniels (2023). As discussed above in Chapter 2, since 2018 the UK government has placed greater emphasis on metrics relating to career outcomes after students complete their courses of study, encouraging UK HEIs to accept that graduate employability is a key driver and measure of university success in providing value for the investment students make in going to university (Lowe, 2023). The former HESA DLHE (Destination of Leavers in Higher Education) metrics, based on student employment and salary six months after finishing HE degrees and administered by UK HEIs, was replaced in 2018 with the Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey, administered by an independent market research organisation, and basing metrics on student employment and salary 15 months after completing their higher education course. 90% of 2018-19 graduates who responded to the 2020-21 Graduate Outcomes survey were in formal work or further study, with 77% responding that their activities fit with their future plans (HESA, 2023). For business and management students, the 2021-22 Graduate Outcomes study showed that 91% of 2019-20 graduates were in formal work or further study, with 74% agreeing their current activity was meaningful (CABS, 2023a).

Graduate outcomes-related curriculum impact has however varied regionally across the UK according to HESA (2021). Although the Office for Students

(OfS) in England has given universities the challenge of expected strategic outcomes including graduates leaving with the knowledge and skills that will contribute to their national and local economies and communities, and drive productivity, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has articulated a less aggressive vision for HEIs to provide graduates who are simply able to demonstrate and communicate their value to prospective employers. A recent review of universities in Scotland outlined a more future-focused aspiration to create a new National Outcome and Impact Framework, to produce work-ready graduates equipped to transition into employment, which has synergy with the new and broader 'Graduating to Success' higher education strategy for Northern Ireland, focusing on how HEIs need to supply graduates with the knowledge and attributes required within the regional economy (HESA, 2021). At national level, the UK QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) includes a 'Skills' section in its subject benchmark statements for business and management subjects for undergraduate course curricula development, including both soft skills and personal development (Cashian, Clarke and Richardson, 2015). All the above result in a lack of consistency in graduate outcomes and skills approaches related to curriculum development across different parts of UK HE.

Despite such regional inconsistencies, as Graduate Outcomes measures feed into university league tables, prospective students are increasingly likely to use these measures to determine where to study, making such measures a potential key driver for curriculum change, as articulated in research by recent thought leaders in this area such as Cheng et al (2021), Hansen and Daniels (2023). UK HEIs will therefore need to increasingly consider the concept of embedding employability skills in the business and management curriculum to

attract prospective students, combining key soft skills such as leadership, critical thinking and intercultural fluency with hard skills such as subject knowledge, data analysis and digital technologies (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). At undergraduate level, skills such as problem solving and critical thinking are also receiving increasing emphasis amongst business and management curricula, whereas at postgraduate level skills such as leadership and management have tended to attract more curricular focus (The British Academy, 2021).

In terms of estimating student confidence in their own graduate employability skills arising from curriculum design, research by regulatory bodies such as the Association of MBAs (AMBA) (2021) contrasts sharply with research by curriculum and employability thought leaders such as Jackson (2012). AMBA research shows that in 2021, 62% of MBA graduates perceived themselves to be better at resolving problems on completion of their MBA, 88% agreed that they had gained substantially more skills to help them do business better, and 74% agreed they had been able to develop all the business-related skills they wanted as a result of doing their MBA (Association of MBAs, 2021). However conflicting research by Jackson (2012) indicates that business and management student perceptions of their own employability skills in key areas such as self-awareness, critical thinking, developing initiative and enterprise are over-inflated when compared with evidence from employers and industry, which tend to rate graduates much lower on these skills. As a result, Jackson recommends involving employers and industry more proactively in business curriculum collaboration, to provide more authentic learning opportunities for students, and to help hone employability skills levels, standards, and expectations more realistically (Jackson, D., 2012).

This notion is developed further in later research by Jackson (2013), who from primary research with business graduate employers cites the following non-technical skills as those particularly required by employers of business and management graduates:

**Table 2 - Non-Technical Skills Required in Business Graduates**

| <b>Skill</b>                       | <b>Behaviour</b>   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Core business skills</b>        | Numeracy; technology   |
| <b>Critical thinking</b>           | Pattern recognition and conceptualisation; evaluation                                    |
| <b>Problem solving</b>             | Analytical/convergent reasoning; diagnosing  |
| <b>Decision management</b>         | Lateral thinking/creativity; information management; decision making                     |
| <b>Political skills</b>            | Influencing others; conflict resolution  |
| <b>Working with others</b>         | Task collaboration; team working; social intelligence; cultural and diversity management |
| <b>Oral communication</b>          | Verbal communication; giving and receiving feedback                                      |
| <b>Personal ethics</b>             | Personal ethics  |
| <b>Confidence</b>                  | Self-efficacy  |
| <b>Self-awareness</b>              | Meta-cognition; lifelong learning  |
| <b>Self-discipline</b>             | Self-regulation; stress tolerance; work/life balance                                     |
| <b>Innovation</b>                  | Entrepreneurship; change management  |
| <b>Leadership</b>                  | Project management; performance management; meeting management; developing others        |
| <b>Formal communication skills</b> | Public speaking; meeting participation; written communication                            |
| <b>Performance</b>                 | Efficiency; multi-tasking; autonomy  |
| <b>Organisational skills</b>       | Goal and task management; time management  |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Environmental awareness</b>     | Organisational awareness; commercial awareness |
| <b>Professional responsibility</b> | Social responsibility; accountability          |
| <b>Work ethic</b>                  | Drive; initiative                              |

(Jackson, D., 2013) (p778)

Curricular reflection of newer graduate skills such as personal development planning (PDP) and reflection are also becoming key in UK HE, as advocated by policy researchers such as Jackson (2019) and Advance HE as important skills for business and management graduates to have embedded in the curriculum, to encourage students to plan and reflect on their experience of learning activities as they move towards the labour market. According to a 2006 Higher Education Academy report on personal development planning and employability, this approach should encourage students to reflect on their capabilities both via 'introspection' around their own personal skills developed, and 'extrospection' gained through, for example, volunteering or work experience (Higher Education Academy, 2006).

Alternative skills for coping with change are however also important to incorporate into curriculum design, as suggested by thought leaders on curriculum development such as Fung (2017) and Carlile (2016). Fung points out that business and management in the real world can be messy and does not always align exactly with business management theories and models taught in UK HE. She therefore asserts that students need to be given learning activities in the curriculum that do not necessarily create rules and frameworks, but instead mirror and prepare student skills for the messy ways in which they will function in the real-world workplace (Fung, 2017). This view concurs with



Carlile et al (2016), who also emphasise that academic and functional knowledge should be accompanied by broader skills of intellectual agility, the ability to be analytical, and 'skills of emotional, contextual and cultural intelligence to anchor the leadership ability that employers seek' (Carlile *et al.*, 2016) (p5). There is therefore a need for active partnerships between business schools and businesses in curriculum design to assure experiential learning and practice, and to foster broad skills such as business judgment, social awareness, and critical thinking. Fung (2017) similarly recommends that both curricula and teaching staff themselves need to be developed by HEIs to improve the work-related attributes of students:

'The prize for securing real improvements in the delivery of employability skills is that we develop more individuals with skills necessary to get a job that is fulfilling and offers a real platform for progression in work.'  
(Fung, 2017) (p6).

A further area of complexity arising from linking curriculum and graduate skills development is how to measure skills against curriculum value, a debate discussed keenly by leading curriculum researchers such as Jackson and Wilton (2016) and Carlile et al (2016), and an area where there is currently little agreement in UK HE. Carlile et al (2016) equate perceived value for money as an outcome for business school graduates with gaining the right set of skills that employers want them to have to tackle the challenges of the business world. These include leadership competence, teamwork, communication, ability to see at big picture level, application of problem-solving abilities, cultural and contextual intelligence, digital and analytical skills. Jackson and Wilton (2016) however believe that business and management students only obtain true value if they graduate with genuine long-term 'career management competencies', which consist of both the acquisition of employable skills and competencies,

and the ability to manage their own continuous career management to achieve their planned career pathways through self-awareness and the ability to resolve career-related challenges (Jackson, D. and Wilton, 2016) (p268). Research by UK Russell Group research-intensive universities also shows that soft transferable skills are as important as hard subject knowledge skills in value to address UK skills gaps and deliver economic growth, estimating that the current skills gap in digital skills for example is costing the UK economy as much as £63 billion a year in potential GDP (Russell Group, 2023).

In summary, improving graduate outcomes and skills in collaboration with employers and professional bodies to meet Graduate Outcomes metrics appears to be a key driver for external curriculum collaboration by UK HEIs, however there is little agreement on the real value of skills in the business curriculum to date, or how these affect HEI rankings, as discussed below.

Ranking tables have become increasingly important in UK higher education in influencing the decisions of prospective students about which courses, curricula and HEIs to choose for study, with research by ranking providers such as AACSB (2017), QS (2022) and researchers such as Chadha and Toner (2017) showing that league tables have become a tool in an increasingly transactional relationship between students and UK HEIs. The impact on curriculum design is that it now needs to play back to consumerist values more commonly found in the corporate world, which can turn curriculum creation into a type of investment project, matching individual human capital profiles to labour market demand as a ranked measure of success (Chadha and Toner, 2017). One of the most used UK employability-related ranking tables monitored by students, employers, central government, and UK HEIs is the QS Graduate Employability Rankings

guide, which looks at graduates employed, and whose 2022 UK university rankings scored as follows out of 100 points:

**Table 3 - QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022: UK Universities**

| University               | Overall Score out of 100 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| University of Oxford     | 96.7                     |
| University of Cambridge  | 94                       |
| UCL                      | 89.6                     |
| Imperial College London  | 82.8                     |
| University of Manchester | 73.9                     |
| LSE                      | 72.2                     |
| University of Edinburgh  | 71.6                     |
| University of Bristol    | 71.6                     |
| University of Leeds      | 70.6                     |
| University of Nottingham | 66                       |
| King's College London    | 65.6                     |
| University of Warwick    | 64.1                     |
| University of Bath       | 59.6                     |
| Loughborough University  | 57.4                     |

(QS, 2022)

This table demonstrates that high graduate employability rankings are strongly dominated by UK Russell Group universities. This type of ranking can result in significant pressure on non-Russell Group universities to improve their rates of graduate employability and curriculum redesign to be more competitive in attracting prospective students. In parallel with ranking tables, accreditation compliance is also playing an increasing role in influencing curriculum collaboration for UK HEIs, as discussed below.

Accreditation has a significant impact on business and management course and curriculum design in the UK and globally, with several business schools and management departments in UK HEIs holding forms of accreditation to assess and uphold UK and international standards of quality, as articulated by HE researchers such as David, David, and David (2010). Business and management departments are often subject to benchmarking processes and assessment against international standards, with curricular outcomes increasingly geared towards the requirements of accreditation league tables and rankings. The three largest business and management accrediting bodies in UK business school accreditation are US-based AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), UK-based AMBA (Association of MBAs), and European-based EFMD (The European Foundation for Management Development) who deliver EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System), all of whom pay particular attention to curriculum design and HE relationships with industry in their inspections and accreditation criteria.

In terms of linkage between accreditation standards and curriculum development, it is notable that bodies such as the British Academy (2021) state that while accreditation is useful for articulating standards to students worldwide and incentivising HE providers to engage with global issues such as diversity, it can also risk stifling creativity and innovation in academic provision. While UK HEIs are keen to achieve business accreditation to recommend improvements in business education, boost student recruitment and brand image, accreditation bodies are not necessarily invited in to co-design or co-deliver business curricula at a collaborative level (The British Academy, 2021).

Concerns over curriculum linkage to accreditation standards from PSRBs are also raised by David, David and David (2010), particularly in terms of specific

student skills accreditation, with key licences and qualifications sought out by employers of business graduates not necessarily forming part of the teaching or syllabus design in UK management and business schools. David, David & David (2010) conducted research which showed that virtually no certifications, licences, or accreditations of technical employability skills such as QuickBooks or WordPress required by employers in job advertisements were found or taught in over 100 AACSB-accredited business school curricula explored across marketing, finance, accounting, and management subjects. The lack of collaboration with employers or licenced skills providers is also evidenced by follow-up discussions by these authors with academics in those business schools, which confirmed that academics were generally unaware of which certifications were relevant in their respective areas, and that business curricula taught were not designed for licensing or accrediting students, with knowledge of theory the main focus, and students expected to obtain licenced accreditations outside the curriculum.

One of the key conclusions here is therefore that business schools should revise their curricula to provide more employment-focused technical skills and accreditation required by employers: 'academics must be willing to share the responsibility of crafting the content of courses with executives' (David, David and David, 2011) (p59).

### **2.1.2.3 Graduate Skills, Frameworks and Models**

The overall drive towards curriculum collaboration relating to graduate skills and employability is being increasingly developed through measurement models and advisory frameworks in business and management subject areas, for example a measurement model by the Chartered Association of Business

Schools (CABS) found in 2022 that 67% of UK business schools reported higher levels of collaboration in 2022 than previously with the private sector, 54% with charities and social enterprises, and 46% with the public sector (Chartered Association of Business Schools, 2022).

A key driver of business curriculum collaboration modelling has been the notion of students themselves expecting to experience curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in business and management subjects, as reflected by researchers into curriculum change such as Jackson (2010), Lowden (2011) and Wharton and Horrocks (2015), who have reviewed successive curriculum-related graduate skills and employability models. Jackson (2010) developed a research model showing that that Generation Y graduates have a more entitled view of the world of work and careers advancement than their earlier counterparts, and therefore expect their HEIs to prepare them for their business careers via an applied and relevant business curriculum in partnership with employers and professional bodies (Jackson, D., 2010). In a later article, Jackson (2014) also pointed out that students are becoming increasingly assertive about the opportunity costs of workplace experience and earnings which they forego while they are studying for a degree, now often regarding their degree as a means of achieving well-paid employment, in a shift where students are moving from being 'inquisitive' to 'acquisitive' (Jackson, D., 2014). This view is also borne out by a joint national model by the Edge Foundation and University of Glasgow, where 73% of students claimed that they went to university with the primary aim to improve their job opportunities (Lowden *et al.*, 2011).

There is however evidence of marked disparities between academic employability frameworks and models versus student perceptions and experience of employability-related content within their degree programmes. Research by Wharton and Horrocks (2015), for example, found that students perceived the most significant areas of their programmes which made them more attractive to employers were demonstrating aptitude in practical learning experiences such as work placements, and engagement with employers in the classroom. However, these were also the areas which students felt were least available to them in their curriculum, resulting in a perceived curricular mismatch around employability skills. Students interviewed clearly articulated a desire for potential future employers to be invited by their HEI to contribute more collaboratively to their curriculum, and in a diverse and inclusive manner, as discussed below.

The need for greater curriculum and skills diversity and inclusivity has recently emerged as an important influence on business curriculum design in the UK, and while policy research by HE bodies such as Advance HE (2011) view this as a regulatory requirement, it is encouraging to see more recent academic researchers such as Hansen and Daniels (2023) and Lowe (2023) argue for greater inclusivity and diversity as a means of increasing soft skills in HE curricula.

Higher education policy bodies such as Advance HE (2011) have frequently encouraged UK HEIs to place greater emphasis on ensuring that all students have inclusive and fair access to employability opportunities through inclusive and diverse curriculum design, no matter how advantaged or disadvantaged their backgrounds may be (Advance, 2011). Advance HE has continued to

endorse the view originally stated in its 2011 report on inclusive curriculum design in business and management, that for HEIs and business schools, employing a wider inclusive approach should be initially underpinned by the adoption of inclusive curriculum design (Advance, 2011).

More recently, however, more social justice-related concerns have been raised by curricular researchers such as Hansen and Daniels (2023), particularly that universities which only include employability opportunities outside the curriculum risk disadvantaging students who are unable to generate the social capital required to find their own placements or internships. Hansen and Daniels (2023) therefore believe that in terms of the current focus in UK HEIs on inclusivity and diversity, embedding collaboration with employers in-curriculum means that universities could aspire to scale employability teaching to all students, linking students with employers in-curriculum to create industry connections from the comfort of compulsory academic models, creating a diverse talent pool for employers, and making employability accessible to all students (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

Similarly, Lowe (2023) recommends strongly that academics work together with industry to update curriculum content to support students from less-advantaged backgrounds who may lack industry networks and social capital. It is therefore logical to argue that academic course teams should in future consider working with employers to update the curriculum by replacing essays with job application assessments, presentations with business pitches and seminars with job interview practice to improve graduate outcomes for less-advantaged students, as advocated by Lowe (2023).



In summary, therefore, inclusivity and diversity in employability skills and improved graduate outcomes through curriculum development and collaboration with industry appear to be a growing area of discussion around business curricula in both UK HEIS and policy providers, which is likely to influence curriculum design and graduate skills modelling increasingly in the future, as discussed below.

The above findings support the notion that universities should consider models and frameworks taking diverse and more holistic employer viewpoints more collaboratively in course and curriculum design and delivery (Wharton and Horrocks, 2015).

Since the 1970s, a variety of different frameworks and models have been developed linking graduate employability skills to curriculum development, of which the most holistic and interconnected are the Connected Curriculum Framework (Fung, 2017) and the Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability (2015), both of which are now increasingly widely adopted across UK HEIs, due to the logic and impact of their connected thinking and design linking students and universities with the external world of work.

Incrementally, earlier models tended to serve as building blocks in scope from being initially student-centric and focused on individual transferable skills including self-awareness, such as the DOTS Model of Employability by Law and Watts in 1977, through to models linking students at a basic level to employability in society, such as Fugate's Psycho-Social Model of Employability in 2004, and the USEM Model of Employability by Yorke and Knight in 2006.

In 2015, the Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability built on previous graduate skills and employability models by considering the concept of

academic and employer collaboration and curriculum engagement by students in building employability skills.

This in turn was built on by the Graduate Capital Model by Tomlinson in 2017, which incorporated the concepts of externally facing human and social capital into student skills development.

Subsequently, however, one of the most innovative, connected, and impactful models in graduate skills and employability linked to curriculum design was the Connected Curriculum Framework developed by Fung in 2017, which put forward a set of connected throughlines in graduate skills and employability linked to academic research, curriculum and teaching, peer learning and the external workplace. This model has emerged as one of the most important and influential frameworks to impact on the concept of collaboration in curriculum in recent years, as discussed below in an incremental analysis of key curriculum-related graduate skills models.

#### **i) DOTS Model of Employability**

Graduate skills and curricular focus for students transitioning into employability were first emphasised in UK HE in the 1970s through the DOTS model developed by Law and Watts, representing a four-stage cyclical process of employability planning on the part of students consisting of self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision-making and transition through graduation (Salford University, 2022).

Students can use the four stages of this model to develop their employability skills as they move into employment, starting with the stage of building self-awareness through good curriculum design to understand their strengths,

interests, values, and qualities to identify their ideal career fit. Students then conduct research to become aware of career opportunities that match their strengths and interests, followed by a third stage of decision-making to rank the opportunities available to them in line with their strengths and skills. Finally, students develop an individualised career plan to transition into their chosen labour market.

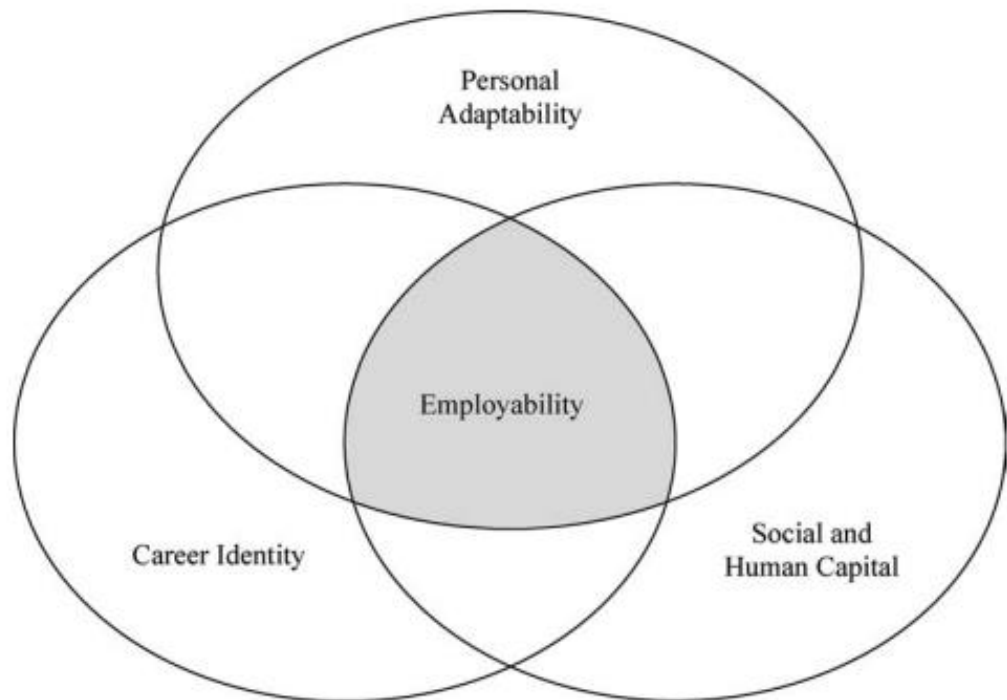
While the DOTS model is simple to understand, during recent years it has been criticised for its over-simplicity and lack of consideration of connectedness to external influences on graduate decisions, with Whistance and Campbell (2018), for example, claiming that the DOTS model lacks broader psycho-social ideas and holistic dimensions which influence the career development discourse, including social and human capital (Whistance and Campbell, 2018).

## **ii) Psycho-Social Model of Employability**

The notion that an individual's employability relates to a variety of person-centered constructs to deal effectively with the career-related changes occurring in the economy was linked to curriculum design and addressed by Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth in 2004, who built on other employability models from the 1970s-1990s to create a new model.

This model advocates that employability represents a form of work-specific active capability, which consists of three dimensions of career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital, with reciprocal relationships between these dimensions:

**Figure 3 - Psycho-Social Model of Employability**



(Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004)

Many HEIs worldwide still use this psycho-social model of employability, as it takes more of a holistic approach to understanding the factors that influence an individual's ability to find and maintain employment.

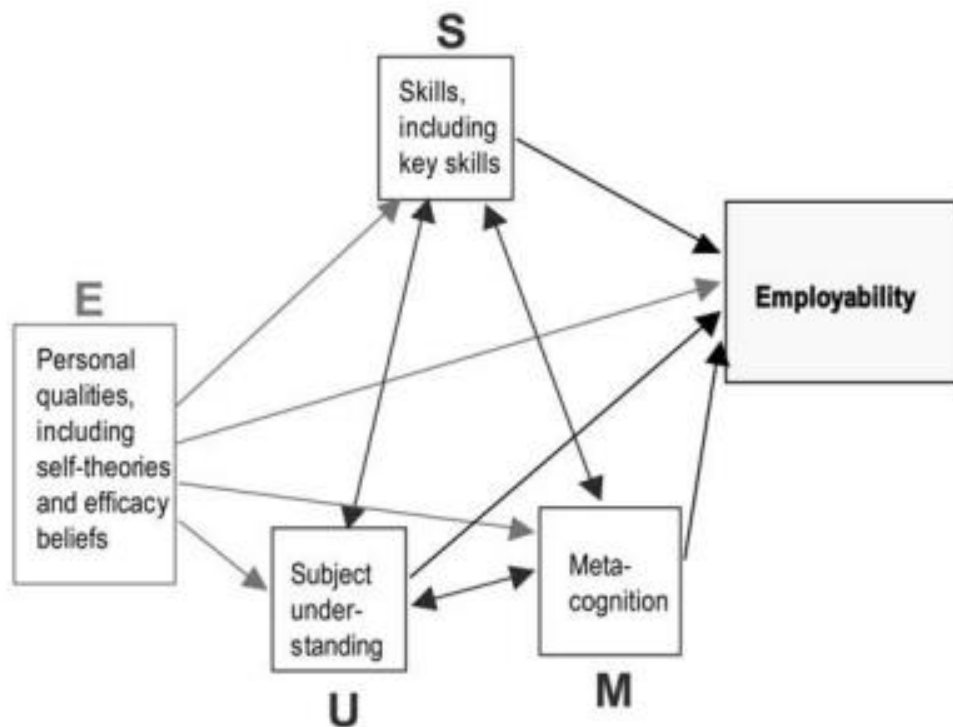
The University of Valencia, for example, after applying the Fugate employability model to over 7,000 graduates, subsequently developed new collaborative activities around networking with employers for increasing student social capital, growing provision for student work experience and student self-reflective career content in-curriculum (Whistance and Campbell, 2018).

The Fugate model is still used in many HEIs, however employability criteria relating to employer curriculum collaboration or other external influences are not defined or connected up in any real detail in this model.

### iii) USEM Model of Employability

Greater holistic connectivity between employability skills and curriculum features was incorporated in the USEM Model of Employability developed by Yorke and Knight (2006). Yorke and Knight advocated that UK HEIs and students should regard employability as influenced by four key inter-related components of understanding, skills, efficacy, and metacognition, including self-awareness, reflection, and capacity for action. In this model, the emphasis is on UK HEIs producing graduates who have a robust combination of these factors. This can however prove challenging for HEIs to develop and measure via curriculum change, particularly efficacy:

**Figure 4 - USEM Model of Employability**



(Yorke and Knight, 2006)

HEI users of this model include University of Queensland, which has applied the USEM model successfully to enable students to translate and self-reflect on

their curricular experience, and to carry this learning into their employability development (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

Other researchers are however more critical of the limitations of the USEM model, particularly when it comes to connecting to external collaborators such as employers.

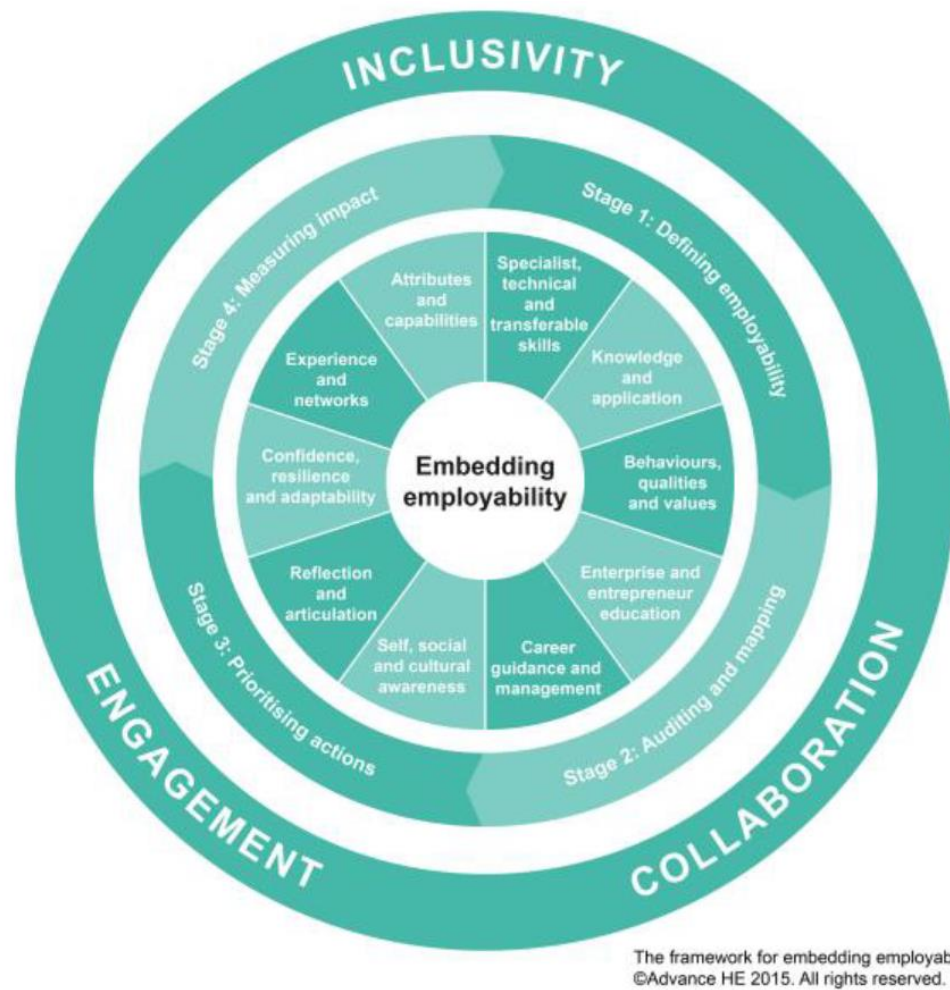
Cook (2022), for example, claims that the USEM model is so heavily focused on developing individual learners' subject understanding, skills, and attributes that it takes insufficient consideration of other external factors such as the skills needs of employers (Cook, E., 2022).

Overall, therefore, the USEM model appears useful for individualistic paradigms related to student career development, but not as key in applying the model's elements to connecting to graduate employability in relation to employers.

#### **iv) Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability**

Building on the needs and skills articulated by the DOTS and USEM models, a more recent model which does incorporate the need for HE curriculum collaboration and connection with the external labour market is the Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability, developed in 2015:

**Figure 5 - Advance HE Framework for Embedding Employability**



(AdvanceHE, 2016)

The Advance HE model advocates the need for HE collaboration around designing employability into the curriculum, particularly at the stage of auditing and mapping employability needs into curriculum creation, which is discussed in more detail in Section 2.4 below. Advance HE claims that this model provides a structure and process for defining and developing effective approaches to embedding employability in higher education (AdvanceHE, 2016), and is used by UK HEIs including Reading University, UCL and Manchester University. However, Lowe (2023) for example questions whether embedding is the right terminology for building graduate employability skills using this model, and

suggests that connecting and integrating might be a more practical term for achieving the aims of this model (Lowe, 2023).

#### **v) Graduate Capital Model**

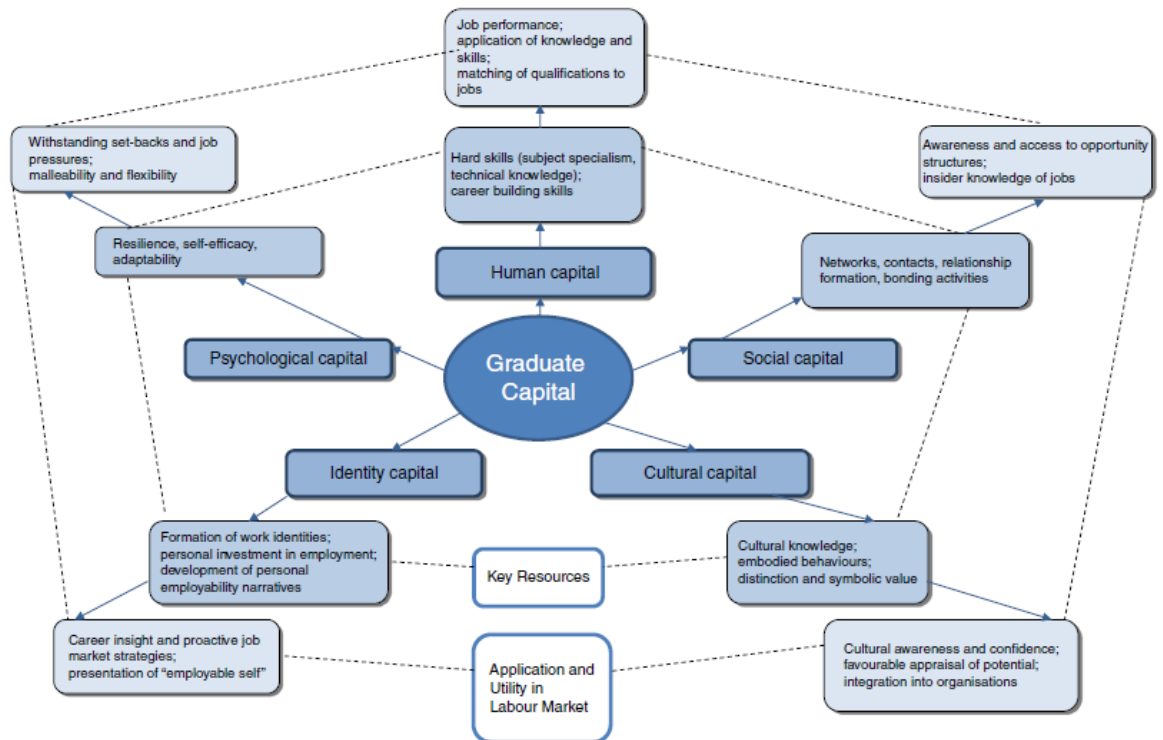
One of the key motivators for curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in UK HEIs is the recognition that employability prospects of students vary according to their access to human, social, psychological, and cultural capital. This concept of an uneven playing field in accessing types of capital for different students forms the key focus of the Graduate Capital Model developed by Tomlinson (2017), who articulates that graduates acquire different types of capital through real-world experiences embedded in the value of the journey towards becoming a graduate.

Tomlinson's Graduate Capital Model recognises that different forms of capital are interconnected and dynamic, with each influencing the others. Students can strategically invest in and leverage these capitals with the support of a strong underpinning curriculum and university experience to optimise their educational journey and future career prospects.

Understanding and applying this model can help educational institutions and policymakers support the holistic development of graduate students, and enable university academics to see where in their own institution curriculum collaboration with employers and professional bodies could improve graduate capital (Tomlinson, 2017):



**Figure 6 - Graduate Capital Model**



(Tomlinson, 2017)

An interesting example of application of graduate capital modelling through curriculum collaboration between academics and employers is Leeds Trinity University (LTU), which delivers student placements via over 3,000 employers, with a clear focus on building attributes incrementally from undergraduate Levels 4 to 6, with a direct impact on improving individual student capitals in a university where 60% of students are the first in their family to attend university, and can lack social, cultural and identity capital in particular (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

Other academics such as Cook (2022) are however critical of the Graduate Capital Model in contributing to student employability development via the curriculum. Cook (2022) highlights that this model is restricting and limited when one considers employability's wider meanings and purposes. Cook maintains that although graduate capital approaches promote the development of

necessary skills and attributes for employment through higher education, they inadequately consider connecting to the external aspects of employability, employment and work which impact on key aspects of human, social and cultural capital, such as associated impacts, issues, and challenges in the wider economic and social environment (Cook, E., 2022). Overall, therefore, the Tomlinson graduate capital model appears to capture the psycho-social factors influencing student employability to be addressed in the curriculum, but does not seem to address adequately wider issues impacting on graduate capitals relating to broader connected industry issues in the economic and socio-cultural environment.

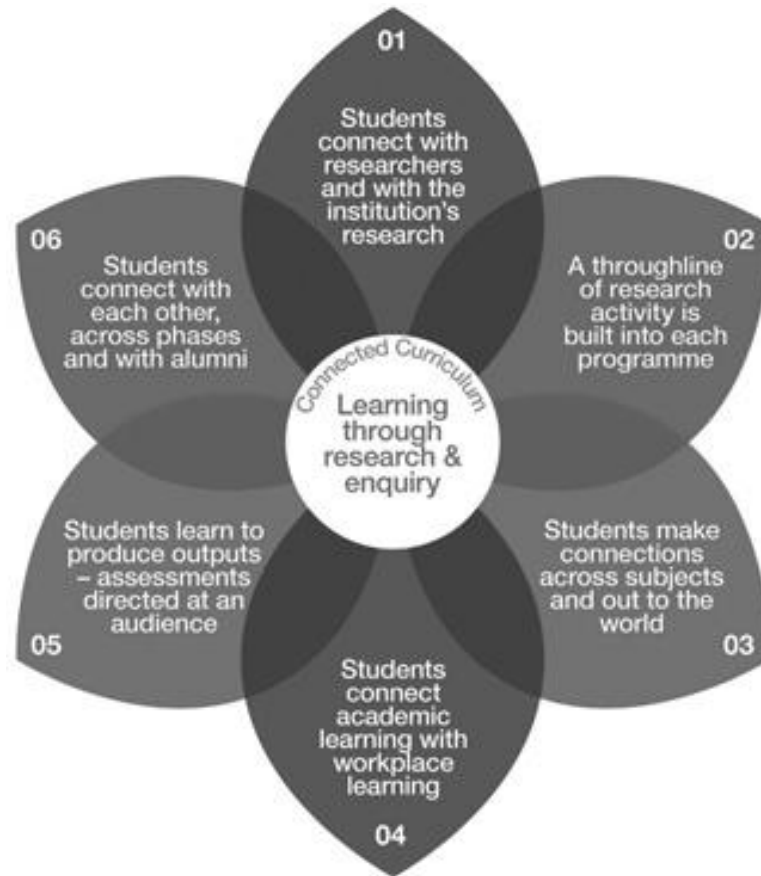
#### **vi) The Connected Curriculum Framework**

One of the more recent and impactful frameworks connecting the employer-university curriculum collaboration debate around graduate outcomes and skills is that of a holistically connected curriculum between research, teaching, employment, and peer interaction, as developed by Fung (2017). Here Fung builds significantly on previous research regarding consideration of curriculum collaboration for assurance of graduate outcomes and lifelong skills. Fung asserts that connectedness and collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in curriculum design provides a throughline of enquiry, which helps students build their own learning narrative across academic research, the workplace, student peers, and the wider world. Fung believes that this in turn can help students articulate practical and conceptual connections between their academic and lifelong employment learning:

‘All programmes of study should give students the chance to connect academic learning explicitly with areas of knowledge, skills and approaches needed, for professional work, and for their future lives in society. They should enable students to become lifelong

learners...developing capabilities and personal attributes for life and work in a changing world.' (Fung, 2017) (p84)

**Figure 7 - Connected Curriculum Framework**



(Fung, 2017)

In terms of the fourth area of connectivity shown in the framework above, students connecting academic learning with workplace learning, Fung (2017) articulates that students should be able to expect their HEIs to automatically connect student academic learning with the knowledge, skills and approaches needed for professional work and lifelong learning, via a curriculum which addresses changing technological innovation, social and organisational needs. This argument for a more connected curriculum nurturing key skills that business and management graduates require as part of their outcomes for future employability is echoed by several other authors, for example Carlile et al

(2016), who highlight that employers increasingly need graduates who have skills such as being tech-savvy, creative and internationally aware, with the ability to communicate cross-culturally, develop competence in leadership and problem-solving. These are attributes that they claim the traditional model of business and management education, with its focus on narrow disciplines, does not deliver (Carlile *et al.*, 2016). Fung's Connected Curriculum Framework (2017) therefore appears to capture the most connected and holistic approach to graduate skills and employability development through collaboration between student peers, workplace employers, academic researchers, and educators, with this model now appearing to be used in a growing number of UK HEIs.

The above models and frameworks demonstrate that there is increasing pressure for universities to collaborate with and engage employers and professional bodies more closely in business curriculum design and delivery, to ensure that academic and transferable skills taught to business students align effectively with employers and professional standards body expectations. UK HEIs are realising that they cannot avoid taking up the challenge of catering effectively for the employability of their graduates, with UK central government departments also playing a growing role in developing tighter managerialist relationships between themselves, HEIs and industry around the employability agenda. UK HEIs are therefore now actively considering steps discussed in the above frameworks and models such as curriculum redesign, forging better links with employers and professional bodies, creating more authentic modes of assessment, and augmenting work-integrated learning opportunities that they may already have offered to students (Chadha and Toner, 2017). Section 2.2 therefore examines evidence relating to how such curriculum collaboration is developed at the initial stage of curriculum design and co-creation.

## **2.2 Collaborative Curriculum Design & Co-Creation**

The focus of Section 2.2 is to explore formal and informal approaches to business curriculum collaborative initiation, co-design, and co-creation. The key findings of this section show that the level of informal or formal collaborative business curriculum design and co-creation is highly variable, depending on the curriculum level and business subject being designed. However, while degree apprenticeships and accredited degrees appear to be more established in curriculum co-design due to regulatory drivers, curricular co-design and co-creation between UK HEIs, employers and professional bodies are now proving increasingly important for skills and quality assurance across most other areas of business undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education provision, with connected and holistic models such as Fung's Connected Curriculum Framework (2017) facilitating collaborative curricular relationship building for co-design and creation. Section 2.2 also however demonstrates that ownership and responsibility for initiating business curriculum co-creation is a controversial issue for many universities.

### **2.2.1 Curriculum Design & Co-Creation Context**

Collaborative curriculum design in HE can be defined as a partnership approach which can prove effective for all collaborative partners concerned:

‘This type of collaboration involves universities and business working in close partnership to adapt existing or design new degree and postgraduate programmes, often based around the overlap between a research or teaching specialism of the university and a particular industry or cluster.’ (Healy *et al.*, 2014) (p21)

In terms of curriculum co-design, there is an argument that business curriculum development should be approached in the same way as product development, with faculty engaging employers from the outset to establish curriculum

priorities and design input to the curriculum, to assure experiential learning for business and management students. This approach is supported by leading researchers in curriculum design such as Lowden (2011), Healy et al (2014) and Carlile et al (2016). Furthermore, it can be argued that collaborative business curriculum design and co-creation can prove a win-win activity for employers, professional bodies, and academics alike, if curriculum design is synchronised with the needs of business, and results from a strong working partnership between HEIs and employer organisations, while ensuring that academic content, quality, and curriculum integrity are not compromised (Lowden *et al.*, 2011). Responsibility for initiating curriculum collaboration is however still an area of debate in universities, as discussed in the next section.

#### **2.2.1.1 Initiating & Resisting Curriculum Collaboration**

The issue of whose responsibility it is to initiate business curriculum collaboration amongst universities, professional bodies and employers is controversial, with differing literature sources such as Healy et al (2014), Al-Majeed (2022), Daubney (2022) and Hansen and Daniels (2023) offering several different viewpoints on attribution of this responsibility. Potential reasons for lack of ownership of collaboration initiation start with multiple concerns by academics that businesses and professional bodies may look for an excessive emphasis on practical knowledge and skills rather than academic theory in the business curriculum, or that professional bodies may have concerns about working with HEIs that they are meant to regulate, and that employers may worry that academics may want to deliver curricula which incorporate an overly theoretical approach (Healy *et al.*, 2014). These discussions echo the likelihood that while there can be a tendency towards inertia in initiating business

curriculum collaboration on the part of employers and professional bodies, it is more likely that it is reluctance or even resistance on the part of HE academics that can slow proactiveness in initiating business curriculum collaboration, for the reasons discussed below.

Starting from the academic viewpoint, it can be argued that academics can be resistant to make the first move in collaborative business curriculum design, as highlighted by Al-Majeed (2022) and Healy et al (2014), because they worry that they are not always completely up to date with latest industry trends in their sectors, or do not see it as their role to approach or have contacts with employers, as this is often the province of careers and alumni teams.

Furthermore, academics can tend to regard the main benefits of such collaborative activities as accruing first to students and then to employer organisations, with only limited benefits perceived for academics themselves, all of which can impact on academics' willingness to initiate business curriculum collaboration (Healy *et al.*, 2014). Lack of time and resources can also result in academics' reluctance to make the first move in establishing external business curriculum collaboration, as discussed by Al-Majeed (2022), whose work with academics has shown that they often feel that they have limited time and resources to identify the right people in relevant employer organisations to engage with, and that the process of working with large employer organisations can involve long chains of approval and an excessively slow pace of action (Al-Majeed, 2022).

In a more sympathetic light, academic resistance to curriculum collaboration can be based on academics genuinely believing that embedding employability through curriculum collaboration is not their job, and that employability-related content might even compromise and threaten the academic rigour of their

programmes (Daubney, 2022). Similarly, academics can perceive that even where it is part of their role to produce employable graduates, they are not sufficiently trained to do so as academics (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

One of the primary reasons for academics being reluctant to reach out to initiate external collaborative relationships is therefore related to their role definition in HEIs. In many UK HEIs, responsibility for employer relationships has traditionally been handled in the eyes of academics by careers and business relations teams, who provide support for work placements, employer events and alumni engagement, as evidenced by O'Leary (2013). With current pressure on universities to develop more extensive relationships with employers for graduate outcome improvements, however, there is no evidence that universities are dramatically increasing the size of their careers teams accordingly, and instead are now frequently expecting academics to create external collaborative relationships themselves, which can be challenging for academics not accustomed to this role (O'Leary, 2013).

With current economic pressure on UK HEIs to balance their finances, a more structural reason for academic resistance to initiating curriculum collaboration is that of academic disincentives, with recruitment, reward and promotion systems in UK HEIs often weighted towards research or teaching, but with little recognition for academics who successfully initiate curriculum collaboration, embed employability in the curriculum, or contribute towards improving their HEI's Graduate Outcomes scores (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

As a result of the above factors, the reluctance of academics to make the first move in initiating collaborative relationships externally can have a negative impact on development of such relationships. Research by Pereira, Vilas-Boas



and Rebelo (2020), for example, shows that academics may often exert their internal status power to actively resist reaching out to employers and professional bodies for curriculum collaboration, preferring instead to exercise their own authority over curriculum design, and more invested in incorporating specialist theory associated with their own research interests than resolving potential mismatches between curriculum and labour market demands (Pereira, Vilas-Boas and Rebelo, 2020).

There are however incentives for academics to overcome reasons for resisting initiation of curriculum collaboration. Ultimately there are more likely to be rewards in initiating business curriculum collaboration for academics than for employers or professional bodies, as academics can themselves gain clear benefits in curriculum collaboration with employers, according to research by Healy et al (2014). Such rewards may include improved student engagement and employability, higher levels of student recruitment, raising the university's profile, knowledge exchange, bringing in external ideas, broadening the academic contact base, and future research collaboration opportunities (Healy *et al.*, 2014).

In summary, academic resistance to initiating curriculum collaboration can be due to a combination of lack of incentives and resources to do so, belief that it is not their role, concerns over the balance of theory, practice, and knowledge that employers or professional bodies could bring to such a collaboration, and lack of perceived benefits to pursue such collaborative initiation. Professional bodies and employers can also, however, prove resistant to making the first move in business curriculum collaboration.

At first glance it would appear that there should be extensive willingness of professional bodies and employers as well as academics to initiate curriculum design collaboration, with clear motivating factors for employers and professional bodies, including improved student employability, securing an appropriately qualified supply of labour, raising the employer's profile and brand with students, broadening the employer's contact base, upskilling staff, and accreditation through formal HE qualifications (Healy *et al.*, 2014).

There is however little literature-based evidence that employers and professional bodies feel they are made very welcome by academics in initiating business curriculum collaboration beyond existing collaboration in research, innovation, standards-setting, or regulation. A 2021 report by the CMI showed that only 37% of employers who had collaborated with UK HEIs reported that it had been a smooth process to get involved with their chosen HEI, and many employers were deterred from becoming involved with HEIs as a result (Chartered Management Institute, 2021). Similarly, research from JISC (2020) indicates that HEIs do not always make it easy for employers to reach out for curriculum collaboration, with limited signposting on UK HEI or business school websites indicating who employers should approach with proposals for initiating business curriculum collaboration (JISC, 2020). The responsibility for initiating curricular collaboration therefore appears to point back towards universities, who are now starting to recruit former industry practitioners as academics able to bring in industry contacts of their own, as discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.1.2 Role of the Practitioner Academic**

One key development according to research by Guild HE, which may result in more academics initiating business curriculum collaboration with employers, is

the growth of what can be termed as dual professional, pracademic or practitioner-academic staff in UK HE management departments and business schools. These are academics who have both been professionals in their industry and directly involved in teaching and learning in HEIs. Research into this growing area by observers such as Dickfos (2019) and Guild HE (2018) demonstrates that practitioner-academics can play a key role in reaching out to employers and professional bodies, building new communities with students, enhancing their transferable employability skills, and providing a talent pool that demonstrates a strong grasp of how industry works. Such practitioner-academics are also increasingly important for informed teaching experience to HE students, with academics having relevant industry or professional expertise rated as important by 85% of students surveyed in Student Academic Experience Surveys (GuildHE, 2018).

Practitioner academics can therefore prove instrumental in initiating collaborative curriculum design, as they can opportunistically identify critical gaps in the teaching curriculum and develop curricula which align effectively with current professional practice. Dickfos (2019) also emphasises that practitioner academics, even if not recruited for those specific purposes, can build curricular bridges between universities and employers by teaching employability skills to students, creating experiential learning activities and authentic assessments based on their pracademic experience and contacts. A further benefit of pracademics is their ability to replicate the work environment within the classroom, providing students with the opportunity to develop their employability skills through modelling, scaffolding, and coaching, using role plays, experiential learning exercises, and authentic industry-informed case studies (Dickfos, 2019).

In summary, recent academic research appears to evidence widespread growth in UK HE of practitioner academics, and of their important capabilities for reaching out proactively to initiate curriculum collaboration relationship development and design, whether for informal or formal curriculum co-creation, as discussed in Section 2.2.2 below.

### **2.2.2 Formal Curriculum Co-Creation**

The context of the concept of formal or regulated business curriculum co-creation collaboration is where business subject areas are regulated, accredited, or standardised by a recognised professional body, all of which can necessitate the need for curriculum collaboration between universities and external partners by regulatory default. The recent growth in formal UK degree apprenticeships and other types of accredited courses has opened further opportunities for business academics in UK HEIs to work together with professional bodies and employers, to co-create degree curricula through the establishment of specific degree standards at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Degree apprenticeships have become one of the most successful formal current examples of the practice and experience of collaborative curriculum co-creation and design between UK HEIs, professional bodies, and employers. Such programmes in business and management include the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship and the Digital Marketer Degree Apprenticeship. These courses, whereby employees study while they work and their apprenticeship degrees are paid for via an employer levy rather than by the student, are designed specifically to meet the needs of employer skills requirements, employee career progression, and university income and student retention. To

contextualise apprenticeship growth, in 2022-23 there were more than 100 UK universities offering such courses (Williams, T., 2023a). By October 2022 there were 572,210 students participating in UK degree apprenticeships (National Statistics, 2023). UK business professional bodies such as the CIM and CMI work proactively with employers and HEIs to design the apprenticeship standard, curriculum, and assessment for these degrees. Examples of leading UK apprenticeship employers named by the UK government for 2023 include co-creative employers such Microsoft, and the University of Bradford's collaboration with supermarket chain Morrisons (Williams, T., 2023a), as well as other leading UK organisations including BT, PwC, Deloitte, and EY (Department for Education, 2023).

Degree apprenticeships are a key example of effective curriculum co-creation collaboration between universities, employers and professional bodies, as apprenticeship providers are required to work with employers and professional bodies as well as the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) to determine the standards of professional competence set for curriculum outcomes, and to conduct tri-partite reviews to monitor ongoing development of apprentice skills, knowledge and behaviours every 12 weeks, as articulated in research into the process of creating degree apprenticeships by Healy (2014), Morley and Jamil (2021) and Nawaz (2023) (Bravenboer, 2023). The importance of collaboration around apprenticeship degree curricula is particularly positively endorsed by Healy (2014), who emphasises that universities need to take particular care in validating degree apprenticeships, to ensure relevance to the employers whose employees will be attending the programme (Healy *et al.*, 2014). Nawaz (2023) also endorses the impact of collaboration around degree apprenticeship curriculum design between

universities and employers, citing examples such as Staffordshire University and Manchester Metropolitan University who deliver Rise, a co-curricular employability programme awarding credit to experiential and skills-oriented learning, alongside their highly successful degree apprenticeship programmes. Nawaz emphasises that co-creation of standards and curricula results not only in skills and knowledge, but also in relevant work behaviours, mindsets and attitudes needed for the workplace (Nawaz, 2023).

It is clear that the employer role in designing degree apprenticeships is as important as that of the academic, with policy body Guild HE (2018) as well as researchers such as Jones, Christie and Brophy (2023) not only endorsing academic-employer collaboration in degree apprenticeship creation and delivery, but also recommending that academics need to understand the significance of the role that employers play in this collaboration, as key actors who not only shape the progress of their degree apprentices, but can also understand the elements of employability needed in the degree apprenticeship curriculum better than their academic counterparts (Jones, K., Christie and Brophy, 2023). Guild HE (2018) also recommends that degree apprenticeships should effectively combine both industry input from employers and academic input from academics, to uphold the rigour and standards of the HEI apprenticeship regime, and to develop an organisation's employees through in-depth and up to date knowledge which is relevant to the employee's role and industry sector. Guild HE (2018) provides best practice examples here, such as the degree apprenticeship programmes in banking and finance offered by the London Institute of Banking and Finance (LIBF). By co-designing the curriculum with both academic faculty and practitioners in banking and finance, benefits accrue to the students on these programmes, including tailored activities,

workplace visits, industry guest lectures by organisations such as the Bank of England, and work-based summative projects. Guild HE points out that the collaborative design of degree apprenticeship programmes can therefore explicitly interlink academic practice with the industry roles and experience of the students on such programmes (GuildHE, 2018).

In summary, degree apprenticeships can therefore be viewed as model examples of formal curriculum co-creation between academics, professional bodies, and employers, due to the fact that, as emphasised by Morley and Jamil (2021), degree apprenticeships require innovation in curriculum design, delivery, and partnership with HEIs and professional bodies working with employers to ensure that new applied curriculum requirements are met which develop relevant graduate skills and employability outcomes (Morley and Jamil, 2021). The model used in degree apprenticeships could therefore be extended to accredited courses in general, which although more established as HE qualifications, have not been as successful in practice at encouraging curricular collaboration.

More general accredited courses in business and management are those which are formally co-developed and monitored by academics and the professional bodies which set subject standards, although not necessarily with the input of employers. As a result, academics and professional bodies are required to work together in curriculum co-creation, to ensure that the degree awarded between the HEI and professional body, as well as any automatic memberships of or exemptions from the professional body's own qualifications, are developed to an appropriate standard of quality (Uniguide, 2023). Leading examples of accredited courses where professional bodies co-design business curricula with

HEI academics include Human Resources Management (HRM), where the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) co-develops and validates curricula with UK HEIs offering an accredited MSc in HRM subjects such as the MSc HRM with CIPD Pathway at Sheffield University. Similarly, the UK Corporate Governance Institute (CGI) co-creates and reviews curricula with UK HEIs offering an MSc in Corporate Governance at Bournemouth University, Lincoln University and Leeds Beckett University, with the double badge of Graduate Status of the CGI granted on completion of the degree (Uniguide, 2023).

Overall, however, while the concept of formal curriculum collaboration for accredited degrees is not new in the UK, there is little evidence in the literature reviewed beyond the examples cited above that academics view both professional bodies and employers as genuinely collaborative partners in formal business curriculum development over and above their regulatory advisory role, which is a similar challenge in more informal curriculum co-creation, as discussed in section 2.2.3 below.

### **2.2.3 Informal Curriculum Co-Creation**

The practice and experience of more informal business curriculum co-creation between academics, PSRBs and employers for HE qualifications where collaborative co-creation is not a formal requisite of course regulation is patchily observed across different HEIs and business schools, despite the increasing importance of curriculum co-creation collaboration to increase graduate and academic knowledge and skills, as evidenced by thought leaders on HE curriculum development such as Warwick and Howard (2014) and Carnell & Fung (2017). Research by the latter postulates as good practice the example of



Leeds Beckett University in embedding key graduate attributes of digital literacy, enterprise and global outlooks into every undergraduate course developed, with courses and graduate attributes created in conjunction with informal employer relationships. The university asserts that its students' employable futures are increasingly determined by the changing nature of society and the workplace, so embedding these graduate attributes into the curriculum adds value to students' degrees, and enables students to articulate these to their future employers (Carnell and Fung, 2017). Similarly, a case study from the business school at London South Bank University by Warwick and Howard (2014) found that to bring student quantitative skills up to the standard required for employability, good quality curriculum design could be achieved by identifying and meeting requirements on an informal collaborative co-creation basis between internal and external stakeholders. This included employers and professional bodies, who played a collaborative co-creative role in quantitative subject design such as accounting and finance. The employers and professional bodies involved recommended that academics reduce the undergraduate accounting curriculum prioritisation given to activity-based costing, and introduce more current subject areas such as online accounting and work-integrated experiential learning opportunities. By approaching curriculum design in this inductive informal manner, the business school created a dynamic and collaborative curriculum co-creation process, considering multiple stakeholder perspectives and deliberation before validating and implementing new quantitative subject business curricula. Professional bodies also played a key role here in standards quality assurance co-design around subject benchmarking statements (Warwick and Howard, 2014).

However, while such examples of good practice in more informal business degree collaborative curriculum co-creation can be found via literature review, there is also extensive discussion of the challenges and hurdles that impact on informal business curriculum co-creation and design in the literature, with far more challenges in implementing business curriculum co-creation collaboratively in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, for example, than executive education, where academics have to work more closely with employers.

Collaboration in curriculum design appears to be growing in favour in undergraduate education, particularly in business and management subjects, where according to research by O'Leary (2013), as many as 84% of undergraduates support the notion of including employer input in the curriculum, with the main aims of understanding employer needs better, and improving student capabilities, character, and confidence. According to O'Leary (2013), employers and professional bodies can become involved in undergraduate curriculum development and delivery even at a basic level, for example as case study providers, as at this level undergraduates are seeking a generally improved understanding of employer needs and improved student confidence (O'Leary, 2013).

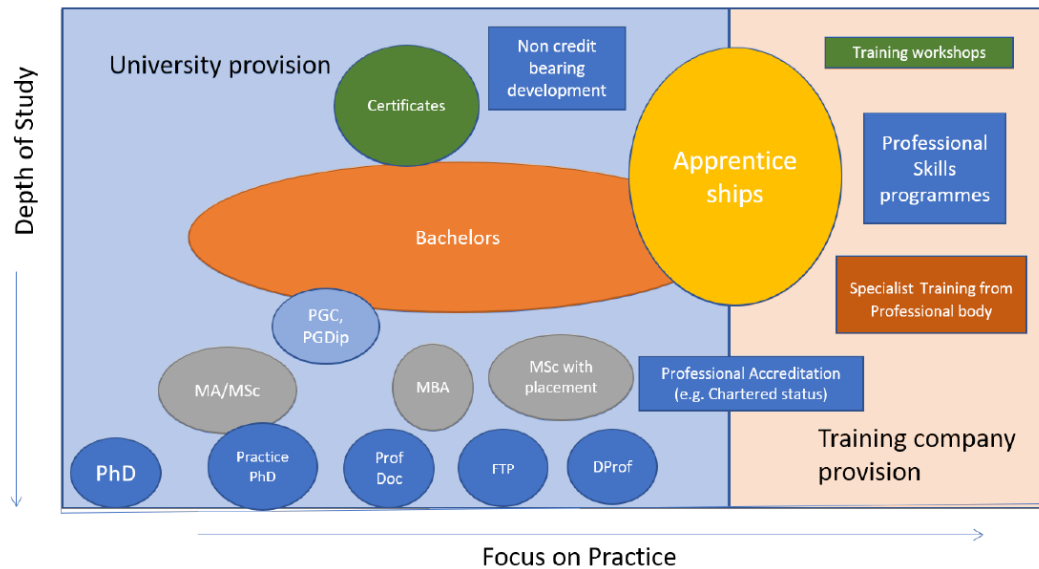
The practice and experience of UK curriculum co-creative collaboration appears to be less common however at postgraduate level, even though postgraduate students often already have work experience, and are looking for a qualification that will enable them to advance or change their careers. Examples of business curriculum co-creation are less common in the literature reviewed for postgraduate curricula, and mainly focus on the trend towards final substantive

assessments on master's degrees in business or management taking the form of an employer-based project, such as a piece of consultancy linked to graduate employment skills, rather than the traditional extended dissertation, as in many universities and business schools such as Leeds Beckett University, London South Bank University, and Regent's University London (O'Leary, 2013).

Both undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum design academics could therefore look at the model of business executive education for co-creative curriculum design examples. In this area curricula usually need to be co-designed and co-delivered between academics and employers from the outset, to ensure that the learning outcomes of executive education students are suitably focused on changes in business and management in the workplace in subjects offered in UK HEI business and management executive education, which often focus on areas such as leadership, strategy, change management, entrepreneurship and finance (CABS, 2017). 72% of UK business schools reported to the Chartered Association of Business Schools that they are growing their collaboration with private organisations to co-deliver executive education programmes (CABS, 2017). The need for universities to collaborate closely with employers in the future in designing executive education curricula is also endorsed in academic research by Dommett, Howieson and Sturgess (2023), who believe that when business schools collaborate in such design with industry and government, executive education produces highly employable executives with the best interests of society at heart (Dommett, Howieson and Sturgess, 2023). A similar viewpoint here is put forward by Fillery-Travis and Davies, writing in Jacob, Kearney, and Meek (2022), who have analysed each of the above levels of study in relation to both depth of study and closeness to market and employer needs rather than individual development, mapping

closeness to professional practice in each case, as shown below in the figure below:

**Figure 8 - The Credentials Landscape**



(Jacob, Kearney and Meek, 2022) (p56)

The observations made by Fillery-Travis and Davies are that while undergraduate degrees can range in their level of engagement with professional practice and employers from minimal to full engagement, depending on the subject studied, postgraduate degrees are more likely to be “double badged” curriculum-wise with Chartered status from a professional body, as such degrees tend to be more specialised and career-focused, with professional doctorates, degree apprenticeship and executive / professional skills programmes closest to focusing their curriculum on professional practice, and therefore require closer engagement between academics, employers, and professional bodies (Jacob, Kearney and Meek, 2022).

In summary, the research discussed in section 2.2 shows that the degree of informal collaborative curriculum design and co-creation varies significantly according to both the level and subject area of business course under

consideration, and even though at most levels is proving increasingly important for skills and quality assurance, academic engagement in co-creative curriculum collaboration is far less common or effective in undergraduate and postgraduate than business executive education provision. Similar challenges to the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies and academics arise at the next level of curriculum collaboration up from co-creation, which is that of curriculum co-delivery and production, as discussed in section 2.3 below.

## **2.3 Collaborative Curriculum Delivery & Co-Production**

### **2.3.1 Curriculum Co-Production & Delivery Context & Approaches**

Following the initial collaborative stage of curriculum design and co-creation, Section 2.3 discusses how involving employers and professional bodies collaboratively in the actual delivery and co-production of business curricula appears to be a more controversial area of professional practice. UK business academics can often prove comfortable with inviting employers and professional bodies at a basic level as guest speakers or to provide projects, internships, or case studies, but not always as comfortable with co-producing and delivering co-teaching or assessment of the business curriculum. This is despite research from sources such as Guild HE (2018) articulating that involving employers and professional bodies in delivering practitioner-focused teaching can offer significant gains to both students and academics, adding new ideas to what is taught, ensuring that students have both subject-specific knowledge and employer-valued transferable skills, and facilitating useful new collaborations which may extend beyond the curriculum into research and innovation (GuildHE, 2018).

Curricular co-production and delivery in business and management subjects can take a variety of forms, ranging from ad hoc input from employers and professional bodies to academic curricula, such as student projects, consultancy, guest speaker events and case studies, through to more formalised module-based interventions such as placements, internships, work shadowing and other forms of work-integrated learning, then up to fuller strategic partnerships in delivery and co-production of for example teaching and assessment with employers or professional bodies as full delivery partners (University of Manchester, 2023). While co-production and delivery of curricular activities at a basic and infrequent level are already quite well-established and welcomed by academics, more formal co-delivery collaborations at a larger scale can however prove more challenging. Here academics either face time and resource issues, or do not see it as their role to engage in collaborations with employers and professional bodies, with whom they often have almost no network or contact to start with, and are reliant on colleagues in the careers team to provide contacts for. Strategic curricular delivery at the upper end of academia can also be resisted by academics, who may not see it as the role of an employer or professional body to deliver teaching or assessment, owing to their lack of knowledge around teaching, learning and HEI quality standards. Further exploration of different modes of curriculum co-delivery is therefore warranted, to understand why academics embrace co-delivery at the most basic level in terms of guest speakers, case studies and projects, but appear more resistant to employers or PSRBs getting involved in collaborative higher-level curriculum co-delivery around for example co-teaching and assessment.

At the most basic level, curriculum co-delivery is commonplace and accepted by business school academics where it concerns low-complexity ad hoc delivery

modes such as guest speaker slots and case study provision. The concept of engaging professional bodies and employers as guest speakers and providers of case studies in curriculum co-production and delivery has become a widely-adopted aspect of curriculum collaboration in UK HEI business and management studies, as HEI collaboration with employer or professional body guest speakers and case studies can inspire and enable students to develop their employability skills, from being passive recipients of theoretical information, to becoming more active participants in their learning, through exposure to a real-world view of the applicability of their skills in the workplace (Study International, 2023). The literature reviewed shows curriculum co-delivery with guest speakers in business and management subjects viewed by academics as largely positive, as for example employers as guest speakers to business students engage in disseminating practice wisdom, dispelling industry myths, and enriching the curriculum by opening potential new career and networking opportunities for business students (Riebe *et al.*, 2013).

Co-delivery using employer case studies is also seen as providing academics and students with the opportunity to enhance transferable skills, and to transform modes of assessment in the process (GuildHE, 2018), with many HEIs and business schools using real-world case studies from sources such as Harvard Business Publishing. However, there is research evidence that UK HEIs are now moving increasingly towards using live employers for interactive case studies to build more applied skills into the curriculum, with positive examples of this discussed by Guild HE (2018). These include St Mary's University College Belfast, which has replaced assessment by examination with a live presentation and report on their case study work with the Innovation Factory (IF) in Belfast. Students receive live feedback from the local case study

enterprises they work with. In this example, students and academics value the opportunity to enhance skills related to running and innovating in a business, and employers have now built more extensive partnerships with the university, resulting in successful curriculum co-production and delivery for both the HEI and the employers concerned (GuildHE, 2018).

At a deeper level of collaborative co-delivery, live business projects and student consultancy work with employers or professional bodies also appear to be gaining traction in UK business subject curricula, for example, industry competitions, gamification and simulations. Such collaborative co-delivery is generally regarded in academic research and industry reports as an exciting and engaging mode of curriculum co-production and delivery, potentially facilitating student job opportunities with the organisation in question according to Guild HE (2018), who also make the point that by using live project briefs, students can pick up cutting-edge skills by applying them to real-world problems. This in turn can give students enhanced understanding of the practicalities and limitations of the technical skills they have already developed, and improve their soft skills, including teamwork and decision making, providing an attractive CV for potential employers (GuildHE, 2018). These benefits are further lauded by Jackson and Dean (2022), who believe that consultancy and project-based work-integrated learning can be offered by HEIs at scale, including to less advantaged students, who may have financial, work, or caring commitments that may prevent them being able to take part in longer term site-based internships or placements (Jackson, D. and Dean, 2022). Drivers for academics to collaborate more closely with employers on co-delivering projects and consultancy are also emphasised by O'Leary (2013), who asserts that this



exposes students directly to employers, and thereby increases student confidence substantially:

‘Collaborations with employers have a positive impact on the employability prospects of graduates and increased confidence of graduates to deal with employers. This collaboration can take several forms, including consultancy projects with clients as an alternative to the well-established academic dissertation...employer collaborations are important, not only to students and graduates, but also to HEIs themselves as they compete for new students.’ (O’Leary, 2013) (p44)

From a student perspective, collaborative business projects can also boost student motivation, provide opportunities for students to learn from each other, contribute to development of students’ organisational, technological, social, leadership and communication skills, and provide students with real world client as well as educator perspectives (Bobeva, M. and Ngugi, 2017). Successful examples in reviewed literature on collaborative business project co-production and delivery in UK HEI include the Learning Through Work programme at University of Central Lancashire, as well as Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincoln, where students on the BA Business Team Entrepreneurship degree work on live entrepreneurship projects with local employers and ‘practitioner-teacher’ SME industry coaches. As a result, students develop business practitioner attributes and capabilities geared towards the world of work on graduation (GuildHE, 2018). The benefits to students of employers delivering real value as proactive collaborators in business curricular projects are also brought out by an Advance HE case study (2020) on the MSc Global Human Resource Management (GHRM) postgraduate course at Newcastle University Business School. Here academics and students work together with employers to co-produce and deliver HR-related business consultancy projects, combining academic research, theory, and practical employer implications. Academics work with employers to ensure that students can reflect and evaluate their skills

and experience as a measured project outcome, thereby increasing their employability. Employers co-produce the project with academics and students, including a conference day to showcase project ideas, seminars, site visits, project proposal, report, and presentation. The projects have resulted in internships for students with the employers involved in this collaboration, creating successful outcomes for employers, students, and academics alike (Norton and Dalrymple, 2020). Further student and staff advantages of curricular co-delivery via projects are brought out by Bobeva et al (2020), who agree that the concept of staff-student-industry collaboration and co-creation in projects provides students with experience in working in a professional role, motivating students to perform to their maximum ability when they know they will be working alongside clients as well as educators, and thereby understanding client values and behaviours (Bobeva, Milena, Landmark and Khaled, 2020).

Such curricula co-delivery can however result in employers and professional bodies ending up as disconnected unequal partners, with the main value of co-delivery of live projects and consultancy activities as part of business curricula often tending to focus on the benefits and viewpoints of academics and students, and less on the practice and experience of either employers or professional bodies. This is even more the case in co-teaching and co-assessment, with the concept of employers and professional bodies working together with academics in co-delivering teaching and assessment on UK higher education business and management courses still proving relatively unusual. There is also little evidence in academic literature that this fuller level of collaboration is proactively encouraged by UK HEIs, or of business and management academics being universally willing to relinquish their key teaching

or assessment roles in any significant part to employers or professional bodies potentially untrained in teaching and learning.

Collaborative co-teaching can however reap considerable benefits for academics, students, and employers, in terms of developing transferable graduate attributes. In research on pedagogy for employability, Pegg et al (2012b) highlighted that both students and academics benefit greatly from having employers engaged in curriculum co-production and delivery, through for example presentation judging, project advisory roles, workshop delivery and teaching on specialist expert topics, and that employers also acknowledge that by doing this they are developing graduate attributes needed in employment, although academics do not always relish having what they see as their specialist role handed over to non-specialists from outside academia (Pegg et al., 2012b). The benefits of collaborative co-teaching business subjects are also borne out by my own professional practice, for example the MSc Strategic Marketing Online course at a central London business school, where in 2022 a new elective on Sustainable Marketing was created, taught 50% by the lead academic, and 50% by the co-module leader, a senior manager in sustainable marketing at a major European food retailer. The employer co-module leader was given basic teaching training by the module leader. The module is highly rated by students for its collaborative academic and employability-based content, and most of the assessment is carried out by the teaching team, leaving the employer to focus on effective teaching which brings in expert industry knowledge.

However, despite these positive benefits and examples, proactive business curricula collaboration between academics and employers relating to co-

teaching is still not widespread, and is even sometimes resisted by universities who may lack trust in the judgment of external collaborative partners in teaching delivery. This lack of trust and connected collaborative co-delivery practice is even more marked in the case of co-assessment, as discussed below.

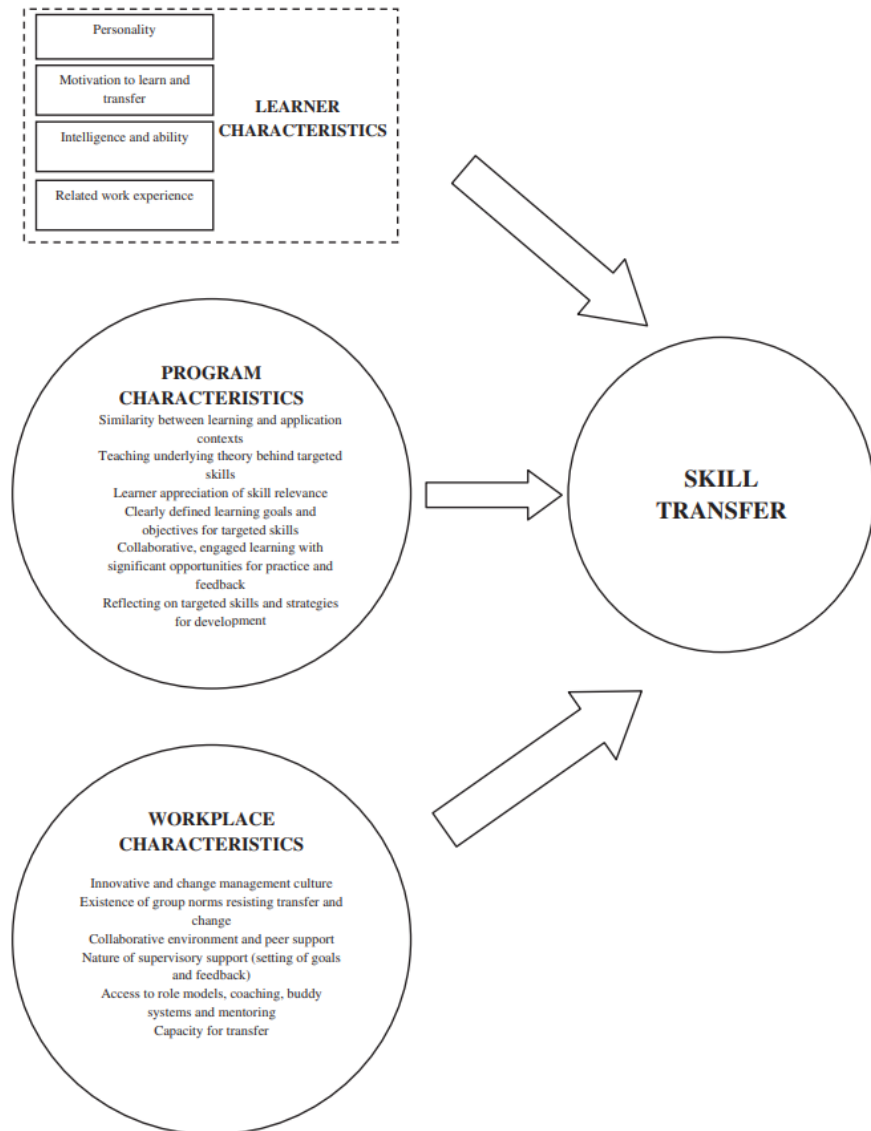
There is currently much debate in business and management education research around whether there is genuine value to universities in applied and authentic assessment, including co-assessment with employers, as a signature mode of assessment for business graduate employability skills. Leading researchers in this debate include Fung (2017), Gordon (2018), Hansen and Daniels (2023), of which Gordon (2018) for example emphasises authenticity in business and management subject areas as being key for employability skills and professional knowledge in the curriculum, in addition to subject academic skills and knowledge (Gordon, 2018). Hansen and Daniels (2023), in a recent comprehensive book on graduate employability, echo the importance of authenticity in assessments, emphasising that this together with experiential learning enables students to replicate work tasks, understand the complexity of work, and reflect on their own skills (Hansen and Daniels, 2023). The importance of assessment authenticity is emphasised even more positively by one of the UK's thought leaders in this area, Fung (2017), who asserts that HE disciplines frequently have their own signature assessment methods, and that many disciplines now include employer-shaped authentic assessments, which Fung regards as mirroring the types of tasks needed in the workplace. Fung's argument is persuasive, as she maintains that the resulting skills can be assessed alongside subject-specific knowledge and skills, using appropriate assessment and feedback criteria with agreed weightings.

Authentic and applied assessment can prove even more important for business subject group work. Gordon (2019) logically emphasises that group-based assessments intended to reflect the real world of work should consider the growing concept of the interdependent shared economy, therefore group assessments should incorporate the concept of sharing more overtly, enabling group members to share the same goal in an interdependent manner via shared platforms or software such as Sway or MS Teams (Gordon, 2019).

Assessment authenticity, if incorporated into the business curriculum and even co-delivered with employers in presentations, for example, should also extend to authentic and constructive assessment feedback. The importance to students of authentic and applied feedback is emphasised proactively by Jackson (2013), who recommends that employers and academics should collaborate in assessment and feedback in business curricula, to ensure that there is sufficient similarity in assessed tasks and content in the HEI setting that the skills learned transfer seamlessly to the applied workplace environment. A key related observation made by Jackson (2013) is that graduate skills transfer does not happen automatically, so typical assessment and feedback modes recommended by Jackson to achieve this aim include peer coaching and assessment, business simulation practice in a controlled environment, and reflective journaling (Jackson, D., 2013). These points are echoed further in a later article, where Jackson formulates a formal model for graduate skills transfer to the workplace, shown in the figure below. This model is useful to academics planning curriculum collaboration and co-delivery, as it emphasises the importance of academics collaborating with employers to ensure that assessment and feedback mechanisms embed similarities between workplace characteristics and programme characteristics via programme assessment and

feedback tools. According to Jackson, this in turn should facilitate student capacity to transfer the employable skills such as oral presentation that they have learned into the employer environment (Jackson, 2016):

**Figure 9 - Model of Graduate Skills Transfer**



(Jackson, D., 2016)

Graduate skills transfer is therefore a key consideration in teaching and assessment co-delivery, as it considers learning characteristics relevant to the graduate workplace, while also acknowledging that these may be difficult to define and measure (Jackson, D., 2016). Graduate skills transfer via effective assessment and feedback is proposed via a similar but more detailed model of

enquiry-based learning by Levy and Petrulis (2012), who articulate that student assessment and feedback should focus not only on student active learning, but also on comprehensive conceptualisation of the real world, through developing critical and reflexive qualities which they will also need in the workplace, and thereby fostering ‘dispositions and intellectual and practical capabilities of particular importance to life and work in contemporary society’ (Levy and Petrulis, 2012) (p96). Their conceptual framework for doing so is shown below in the figure below, with the importance of external assessment input such as employers emphasised at the ‘producing’ stage in this model to enhance graduate skills transfer:

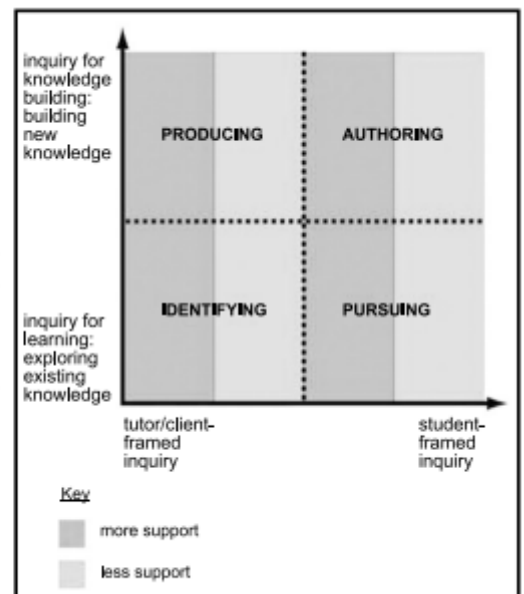
**Figure 10 - Model of Modes of Enquiry-Based Learning**

**Authoring:** Inquiry tasks are designed to encourage students to explore their own open questions, problems, scenarios or lines of inquiry, in interaction with a knowledge base (‘how can I answer my open question?’).

**Producing:** Inquiry tasks are designed to encourage students to explore open questions, problems, scenarios or lines of inquiry, framed by teachers, or others such as an external ‘client’, in interaction with a knowledge base (‘how can I answer this open question?’).

**Pursuing:** Inquiry tasks are designed to encourage students to explore a knowledge base actively by pursuing their own questions, problems, scenarios or lines of inquiry (‘what is the existing answer/response to my question?’).

**Identifying:** Inquiry tasks are designed to encourage students to explore a knowledge base actively in response to questions, problems, scenarios or lines of inquiry framed by teachers (‘what is the existing answer/response to this question?’).



(Levy and Petrulis, 2012)

In this enquiry-based model, students move from identifying assessment tasks through pursuing active inquiry, then produce answers, and author their own solutions as they would in a real workplace environment. This model therefore demonstrates the importance of academics delivering assessment and feedback which co-delivers employer requirements of graduates and their

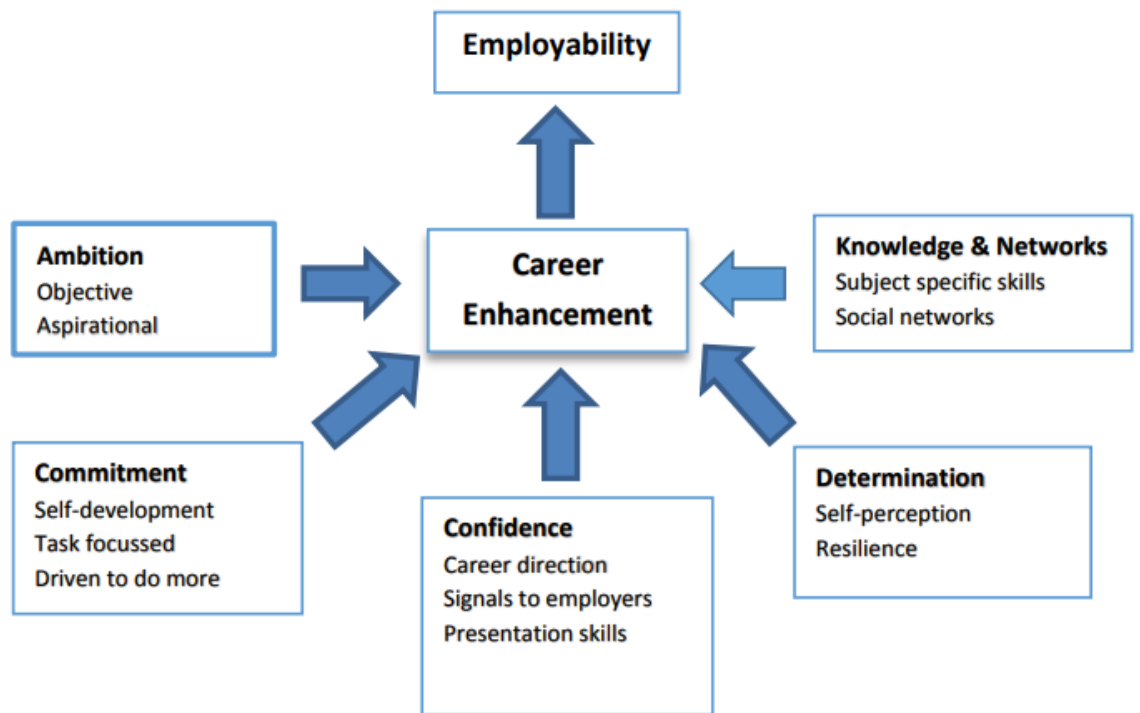
reflexive skills in the real workplace through active curriculum collaboration (Levy and Petrulis, 2012).

Co-assessment can also enhance curriculum contribution to graduate skills if elements of student reflexivity are incorporated into the assessment content. This is endorsed for example by Pegg et al (2012b), who in addition to authentic and applied assessment also recommend that co-designed reflective assessment can be highly relevant for student employability, particularly for students on part-time degrees, where they are often already working, or on degree apprenticeships. An interesting example in a Higher Education Academy report on pedagogy highlights proactive work in reflective assessment by The Open University, which has a high number of students on part-time business and management degrees also working during their studies. Here The Open University innovatively resolves the tension between student commitment to study and to the workplace by explicitly working with employers to ask students to situate their learning within their workplace, and to regard it as a 'learnspace' where they can reflect on their learning, and on its impact on their activity in the workplace (Pegg *et al.*, 2012b).

This impact on graduate skills through effective assessment design and co-delivery which facilitates student reflection on their skills and learning, and self-assessment of these factors, is modelled innovatively by Whitton (2019). She demonstrates in her Career Enhancement Model of Employability (CEME) that for part-time students in particular, the key factors of ambition, commitment, confidence, determination, knowledge, and networks impact on career enhancement, and that this in turn impacts on the conceptualisation of employability, as shown in the figure below:



**Figure 11 - Career Enhancement Model of Employability for Part-Time Students (CEME)**



(Whitton, 2019)

Whitton’s CEME model above is innovative, as under “Confidence” she specifically includes the need for graduates to signal confidence to employers, which makes her model outward-looking and connected to the world of work, rather than focusing on purely internal factors in the student’s own personality and skills set as many other models have done, as exemplified by the DOTS Model of Employability (Salford University, 2022) discussed above in Section 2.1.2.3.

One key consideration however concerning business subject assessment and related feedback is that it usually needs to be derived from the ILOs (Intended Learning Outcomes) of a module or programme. Going back a step, therefore, HEIs would first need to work with employers to redesign ILOs for modules and programmes, so that students can see tangible outcomes that enable them to

produce demonstrable evidence of employable skills and competences to show employers in their assessments, as articulated by Atkinson (2015). These outcomes can be broken down into employability skills and competencies which are affective, including professional values and attitudes such as reliability and teamwork; cognitive, including understanding of knowledge structures via skills such as decision making, problem solving or creative thinking; knowledge-based, incorporating epistemological dimensions of knowing such as numeracy, organising or planning; and psychomotor, involving manual or physical skills such as digital or technology skills (Atkinson, 2015).

In summary, section 2.3.1 has evidenced commonality of views by thought leaders favouring involving employers and professional bodies in co-delivering business and management subject activities such as live projects, case studies, consultancy, and guest speaker slots, although only to a lesser extent in co-teaching, assessment, or feedback, as authentic, applied, logical and desirable for students and all stakeholders concerned.

Taking this debate into the future, it is therefore relevant to ask whether UK HEIs should be considering new credential structures between employers, HEIs and professional bodies. This point is made credibly by Fillery-Travis, and Davies, writing in Jacob, Kearney, and Meek (2022), who point out that UK HE is starting to move towards a new taxonomy of lifelong learning and microcredentials (Jacob, Kearney and Meek, 2022).

In practice, however, there still appear to be only limited examples in academic research of UK HEIs proactively involving employers or professional bodies in the co-delivery of either assessment or feedback, or insight into how the phenomenological practice and experience of these stakeholders is changing in

curriculum co-delivery, co-teaching and assessment in business and management subjects in the new world of lifelong learning. This longer-term view of collaborative curriculum delivery is mainly observable in one key area of business curricula, that of work-based learning, with its associated benefits of professional identity development, as discussed in section 2.3.2 below.

### **2.3.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity**

A common feature of successful collaborative curriculum co-production in UK HE business and management subjects that has existed for several years is Work-Based Learning (WBL), based either within or externally to the curriculum. WBL is also referred to in business curricula as Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), usually associated more with work experience integrated into the curriculum, such as for-credit placements. This section discusses the benefits of collaborative curriculum co-delivery relating to WBL and WIL, such as graduate development of professional and pre-professional identity.

Many UK HEIs begin their collaborative WBL journey primarily through extra-curricular rather than in-curricular WBL and WIL, primarily encompassing non-credit internships, work experience and shadowing. Extra-curricular WBL represents a tangible intersection of theoretical knowledge and applied learning in business and management subjects in UK HEIs.

Research by Kroon and Franco (2022) and Hansen and Daniels (2023) concurs that such modes of WBL are becoming increasingly important to business and management curriculum delivery, with 78% of employers believing that graduates who had completed WBL were more skilled than those who had not (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

WBL has now become so important in the graduate journey that a new UK Work Experience Standard was launched in 2022 by The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) as a framework for universities and employers to achieve best practice standards relating to development and learning, as well as ensuring work experience students are paid fairly (Institute of Student Employers, 2022).

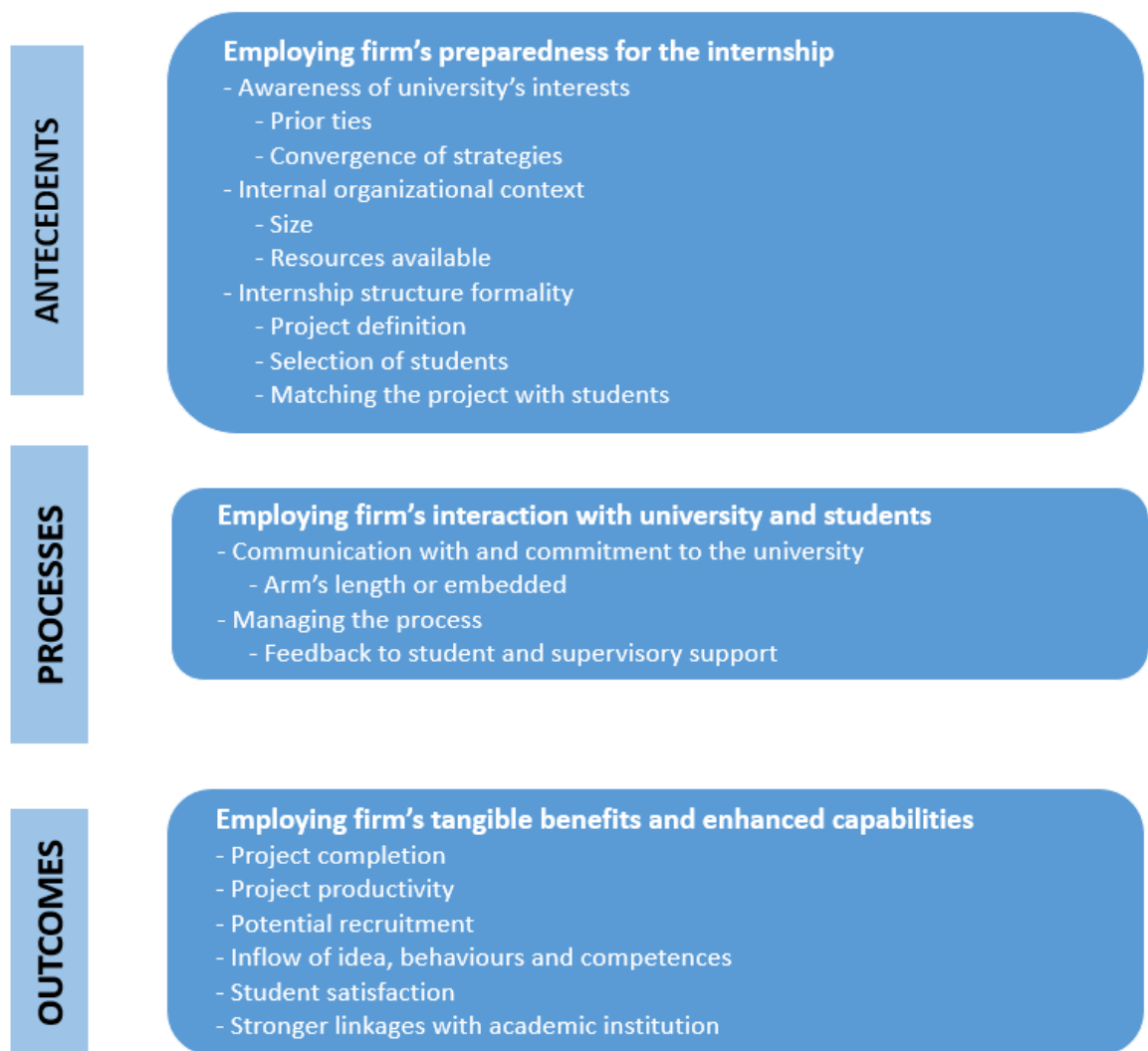
While academic research appears supportive of work experience external to the curriculum, there is however little evidence that universities and business schools collaborate sufficiently in designing such activities for the full benefits that could accrue to both student and employer, as emphasised by Kroon and Franco (2022). Their research is perceptive in noting that one of the negative outcomes of university-industry internship co-operation is the high frequency of employers complaining about weak collaborative ties with academics in the educational institutions to which they are providing internships, indicating that HEIs need to find new ways to strengthen collaborative relations with organisations providing internships. Their innovative proposal to address this challenge considers antecedents, processes and outcomes relating to student internships as shown in the figure below.

According to this model, before entering into internships with universities, employers should ensure that as key antecedents they make themselves aware of the university's interests and objectives in engaging in the internship, the process for selection and matching of students to the internship, and the resources available to support the internship on the part of the employer. When engaging in the internship process, the employer should then ensure that communication with the university and student is proactive and includes

feedback on internship performance. Following the internship, employers should indicate their level of satisfaction with the student, and suggest ideas for competences and stronger linkages with the academic institution in question.

However, it is to be noted that this model has key shortfalls, as it does not specifically include employers at the antecedent stage in the design of the internship, leaving employers open to a potentially poorly-designed delivery of the internship for the employer and the student:

**Figure 12 - Model of Employer's Perspectives on Higher Education Internships**



(Kroon and Franco, 2022)

If utilising such a framework for university-employer internship collaboration involves collaboration with employers to co-deliver work-based learning antecedents, processes and outcomes, this might have the potential for HEIs to be more systematic in increasing the employability rates of their students, as well as strengthening employer relationships in other areas such as joint research, academic entrepreneurship and curriculum co-design, as suggested by the authors of the above model (Kroon and Franco, 2022).

In summary, extra-curricular WBL appears have the potential to be highly effective in assuring graduate employability, but needs to involve employers more deeply in co-delivery to assure genuinely tangible benefits and enhanced employability skills for HE students, in the way that assessed in-curriculum WBL can deliver.

In-curriculum credit-bearing WBL and WIL in UK management and business schools is now fairly established and successful, having grown out of a tradition of 'thick' sandwich undergraduate degree courses, whereby two years of study are followed by one year of credit-bearing full-time work in industry, before returning to university for a final year, as well as 'thin' sandwich undergraduate degree courses, whereby one year's work credit-bearing experience can be structured into multiple placements, and summer or short internships, work placements, work experience or shadowing on a credit-bearing short-term basis at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (AGCAS, 2020).

In-curricular WIL and WBL are also increasingly now delivered to learners based primarily within their own employer organisations, who then study for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees out of the workplace. This includes for example University of Wales Trinity St David's professional research

degrees such as the Doctorate in Professional Practice, which integrates taught modules with a learner's professional career development in their professional area (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2023). Such forms of in-curriculum work-based learning are increasingly recognised as a key way to bridge UK HE with the world of work, according to researchers such as Major (2016). Whereas the university itself has traditionally been the place to prepare students to enter employment, WBL and WIL based within the employer organisation can innovate by making the workplace itself the site of learning, and the place where learners can develop and reflect on their own professional practice while still accessing degree opportunities to gain credit for their learning, as long as universities are sufficiently flexible to collaborate with businesses in an accommodating manner in relation to the employer's needs (Major, 2016):

'The idea of taking the university into the workplace is no longer a rare occurrence but an increasingly common one, that benefits both growth in knowledge capital and human and social capital.' (Major, 2016) (p18)

Recognising that work-based learners are often adult, working full-time, studying part-time, and often at a distance, means that such in-curricular work-based learning needs to occur at times and places convenient for learners and their employers, rather than for staff and the university (Talbot, Perrin and Meakin, 2014).

However, while basic in-curricular models of WBL and WIL have existed since the 1970s, for-credit work experience in-curriculum is still not yet the norm in the UK. AGCAS reports that up to 2020, as many as 70% of student-employer interactions in UK higher education were extra-curricular, and only 30% embedded in the curriculum. These were primarily structured credit-bearing year-in-industry schemes such as placements or structured consultancy

projects (AGCAS, 2020). Academic interest in integrating WBL and WIL deeper into the business curriculum in collaboration with employers has however appeared to increase recently, particularly as UK HEIs moved on from Covid-19 restrictions, where virtual placements and internships sprung up as new WBL and WIL models. In terms of virtual and online WIL and WBL, Jackson and Dean (2022) for example view this trend as highly positive in helping to align student learning with more up-to-date and authentic technology-based work practices (Jackson, D. and Dean, 2022).

In-curriculum WBL and WIL co-delivery can also give students an ideal opportunity to integrate real-world experience with active, student-centred, and authentic academic learning, as highlighted in earlier research by Jackson and Wilton (2016). This experience also enables students to obtain employer feedback on their capability and self-reflection while still studying for their degree, providing enhanced awareness of the world or work and specific job roles to inform their ultimate choice of career. At a deeper level of learning, students who undertake WBL can also enhance their social capital by increasing their networking skills and contacts through their WBL experience. WBL can primarily be effective, however, if UK HEIs are themselves proactive amongst employers in promoting and securing WBL opportunities for students, especially amongst disadvantaged social groups, and in scaffolding and integrating WIL experiences into the business curriculum. This indicates that WBL can be most effective if HEIs allow employers collaborative input into the design and assessment of WBL competencies, to add realism and credibility to WBL and WIL content and outcomes (Jackson, D. and Wilton, 2016). The need for universities and employers to collaborate closely on WBL curriculum delivery is reinforced by Boud and Solomon (2001), who present several UK case



studies in their book on work-based learning, which support the view that a genuine partnership approach is needed between employers and HEIs to foster learning effectively in WBL curriculum development, and even thereby develop new pedagogies for learning:

‘Partnerships are required to enable infrastructure to support learning to be established...It would be a demanding process to establish afresh any given learning if a relationship did not already exist between the educational institution and the employer.’ (Boud and Solomon, 2001) (p5)

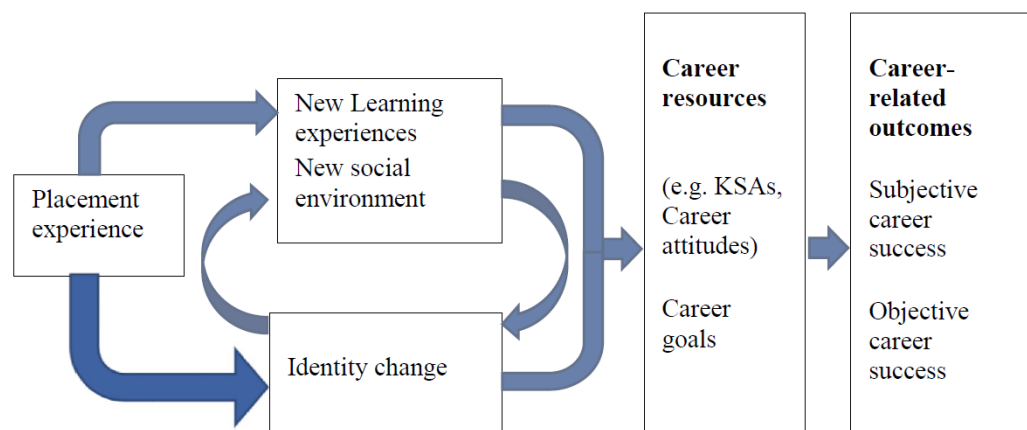
The need for employer-university collaboration for mutual benefit in WIL is also emphasised by policy makers such as the Council for Higher Education (2011). Their report on good practice in work-integrated learning emphasises that curriculum development teams incorporating work-integrated learning should include academics, students, and employers, to co-produce and deliver both effective, relevant, and meaningful outcomes for work-integrated learning, and to agree on learning outcomes, main WIL activities, and logistical issues of WIL delivery (Council on Higher Education, 2011). WIL and WBL collaboration between universities and employers is also encouraged by UK regional policy bodies, for example, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), where students researched concurred that WBL was a major positive contributor to their employability outcomes, and 69% of students surveyed responded that their course emphasised employability and collaboration with industry effectively (HEFCW, 2023).

In terms of future WIL relationships between academics and employers, it therefore appears clear that there is a need for stronger collaborative ties to facilitate WIL in business and other subject areas, although it should also be acknowledged that WIL academic practitioners need not only to juggle workload demands of research, teaching, and other academic administrative duties, but

also the demands of sustaining industry connections and WIL networking (Sheridan *et al.*, 2021). This is particularly the case in finding placements as part of in-curricular WIL, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive if undertaken by academics with employers.

Research by Inceoglu, Selenko, McDowall and Schlachter (2019) therefore endorses the benefits of collaborative placement-based curriculum development between universities and employers, as placements and other supervised work experiences are central and positive in enabling social learning processes, professional identity development, social capital networks and future employability for students. Inceoglu et al therefore developed a theoretical model showing how a placement experience influences social learning, identity, and employability outcomes, by enabling students to visualize their career goals and key skills more effectively, as demonstrated in the figure below:

**Figure 13 - Placement Experience and Graduate Outcome Theoretical Model**



(Inceoglu *et al.*, 2019)

Placements can be effectively integrated into the business curriculum by academics in collaboration with employers, to enable students to improve their outcomes for the world of work, while still gaining in-curriculum credit. Fung

(2017), for example, holds a holistic view here that incorporating authentic assessment in placements, work experience, internships and even volunteering activities can provide students with opportunities to write reflective analyses of their experience to be assessed for credit, for example using authentic and applied work-based portfolios supported by the employer with whom they work (Fung, 2017).

The incorporation of authentic assessment in curriculum based WBL is key, as it brings employability advantages to both students and employers. This point is strongly endorsed by Jackson (2015), who asserts that authentically assessed WBL encourages employers and students to co-produce highly employable skills such as confidence in workplace capabilities, understanding of standards of industry-required skills, teamworking, problem-solving, communication, information literacy and professionalism. This in turn can foster partnerships between UK HEIs and employers in co-delivering curricula which are responsive to the needs of both HE and industry (Jackson, D., 2015). The need to assure the authenticity of WBL assessment through effective curriculum collaboration was also emphatically brought out in earlier research by Fletcher-Brown, Knibbs, and Middleton (2014), who suggested that WBL authenticity works particularly effectively by involving employers from small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the collaborative co-production of WBL. They recommended that this not only develops key relationships between UK HEIs and their local business community, but also provides students with more of a consultancy-style opportunity to develop their employability skills (Fletcher-Brown, Knibbs and Middleton, 2015).

A further crucial skill which co-delivery of in-curricular WBL can provide is the development of professional and pre-professional identity for students. This opportunity is endorsed by Jackson (2019), who believes that by participating in WBL and WIL, students discover the added benefit of increasing their own and their employers' sense of their professional identity, the extent to which individuals regard themselves as a professional in their chosen career area, able to internalise professional values, beliefs and attributes associated with their professional role. Interestingly, Jackson emphasises the importance of WBL for students in realising the importance of professional identity through reflective activities and authentic assessments both during and after their work experience with their employers, with WBL also enabling students to test out and co-produce specific career identities in a safe WBL environment to inform their long-term career choices after graduation (Jackson, D., 2019).

WBL also provides students with valuable opportunities to experience different work-based discourse, enabling them to think about their future corporate roles and careers, as recommended by Bass (2014), who uses discourse analysis in-curriculum to encourage students to consider what kind of manager they ultimately want to be, and how to become that kind of manager (Bass, 2014).

Although pre-professional identity is a newer concept relating to in-curricular WBL co-delivery, the benefit of collaborative in-curricular WBL contributing to future professional identity development is tangible, and is emphasised further in research by Forder and Fowlie (2020). Their research shows that work-integrated learning and psychological capital development not only supports professional identity development for student job readiness, but also the deeper concept of pre-professional identity and inclusivity, which enables students to

reflectively develop awareness of the skills, qualities, behaviours, values and standards of the student's chosen profession, as well as understanding of their professional self in relation to the broader general self, for example through contacts using alumni or Linked In (Forder and Fowlie, 2020). The use of LinkedIn and similar social media channels for linking students, academics and employers collaboratively is also endorsed by Komljenovic (2019), who recommends that 'Universities are encouraged to use the LinkedIn platform in relation to various processes revolving around the employability discourse', including collaborating with students to create personal branding content and to look for WBL with employers (Komljenovic, 2019) (p33).

An encouraging example supporting the concept of curricular pre-professional identity development through WIL is University of Derby business school, who embed employability through collaboration with employers and professional bodies into their BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance degree to improve the formation of pre-professional identity for their students. The business school developed a module of Professional Development for Accounting and Finance Graduates with employers, which enables the business school to embed, connect and develop employability skills specifically for accounting and finance students, such as analytical modelling across the programme in parallel with central careers service provision, thereby improving student's pre-professional identity formation significantly (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

In summary, the practice of HEIs collaborating with employers to provide WBL and WIL opportunities for students appears to have the potential to enhance both their future professional identity formation and pre-professional views to

shape their forthcoming career choices more clearly, as a future UK model of WBL, along with other models discussed below.

Future models of collaborative co-delivered work-based learning are still developing in the UK, including new for-credit modules in volunteering, pioneered by UK HEIs such as the University of Glasgow, and now growing in popularity in schools of business and management such as the Community Engagement Module at University of Leeds, and the University of Nottingham's Advantage Award with organisations such as Save The Children. Research by The Sutton Trust also highlights that in-curriculum volunteering co-delivered with employer organisations can have a positive impact on graduate skills development such as leadership and project management, and that HEIs are increasingly interested in working with employers to facilitate and co-create volunteering opportunities for business students through community service-based learning for credit (The Sutton Trust, 2021).

Overall, however, there are still considerable barriers in UK HE to co-delivering in-curricular WBL and WIL, for example not all students in business and management subject areas are able to take up such opportunities, as they want to finish their degree and obtain a job because of financial hardship sooner rather than later, and are not always clearly shown the benefits of WBL and WIL by employers and universities.

Access to WBL opportunities can also be a barrier to students and academics lacking their own industry connections, for example in work shadowing. This is usually found only informally and not widely advertised, as it involves students following an employee in their role to understand how they do their job for a short period of time, aimed at providing insight into the role and organisation

(Manchester University, 2021). As work shadowing opportunities are rarely advertised, students and academics lacking industry connections from employer-HEI collaboration and relevant human capital can often find themselves at a disadvantage to those who are more widely connected.

It is therefore recommended that for WBL and WIL to be effective in the future, universities need to ensure students have inclusive opportunity access, line management support, clarity, curricular structure around their tasks and tangible outputs, to show they have made a meaningful contribution to the organisation they have worked with (McEwan, 2023). This can however prove a further challenge to universities with low levels of resourcing to support WBL and WIL.

In summary, section 2.3.2 has demonstrated that work-based and work-integrated learning are key aspects relating to the business curriculum which can work highly effectively when co-produced and delivered with employers as part of the business curriculum, but that this can only happen if effective collaborative relationships between universities and employers are both initiated and sustained over the longer term, as discussed in more detail in section 2.4 below.

## **2.4 Maintaining Effective Collaborative Curriculum Relationships**

Once collaborative relationships have been built between academics, professional bodies and employers in the co-creation and co-delivery of the business curriculum, a further key challenge is maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships over time. The challenge of maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships is considerable as key personnel change, particularly amongst academics and employers, and a lack of systems for capturing and passing on key contacts

prevails. Key factors impacting on this challenge are therefore discussed below from the literature review, including the vital importance of one-to-one relationship building, curriculum advisory boards, alumni, and more formal routes to maintaining collaborative curricular relationships, such as qualification validation cycles.

#### **2.4.1 Relationships with Academic Staff & Alumni**

The issue of how to maintain successful long term collaborative relationships between academics, employers and professional bodies brings to the fore a range of both philosophical and systemic challenges in UK HE, based on academic research sources in this area. In terms of long-term role considerations, academics in subjects such as business and management often believe that maintaining employer relationships is firmly the responsibility of careers, alumni, and business development colleagues, with academics responsible for teaching and research only (O'Leary, 2013). In a similar vein, Hansen and Daniels (2023) in their recent book on graduate employability also question whether academics do not see collaborative relationships as their area of control because the role of the central university careers service has the potential to transform from a student support service into a quasi-consultancy practice, equipping academics and employers with the tools and relationships for embedding and maintaining employability in the curriculum (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).

This view is however counterbalanced by research from Carlile *et al* (2016), who recommend that faculty in business and management should consist of a more balanced mix of both academic researchers and experienced practitioners, who together can enhance academic practice and curricula by



embedding business relevance, accessibility and actionability. In such cases practitioners can work effectively with research-focused academics, as the former can be more willing and experienced at reaching out to employers and professional bodies to create long term collaborative curricular relationships (Carlile *et al.*, 2016).

A positive example of long-term curricular relationship maintenance cited by Pegg *et al* (2012b) in their report on pedagogy for employability is Birmingham City University, where academics work with the university's Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) on an initiative called RoLEx (Redesign of the Learning Experience). Here academics consult and build long-term partnership-based relationships with employers around curriculum design and delivery for the real world, including embedding work placements, work experience, live projects, assessment, and collaborative identification of skills gaps and outcomes, with related curriculum-based solutions. This also has the advantage of enabling academic staff to enrich their own personal and professional development by working over the longer term with employers (Pegg *et al.*, 2012b).

Looking further ahead, however, long-term curricular relationships can primarily endure if there are mutual win-win outcomes established for both academics and employers in business curriculum collaboration, as advocated by Boshoff and Fernandes (2020), who cite their own example over a period of three years of forming productive long-term relationships with key employers to build a bridge between the classroom and the business world on a Strategic Marketing course. The researchers used a participatory action learning research collaborative-participatory process to work in partnership on curriculum

development, authentic assessments, and student learning experience, with a positive win-win impact in improving both student employability skills and employer satisfaction with the quality of graduating students (Boshoff and Fernandes, 2020). The win-win benefits of maintaining long-term collaborative curricular relationships between academic staff and employers are also demonstrated in a case study by Advance HE on Kaplan International Pathways, who have developed a formal programme to facilitate academic staff and students joining relevant professional networks such as the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs, to develop transferable skills, create useful contacts, and refresh subject knowledge with real world business expertise (Norton and Penaluna, 2022).

Despite these positive examples, however, it is not easy to locate evidence in published research that academic staff, employers, and professional bodies are systematically reaching out to each other to maintain long term relationships for effective collaboration around UK business curricula. Logically, researchers such as Pereira, Vilas-Boas and Rebelo (2020) suggest that the simplest way for such relationships to be maintained is for academics to first reach out to alumni, as HEIs should maintain databases of industry alumni contacts, and there should already be a mutual relationship in place with academics who have engaged with alumni. Alumni can add significant value to students and curricula in long-term collaborative relationships, acting as engaged role models, helping students develop up to date employability skills, and helping academics to adapt curricula to labour market needs (Pereira, Vilas-Boas and Rebelo, 2020).

In summary, section 2.4.1 illustrates that despite a prevailing view in the literature reviewed that maintaining collaborative curriculum relationships over

time brings significant benefits to staff, students, and employers in terms of welcoming employers, alumni and professional bodies in to advise and collaborate on business curricula, there is still much to be done by universities in terms of even simple steps such as creating long-term win-win outcomes and connecting systematically with alumni to achieve this objective. More formal approaches to relationship maintenance such as advisory boards and validation panels are therefore discussed in more detail in the next section.

#### **2.4.2 Curriculum Advisory Boards & Qualification Validation**

Many universities in the UK are now moving towards setting up curriculum advisory boards around course validation cycles, to enable business programme directors to update their curricula through accessing expert external knowledge and guidance. The experience of establishing and maintaining curriculum advisory board roles for employers, industry experts, subject practitioners and professional bodies for longer term business curriculum collaboration can prove very positive, generating ideas for curriculum change and student skills from professional bodies and graduate employers. As Director of Education at a number of central London university business schools, I worked closely with academics to involve employers and professional bodies such as CIM, CIMA and IOD in new curriculum advisory boards set up to review and co-create new undergraduate and postgraduate curricula across all business subjects. Through inviting employers and professional bodies to co-design the new curriculum, and involving students, these business schools identified new graduate skills such as digital management, AI and blockchain, which academics might not have understood were future skills requirements for graduates without employer curricula input.

The successful adoption of curriculum advisory boards as a positive means of maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships is evident in academic literature, for example through case study research in an Advance HE compendium of recent employability case studies, including Sheffield Hallam University (Norton & Dalrymple, 2021). This university has a vision of becoming the world's leading applied university, developing mutually beneficial collaborations with employers, to ensure students are positioned to provide access to business and management skills and talent valuable to employers. The university therefore created an Employer Advisory Board to enrich curriculum development on every course, resulting in long-term curriculum collaborative relationships facilitating co-design of resources and curriculum content. This has resulted in the practice of academics and students viewing employers as lifelong partners, and an increase in Graduate Outcomes metrics to 96% post-study skilled employment (Norton and Dalrymple, 2021). Earlier research by Lowden et al (2011) also demonstrates that if employers play a more active long-term role in HEI policies, then employer presence on curriculum advisory boards can facilitate highly meaningful contributions to curriculum collaboration from employers (Lowden *et al.*, 2011).

In summary, both academic research and personal experience show that business curriculum advisory boards can prove crucial in maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships with employers and professional bodies, in addition to more formal validation panels, as discussed below.

The validation of business and management degree qualifications via formal validation panels is another very tangible area where effective collaborative business curriculum relationships between academics, professional bodies and

employers can be maintained. Many UK business schools now require an employer or professional body to sit on qualification validation panels to review curriculum content and suggest any valid amendments, leading to the maintenance of long term, effective and productive curriculum collaboration relationships. Positive examples of this phenomenon include the University of Plymouth Business School, which requires in its regulations at least one academic and one industry external panellist for cyclical curriculum validation panels, thereby maintaining interactive long-term relationships between academics and employers for curricular collaboration (University of Plymouth, 2023). Recent research for example by Osika *et al* (2022) recommends that universities should aim to draw industry stakeholders into qualification validation activities, to ensure that course alignment is maintained against the directions and demands of industry (Osika *et al.*, 2022).

This can prove challenging however in business subjects, as business is not a discipline like medicine or teaching where external practitioners are expected to come in statutorily to formally assess student skills and performance. While academic sources such as Osika above (2022) regard external representation on validation panels as beneficial, therefore, some academics regard this type of initiative as unnecessary and even potentially distracting, including the Wilson Review of University-Business Collaboration in 2012, which suggested that employers and industry representatives could not be expected to sit on validation panels, as the burden and regulatory complexity of paperwork generated for such panels could not be reasonably managed or read by business panel members (Wilson, 2012).

In summary, section 2.4.2 has located researchers and case study examples in the literature reviewed who have found significant benefits in the inclusion of employers and professional bodies in qualification validation for maintaining long-term collaborative relationships with employers and professional bodies. However, it still does not appear to be widespread business and management best practice for academics to involve employers or professional bodies in business curriculum and qualification validation panels, either at national or local level, as discussed further below.

### **2.4.3 Local & Civic Collaboration**

A further key facilitator of maintaining effective collaborative curriculum relationships in UK HE is the establishment of strong local and civic level collaboration. There are significant benefits to maintaining curriculum design collaboration between HEIs and employers at local level, including skills development, research partnerships, and job opportunities for graduates in the area close to the university, as advocated by Healy et al (2014):

‘As businesses tend to be involved in the delivery of programmes, contact between employers and students can lead to opportunities for jobs. This supports graduate retention in the local area...Partnerships with business in this area can result in further business engagement with the university in other areas, e.g., research’ (Healy *et al.*, 2014) (p22)

This view is echoed by the UK CBI and UPP Foundation’s Civic University Commission, whose research also highlights that local and civic partnerships are a robust means of maintaining university-industry collaboration around curriculum development. This research asserts that there are four tests for a civic university – a public test, place test, strategic test and an impact test - whereby a university can measure and maintain the impact of its civic activity (Brabner, 2023).

At local and civic level, academics as well as students can benefit from building relationships with local employers, including professional business networking organisations with regular events and relationship-building opportunities such as local Chambers of Commerce. As an example, the Dean of an inner London university business school where I held a senior role became chairperson of the local Chamber of Commerce in 2021, a relationship which facilitated employers willing to collaborate on different aspects of the curriculum of the business school, including guest speaker events and work experience (Southwark Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

Business schools that invest in executive education for local businesses also have the potential for longer-term curriculum collaboration to foster vital links between universities, employers, and students at local and civic level, as advocated in recent research by CABS (2023), as this enables universities to become civic entities integrating research, teaching and community engagement to support the local economy and local business leaders highly effectively (Dommett, Howieson and Sturgess, 2023).

Examples of the success of such collaborative local and civic relationships between universities and employers in the UK include the Civic University Network in Sheffield and the National Civic Impact Accelerator, which both aim to connect universities to tackle the needs of civic society through initiatives such as the widely adopted UK government Help to Grow management programme. This is run by universities such as Brunel Business School to help and support local SMEs through collaboration between academics and local small businesses using business and management subject content.

Collaborative programmes such as Help to Grow can provide longer-term civic

business input into academic thinking and curriculum design, as advocated in research by Vitali and the Policy Exchange thinktank:

‘There was huge value in peer-to-peer learning facilitated by management programmes...one of the remarkable elements that has been replicated by Help to Grow: Management is that it allows a high degree of practice-sharing across business...this diversity sparked a high degree of cross collaboration and peer-to-peer learning amongst course participants.’

(Vitali, 2023) (p20)

Even in large metropolitan areas such as London, policymakers such as the London Mayor’s Office for Business also recommend that maintaining collaboration between universities, civic bodies such as London Higher and local employers for curriculum development can result in high graduate employability, particularly through placements and case study insights:

‘Business-ready skills are provided across all course disciplines. Universities and businesses should work together to communicate these in ways that enhance graduate employability prospects and commit to work together to fill higher level skills gaps that will complement London’s Local Skills Improvement Plan...Universities and businesses should increase engagement...so that they can provide support with input into course development and facilitate business outreach strategies.’ (London Higher, 2023) (p8)

One of the most recent impactful examples of maintaining effective long-term local collaborative curriculum relationships is the new Anglia Ruskin University at Peterborough, opened in 2022 specifically to meet the needs of local employers, who are immersed by the university in curriculum collaboration, design, delivery, co-teaching, and relationship-building, as well as university research. Together with the CBI, ICAEW, and other professional bodies, the university has created a new employer-informed course and degree apprenticeship portfolio, with the intention of maintaining long-term collaborative relationships with employers for graduate jobs creation (Hansen and Daniels, 2023).



In summary, section 2.4.3 has demonstrated that a university can be an effective civic entity if it collaborates effectively with local industry, and recognises that employers can thereby prove a strong force for maintaining long term effective collaborative curriculum relationships at local level in business and management subject areas for the benefit of university teaching, research, students, and staff. Further areas of connectivity, success and transformation in business curriculum collaboration are discussed in Section 2.5 below.

## **2.5 Success and Improvement in Collaborative Curriculum Relationships**

The preceding literature review sections indicate that effective business curriculum collaboration can prove extremely valuable for HEIs, employers, professional bodies, and students, in terms of future-focused curriculum design and delivery, long-term relationships which can provide teaching and research links, local economy partnerships, and graduate employment.

However, while a connected and proactive approach appears key to such collaboration, the literature reviewed does not suggest any clear single recipe for successful implementation of such collaboration in professional practice.

This conundrum is echoed in academic research on successful curricular collaboration by thought leaders such as Cole and Tibby (2015), who point out in their report for the Higher Education Academy that the complexity and variability on how curriculum is implemented in UK higher education curricula means that no single, ideal prescription can be provided for this, and such collaborative embedding has to be approached with reference to the specific curricular and subject context involved (Cole and Tibby, 2013). Academic

research does however provide key examples of the phenomenon of business curriculum collaborative relationships in UK HE which are both successful and effective, with these derived particularly from specific forms of curriculum delivery modes and business subject areas such as marketing, as discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Most Successful Aspects of Collaboration**

As discussed in Section 2.3.2.1, examples of the most effective and trusted modes of business curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies revolve around connected co-delivery of work-based and work-integrated learning, with mutually beneficial collaborative relationships delivered particularly effectively via employer case studies, projects, and guest speaker events. These areas of curriculum collaboration and co-production are where academics and students value and trust the knowledge and experience of employers and professional bodies, in contrast with delivery modes such as co-teaching and co-assessment, which academics from Sections 2.2 and 2.3.2.1 above regard as more HEI-led activities.

Further evidence of the transformative success of employer projects as a key collaborative co-delivery mode is demonstrated in a recent case study compendium by Advance HE on employability in UK HEIs, with particular emphasis on the work carried out since 2018 by Anglia Ruskin University (Norton & Dalrymple, 2021). Here all business and management subjects are part of a new intervention known as the Active Curriculum Framework, which takes a holistic curriculum approach, and involves active connection and collaboration between employers and academics on all undergraduate courses to develop graduate capital and employability. This includes a Live Briefs

initiative for authentic and engaging learning and assessment, with successful measurable outcomes in developing graduate employability in partnership with industry partners (Norton and Dalrymple, 2021).

A further successful aspect of business curriculum collaboration from academic research appears to be formal curriculum co-creation and design via degree apprenticeships and accredited courses, as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1. Here regulation requires academics, employers, and professional bodies to collaborate, from initial stages of curriculum design and co-creation of standards and exemptions through to co-production and delivery of business curricula in subject areas such as marketing, resulting in success and impact via student outcomes such as double awards, work skills enhancement and professional exemptions, as discussed in Section 2.3.2.1.

In terms of future innovative business curriculum collaboration, modes such as online collaboration have proved effective since the Covid-19 pandemic, when UK HEIs had to turn to virtual delivery to collaborate with employers and professional bodies on business curriculum relationships (JISC, 2020). One of the most successful online pivots has been the creation of virtual platforms for curriculum collaboration. A successful example cited by JISC is the collaboration between University of Southampton's Business School and Riipen, an experiential learning platform bringing virtual work experience to students. The university partners with more than 13 local and international employers via Riipen co-designing and embedding work-integrated learning experiences into module curricula. During 2021, students at Southampton Business School took part in 350 live project learning experiences co-designed into the curriculum with employers in marketing and project management,

including applied reflective learning for credit-based assessment. The Business School thereby increased the number of employer connections with its academics via the international reach provided by the Riipen platform, which has also helped with its EQUIS accreditation (JISC, 2020). Virtual business curriculum collaboration via mediated platforms such as Riipen therefore has the potential to underpin future business curriculum collaboration and skills transformation between HEIs and employers.

Other positive examples of future opportunity recognition include universities such as UWTSD who are compiling and implementing strategic action plans for employability in the curriculum with a longer-term view of graduate and HEI success. Other key positive examples include the Future Global Leaders Forum instigated by and open to all students at Queen Mary University of London, graduate employability curriculum agenda development co-created with employers in the Leeds City Region by Leeds Trinity University, and the M-Coach mentoring scheme set up by Bournemouth University (Norton and Dalrymple, 2021).

In summary, the most successful aspects of business curriculum collaborative relationships between employers, academics, and professional bodies, judging by the review of literature in the preceding sections, appear to fall into three main categories. Firstly, formal curriculum co-creation and design, driven by professional standards and HE regulation, drives effective curriculum collaboration for degree apprenticeships and accredited or double-badged courses in subjects such as accounting and marketing. Secondly, collaborative curricular delivery and co-production modes can be found mostly where academics believe they can trust the expertise of employers and professional

bodies, for example work-based learning, employer case studies, projects, and guest speakerships. Thirdly, future innovative modes for online and virtual co-delivery of curricular collaboration in business subjects have high potential for effective business curriculum collaboration, including strategic employability action planning, and online platforms such as Riipen for collaborating on work-integrated learning, virtual employer project support and site visits.

In terms of specific business subjects where curriculum collaboration is most successful, the case study examples discussed earlier in Chapter 2 demonstrate that curriculum collaboration relationships can prove most successful where business subject courses are designed collaboratively to double-badge degree awards, adhere to set professional standards, or certify professional exemptions in areas such as marketing (CIM) or human resources (CIPD), for example the degree apprenticeship courses at Bradford and Manchester Metropolitan University discussed in Section 2.2.2.1 above.

Business curriculum collaboration relationships also appear to be stronger in subjects where a business discipline lends itself naturally to networking and collaboration to share best practice between universities and industry, such as marketing and finance, as demonstrated by examples in Section 2.4.1 above such as Birmingham City University. Norton and Dalrymple (2021) also present a convincing example of successful curricular collaboration through innovative teaching and learning from Swansea University on co-designed innovation in the accounting curriculum. Here the university's school of management worked with accounting professional bodies and employers to extend the final year undergraduate curriculum into new computerised accounting modules, as employers had fed back that knowledge of digital accounting software packages

was the top skill they were looking for in accounting graduates. This resulted in success in developing student employability skills, through an industry-informed curriculum combining academics' knowledge of accounting skills with experiential learning and software application of key digital accounting packages (Norton and Dalrymple, 2021).

Despite the above inspiring examples of approaches that work successfully in business curriculum collaboration, the practice and experience of curriculum collaboration is still however beset with challenges and areas for improvement, of which the main issues, such as contact retention and academic resistance, are discussed further in section 2.5.2 below.

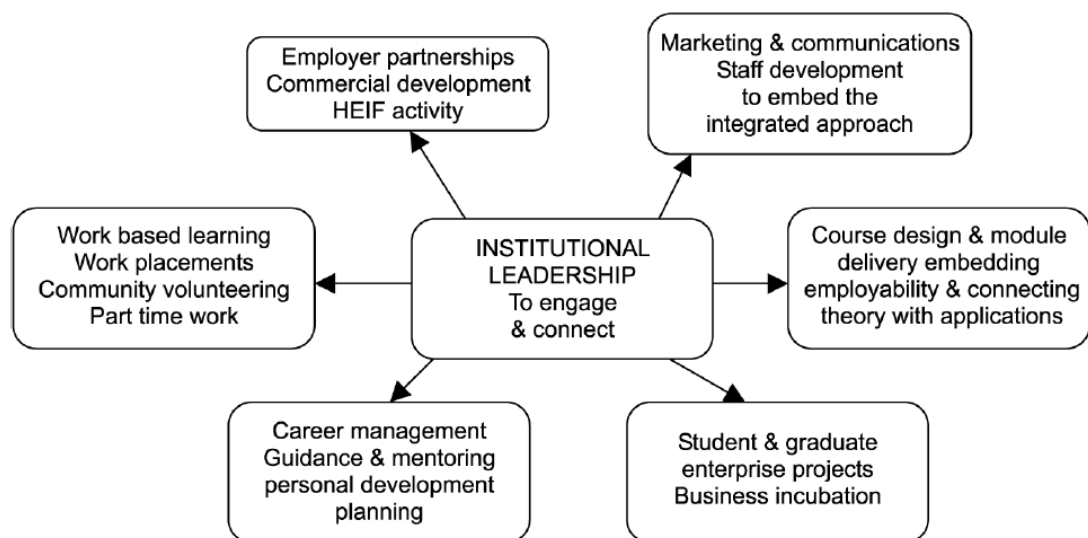
### **2.5.2 Collaboration Areas for Improvement**

The following section discusses key challenges and areas for improvement in curriculum collaboration between academics, professional bodies, and employers, which emerged from the literature review most notably as disaggregation in HEI structures and processes, and an academic culture of residual resistance to building collaborations, due to lack of incentives, resources, reward, and recognition.

The problem of structurally disconnected HEI roles and processes which negatively impact on effective curriculum collaboration was one of the most common areas for curriculum collaboration improvement in the literature review. While it is the norm for academics to run individual subject courses in business schools, collaborative relationship support services such as careers or business development are often managed centrally, leading to a lack of integrated employability and curriculum planning internally in terms of external collaborative employer relationships (Rae, 2007). As a result, key collaborative

initiatives such as work experience and employer curriculum input can be left out of curriculum design, owing to disaggregated structures of university management. One solution to this challenge would be the creation of a model of improved organisational connectivity relating to employability, curriculum, and external collaboration, as shown in the figure from research by Rae below, whereby senior leaders would lead connectivity of academic curriculum development and delivery integrated with employer engagement:

**Figure 14 - Model of Institutional Connectivity of Curriculum, Employability and Enterprise**



(Rae, 2007)

The success of this type of model however relies on strong and connected institutional leadership, which is not always evident in UK HEIs. Preceding chapters in this thesis highlighted key challenges in the connectedness and leadership of academic culture acting as barriers to effective business curriculum collaboration, including lack of role clarity, lack of rewards and incentives, and protectionism towards tasks such as co-teaching and assessment amongst academics. Research by Rae (2007) adds to these issues

the challenge of a culture of academic inward focus on subject disciplines and research relating to course curricula. It is notable that Rae sees the production of academic knowledge tending to prioritise subject theory, and thereby tending to deprioritise broader connected application of conceptual knowledge through external curriculum collaboration, with reluctance or even hostility towards looking outwards and engaging effectively with employers evident (Rae, 2007), as also discussed in Section 2.2.1.1 above regarding initiation of curriculum collaboration. Over the longer term, even when academics agree to integrate employability skills into their teaching and assessment practice, this tends to occur inconsistently, and not in a long-term or systematic manner, depending on individual academics' discipline, experience, and role. Research by Cotronei-Baird (2020), for example, shows that this variation in teaching and assessment practice means that student exposure to employability skills development opportunities via the curriculum may vary by subject even within the same degree program. Cotronei-Baird therefore points out that negative academic culture may potentially explain deficits reported by industry among graduates across different subjects in the acquisition of employability skills (Cotronei-Baird, 2020).

Taking these arguments into consideration, one improvement would be for HEIs to embed more of a climate of mutual gain for academics regarding external engagement with employers and professional bodies around curriculum collaboration, to extend the comfort zone of any reluctant academics, and to bring long term value to curriculum collaboration relationships, as advocated by Wijayaratna and Cottam (2022):

'Often, improving one's ability to speak to people and grow external networks simply requires the right mindset. Appreciate you're playing a long game in



which benefits aren't always obvious or immediate. The value of external relationships can be surprising.' (Wijayaratna and Cottam, 2022) (p4)

In summary, section 2.5 has shown that the most common areas for improvement in the practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration appear to revolve around disaggregation and lack of connected leadership in HEI structures and processes, together with an academic culture of insufficient incentives, resources, reward, or recognition for academics to reach out externally and engage in business curriculum collaboration. The recommendations discussed above by researchers in these areas show that these challenges are not insurmountable, through improved win-win incentives to collaborate, and better connectedness in HEIs between academics, alumni, and central business development or careers teams.

## **2.6 Summary & Key Gaps in the Literature**

The literature review above was undertaken in response to the objectives of this research study. These were to explore how the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed in designing and delivering business curricula in UK higher education institutions, together with commonalities across UK higher education institutions in maintaining business curricula collaborations with employers and professional bodies, as well as aspects that work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

The preceding literature review sections demonstrated that overall drivers for collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in UK HE business curricula are growing rapidly due to several factors, including

government metrics, ranking tables, employer skills demand, accreditation compliance and student skills, as discussed in section 2.1, requiring a connectedness in curriculum strategy thinking and a willingness to reach out to external curriculum collaboration partners on the part of universities in particular. However, although Section 2.2 found that there are positive examples of the practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration when required on a formal basis, particularly in courses such as degree apprenticeships and professional body accredited courses, there are significant gaps in the practice and experience of stakeholders in informal curriculum design and co-creation, with implementation still fairly patchy, sporadic and disconnected, and little clarity on who should initiate curriculum collaboration beyond practitioner academics in UK business schools. The practice and experience of curriculum co-production and delivery also varies significantly by level of study and intensity of role, with a lack of connected curriculum thinking around more complex curriculum delivery modes such as co-teaching, and primarily only basic collaboration evident in areas such as case studies, guest speaker slots, projects, consultancy, and work-integrated learning in UK HEIs. There was comparatively little evidence of collaboration in delivery of activities more academically intensive in nature which HEIs tend to want to deliver in-house, such as co-teaching and assessment.

In terms of the second research objective relating to maintaining effective business curriculum relationships over the longer term, Section 2.4 demonstrated that even with willingness on the part of employers and professional bodies, longer term collaboration can prove challenging, due again to lack of connected thinking and reward mechanisms for academics within

universities, despite opportunities to include professional bodies and employers on curriculum validation panels or advisory boards.

Finally, with regard to aspects that work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula, it was clear in Section 2.5 that there are highly successful and impactful aspects of collaborative business curriculum relationships in subject areas such as marketing, and via delivery modes such as degree apprenticeships. However, there are also major areas for improvement, relating in particular to lack of connected thinking around resourcing, reward, recognition and incentivisation of HE academics to engage in collaborative curriculum relationships, and a lack of connected HE systems and processes to support such initiatives in business schools.

Motivating factors for greater business curriculum collaboration are certainly evident in the literature reviewed, with academics, professional bodies and employers finding that such collaboration can reap significant benefits in terms of employability, teaching, research, local and civic economic growth, and student engagement. As Cole and Tibby (2013) emphasise in their keynote research for Advance HE:

‘Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities, and employers. This will bring significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education’s broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development.’ (Cole and Tibby, 2013) (p5)

The literature review has however surfaced key gaps relating to the practice and experience of business curriculum collaborative relationships in UK HE, particularly around the lack of connected thinking influencing such relationships, and the viewpoint of professional bodies and employers as well as academics.

These gaps in knowledge were therefore addressed further via primary research, as set out in the following thesis chapters.

## 3 Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This thesis chapter discusses the research methodology and philosophical underpinnings supporting the main topic of this study, which is the phenomenological experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This chapter discusses the methodological choice for the research, epistemological and theoretical perspectives, data collection methods, selection of participants for both data gathering stages, and the initial approach to data analysis. Ethical issues relating to this research are also discussed. Chapter 4 then outlines the approaches used to analyse the research results.

A key methodological consideration for this study was how it could meet the dual challenge of being theoretically and methodologically rigorous, while also being relevant to the world of professional higher education management practice. Jackson and Cox (2020) point out that in fields where practitioners can be considered as action-oriented, which includes higher education management, practitioners need to pay attention to inherent logic in both practice and research, so that they can understand the relationship between both worlds, and identify how to develop an approach to working between practice and research that benefits both (Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020).

This study therefore aims methodologically to generate knowledge relevant both to practicing university academics, and to employer organisations and professional bodies active in higher education collaboration.

The primary research methodology underpinning this study as stated in its title is that of phenomenology, as this qualitative research methodological approach seeks to explicate meanings from the lived experience of people in their everyday existence (van Manen and van Manen, 2021), a crucial requirement when exploring the lived experience of business curriculum collaboration between employers, academics, and professional bodies.

Phenomenology provides an approach to research that aims to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it in depth from the perspective of those who have experienced it. Phenomenology therefore seeks to describe both what was experienced and how it was experienced, in order to surface the meaning of this experience.

By doing so, phenomenology eschews concepts that have already been conceived in favour of authentic lived experience. With its focus on lived and situated experience, phenomenological scholarship is utilised extensively in education research, due to its powerful focus on the study of individuals' lived experiences within the world (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019), and its ability to explore and draw out tacit meaning from educational lived experiences.

In clear alignment with the aims of this study, therefore, adopting a research approach based on phenomenology does not in any way neglect lived experience such as curriculum collaboration, or treat it as simply subjective, but uses it as a starting point for further systematic investigation, reflection, and understanding of that experience throughout the structure and content of this research study (Dahlin, Ostergard and Hugo, 2009).

### 3.2 Meeting the Research Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the research outlined in Chapter 1 were as follows:

#### Aim of the research:

- To achieve phenomenological insight into the nature of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

#### Objectives of the research:

- To explore how the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed in designing and delivering business curricula in UK higher education institutions.
- To explore commonalities across UK higher education institutions in maintaining business curricula collaborations with employers and professional bodies.
- To examine what aspects work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

To meet these aims and objectives the following research questions therefore needed to be answered:

- What are the key drivers for business curriculum collaboration in and with UK HEIs?
- How does collaborative design and co-creation occur in business curricula, and who takes the lead in initiating collaboration?
- How do collaborative delivery and co-production occur in business curricula?
- How are effective collaborative business curriculum relationships maintained?
- What are the most and least successful aspects of effective business curriculum collaborative relationships?

### 3.3 Research Outcomes

The outcomes of this research study have the potential to be used to underpin development of a framework for higher education business and management

academics, employers, and professional bodies, as discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7. This could enable more effective collaboration around business curricula design, development, and delivery, in the interests of graduate employability and competency advancement in the UK. Redefining the phenomenological practice and experience of curriculum collaboration using the research outcomes may also provide the following opportunities:

- For HEI academics – to overcome barriers and engage in effective collaboration with employers and professional bodies, in the interests of business curriculum currency and graduate outcomes;
- For employers – to input to and access a talent pool of UK university graduates with highly relevant and transferable employability skills based on highly relevant business curricula;
- For professional bodies – to add significant subject-related value to business curricula in addition to regulatory oversight of graduate learning and outcomes.

### **3.4 Research Methodology & Philosophy**

#### **3.4.1 Research Paradigms, Ontology and Epistemology**

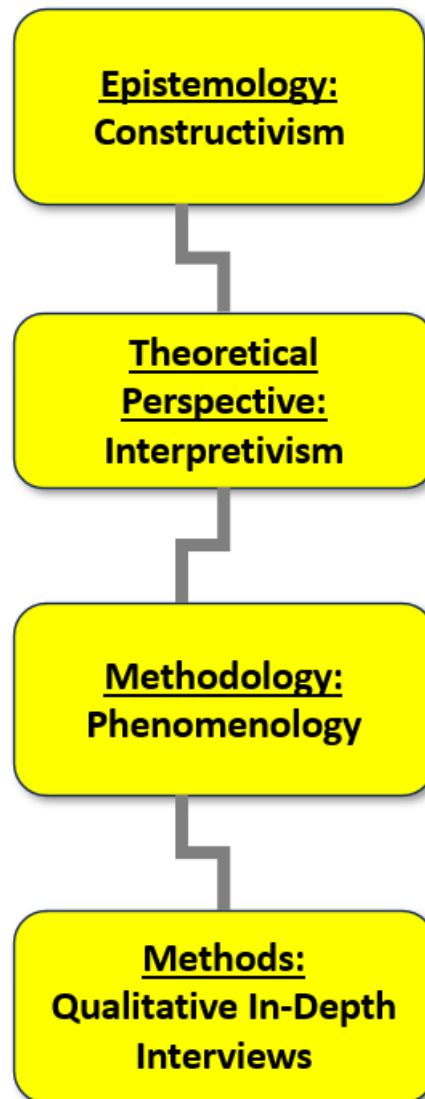
##### **Research Paradigms**

When considering the study methodology in terms of process, key elements applied were based sequentially on the work of Crotty (1998), who encourages social sciences researchers to ‘consider what methods to use, what informs the choice of methodology and methods, the theoretical perspectives of the methodology and the epistemology stance that informs this theoretical perspective.’ (Crotty, 1998) (p 2).

The research process therefore consisted of the following key elements, for which the research philosophy and paradigms are discussed in more detail in the remainder of this chapter:



**Figure 15 - Key Elements of Research (Based on Crotty, 1998)**



(Crotty, 1998)

This research study is mainly concerned with exploring the practice, experience and opinions of individuals working for employers, universities and professional bodies involved in business curricula collaboration in UK higher education institutions. In terms of research paradigms, the research therefore aims to uncover experience, attitudes, and perceptions, driven by an interpretivist ontology, in a world view where a single truth or reality does not always exist, and where reality is perceived differently depending on the context and

individual differences of the different participants in the collaborative experience. As stated by Morgan and Smircich (1980):

‘Human nature is voluntaristic, humankind has freewill and is autonomous; humans are intentional beings, shaping the world within the realm of their own immediate experience.’ (Morgan, G. and Smircich, 1980) (p491)

### **Ontology**

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, and whether anything has existence, or is instead the product of the human mind (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Objectivism is an aspect of ontology representing the position that social entities exist externally to social actors. However, this study is more subjectivist in ontological terms, as it is based on the view that individuals themselves attach their own meanings to their experience of curriculum collaboration, and that the phenomenon of this experience is created through the perceptions and actions of the individuals involved. As a result, there is a need to study the social phenomenon of curricular collaborations in detail, to understand the reality occurring behind what is happening in such collaborations.

As highlighted by Whiting and Pritchard (2021), ontologically this research seeks to adopt a relativist rather than a realist perspective, as the research challenges the notion of a concrete reality, and instead assumes that reality comes into existence via complex processes of construction on the part of the different participants in curriculum collaborations (Whiting and Pritchard, 2021). Seeking to understand the subjective reality of the university academics, employers and professional bodies involved in curricular collaborations has therefore enabled myself as researcher to make sense of their motives, beliefs and actions in a way that is meaningful. This research is therefore primarily subjectivist in ontology, whereby as discussed by Jegede (2021) the reality of

the phenomenon of curriculum collaboration is perceived differently from each of the subjective viewpoints of the academics, employers and professional bodies involved (Jegade, 2021).

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with the study of the nature of knowledge and with the nature, validity, and limits of inquiry (Holden and Lynch, 2004).

Epistemology seeks to identify what the relationship is between the researcher and what is knowable, considering what knowledge the researcher is focusing on, and what forms of knowledge can be obtained (Zahra and Ryan, 2005). In line with the constructivist perspective outlined above, this research therefore adopts an interpretivist epistemological approach as advocated by Jegede (2021), as it focuses on a topic that has been primarily built on perceived wisdom, where meaning has been created by individuals through their practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration:

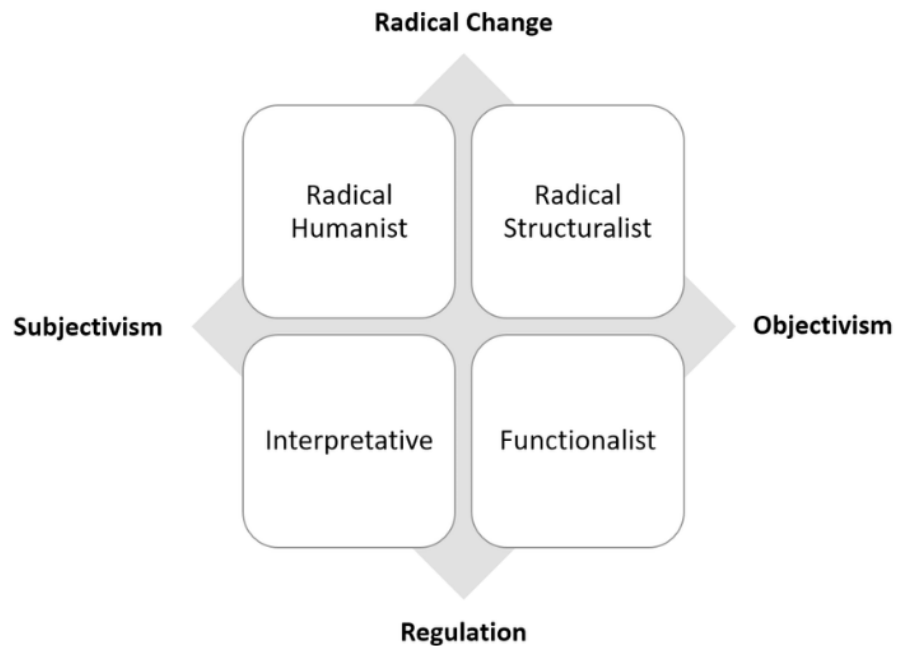
‘While empiricists believe in the objective testing of hypothesis to establish reality or truth, constructivists prefer an interpretive approach, suggesting that reality can be constructed and interpreted in different ways.’ (Jegade, 2021) (p115)

This research study therefore aims to interpret the roles of academics, employers, and professional bodies in accordance with the meanings that they each give to their roles in such collaborations. This research is therefore interpretivist rather than positivist in epistemology, as it has utilised a phenomenological explorative approach to examining the creation, maintenance, and positive aspects of the experience of business curricular collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in UK higher education institutions.

### 3.4.2 Phenomenological Approach

In terms of research paradigms, this study draws on the categorisation of Burrell and Morgan (2016) relating to social science research paradigms concerning the ontology of research and the nature of society, as shown in the figure below:

**Figure 16 - Four Paradigms for the Analysis of Social Theory**



(Burrell and Morgan, 2016)

Based on this paradigmatic framework, this research study takes an interpretative theoretical perspective, as it involves researching the philosophical position of attempting to make sense of the world around those involved in business curricular collaboration, to understand and to try to explain what is going on in such collaborative relationships. As the study respondents were different from each other, they were likely to construct different meanings from the same experience. As a result, an interpretative approach was most appropriate to enable gathering data from multiple sources without concern about respondents' experiences and meanings being different, as it takes the

perspective that reality may exist in the form of 'multiple subjective constructions' on the part of participants being researched, and that the researcher in the interpretative paradigm seeks to understand the social world as it is, at the level of subjective experience (Zahra and Ryan, 2005) (p7). Interpretivism requires the researcher to look for explanations within the participant's frame of reference rather than that of the observer, and for: 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world'. (Crotty, 1998) (p67). Within interpretivism, according to Gray (2022) there are five key methodological approaches:

- Symbolic interactionism – meaning is central to social behaviour; it is neither fixed or stable, but based on experience;
- Phenomenology – any attempt to understand social reality has to be grounded in peoples' experience of their social reality and revisited to create new meaning;
- Realism – objects act independently of the researcher;
- Hermeneutics – social reality is seen as socially constructed, and interpretations are more important than explanations and description;
- Naturalistic inquiry – there are multiple, constructed realities that can only be studied holistically.

(Gray, 2022)

In considering each of these approaches for this research study, realism and naturalistic inquiry were not pursued, as these did not align with the epistemological perspective outlined above. Hermeneutics was also not utilised for this study, as according to Perez, Nieto-Bravo and Santamaria-Rodriguez (2019) the hermeneutic method introduces itself into the content and dynamics of the participant studied, in their implications, and seeks to structure a coherent interpretation of the whole, whereas the phenomenological method completely respects the person's account of their own experiences (Perez, Nieto-Bravo and Santamaria-Rodriguez, 2019). The purpose of this research is therefore to

focus on more phenomenological description and explanation, and for participants and readers of the research to make their own interpretation.

In terms of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, both have a degree of relevance to this research study. As Gray (2022) points out, in both approaches researchers interpret the meaning of objects and actions in the work, and act upon those interpretations, with meanings arising from the process of social interactions, then handled and modified by an interactive process.

However symbolic interactionism derives from the premise that human beings actively create, enact, and change meanings and actions in a problem-solving mode reflecting social and personal values and goals, and tends to focus on cultural scripts and interactions between participants and roles being researched (University of South Australia, 2023). Symbolic interactionism was not therefore chosen for this study, as it relies on individuals deriving a sense of identity from interaction and communication with others, which is not the focus of this research.

Phenomenology therefore has the greatest alignment with the research aims of this study, as a key aspect of phenomenology is understanding the experiences of others to construct meaning from research data gathered. In the case of this study, phenomenology allowed the voice of each individual participant to describe their specific experience of business curriculum collaboration. Taking this in-depth inductive approach encouraged respondents to explain feelings, perceptions and emotions surrounding their experience to enable deep understanding, as the phenomenological approach focuses largely on the real world and an openness to the experiences of the subject. This approach aligns with the views of Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio (2019), that as phenomenology

is the study of an individual's lived experience of the world, by looking at an experience as it is subjectively lived, new meanings and appreciations can be developed to inform or even re-orient how that experience is understood (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019). The relevance of this approach for this study is reinforced further by the views of Bachkirova, Rose and Noon in Chapter 5 of Jackson and Cox (2020):

'The underlying aim of phenomenology as a philosophy and research orientation is to capture the structures of experiences which can be intersubjectively accessible and therefore capable of being understood in relation to other experiences.' Bachkirova, Rose & Noon in (Jackson & Cox, 2020) (p79)

In terms of phenomenological philosophy, this study aligns broadly with the principles of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology, as I have attempted as researcher to acknowledge but to then put aside or bracket prior knowledge and assumptions to avoid bias and to allow participant themes to emerge from the research data, as recommended by Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio (2019), who state that transcendental phenomenological researchers have a need to contain their own understanding, so as not to allow their opinions, biases or views interfere with the phenomena being researched. Bias can prove problematic for practitioners who take a phenomenological research approach, as they are naturally curious about experiences which are important to them as researchers, to facilitate sense-making about the experience being explored. Bracketing out prior knowledge can therefore prove challenging for the phenomenological researcher. However, adopting a reflexive stance helped me as researcher to bracket out my prior knowledge, through identifying when I was likely to impose pre-existing assumptions during the primary research and analysis, and to self-correct early on in this process to prevent interpretive contamination of ideas, in alignment with the recommendations of Bachkirova,

Rose and Noon (Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020). The chosen phenomenological Husserlian method for this study therefore involved the bracketing of foreknowledge of the subject matter of the research as part of the researcher role, as shown as a requirement in the first column of Figure 17 below under the profile of the phenomenological psychology method. This method has as its theoretical underpinning transcendental or 'pure' phenomenology, by which things of the world are allowed to present themselves as phenomena, and the lifeworld as the source of lived experiences (van Manen and van Manen, 2021). The main purpose of this method, as shown in Figure 17 below, is therefore to elicit an integrated picture or essence of the phenomenon being studied, with theoretical assumptions bracketed effectively, and description offered of the themes emerging from the research. The other phenomenological research methodologies shown by comparison in Figure 17 below do not place such emphasis on bracketing of foreknowledge, and were therefore less appropriate for this research study in terms of allowing the essence of the phenomenon of lived experience of employers, academics and professional bodies to emerge:

**Figure 17 - Comparison of Typical Phenomenological Research Methodologies**

|  | Phenomenological psychology method   | Interpretative phenomenological analysis   | Heuristic research   | Conceptual encounter  |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Theoretical underpinning/associations</b> | Transcendental phenomenology, Idiography   | Idiography, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Symbolic Interactionism   | Phenomenology, Idiography, Humanism, Constructivism  | Phenomenological psychology, Humanism, Idiography, Interactionism                                       |
| <b>Main proponents</b>                       | Giorgi and Giorgi (2013)   | Smith et al. (2009)  | Moustakas (1994)   | de Rivera (1981)  |
| <b>Dimensions of differences</b>             |  |  |  |   |
| <b>Role of the researcher</b>                | Bracketing foreknowledge, comparing accounts, establishing a general structure of the phenomenon | Micro-analysing and interpreting with reflexivity the convergence and divergence in accounts to interpret the meaning of experiences | Researcher as an instrument for data collection, self-inquiry as well as the inquiry into the phenomenon | Gatekeeper of concept development, foreknowledge of researcher is included in the dialogue and analysis |
| <b>Main purpose</b>                          | The integrated picture (essence) of the phenomenon   | A picture of similarity and variability of human experience  | Personal change of the researcher and essence of the phenomenon  | Elucidation of the structure that exists within psychological events                                    |
| <b>Role of theory</b>                        | Theoretical assumptions bracketed<br>Only description is offered                                 | Theoretical propositions are explored and compared with existing literature alongside emerged themes at the final stage              | Theoretical propositions are secondary to creating synthesis that could be seen as theory                | Concept is gradually developed and can be seen as a theoretical proposition                             |
| <b>Balance of text and visual means</b>      | Analysis of the observations or text   | Analysis of text and own memos – other data collection methods are encouraged but not often used                                     | Any means of data collection, creative approach to final synthesis                                       | Concept can appear as a map or an 'elegant' model   |

(Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020) (p77)



Participant intentionality was also an interesting aspect of the phenomenological approach used for this study, as phenomenology also implies that there are other aspects that participants relate to their experiences, and therefore their understanding of the world according to Bachkirova, Rose and Noon (Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020). This notion of intentionality is often key to phenomenology, whereby researchers study the phenomenon of interest, and, in the case of this study, in addition to the practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies, participants raised interesting broader intentional issues such as cynicism and optimism connected with this experience which could be analysed for the output of this study. Intentionality allows things that happen in the world to present themselves as phenomena, which can be viewed effectively using a Husserlian approach of bracketing and suspending natural attitudes in favour of an epoché or transcendental reduction, revealing the phenomena and lifeworld of our experiences (van Manen and van Manen, 2021).

Adopting a phenomenologically informed transcendental Husserlian approach as shown in the table above therefore facilitated robust access to the experiences of the research participants in this study, and generated a rich level of data from which to attempt to interpret meaning. This phenomenological approach also aligned with the principles of constructivist epistemology and the interpretative theoretical perspective required to answer the study's research aims and objectives.

### **3.4.3 Rationale for Qualitative Data Collection**

In terms of research approaches impacting on data collection, both a deductive and an inductive stance were initially considered. Deduction begins with a

universal view of set of premises from which conclusions are logically derived, whereas inductive conclusions are deemed to be supported by the observations made. An inductive approach allows meaning to emerge from data as it is collected, to identify key patterns and relationships in the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). The aim of this research therefore indicated that an inductive approach would be a more natural fit than deductive. As described by Gray (2022), 'plans are made for data collection after which the data are analysed to see if any patterns emerge that suggest relationships between variables.' (Gray, 2022) (p 17)

As a practitioner researcher, it was important to focus on qualitative data gathered to look for themes, patterns, consistencies, and inconsistencies, rather than a more quantitative research process around a hypothesis to test.

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), qualitative research typically has the following characteristics:

- It is conducted through intense contact within a field or real-life setting.
- The researcher's role is to gain a holistic or integrated overview of the study, including the perceptions of participants.
- Themes that emerge from the data are often reviewed with informants for verification.
- The focus of the research is to understand the ways people act and account for their actions.

(Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013)

In considering an optimal data collection approach, it was important to pay particular attention to the overall research aims and objectives. The study was intended to be exploratory in nature, asking open questions to gain insights about the topic of interest considering the views of different stakeholder groups in a relatively unstructured manner. This emphasis therefore pointed towards

adopting an ideological approach involving qualitative methods. Qualitative research studies participants' meanings and the relationships between them, thereby facilitating development of a conceptual framework. As data collection was not standardised, data was more likely to emerge during the research process using a qualitative approach which could add new meaning to the phenomenon under investigation. A mono method of qualitative research was therefore chosen for this research study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

Gray (2022) refers to four different types of information to consider for data collection. The table below illustrates the relevance of each to this research:

**Table 4 - Data Collection Types and Relevance**

| <b>Type of information</b> | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Relevance to the choice of method</b>   |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Contextual                 | Data relating to the context, situation in which the participant exists | Medium<br>Participants must be employers, academics or professional bodies, and this forms part of the selection criteria for participants |
| Demographic                | Data such as age, gender, years of experience, etc.                     | Low  |
| Perceptual                 | Data relating to the views, opinions of an experience                   | High<br>This is the main information type the research method is intended to gather  |
| Theoretical                | Data relating to what is already known about this topic                 | Low<br>This data forms part of the Literature Review   |

(Gray, 2022)

As the research could potentially affect a broad range of stakeholders, it was concluded that it would be useful in the method design to have representatives from those directly and indirectly involved in the academic, employer or professional body fields to elicit new or alternative points to be gathered, and to focus on collecting contextual and perceptual rather than demographic or theoretical data.

### **3.5 Other Methodologies Considered**

Alternative strategies considered for this research included action research and grounded theory.

#### **3.5.1 Action Research**

Action research is an iterative process of inquiry that supports development of solutions to real organisational problems through a participative and collaborative approach, thereby promoting organisational learning via practical outcomes on which to base future organisational actions. Action research is typically based on four steps repeated as cycles during the research process of planning, action, reflection, and subsequent conceptualisation (Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020). As the purpose of this research study was not to promote organisational learning through iterative cycles, but to analyse the phenomenon of the experience of curriculum collaboration through the lenses of three different types of collaborative partner, action research was not therefore considered a suitable methodology for this study.

#### **3.5.2 Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is often applied to develop theoretical explanations of social interactions and process based on the accounts of social actors, explained as a

set of integrated conceptual hypotheses systematically generated to produce an inductive theory about a substantive area (Jackson, P. and Cox, 2020).

Although grounded theory is inductive, which sits well with my own theoretical perspective, its purpose is to generate theory from data, thereby grounding the theory in the data. As this research is not intended to generate a theory, however, this methodology would not support the delivery of my research aims, so was not chosen for this study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.6.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) were chosen as the data collection method for this research study, as this format allows a high level of flexibility for follow-up questions to be asked, enabling the interviewer to probe answers, and for the participants to expand on what they have offered. This flexibility is 'vital where a phenomenological approach is being taken where the objective is to explore subjective meanings that respondents ascribe to concepts or events' (Gray, 2022) (p386). Furthermore, IDIs can go to the heart of the objective of qualitative research of gaining a rich, nuanced understanding of participant behaviour that drives behaviour and attitude formation (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015). Wilson (2012) also advocates that in-depth interviews are highly suited to developing a deeper understanding of participant attitudes and the reasons behind specific behaviours, particularly where the topic is complex or sensitive in nature, by allowing probing of answers for additional data via an unstructured and flexible interview approach. Depth interviews are not only flexible, but also evolutionary in structure, with the interview answers likely to differ by participant over a series of interviews to generate deeper patterns of meaning for the

researcher. Here I was able to use the semi-structured interview format to allow participants to evolve and expand on their own individual experiences of business curriculum collaboration (Wilson., 2012).

The format of a semi-structured IDI was therefore particularly relevant for this research, as a semi-structured IDI allows for reference to an interview guide shown in the appendices to this study to ensure that relevant topics are covered, but also flexibility for participants to evolve and expanding their answers to each topic, facilitating a positive atmosphere of responsive interviewing (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015).

In terms of disadvantages of in-depth interviews, care was taken to limit interviewer bias via the use of bracketing, as set out in Section 3.4 above. The key issue for this type of research instrument was to ensure it was applied consistently. Three key stakeholder groups were included in the interviews. These comprised of employers involved with recruiting UK business or management graduates, professional bodies involved with UK business or management HE courses, and academics involved with teaching UK HE business or management students.

A criteria-based purposeful sampling approach was applied, as discussed in Chapter 4. Selection criteria based on respondents' experience in the topic area of research was applied to selecting interview participants. As there are fewer professional bodies than HEIs or employers involved in business and management subjects, a higher number of respondents was felt to be appropriate amongst employers and HEI academics than professional bodies to be representative. Participants were offered face to face or virtual interviews, and

all participants chose to be interviewed online via MS Teams. An interview guide was developed, as set out in Appendix 8 below.

### **3.7 Ethics, Authenticity and Transferability**

In terms of research ethics, Gray (2022) highlights that ethical participant research principles tend to fall into four main categories, namely the need to avoid harm to participants, ensure informed consent of participants, respect the privacy of participants, and avoid the use of deception.

These factors and the need for ethical awareness are of particular importance for reflective practitioners such as myself involved in scholarship of teaching and learning, as emphasised by Healey, Bass et al (2013):

‘As the purpose of reflection expands from enhancing one’s own professional practice to providing information for others, the undertaking is no longer simply about professional practice and professional development; it becomes a research undertaking with concomitant obligations and expectations, including considerations related to evidentiary standards, students as potential human participants, and the privacy and confidentiality of data.’ (Healey *et al.*, 2013) (p25)

Interviews for this study therefore followed UWTSD and appropriate industry protocol using Market Research Society ethics guidance. The core ethical guidance documents used in completing the study included the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice, UWTSD Research Data Management Policy, and Market Research Society Code of Conduct 2023.

In terms of assurance of the reliability and validity of the research, the choice of methodology was congruent throughout and complemented the study’s ontological, epistemological, and theoretical stance. A clear rationale for the choice of methodology and methods has been provided, alongside a rationale for not selecting other methodologies and methods, to ensure the decision-making

process was both transparent and clear. Clear criteria for participant selection were in place, together with a semi-structured format created for the in-depth interviews. Verbatim transcripts were created from interviews, and NVivo records of the themes were built, demonstrating how these had been developed.

Chapter 4 below on Project Activity clearly details how the research plan of activity compared to the reality of deploying the plan. Further details concerning ethics and confidentiality of the participant research are shown in Appendix 13 below.

Regarding the authenticity and transferability of the participant research, it was important for validity purposes and for professional practice reasons to ensure that the findings of the research were sufficiently authentic and transferable that users of the research would be able to trust transferring and acting on the implications of the findings, and that the study could demonstrate it had captured the authentic voice of the research participants. Key principles developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were therefore taken into account, particularly their criteria for assessing the transferability as well as the credibility, dependability and confirmability of qualitative research. Here Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed techniques to enhance the transferability of qualitative research such as prolonged referential adequacy, and provision of sufficient descriptive data to allow users to evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This has been manifested through the quality of references used as shown in the study Reference List, and through the depth of participant data included in Chapter 5 below.

In terms of authenticity, Guba and Lincoln (1989) built on their earlier work by introducing the concept of authenticity as a criterion particular to the



constructivist paradigm, focusing on the extent to which researchers truthfully surface a range of different realities, and convey the feelings, tones, beliefs, perceptions, and values of the participants in the research. Of the five dimensions of authenticity suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989) of ontological, educative, catalytic, tactical and aesthetic authenticity, this research study focuses particularly on aesthetic authenticity, in terms of reproducing and referencing the authentic research participant expression of findings in Chapter 5 in a way that is likely to evoke a credible response from users of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Finally, in terms of the overall reliability and validity of the research, efforts were made to ensure the research adhered to both the criteria above established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) concerning trustworthy research, and the eight 'big-tent' criteria for assurance of reliability and excellence in qualitative research by Tracy (2010), particularly the criteria of rich rigour, credibility, topic worthiness and significant contribution. The research seeks to establish rich rigour through being timely and relevant for all parties involved in collaboration, as evidenced by the participant interview content, and to achieve credibility through showing the experience of the research participants in their actual collaborative work settings. The topic is worthy, owing to its timeliness and significance in the changing environment of UK higher education, and has the potential to make a significant contribution to higher education and business curriculum collaboration by presenting important insights from not only academics, but also employers and professional bodies, to advance knowledge and professional practice in curriculum collaboration in the future (Tracy, 2010) . The process followed in the primary research project activity is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 below.

## **4 Project Activity & Data Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out the project research activities which took place to meet the research aims and objectives, shaped by the research methodology described in Chapter 3. These activities included semi-structured in-depth interviews, data analysis, and coding.

### **4.2 Participants & Sampling**

Following the literature review, key questions relating to gaps arising from the literature review were incorporated into a qualitative discussion guide for 45-minute in-depth research interviews with 32 participants involved in business curricular collaborations in UK higher education. This number was higher than the original target of 30 respondents, owing to the enthusiasm of respondents contacted to participate. The 32 interviewees consisted of eight employers, 20 university academics and four professional bodies. Participant comments were anonymised in the thesis material submitted. Participants were asked if they would give permission for the interview to be audio recorded for analysing the interview contents, and all agreed. Participants were not paid for the interviews, and participation in the interviews presented no potential risks to participants.

The original target of 30 respondents was based initially on phenomenological research benchmarks found in comparable doctoral theses by other qualitative phenomenological researchers, and on academic literature research on qualitative interview sampling. A research report by the UK National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), for example, states that when advising researchers on qualitative interview numbers including phenomenological

research: 'We often suggest aiming for a sample of loosely around 30. This medium size subject pool offers the advantage of penetrating beyond a very small number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when researchers are faced with time constraints. This is a good round number.' (Baker and Edwards, 2012)

Secondly, in terms of the purposive logic behind the subpopulation samples for this study for academic respondents, there are as cited in Chapter 1 131 UK HEIs offering business and management degrees, so it was logical to allocate the highest number of subpopulation interviews to this category. Of the 23 respondents invited to participate in the study, 20 took part, representing approximately 15% of the total number of UK business schools. In terms of graduate employers, there are eight key subject areas outlined in Chapter 1 as forming the scope of this study, so 8 employers were interviewed to attempt to obtain a range of views across the 8 subject areas covered by this study. In terms of PSRBs, the QAA works with 21 business and management-related professional bodies in the UK as set out in Appendix 4 of this study, so of the 6 PSRBs invited to participate in the study, 4 took part, representing approximately 19% of the total which work with the QAA on business and management regulation.

Finally, the issue of theoretical saturation became a consideration at the point where relevant respondents were being sampled up to the point where few new theoretical insights were being obtained from the interview data, which became the case once the point of 32 interviews was reached. Overall, therefore, the sample size interviewed of 32 satisfied both methodological and epistemological

issues of reliability, replicability, validity and saturation, as advocated by the UK National Centre for Research Methods (Baker and Edwards, 2012).

As a result of my own professional practice in both industry and universities, I was able to draw on a wide network of UK higher education academics, professional bodies, and business employers to sample. In terms of selecting research participants, the approach put forward by Greener on purposive sampling (Greener, 2008) represented a credible means of selecting research participants for this study, in alignment with the aim of purposive sampling as being strategic about who is targeted to participate. According to Greener, the researcher should select participant cases who are particularly related to the research topic. Phenomenological research also requires sampling respondents who have established and meaningful experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling was therefore the most relevant approach to identifying relevant research participants for the study.

In terms of potential disadvantages of this approach, participants may not be fully representative of the broader population, and there may be limited degrees of similarity or difference for meaningful comparisons and contrasts between participants. However, as it was key for this research for participants to have knowledge of the research subject, it proved acceptable to target respondents from institutions known to the interviewer, conferences etc. as participants, and the differences between their views were highly meaningful.

The main stakeholder groups targeted for the in-depth interviews were graduate employers, business professional bodies, and HEI business and management academics. Each group was allocated a set of selection criteria shown in Appendix 6, reflecting the need for respondents experienced in graduate

employability skills and curriculum considerations. Although invited participants were able to self-select in or out of the research based on whether they fulfilled these criteria, none did so. 35 potential participants were sent invitations to participate in the research (Appendix 7), and the responses secured sufficient research respondents, with 32 interviewed compared with an original target of 30 respondents. The remaining three respondents invited did not refuse to be interviewed, but ran out of time to do so owing to their work commitments.

Academic participants were sourced from personal contacts and their recommendations, and from speaker lists from key UK higher education conferences on collaborations such as CABS, Advance HE and AMBA.

Professional body participants were sourced via PSRB representatives across different business sectors working with UK universities where I have been active in accreditation development, including CIM and CMI. Employer participants were drawn from organisations across a variety of business sectors that work with universities.

While most participants were in middle-management roles, they could theoretically be classified as elite respondents, owing to their rich knowledge of the topic of curriculum collaboration from a relatively senior perspective.

Consideration was therefore given by the researcher to the recommendations of Mikecz (2012), who advocated that researchers interviewing elite respondents should both establish rapport with elite respondents through pre-interview preparation and understanding of the topic being discussed, and to maintain a critical distance through keeping their positionality relative to the respondent both fluid and controlled. This approach enabled the researcher to establish trust and gain reliable content from the respondents interviewed (Mikecz, 2012).

Qualitative in-depth interviews were the most appropriate approach for this stage of the research, as in-depth responses were required from employers, professional bodies, and academics to fill gaps in knowledge around the research topic, together with reasons and explanations to support participants' answers. By applying qualitative research methodology for this study, it was possible to obtain a rich context of experiential information around the thesis topic, via detailed attitudes, motivations and preferences of employers, academics and professional bodies involved in business curricula collaboration. This provided a means of answering in depth the key questions posed to meet the research aims and objectives. The discussions consisted primarily of open-ended questions around areas where gaps in existing knowledge were identified by the literature review, as open-ended questions allow participants to answer questions of a qualitative nature from their own frame of reference, and with their own preferred terminology (Wilson., 2012).

Design and finalisation of the qualitative discussion guide, recruitment of participants and interviews lasted three months. Respondents were identified and invited to participate using a non-probability purposive convenience sampling approach, as discussed in more detail below. All participants were UK-based, and were emailed an invitation to take part in a research interview either face-to-face at the participant's preferred location, or an online interview via Microsoft Teams. The purpose of the research was explained, and anonymity assured in accordance with UK Market Research Society guidelines, stating that respondent anonymity must be preserved unless respondents give informed consent for their details to be revealed (Market Research Society, 2023). Consent was gained from participants before they took part in the

interview via a statement of consent, completed by participants before commencing the interview.

Questions discussed in the interviews focused on the following areas, based on the study research objectives, and gaps in knowledge arising from the literature review: -

- How do UK university academics, employers and professional bodies initially recognise the need to collaborate with each other on business curricula?
- Do employers and professional bodies start their business curriculum collaboration journey via more general level collaborations?
- In which aspects of curriculum design do employers and professional bodies collaborate with academics, e.g., new course design, revalidations, assessment etc.?
- In which aspects of curriculum delivery do employers and professional bodies collaborate with academics, e.g., case studies, guest lectures, placements, internships?
- How do academics in UK higher education institutions maintain collaborations on business curricula with employers and professional bodies?
- How would employers and professional bodies characterise the practice and experience of their collaboration with academics on business curricula?
- Are there aspects of effective business curricula collaboration which work particularly well for employers, professional bodies, and academics?

Following the qualitative interview stage, responses were reviewed using phenomenologically informed thematic analysis to group frequency and intensity of key themes cited by participants, utilising NVivo software. Given the sample size, outputs were largely indicative.

The results were then analysed and triangulated with the results of the literature review to confirm key explorative themes, and address the research aims and

objectives relating to the experience of collaboration in the business curricula between academics, employers, and professional bodies.

### **4.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

Eight graduate employers, 20 HEI business or management academics and four professional bodies agreed to the formal interview invitation. The interviews were scheduled to fit with respondent availability and location, which meant that all interviews were conducted virtually via MS Teams, resulting in approximately 23 hours of data to analyse. Most regions of the UK were included in the respondent recruitment, as shown in Chapter 5, although the small number of universities in areas such as Northern Ireland meant it was not possible to recruit respondents from all UK geographic areas, and the high number of businesses and universities in the London and Southeast England area resulted statistically in a higher number of respondents interviewed in those areas. In all cases strenuous efforts were made to interview universities from different backgrounds e.g., Russell Group, Post-92 etc. This type of university grouping has not been shown as a specific attribute, as not all universities interviewed cleanly fall into either Russell Group or Post-92 classification e.g., specialist or international universities.

The interview guide was informed by the study research aims and objectives, as set out in Appendix 8 below. Following the interviews, voice recordings were uploaded to a secure PC and the UWTSD OneDrive portal with the MS Teams transcripts, which were edit-checked for spelling or typographical errors. Once transcribed, the documents were analysed using thematic analysis with the support of NVivo. This analysis started by producing 50 codes at the open coding stage. These were then thematically merged and aggregated to produce



48 themes at the axial coding stage, resulting in five superordinate themes each with 3-5 subordinate themes and a total of 31 associated sub themes, as set out in Table 5 in Chapter 5 below, and in more coding detail at Appendix 9. In terms of data preparation for coding, all individual interview recordings were played back several times, both for re-acquaintance with the interview content (Kvale, 2007), and to tidy up any errors which MS Teams had potentially misinterpreted against the manual interview notes taken.

All respondents were offered the opportunity to review their interview transcript for checking to reassure participants' sense of accuracy over the data. Only one respondent took up this offer, and highlighted only one MS Teams transcription query which was rectified. Total transcript review and amendments for all 32 interviews took 30 hours to complete. All interview transcripts were anonymised by assigning each respondent with a profession and interview number as shown in Appendix 11 (e.g., U1, E2 etc.). The ethical framework set out in Chapter 3 to assure conduct of the research and to act as a guide should an unexpected issue arise was adhered to. The research activity was successfully completed within this framework, with no unexpected issues arising.

#### **4.4 Thematic Data Analysis & Coding**

The process of data analysis is pivotal in research analysis, as it is inextricably linked with how findings are interpreted and articulated. The importance of effective data analysis in qualitative research is set out clearly by Hatch (2002):

'Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding.' (Hatch, 2002) (p148)

Every effort was therefore made to organise, read, and code the interview findings in a systematic manner, to surface relevant experiences, perceptions, and attitudes for coding into meaningful patterns. The model of thematic analysis advocated by Clarke and Braun (2017) was used to analyse interview data thematically, as this was developed primarily for application within qualitative paradigms, emphasising an organic approach to coding and theme generation, as well as the active role of the researcher in this process. Codes were developed out of the interview data which acted as building blocks for themes, underpinned by the core research concept concerning the practice and experience of collaboration in business curriculum by the interview respondents. Themes were reviewed in stages against the data coded and the overall dataset, as recommended by Clarke and Braun (2017):

‘Thematic analysis can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants’ lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; ‘experiential’ research which seeks to understand what participants’ think, feel, and do.’

(Clarke and Braun, 2017) (p297)

Thematic analysis was chosen as an appropriate approach for this analysis rather than Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as although IPA aims to analyse texts in relation to the creator’s experiences and the meanings attached to these experiences, IPA is also based on the assumption that the social world and the researcher exert an interactive impact on each other, with inseparability of facts and values (Jegede, 2021). In the case of this study, however, thematic analysis was more appropriate, as the main purpose was not for the researcher to interact with the social world researched, but rather to inductively identify themes and patterns of significance to the study research aims and objectives. As this research is interpretative in nature, thematic analysis

of the data was therefore appropriate in providing interpretive analysis beyond initial basic data findings. As emphasised by Sundler et al (2019), thematic analysis is highly applicable to phenomenological studies exploring lived experiences:

‘When researching lived experiences, openness to the lifeworld and the phenomenon focused on must be emphasized (i.e., having curiosity and maintaining an open mind when searching for meaning). The researcher must adopt an open stance with sensitivity to the meaning of the lived experiences in focus...researchers must strive to maintain an attitude that includes the assumption that hitherto the researcher does not know the participants’ experience, and the researcher wants to understand the studied phenomenon in a new light to make invisible aspects of the experience become visible...The goal is to achieve understanding of patterns of meanings from data on lived experiences (i.e. informants’ descriptions of experiences related to the research question in interviews).’ (Sundler *et al.*, 2019) (p733)

The stages of thematic analysis followed involved an initial step of re-establishing familiarity with all the data, by reading interview transcripts, manual notes, and listening to the interview recordings. This process was useful in highlighting common themes or phrases within the data. The interpretive approach subsequently used guided and supported coding and reduction of the data for interpretation. The thematic analysis process took considerable effort in terms of analysing transcripts, identifying and coding emerging themes to create meaning out of the data. This approach contributed effectively to facilitating in-depth understanding and immersion in the context of the research topic (Hughes and Sharrock, 1998). In terms of the coding approach used, this sought to identify and draw together key themes related to the study aims and objectives, in alignment with Braun and Clarke (2013), who state that the process of coding is a common element of qualitative analysis, involving generation of labels for important features of data of relevance to the question guiding the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Boeije (2010) also emphasises the importance in

coding of segmenting research data through analysis, then reassembling it in a way which transforms the data into meaningful findings (Boeije, 2010).

Following re-reading of the interview data for immersion into the themes generated, my initial step was therefore to identify fragments of data from each interview transcript of potential meaning and interest to the research aims and objectives, drawing on the support of NVivo software to store and label data fragments identified. NVivo played no role in judging the value of data fragments, deciding which codes to assign, or interpreting relationships between coding categories, all of which were carried out by myself as researcher. However, NVivo was useful in providing search tools such as graphical visualisation of code connections, code filing, coding stripes, interview case attribute listing, and quote retrieval from interview transcripts by code. Initial data fragments were recombined and reassembled into initial building blocks, through continuous reconsideration of the data, and evolving relationships between emerging thematic categories, as recommended by Boeije when addressing qualitative data segmentation. This also involved constant comparison of thematic categories as they arose with each other and against other codes being used (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012) to revisit new ideas and relationships between emerging thematic categories as the analysis progressed (Boeije, 2010).

Once the data had been explored, initial open coding was completed by analysing the data, developing analytical codes as they emerged, and reorganising the data into categories. The stage of open coding was important in forming the conceptualisation of the field of research, encouraging a thematic approach by forcing the breakdown of text into fragments for comparison and

assignment to indexed groups addressing the same theme to the point of saturation (Boeije, 2010).

Axial coding was then applied by identifying meaningful relationships between coded categories, forming second order themes, as shown in the project codebook at Appendix 9. Axial coding represents 'a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories' (Boeije, 2010) (p108). This stage of coding enabled focussing in to determine which ideas were dominant or less important in relation to the central research aims and objectives. Second order themes were then reduced further through selective coding, applying final merger and aggregation to produce five superordinate themes of relevance to the overall research aims and objectives, as outlined in Table 5 below. Selective coding therefore facilitated finding connections between the second order categories to make sense of the data against the core category of the field being researched (Boeije, 2010). The interview data findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 below.

Finally, the structure of the themes coded from the research interviews is in places not dissimilar to the meaning of some of the research questions asked. Coding was however not carried out to the research questions, and all feasible steps were taken to ensure this was not the case. To assure quality and objectivity in the coding process, steps relating to methodological accountability were taken as advocated by Boeije (2010), including logging of a methodological account of all coding activities capturing how the data were handled and how transformation was achieved (Boeije, 2010).

## 5 Project Findings

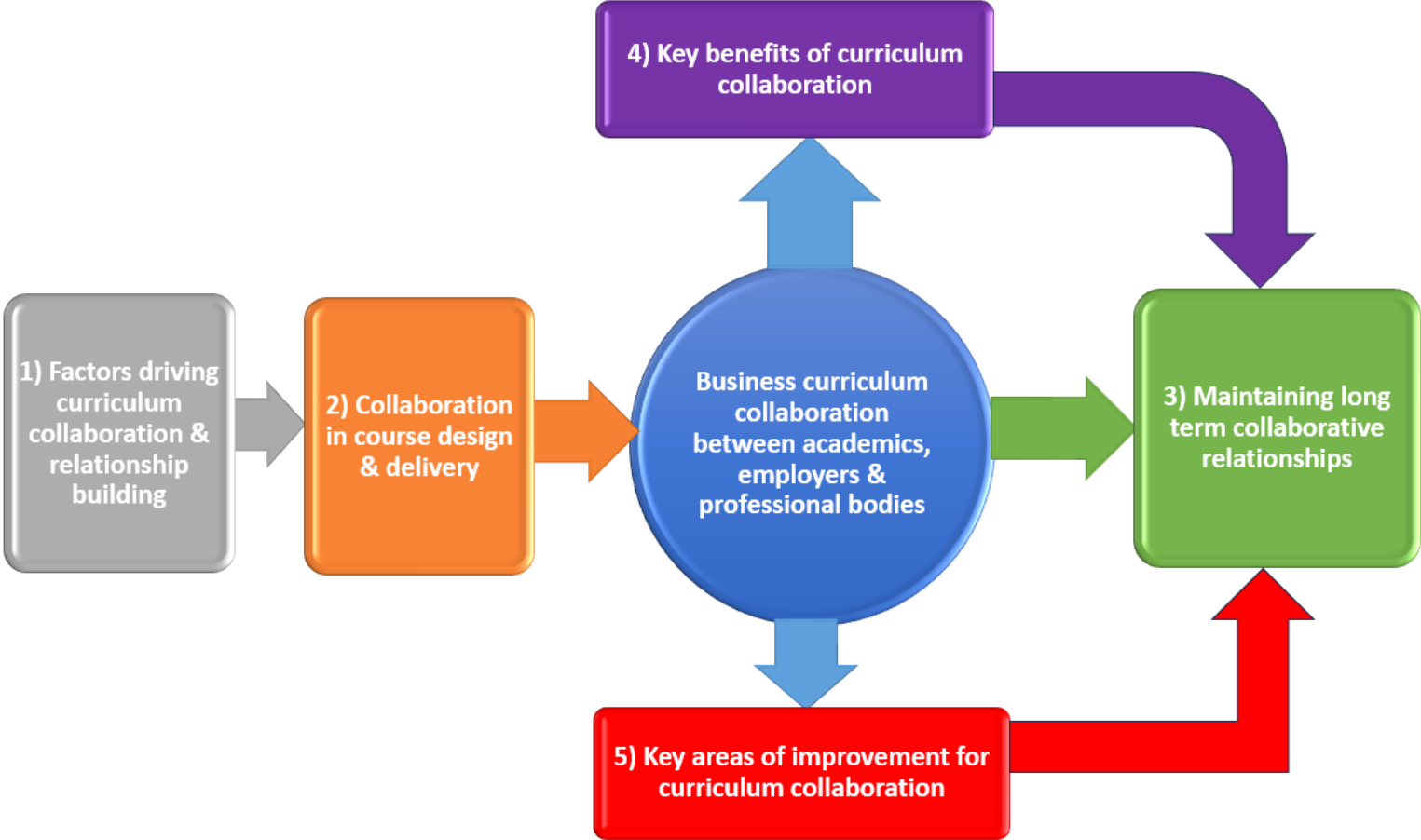
### 5.1 Introduction

The data collected for analysis was collected via 32 one-to-one semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives from key stakeholder groups. The interview findings generated rich content across 22 hours of transcribed material. Five significant and partly interrelated themes emerged from the interview data, as discussed in the sections below, and illustrated in Figure 18.

Key factors discussed under Theme 1) in Section 5.5 such as the initiation of curriculum relationships are those which initially drive business curriculum collaboration and relationship building, and can then lead to collaboration in course design and delivery, as discussed under Theme 2) in Section 5.6. This designed-focused level of collaboration can then lead to the tangible phenomenon of collaborative relationships forming as shown at the centre of the diagram for curriculum co-delivery. If this experience works effectively, then longer-term collaborative relationships can be successfully formed and maintained as discussed under Theme 3) in Section 5.7. Alternatively, key benefits of curriculum collaboration can be derived from collaborative relationships to build upon before moving to longer term collaborative relationships, as discussed under Theme 4) in Section 5.8. However, the impact of key areas of improvement for curriculum collaboration may also need to be identified and addressed, as discussed under Theme 5) in Section 5.9, before moving on to maintaining longer term collaborative relationships. Both Themes 4) and 5) can therefore inform and enrich the longer-term maintenance of business curriculum collaboration discussed under Theme 3).

The five main coded themes link together logically as shown in the figure below, based on the illustrated collaborative flow discussed above:

Figure 18 - Interview Thematic Map





In this chapter the findings from the research are presented thematically in order of the coding concept map structure shown in Appendix 9, which follows the typical chronological journey followed in practice in setting up, delivering, and maintaining collaborative curriculum collaboration.

The project findings include the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged from the analysis of all 32 interviews, as shown in the research codebook in Appendix 9. The chapter concludes with a summary of the interview findings.

## **5.2 Research Participants**

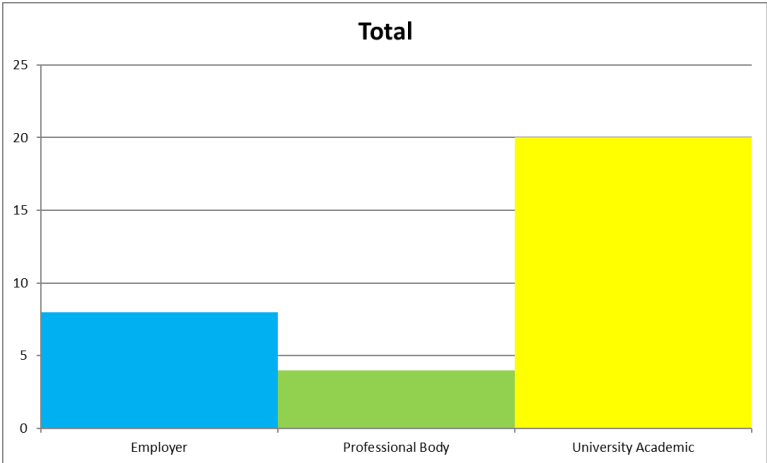
The interview participants were drawn from UK university academics, graduate employers, and professional bodies. All research participants met the criteria specified in Appendix 6 for inclusion in this research.

Analysis of the results of the interviews included quotes cited from participants referred to by their numbered interview as **U** (University Academic – quotes in yellow), **E** (Graduate Employer – quotes in blue) or **P** (Professional Body – quotes in green).

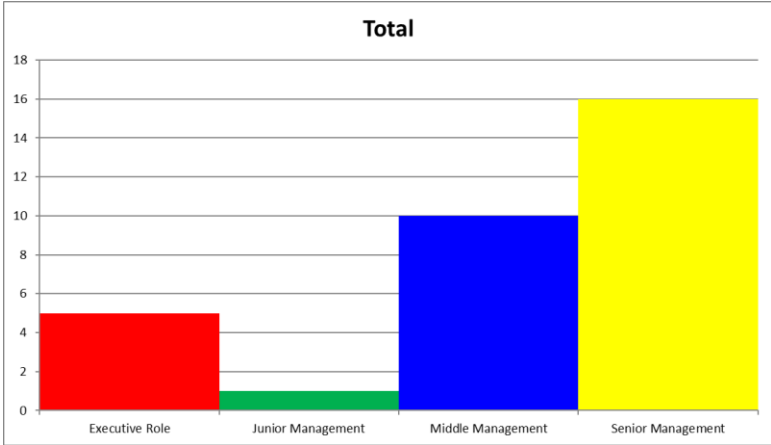
The designations of all 32 interview respondents by the key attributes collected in the interviews of profession, organisational management level, main UK work-based region and subject specialisation are shown in Appendix 12 as a single table, and graphically in the figure below:

**Figure 19 - Designation of Interview Respondents**

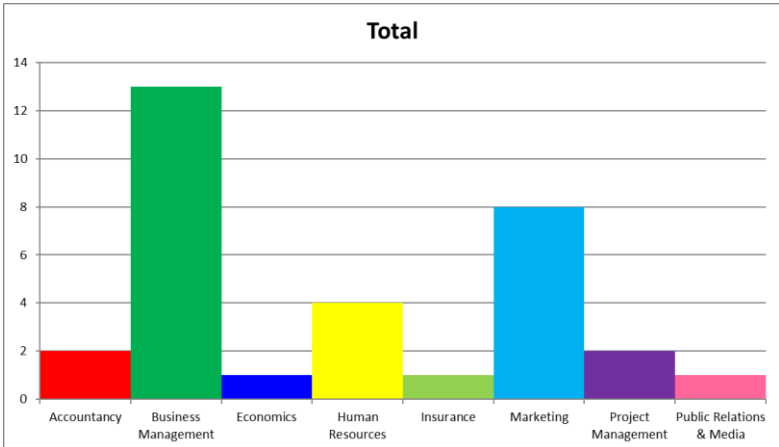
**i) Respondents by Profession**



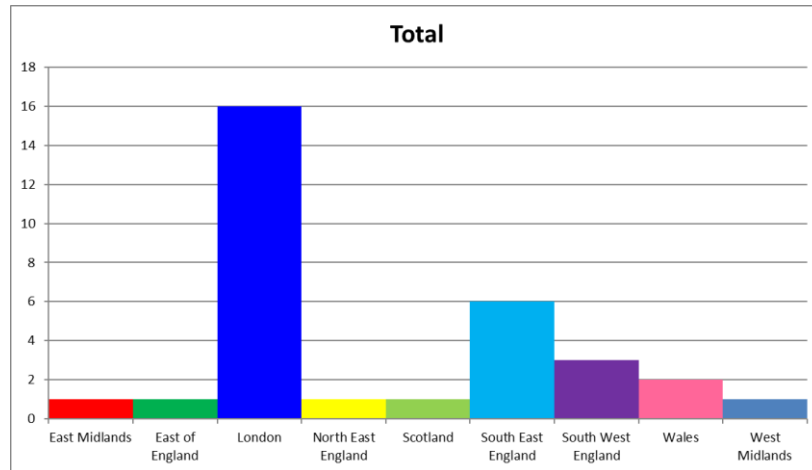
**ii) Respondents by Organisational Level**



**iii) Respondents by Primary Business Specialism**



#### iv) Respondents by Main UK Work-Based Region



### 5.3 Qualitative Interviews – General Observations

The 32 in-depth interviews provided significant depth of content via 1,179 coded references, equating to an average of 43 coded references per transcript.

Several interview participants commented that they found the interviews so thought-provoking they would make changes to their own practice based on the interview discussions.

### 5.4 Summary of Themes – Qualitative Interviews

Following open, axial, and selective coding, five superordinate themes emerged with 3-5 subordinate themes each, and differing numbers of aggregated sub themes. These themes provided several answers to the questions set out in the research aims and objectives, surfacing many interesting sub themes as well as answering gaps arising from the literature review in Chapter 2 above, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 below. The concept map arising from the coding process and the emergent themes is illustrated diagrammatically in Appendix 9 below. The full thematic analysis codebook with subordinate themes and their sub themes, together with numbers of references coded, can also be

found at Appendix 9. Table 5 below summarises the superordinate and subordinate themes by which the research findings are presented in this chapter:

**Table 5 - Interview Superordinate & Subordinate Themes**

| Superordinate Theme   | Subordinate Themes   |
|---|--|
| 1. Factors Driving Curriculum Collaboration & Relationship Building | Changing collaborative role of a university                  |
|   | Graduate employability & recruitment                         |
|   | Initiating curriculum collaboration                          |
| 2. Collaboration in Course Design & Delivery                        | Collaboration & planning in curriculum design                |
|   | Accredited & ranked courses                                  |
|   | Collaboration in curriculum delivery                         |
| 3. Maintaining Long Term Collaborative Relationships                | Issues in maintaining collaborative contacts & relationships |
|   | Contact capture & sharing                                    |
|   | Advisory boards  |
|   | Alumni role  |
| 4. Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration                         | Student value  |
|   | Win-win common goals   |
|   | Local, civic & regional collaboration                        |
| 5. Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum Collaboration            | Removing barriers to collaborative relationships             |
|   | Mismatches in mutual understanding                           |
|   | Improving student engagement                                 |
|   | Overcoming academic negativity                               |
|   | Resolving resource & workload hours support                  |

An expanded version of Table 5, including description and numbers of references relating to each subordinate theme, can be found at Appendix 14. Sections 5.5 to 5.9 below provide in-depth discussion of the interview findings under each of the superordinate themes identified.

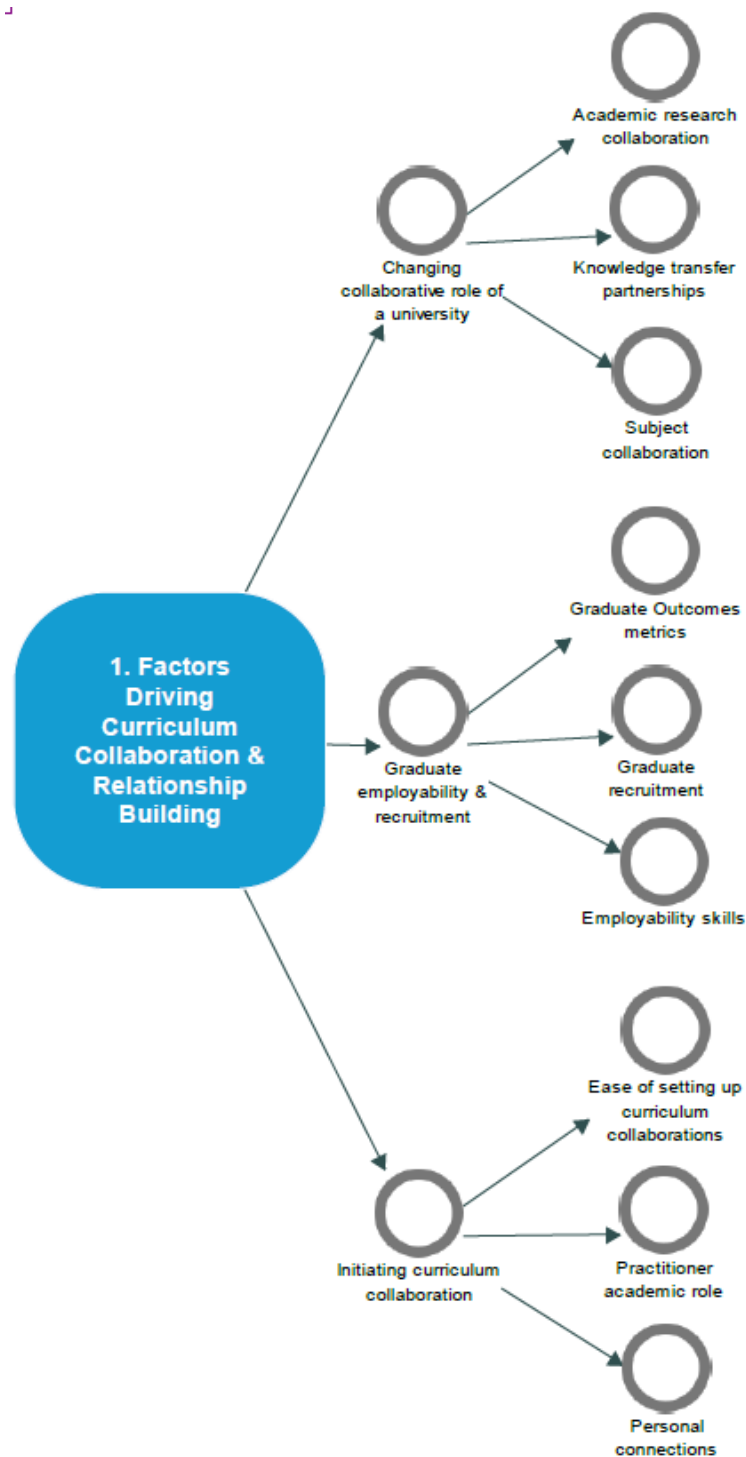
## **5.5 Superordinate Theme 1: Factors Driving Curriculum**

### **Collaboration & Relationship Building**

Factors relating to why and how curriculum collaboration and relationship building are driven were thoughtfully discussed by the interview respondents, with 285 coded references, the second most discussed superordinate theme by number of references. Key subordinate themes discussed with their associated

sub themes, as shown in the figure below, were the changing collaborative role of universities, graduate employability, and recruitment, and who should initiate curriculum collaboration:

**Figure 20 - Superordinate Theme 1: Factors Driving Curriculum Collaboration & Relationship Building**



### 5.5.1 Changing collaborative role of a university

Several employers expressed the view that universities do not always see it as their role to collaborate with employers or professional bodies in the interests of curriculum development or graduate employability, particularly universities with a strong brand, whose students they regard as highly employable without having to collaborate externally:

'I'm not sure they see their role as preparing students to undergo internships with insurance companies. I think universities see themselves as, here's our degree content, we'll teach to that.' (E6)

Academics even within strongly branded universities interviewed tended to back up this view:

'Having the branding of our university comes with a calling card. If they reach out, they will not have much difficulty bringing people in.' (U19)

'There is a brand value about the big universities, carefully cultivated like any brand.' (U2)

Other academics felt however that being a less strongly branded university was a positive encouragement to try to collaborate more externally, driving sector best practice:

'I don't think a big university should be complacent their brand is so strong that everything will be fine. They need to up their game. I don't think the most prestigious, famous universities are best at doing this. They can learn from smaller, hungrier, less established universities who really focus on getting industry collaboration.' (U2)

The main areas in which respondents appeared to see university roles changing to collaborate with employers and professional bodies were in academic research collaboration, knowledge transfer partnerships and subject-based collaboration, as discussed below.

### 5.5.1.1 Academic Research Collaboration

Several employers and university academics cited academic research as the traditional primary means by which they collaborate, rather than curriculum design, particularly research-intensive institutions, or HEIs collaborating on research with local employers and public institutions:

‘From a research perspective, I’ve noticed there are already well-established research links, especially with local councils, long term collaborations on projects that are EU funded, worth millions of EUR...From the research side, it’s driven by money.’ (U7)

‘We’ve done a lot with University LS in London on the Environmental, Social and Governance code, on different technical areas in which we do consulting work...In terms of white papers and thought leadership, consultancies are always looking for the next thing, that’s something universities can offer in terms of research.’ (E5)

Academic research was not commonly regarded as a leading area of collaboration however for universities from specialist or post-92 backgrounds, for whom teaching is more of a lead into collaboration:

‘We’re not a research-intensive institution. There are very few just doing research and that’s their main thing.’ (U12)

For post-92 and specialist institutions, teaching and knowledge transfer appeared to be more of a lead into external collaboration than research partnerships, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.5.1.2 Knowledge Transfer Partnerships

Many university respondents cited Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) as a central driver for external collaboration with employers. Universities of different sizes, backgrounds and locations cited the importance of external collaboration on KTPs to produce revenue, particularly business schools:

‘Knowledge transfer partnerships to get companies’ research money into business schools are extremely popular and garner a lot of resource.’ (U1)

'There's a big push from the university for academics to engage with external partners, conducting research with companies, and KTPs.' (U14)

'They're trying to get us to do knowledge transfer partnerships, to have things pay for themselves through KTPs. They pay for or buy out the time for the academic to turn it into a research project...and the impending KEF metrics.' (U15)

The importance of KEF metrics was also referred to in connection with KTP collaboration, as cited by respondent U15 above. This often happens on a subject basis, as discussed in section 5.5.1.3 below.

### **5.5.1.3 Subject Collaboration**

The level of external collaboration driven by subject-based curricula and employability demands varied significantly across the interviews. Several respondents cited engineering and medicine as subjects with high levels of curricular collaboration, through their dependency on employers and professional body accreditation, with humanities having low levels of external collaboration, and business subjects in the middle of this spectrum:

'It varies across faculty. Engineering, I see a lot of collaboration on projects, panels of employers coming for third year projects. That's good, that gives skills to the students, it solidifies that relationship, employers having input. Every iteration will be changed because of feedback from those employers.' (U6)

'Business and management subject areas are straight away more applied disciplines, quite often students undertaking those disciplines ... have a clear vision of where they want to go.' (U19)

Within business and management subjects, professional bodies and university respondents tended to cite subjects which required more external accreditation such as degree apprenticeships, accounting or finance as where external curriculum collaboration leads the way:



'MBA and professional qualifications, apprenticeships. We've built amazing apprenticeship relationships, but that takes time, investment, ongoing resource, that isn't matched at undergraduate or postgraduate level.' (U10)

'Some departments such as finance and management bring employers in to take part in extracurricular events, sometimes into courses... That's variable across the institution, you're more likely to see that as a central part of curriculum in departments like accounting and finance.' (U19)

However, the interviews showed that initiating subject curriculum collaboration was also increasing in areas such as marketing and economics:

'The economics department is very academic, quantitatively focused, employers were telling us our economic students had good quantitative skills but were backroom analysts. We've changed our curriculum a lot since then, feedback was that we were producing high-end gold standard backroom analysts, but they weren't people who would be sitting at the top of the table in the boardroom.' (U19)

'Social media is important. They must have a module on integrated marketing because employers are telling us they want that.' (U2)

A key driver here was therefore to produce graduates with greater employability skills in these subject areas, as discussed in 5.5.2 below.

To summarise section 5.5.1, key interview take-outs were that factors driving curriculum collaboration and relationship building between universities, professional bodies and employers were resulting from changes in the role of universities, with increasing central pressure towards collaboration for improved subject knowledge, development of apprenticeships and ranked courses such as MBAs, knowledge transfer, and academic research. Further factors relating to graduate employability are discussed in section 5.5.2 below.

### **5.5.2 Graduate employability & recruitment**

In addition to knowledge transfer partnerships, research and subject collaboration, a key driver of collaborative relationships discussed by universities and employers was the need to work together on graduate

recruitment and employability. Over half of the employers interviewed stated that the initial driver for them to collaborate with universities was a ‘talent pool’ search for good graduate recruits, feeding back to academics and careers teams on employability skills they would like to see in graduates:

‘Certain courses lend themselves to stronger applications. If you study business, you are going to have a leg up.’ (E2)

‘We make clear through our interactions with universities what types of skills we look for. It’s great if they take those on board, they adapt the curriculum, or encourage students to have a holistic university experience alongside the curriculum.’ (E2)

Academics reported sometimes feeling sidelined, however, when employers do feed back on graduate recruitment skills required, as that this does not always happen collaboratively:

‘Employers say they may be less interested in students with distinctions or firsts, because if a machine can do that, they need students with other skills. Those are metacognitive, reflective, group work, presentation skills. But will that lead to more wholehearted curriculum change? It’s an interesting question.’ (U19)

It was clear that academics believed being left out of the loop by employers here would not facilitate the goal of informing curriculum change, or of improving graduate outcome metrics, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.5.2.1 Graduate Outcomes metrics**

The increasingly important role played by UK Graduate Outcomes metrics in driving curriculum collaboration between universities, employers and professional bodies was referred to by several academics, although potentially as box-ticking rather than authentic collaboration:

‘Because of graduate outcomes, our validation documents say, what do employers think about this? We’ll get an e-mail, could you just give me this? They want us to support them, but they’ve not consulted with us.’ (U12)

Other university respondents however regarded Graduate Outcomes metrics as a positive driver from the institution for genuine curriculum collaboration between employers and universities:

'We have a big piece around graduate outcomes, how we're going to get our students into jobs, we are encouraged to bring in employment and external engagement...to engage externally, so our students can land those jobs to push our graduate outcomes.' (U14)

'It started off as a necessity, but now they view it as a collaboration, there's so much more now in students' employability skills which are measured as an outcome of our students, they're taking it more seriously now...it's outcomes driven, what kind of employment they have. It is highly skilled employment that feeds back into KPIs for the university, therefore that relationship now is seen as more pivotal, they're viewed more as partners.' (U5)

'Graduate outcomes and student experience, they want to have students exposed to potential and current employers as much as possible. So, we as academic staff get encouraged to have them as exposed as possible to these people, so those metrics improve.' (U7)

This view of Graduate Outcomes metrics as a strong current driver of curriculum collaboration was put forward by universities who were both regional and based in the London area, as was the issue of graduate recruitment, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.5.2.2 Graduate recruitment**

Several employers confirmed that a key longstanding driver for building relationships and curriculum collaboration with universities was to recruit a stronger talent pool of graduates, to ensure good skills fit for their organisations:

'The main interaction we have with universities is through recruiting, we have priority universities we use as a talent pool. We socialise with students and universities, we go into the university and work with career centres and teachers.' (E2)

'We've got a talent acquisition team in the company...people doing the recruitment side, interviewing...to engage with universities up and down the country... to have employment positions for their students.'

Academics like that, we offer them business mentorship and talk to them about the world of business.’ (E8)

Graduate recruitment therefore appears to be a major driver for relationship building between universities and employers, as do employability skills, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.5.2.3 Employability skills

Both employers and universities discussed building relationships with each other to improve graduate employability skills. Employers believed that universities cover excellent academic skills in the curriculum, but their graduates do not always have accompanying employability skills such as teamwork or leadership capabilities:

‘Work in real life is not about looking stuff up, it's about working with people and advancing together, it would be nice if universities were more aware and gave more assignments that encouraged collaborative work. That helps set students up for professional life.’ (E2)

‘Graduates come in, they have technical skills you would expect from a relevant degree, but they don't have soft skills, communication, supervisory and management skills you need to progress.’ (E6)

Professional bodies also discussed employability skills development as a key driver for building curriculum collaboration relationships with universities:

‘Employers are always telling us students are getting fantastic content, but they haven't got transferable skills to hit the ground running. Universities are producing amazing content, but the gap is the opportunity to apply those skills.’ (P1)

‘We're not offering skill sets that employers need. I'm speaking about digital marketing. There are gaps there.’ (U10)

‘I wouldn't say it's been fully integrated or translated into curriculum design and development, we're very aware that our students develop strong critical analytical skills...we have gone through restructure of our economics programme to create a more diverse set of assessments to develop a broader range of skills in our students, including more groupwork, presentations.’ (U19)

To summarise section 5.5.2, graduate employability and recruitment emerged as powerful drivers for curriculum collaboration, enabling employers and professional bodies to input to curriculum change to enable more appropriate graduate skills and build talent pools, as well as for universities to achieve better graduate outcomes metrics. The issue of who should initiate such collaboration was however more controversial, as discussed in sub section 5.5.3 below.

### **5.5.3 Initiating curriculum collaboration**

The question of who takes the lead in initiating curriculum collaboration was a heatedly discussed topic, with 126 coded references. Employers usually expected universities to come to them for curriculum collaboration, rather than initiating collaborative relationships themselves:

‘They come to us. We wouldn't go to see them.’ (E1)

‘For in-curriculum input, it's the academic who looks at the module, if it's in-curriculum, it's the academic reaching out, either to their own network, or cold calling, picking up the phone, ringing somebody in an organisation.’ (E4)

For professional bodies, initiation of curriculum collaboration relationships can be more variable. PSRBs in subjects such as accounting know universities cannot award degrees without their accreditation, so can wait for universities to come to them, whereas in subjects such as marketing, with no UK requirement to have professional body accreditation, PSRBs must be more proactive at initiating curriculum relationships with academics:

‘It is programme leaders. Sometimes I have good relationships with heads of departments, Deans sometimes, but few and far between.’ (P3)

Amongst professional bodies, relationships are often initiated with academics only at quite a basic level, with low visibility at Dean or senior management level:

‘Our relationship tends to be with programme leaders. I’ve discussed this with our management, we need to have the relationship higher up, with Deans of business schools...however much as you try, Deans are always too busy, or it’s not their specialism.’ (P1)

Universities stated that curriculum collaboration is not usually centrally driven or systematic, but was usually delivered on a more ad hoc basis through individual academics:

‘In the School of Management collaborations have often been driven by individual academics.’ (U1)

This was the case for university contacts in both industry and in professional bodies, which are not always easy to set up, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.5.3.1 Ease of setting up curriculum collaborations**

There was general agreement amongst employers and professional bodies that universities do not make it easy to initiate curriculum collaboration, with issues including administrative red tape, academic year timings, and university administrators not knowing how to talk to employers:

‘It is difficult. It’s easy to get excitement and agreement, then...maybe the person that initially had the conversation isn’t who ends up being course director... It’s incredibly hard for both parties to be empathetic on their objectives.’ (E7)

‘Some universities have a lot of red tape. It goes down to the department. Are you invited by the business school or someone within the university?’ (P4)

Universities do not always make it easy for employers to work out where to go to discuss curriculum collaboration relationship building either:

'If they need support at the university, they don't know where to go. It isn't obvious. There's nothing on the website that says, if you're an organisation and you want to engage with us, come here.' (U5)

This challenge is significant for employers and professional bodies, and is also explored under recommendations for improvement in Section 5.9, in addition to the following section on the role of practitioner academics.

### **5.5.3.2 Practitioner academic role**

One of the most discussed roles in curriculum collaboration relationship building was that of the practitioner academic, a university academic who has previously worked in industry and now in academia. Several respondents emphasised the importance of the practitioner academics in using their contacts and industry knowledge to bring in employer contacts that research-intensive academics did not always have:

'Those who have strong networks themselves, who've worked in industry for years, will bring in people from industry...practitioner academics who like networking and keep networking are likely to have a lot of guest speakers.' (E4)

'Those who have industry experience, people who already know the industry is there to support them...people that have worked in industry, having been professionals themselves...these people understand the need to integrate industry in, that makes it work really well.' (P4)

Academics also discussed the proactive opportunistic role practitioner academics can take in building relationships with employers and professional bodies, owing to their industry knowledge and contacts:

'People have professional connections, come from practice. It's difficult if you don't have networks and connections. It's mostly ex-practitioners.' (U16)

'It has to be led by people who used to work in industry, who are now colleagues in the teaching department, great.' (U15)

'The universities I teach at want me to draw on my professional experience working in business and marketing. I embrace my previous life as a working marketing practitioner.' (U2)

Practitioner academics are therefore highly valued, even if not specifically recruited for contacts in many universities, owing to their extensive industry knowledge and contacts:

'It's colleagues, we call them practitioners, who leave industry, join universities, that's their unique selling point, they maintain these relationships, real life experience.' (U3)

'A lot of our marketing academics come from industry then into university, they've got these links, they're very conscious of the practical aspects of the courses they run.' (U5)

'If you've got somebody straight from a post-doc role, they might not have the experience of somebody out of industry. Some subjects lend themselves more easily to that, and attract people who've been in business, for example, business management...who've worked in industry, they do a lot of good work.' (U6)

In other universities, however, internal relationships between practitioner and research-intensive academics are not always proactive:

'A lot of academics who haven't been practitioners find practitioners difficult to connect to. A lot of practitioners have a dim view of academics.' (U1)

'You may speak to a practitioner who is passionate about curriculum collaboration, you might get a completely different perspective if you spoke to a researcher.' (U10)

'What makes things harder, tension between practitioners and academics or researchers who have come through a different route.' (U3)

This tension appeared more marked in research-intensive institutions, who can lack personal connections outside the university, as discussed in the next section.



### 5.5.3.3 Personal connections

For practitioner and non-practitioner academics, the benefit of having personal connections was a major advantage in building relationships with employers for curriculum collaboration:

'The way in which collaboration works...it's individuals moving in and out of academia, of the private sector, they form the bridge between institutions and companies.' (E5)

'We tend to have more individual relationship-driven links with business schools. They tend to be driven by individuals' relationships...everything is about personal relationships.' (E7)

Personal connections were highly regarded by university academics in relationship building for curriculum collaboration:

'Curriculum collaboration depends on personal contacts and relationships.' (U17)

'Academics that had direct links with businesses, they just went out and did it because they had those direct links, made the most of them.' (U5)

However, academics having extensive personal connections was also seen as a potential disadvantage, in terms of being put upon for their contacts as a substitute for systematic contact provision from central university teams:

'It is often left to the module leader to organise this from their network. It's hard work constantly finding people, you don't feel like you can ask the same person again and again. You're constantly having to find new people.' (U10)

'The university sometimes contacts employers in a way we're not keen on, because they are colleagues from previous jobs, or our friends. If it's somebody you've made contact with, you've done all the setting up, then they take advantage of those people.' (U16)

In summary, Section 5.5 has therefore raised many interesting issues from the research interviews relating to drivers of curriculum collaboration, but also tensions and barriers such as mistrust of practitioner academics.

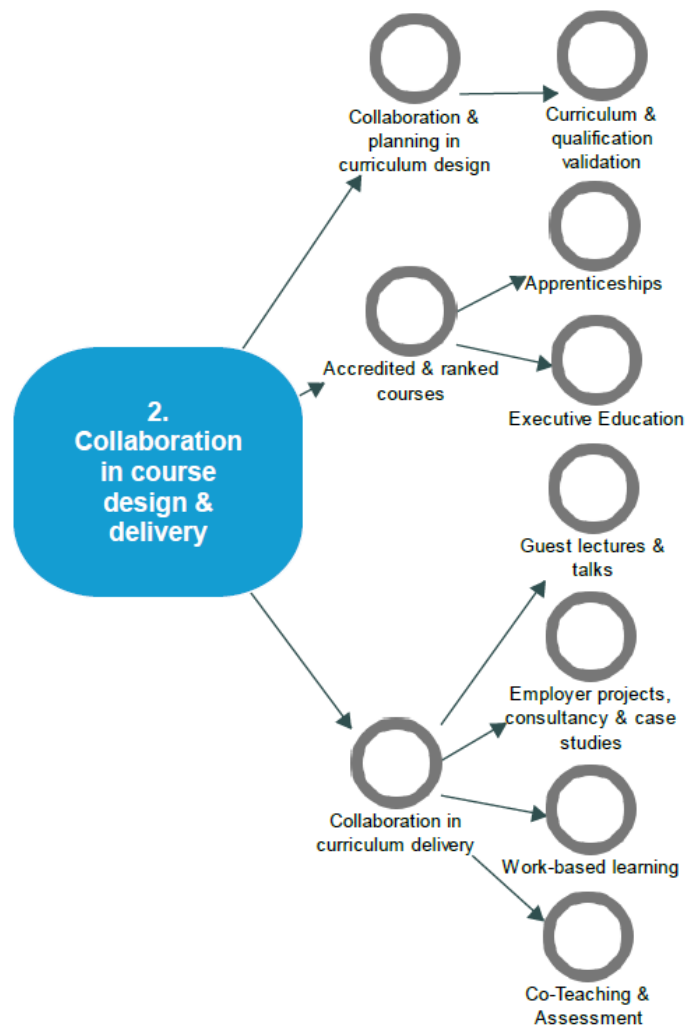
However, factors such as improving graduate outcomes and employability are now driving curriculum collaboration and relationship building in business and management subject areas, resulting in more embedded collaboration around co-design and delivery of business curricula, as discussed in section 5.6 below.

## **5.6 Superordinate Theme 2: Collaboration in Course Design and Delivery**

While Section 5.5 discussed the significant challenges and benefits raised by respondents relating to initial relationship building and business curriculum collaboration, Section 5.6 discusses the next challenging stage of curriculum collaboration in co-creation and delivery between academics, employers, and professional bodies.

Both benefits and challenges arose from the interviews regarding designing and delivering curriculum on a collaborative basis. Key subordinate themes discussed with their associated sub themes, as shown in the figure below, emerged as collaboration and planning in curriculum design, importance of accredited and ranked courses, and the need for collaboration in curriculum delivery.

**Figure 21 - Superordinate Theme 2: Collaboration in Course Design & Delivery**



### 5.6.1 Collaboration & planning in curriculum design

While most interviewees were generally positive about planning and collaboration in business curriculum design and co-creation, this is not always seen as natural. For some employers it was felt that collaborating with only a few UK universities could be construed as giving them an unfair advantage in recruitment, so some preferred not to collaborate at all on curriculum co-design:

'I'm not sure to what extent we can involve ourselves in curriculum design, we don't have that relationship with academics or people designing courses, what we can do is communicate to career centres...

the types of skills required and give a strong idea to anyone who is designing curriculum how they might take that on board, and adapt the curriculum.’ (E2)

However, other employers and professional bodies interviewed felt it would be positive to be involved in collaborative curriculum design, and were concerned this does not currently happen sufficiently early on:

‘When employers are involved early on, at the design stage, they understand the learning outcomes, they see how their contribution fits in, they can see what the students have learned, and what will then follow, topics-wise.’ (E4)

‘Having early involvement is best, by the time they get developed and go out, even where they’re getting validated, is too late...When you exclude industry at the early stages of programme development, in the decision of what programmes to build, that’s when the issue becomes more evident.’ (P4)

Several universities confirmed they were now required to involve industry employers and professional bodies in curriculum design and validation of business and management subjects. Several academics felt their institutions made genuine attempts to involve employers and PSRBs early at the design and co-creation stage, particularly in programmes accredited by professional bodies:

‘About the curriculum when designing programmes, we have an employer or sector board that helps design the programme, we bring employers back in when we do our programme review, every four years.’ (U10)

‘We reached out and formed the Advisory Board for the undergraduate programme. We consulted with industry and potential future employers in the design...we were talking to them about getting the balance right, employability prospects for our graduates... what are your major needs, sounding them out for their input very early on. They were genuinely engaged early. They could genuinely impact it, a feeling of being respected.’ (U17)

‘Externals were involved from the beginning in that programme because it’s accredited, it has a standing Advisory Board of non-academic partners and practitioner partners...that programme does incredibly well, staying close to industry and practice, many who teach on that programme are practitioners.’ (U15)

Other universities stated however that co-creative collaboration was often seen as more of a tick-box exercise:

'I've designed new modules; I've never involved employers or professional bodies. Employers should be consulted. They should be included in the design; we should be talking to them. We should have a more strategic approach...we should be serious about talking to employers, designing courses and modules that respond to needs.' (U3)

This indicates that involving employers late on in validation can render academics unable to make sufficient worthwhile curriculum changes, particularly at validation stage, as discussed in the next section.

#### **5.6.1.1 Curriculum & qualification validation**

As discussed in Section 5.6.1, the qualification validation process can be regarded as an appropriate point to involve professional bodies in curriculum design, to ensure PSRB requirements are met:

'The programme amendment I'm going through for revalidation has a section, have you spoken to professional bodies? The same with module amendments mapped to the professional body framework.' (P2)

'When we validated my human resource management course, we had to involve CIPD. We wanted the accreditation. For the university, they do it because they have to.' (U4)

However, many universities now appear to be using the validation process to bring in employers and professional bodies more proactively for non-accredited courses as well:

'For new programmes, it's a requirement within the Business School...Sector engagement is required as part of the approval process. We've always had external examiners and students, but industry is a new one we're adding.' (U10)

'During the formal validation we had two practitioners involved, that was very helpful... the validation panel were actually critiquing the modules, learning outcomes, reading lists and assessments.' (U13)

'There needs to be evidence of consultation with them. We look at the PSRB, that's based on what employers are saying they need. We map

our programmes against that. When we have a draft of what our modules might look like, we either have an employer panel, or we send information out to employers.' (U20)

The validation process is therefore seen by many universities as a key means of engaging externally in curriculum design collaboration for applied authenticity in course design, particularly in ranked or accredited courses, as explored in the next section.

### 5.6.2 Accredited & ranked courses

Several interview respondents focused on the importance of curricular co-creation for courses which are either accredited by professional bodies, or ranked:

'We get people trying to align their courses more closely to professional qualifications when it comes to accounting, trying to get further exemptions and fast track students through.' (P3)

'For professional qualifications, you've got to fit in with what they say. So, although it's collaboration, the power is held by the professional organisation.' (U18)

'All of our business programmes have professional accreditation. We appointed an accreditations manager, because they were a bolt on, we wanted it to be really embedded in what we were offering staff and students.' (U20)

'AMBA, AACSB, they're really interested in, do employer links exist, how evident are they?' (U5)

The interviews therefore showed that involving staff with PSRBs in co-creating accredited courses can then inspire non-accredited or ranked courses to do likewise.

This has also been the case for apprenticeships, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.6.2.1 Apprenticeships

Degree apprenticeships were held up by employer, PSRB and academic respondents as effective examples where professional bodies, employers and universities collaborate on co-creating business curricula:

‘This is a big long-term commitment from an employer, to work with the university to set up an apprenticeship. Employers like the idea of apprenticeships; they have to do a lot of hard work. All the apprenticeship standards have been set up by trailblazer groups of employers.’ (U1)

‘I know I’m banging on about apprenticeships, but apprenticeship suppliers are really high involvement decisions for a business. If they trust us enough to train the future talent in their organisation, they’ll do it with us.’ (U12)

The degree apprenticeship model therefore appeared to be a positive collaboration co-creation experience, as was executive education, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.6.2.2 Executive Education

Universities and employers who were involved in executive education praised it as an effective approach for involving employers in co-creation and design of business curricula with universities:

‘We work with and do bespoke training for employers, professional programmes, definitely a collaborative approach.’ (U18)

‘We’ll start by doing a senior leader programme or something with them, and we manage the whole of that relationship’. (U12)

The lead-in to curricular collaboration in executive education appears to start with either inviting industry leaders onto open executive programmes or bidding for other bespoke training to develop into more of a co-curricular experience for that organisation.

In summary, section 5.6.2 has shown that ranked and accredited courses such as degree apprenticeships and executive education play a key role in inspiring excellent collaborative curriculum co-creation and design, particularly in business subjects, and that this can lead further into collaborative curriculum delivery, as discussed in section 5.6.3 below.

### **5.6.3 Collaboration in curriculum delivery**

Curriculum co-creation can prove an effective first step in a collaborative relationship as discussed in section 5.6.2, however deeper commitment to curriculum collaboration can be evidenced through co-delivery of business curricula, the focus of section 5.6.3. The interviews captured many areas of existing best practice in collaborative curriculum delivery. Several non-university respondents found collaboration in curriculum delivery a positive experience, particularly as it gives students insight into real world business practice:

'I think it's great us coming to do a talk and show what we do, but also to get industry feedback from professionals would be super value.' (E3)

'Using a lot of the knowledge that we have, or the expectations from employers can be good, if they're not already doing it.' (P3)

The interviews did however demonstrate awareness that asking employers or PSRBs to collaborate in curriculum delivery could drain their time and resources, so there was evidence of academic concern about approaching them for this purpose:

'It's volunteer based. They're doing us a favour, so we can't really ask them to do a lot other than that.' (U11)

There were also concerns from universities about quality assurance in letting employers get overly involved with curriculum delivery unsupervised:

'We're increasingly bringing companies in to help deliver the curriculum. But you run into quality assurance issues with who is delivering the



teaching. You have to be careful; we've got a few modules taught together with companies.' (U14)

'Everything is involved except on-site assessment; I don't know whether we would get away with industry assessing and having the grade count.' (U15)

The following sub sections develop these points by looking at the most common areas of collaboration in business curriculum delivery discussed, ranging from basic guest talks through to co-teaching and assessment.

### 5.6.3.1 Guest lectures & talks

Bringing in employers or professional bodies for basic ad hoc guest lectures or talks was one of the most common areas of curriculum delivery collaboration discussed:

'The kind of guest speakers brought in for collaboration tend to be from a functional area, so you'd have somebody from the treasury function to come in and talk to finance students.' (E4)

'We get asked to come in and talk to students...we go in and talk about marketing...We get asked if we know guest speakers. We hold a register of experts. So we act as an introduction agency. We do that with a number of UK universities.' (P1)

Inviting employers or professional bodies in for guest lectures and talks can however cause problems, as academics cannot do much to control what is said to students, or whether students attend and engage:

'I can think of several guest speakers who proved complete loose cannons, advising students university grades aren't important, you're wasting time studying, and to a diverse group of students from deprived backgrounds, that spelling mistakes don't matter in applications...if the academic has a proper briefing session with them, what are you going to cover...that works well.' (E4)

'Risk elements, sometimes when you have a business guest speaker students assume, we're not going to be assessed on that topic, so won't turn up. That is a risk I have observed.' (U1)

'I brought somebody in from SurveyMonkey because I was doing Research Methods, and I should have had 250 students in my lecture...

three students came, because it clashed with a deadline... It was embarrassing to have an employer there.' (U16)

There were also university concerns expressed over abusing the good will of employers, by not paying them, or expecting them to move their own work schedules to fit in with inflexible university timetabling:

'We were told to recruit guest speakers from industry in our modules. I asked, what is the hourly rate we are paying? Oh no, it's just something they can put on their CV and LinkedIn page and be proud of. I invited an acquaintance at Disney, she came to do a guest lecture, I invited her once. I'm not going to invite her again. It's unpaid. When I ask, can I take her to lunch, yes, you can, but there's no budget for it.' (U3)

Overall, however, guest lectures and talks appeared to be popular with both academics and students:

'They want guest speakers. They want people to come in from industry, because they want to even out the theory and the internal with the external. Recently we brought in someone from Harrods to talk about AI. We brought in someone from Ferrari to talk about immersive design. We bring industry in.' (P4)

This demonstrates the real insight that industry guest speakers can provide for students and academics into the current and future world of work in relevant business areas at even a basic level. Section 5.6.3.2 looks at more advanced collaboration around projects, consultancy, and case studies.

### **5.6.3.2 Employer projects, consultancy & case studies**

The next step up in collaborative business curriculum delivery from basic guest lectures and talks appeared to be involving employers and professional bodies in student projects, consultancy, and case studies, particularly amongst postgraduate students:

'If you've got interested students who can support a project, that's good, gives them exposure to the way businesses work, and practical experience. If you can find a good existing project for a student to work

on, they get more out of it than feeling they've been given a paper exercise to follow just for the sake of it.' (E1)

'We have a competition called the case study pitch, we get a sponsor every year, students enter in teams... it's an opportunity for them to demonstrate their knowledge, how they can apply it to a real-life situation.' (P1)

'I've done a live challenge, you get a real client company to come in... they brief students on a project that is realistic, the students have a few weeks to work on it, they do group presentations, the client comes back to watch, everyone gets something out of that.' (U2)

However, these types of collaborations were also seen as hard work by many employers, in terms of adhering to inflexible university term and module timings, and protecting employer data:

'To work on any projects and client examples, they'd have to be on-boarded as employees. Whether that's the temporary fixed term employee on a fixed term contract, or full time, or an internship, they would have to become employees to access and perform work.' (E5)

'We do Master's projects the most. That's hard work from our point of view. In a project especially, we're doing it as a potential job interview.' (E7)

Many universities however commented about how curriculum delivery via projects, consultancy and case studies opened real-world work experience and potential recruitment opportunities for students, as well as deepening relationships with local and national employers:

'Local employers were always keen to be live cases...that's no longer exceptional. It's business as usual. The easiest thing for academics and for employers is the live case...no money is involved. Employers come in and set a scenario, students work on it. The employer thinks that was very interesting. I've got new ideas from that. We'll come back next year.' (U1)

'A lot of modules have case studies where we work with a live organisation, in my case they share their Google Analytics, previous marketing spend. In the digital marketing live case study, the client comes in twice. They do a brief, they come in midway. Students submit an outline concept idea; the client gives them direct feedback.' (U10)

'Live case studies, students get an immense amount of real-world knowledge from that, when they go for an interview, they can draw on

that, and talk about it. So that's the most valuable, and that's what we find students value, that input and engagement with business.' (U5)

However, while employer feedback was generally welcomed, very few universities allowed employer feedback to be used in actual student grading:

'We have had student presentations on consultancy projects where organisations have attended, but I don't think they're part of grading.' (U15)

Overall, employer projects, consultancy and case studies on business and management subjects seem to be proving so popular they are now even replacing dissertation choices for students:

'Some of the best students don't take the dissertation module so they can do projects instead...we bring those case studies to life.' (U20)

'We have a new consultancy project...students are matched with a company and asked to do a project with them, and report on what they've done together for three months. This works. Now nobody wants the dissertation. They just want consultancy projects.' (U4)

'It was in School of Management where they had research in their final year dissertations, they had office space for their projects, so their supervisors were partly employers, and partly academics.' (U6)

Final projects replacing dissertations can therefore include both consultancy projects and case study projects. A longer-term option for co-delivery of curriculum is work-based learning, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.6.3.3 Work-based learning**

Work-based learning (WBL), including internships and placements which count towards a degree, was regarded by several respondents as the next step up from projects in collaborative business curriculum delivery, providing job opportunities and applied learning benefits for both students and employers:

'If you're doing an internship for work experience, then a job opportunity comes up, they're more likely to hire someone who has done work experience...the most valuable thing is having industry experience, you need to get as much of that as possible. That's why using summers

between term-time is valuable to get as much experience as possible.' (E3)

'We've got good relationships with most universities we deal with, because they want placements for their students. We do internships, placements, and the graduate scheme. They want people in roles, students love having our international brand on their CV, even if they don't stay with us long-term for a management position. What they go away with at the end is invaluable.' (E8)

Other employers however voiced concern over problems such as having to adapt WBL timings to university calendars, or being seen as exploiting cheap labour:

'There's the aspect of, cynically, having cheap labour available to support a project... They've got to be engaged for a meaningful period to learn something, to add value. Two-week internships don't help anyone, so one would look for a couple of months at the very least.' (E1)

'We have paid interns. It's quite an investment from our point of view, putting together a programme that's going to be appropriate and engaging. It's quite hard going.' (E6)

Employers did however seem to be increasingly encouraged to co-design WBL structure and content by universities:

'The two-year degree is condensed, shorter sandwich placements, students essentially gave up their summer holidays. They work through the whole three years, there were professional readiness modules that students had to complete as soon as they arrived, employers had input into the design of that.' (E4)

'We use the likes of Company C. Their sandwich opportunities are fantastic. We've also got an awful lot of SMEs; you have to have a good mixture.' (U20)

There was variation in how universities gave credit for WBL, both using placements as a pass / fail element of an overall degree, and using internships as credit-based modules:

'We do a whole year, "With Industrial Experience". It's popular with our home students. Numbers are going down, because international undergraduate numbers are increasing, and they're not interested in a sandwich year. So, we have a business and industry placements module, credit-bearing, rewarding them for doing a placement, getting that within their degree...we are finding that increasingly popular with our

international students. They don't want to do the full year, but they want to do the summer or Christmas placement.' (U10)

One effective work-based scenario seemed to be work-integrated learning, where universities integrate the work opportunity directly into the curriculum:

'They engage with employers to relate to placement students. They ask the employer; did they feel the student came in with the right skills? Did they have any areas that appear to be areas of weakness to improve? You feed that back to the university placement unit, and you get this circular effect where that feeds into programme development, courses, modules.' (U5)

Work-integrated learning therefore appears to be used effectively as a platform to ask employers for feedback on perceptions of students' employability skills, and is more common than co-teaching and assessment, as discussed in 5.6.3.4 below.

#### **5.6.3.4 Co-teaching & assessment**

The most complex collaborative form of business curriculum delivery was seen as co-teaching and assessment between universities, employers, and professional bodies. Here however there was little interview evidence that this was favoured by universities:

'We have student competitions; they might invite somebody along from business to adjudicate. But it's not much.' (U18)

'Teaching is difficult, if you have a senior manager from a company, would they want to devote time to come and teach?' (U3)

'No. Assessment lies on academics to do this.' (U4)

Reasons for co-teaching and assessment not being favoured by universities included the level of expertise needed by academics to teach and assess for quality purposes, and employers not having time to do this.

To summarise section 5.6 and its superordinate theme of collaboration in course design and delivery, employers and professional bodies appear

increasingly interested in co-creating business curricula with universities, starting with established collaborative qualifications such as ranked and degree apprenticeship courses, then becoming more involved in validation and advisory activities around both degree and executive education. Extending this relationship into business curriculum co-delivery already appears to work well around guest speakers, case studies and work-based learning, with increasing interest in consultancy and other student project work, although less interest in co-teaching and assessment, which is seen as more the province of the academic from an expertise and regulatory perspective. Embedding these activities into longer-term collaborative relationships can however be more of a challenge for all collaborative parties involved, as discussed in section 5.7 below.

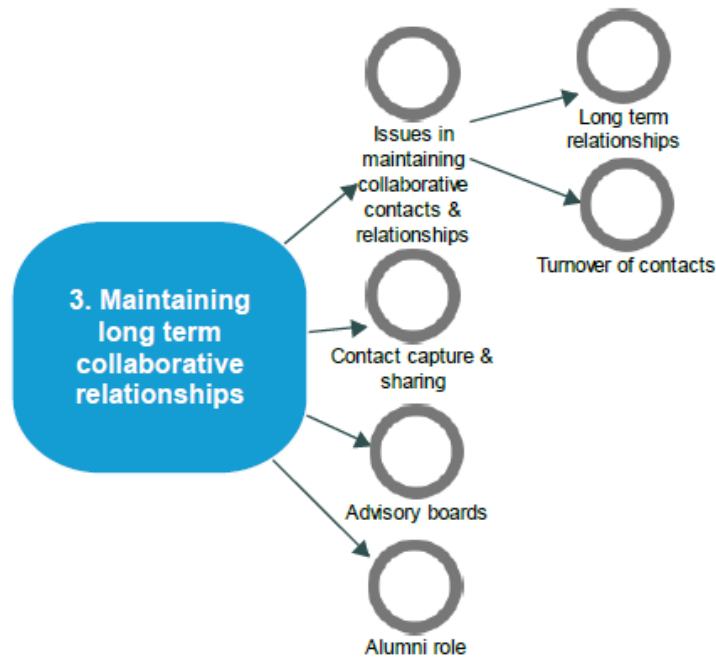
## **5.7 Superordinate Theme 3: Maintaining Long Term**

### **Collaborative Relationships**

Section 5.6 illustrated some of the key challenges as well as the benefits of co-design and co-delivery between academics, employers and PSRBs in business curricula, particularly challenges relating to expertise and understanding of mutual objectives. Section 5.7 moves this discussion into broader considerations by examining key issues and roles relating to maintaining long-term collaborative relationships.

Key subordinate themes discussed with their associated sub themes, as shown in the figure below, include issues in maintaining collaborative contacts and relationships, contact capture and sharing, advisory boards, and the role of alumni.

**Figure 22 - Superordinate Theme 3: Maintaining Long Term Collaborative Relationships**



### **5.7.1 Issues in maintaining collaborative contacts & relationships**

Respondents agreed that collaborative relationships and contacts should be maintained consistently for the benefit of all parties:

‘The ultimate goal is to still work together, keep that strong relationship, help benefit students in the long run.’ (P3)

However, several respondents raised issues around how poorly and disconnectedly curriculum relationship maintenance was executed at present.

This view was shared by employers and professional bodies:

‘As soon as your contact has moved on, it’s like starting again. We have a spreadsheet where we note down our contacts. We try to keep on top of it, but I can’t say there’s a good handover. When someone from the university leaves, they don’t introduce the new person.’ (E3)

‘Sometimes you get on really well, a really good relationship, then you have to build it again when someone else comes in.’ (E8)



'If you have a good programme leader, the moment they leave you have to start that relationship over again. I try and develop relationships with the teaching team, so they all understand how it works. The relationship should be owned at a higher level, but that's hard to make work.' (P1)

University academics also felt there were significant shortfalls in universities and academics maintaining records of collaborative contacts and relationships:

'It just falls apart... no contact is owned by an individual, you should be passing on that information to colleagues, employer engagement, so it becomes a contact for the university which somebody else may use in the future.' (U1)

'We used to have a business academic who was supposed to run all this employer engagement stuff. She left, there was no legacy, no contacts, no lists. What I've had to do is pick up. I'm trying to keep on top of where all the contacts are.' (U13)

'It was spoken about two years ago, a database where we could just dial in. But I've never seen it.' (U14)

Respondents who maintained collaborative contacts and relationships more systematically referred to lists or databases of contacts for this purpose:

'To handle that attrition, we set up a playbook, so it's not from scratch every year. We have materials we can reuse each year, contacts, to make sure it's a smooth relationship. We do it on our internal cloud file.' (E2)

'We have a good CRM system. We keep good records.' (U12)

'The Research and Enterprise Office had their own database, if we needed someone, or were looking for an employer interested in a particular project, we would get in touch with that office, if we were inviting lecturers, we had a shared drive. We had a spreadsheet with names of people who visited us as guest lecturers.' (U3)

It was primarily more well-resourced universities who invested proactively in keeping employers collaborating through events during the academic year to maintain relationships:

'The main sponsors of the careers service were invited to a rather nice sit-down dinner, five courses, nice wine and champagne every year. Some universities are less well-resourced to do that.' (E4)

Several respondents stated that if an academic left a university, employers would follow them to their next institution, rather than staying with the original institution:

'It's far more likely I would follow the course director than the university.' (E7)

'I don't think they are good as they could be, that's what they've found out trying to get data for AACSB, there doesn't appear to be central ownership, it's too disparate, when people leave, those important links go. With the Business School, some academics were proactive, but unless somebody else was of a similar mindset, if they left, that could fall by the wayside.' (U5)

Issues and challenges in maintaining contacts and curricular relationships were therefore felt to be a result of a lack of systematic approaches on the part of universities in both the short and long term, as discussed in the next section.

#### **5.7.1.1 Long term relationships**

Several employers and professional bodies stated that maintaining collaborative curricular relationships was easier if partners regarded this as a long-term partnership from the outset, rather than a one-off collaboration:

'There tends to be a partnership. Our accountancy firm has strong links with University LS and University LB. That tends to be the way relationships come about.' (E5)

'It has to be a peer-to-peer relationship, a real eagerness that what the other brings is something valuable that's not available within their own organisation.' (E7)

'We have longstanding relationships. They look to us for our viewpoint, they know we work collaboratively. It's not just some agreement. It's more than that. We work collaboratively, we get to know each other, they know what we're trying to achieve.' (P3)

The importance of creating long-term relationships around curriculum collaboration was also echoed by several universities:

'If you've got the relationship, that's key, because then you have the capability to explore different objectives.' (U12)

However, creating and maintaining long-term curricular relationships can be beset by real-life challenges such as contact turnover, as discussed in the next section.

#### **5.7.1.2 Turnover of contacts**

Although turnover of contacts did not seem to be a problem within professional bodies, both employers and universities found turnover of contacts made it more difficult to maintain collaborative relationships over the longer term:

‘If those people leave, you’re screwed, there isn’t that relationship, it doesn’t have that longevity.’ (U12)

‘You have one contact at a company, they move on, they’ve never introduced you to anyone else, you get an auto reply that says, I have left, find me on LinkedIn, that’s it.’ (U15)

For some employers, however, having contacts move around between academia and industry helps to deepen longer term relationships:

‘The pattern I see in which collaboration works is basically individuals moving in and out of academia, in and out of the private sector, and they form the bridge between institutions and companies.’ (E5)

If contacts are not captured systematically, however, this can raise further challenges in maintaining relationships, as discussed in 5.7.2 below.

#### **5.7.2 Contact capture and sharing**

Capturing and sharing contacts was regarded as a significant issue for many respondents in maintaining long term collaborative relationships. Many respondents did not have formal systems for capturing contacts in their organisations:

‘That’s really important information that should be captured but is not. It’s such valuable information. There is this list of businesses the university keeps. But when you try to access that list because you want to engage with these businesses, it’s gold dust. Nobody will give it to you. They

were very protective. When they were asked for this, it was, we can't give it to you. It's short-sighted.' (U5)

'I'm frustrated because I'm very good at making contacts, I try and pass them to other people to do something with. The academic never follows up. That always frustrates me.' (U16)

Lack of willingness of colleagues to relinquish individual control and share contacts was also mentioned by several respondents as an issue in maintaining long term collaborative relationships:

'A system was set up whereby different contacts within the organisation and key contact holders were listed, there was a lot of pushback from academics. They were not forthcoming handing them over to the central team. I had to ask the academics for permission, virtually everybody said no.' (E4)

'No-one likes to share their contacts. It's always hush-hush.' (U8)

'People tend to keep their contacts, because that's their power.' (U18)

'If they want to keep theirs, that is a tough nut for us, it's people who've got their own contacts and they just don't want to share. Getting people to share was hard.' (U12)

This problem appeared to be more marked within universities than employers or PSRBs, where contact sharing seemed to be more accepted. Lack of contact sharing also prevents setting up long-term collaborative partnerships such as advisory boards, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.7.3 Advisory boards

One approach discussed to maintain long term collaborative business curricula relationships was for universities to invite employers and professional bodies to sit on curriculum advisory boards as well as validation panels:

'I'm on an Advisory Board, I see the engagement that happens with the CEO or the Deans.' (P4)

'We have an Advisory Board of employers. One for each disciplinary area. We have a marketing professional, HR, finance, etcetera. We brought them all in to consult on curriculum design and asked them what

a curriculum should look like. But I wouldn't say that's necessarily common.' (U14)

'Our Strategic Marketing Advisory Board valued spending time with each other, their own kind of professional networking opportunity. They used to value that because they could mix with other people of interest to them.' (U17)

'The Advisory Board is quite recent at University D, they were in the process of setting one up years ago, but it's only just come together, I know the Dean manages the meetings with the Advisory Board. It's related in a large part to curriculum development, providing a working relationship with businesses so we get that link.' (U5)

However, employers can sometimes feel uncomfortable about sitting on university advisory boards:

'Advisory boards. There's a political thing there where I can't imagine certain universities wanting to invite us. For example, let's say Oxford. I'm not sure they would bring us into the fold for that, but that could happen with other universities.' (E2)

One main reason for these concerns arose from potentially making them appear biased towards individual UK universities, although this would not be the case for alumni of the university, as discussed in the next section.

#### **5.7.4 Alumni role**

Several respondents wished that university alumni were used more extensively to engage and broker collaboration between employers and business schools, as they would be easier to bring in than cold industry contacts:

'We have a strong alumni network. We send alumni to run workshops on campus. Academics attend these. I know of applicants who practise with their academic teachers for interviews, not just with the careers team.' (E2)

'Go through the alumni team. That's great because we have so many amazing alumni. There is the alumni list, we get loads of alumni who work as mentors, even an ask-an-alumni question where you can just pick someone and e-mail them. There is a list of alumni who are very engaged.' (U10)

Business schools with US links appeared to be at a particular advantage in using alumni effectively in curriculum collaboration relationship maintenance:

The Business School is extremely good at using connections and alumni networks to bring speakers in. It's quite extraordinary the work that academics and administrators have done to connect with alumni and organisations to get speaker slots. They got into Goldman Sachs because I have a banker on my board. They got into one of London's leading fintechs. It is quite extraordinary to watch how my U.S. business school colleagues relentlessly network to get students that kind of edge.' (U13)

However, there was a difference for universities who had weaker alumni networks and databases:

'We need to do more. We're not great on alumni. We should have a list; these are people that are running businesses and our city. I want to do a lot more work on that.' (U20)

As a result of a lack of alumni data, several universities felt they were not making sufficient use of alumni to collaborate on business curriculum partnerships.

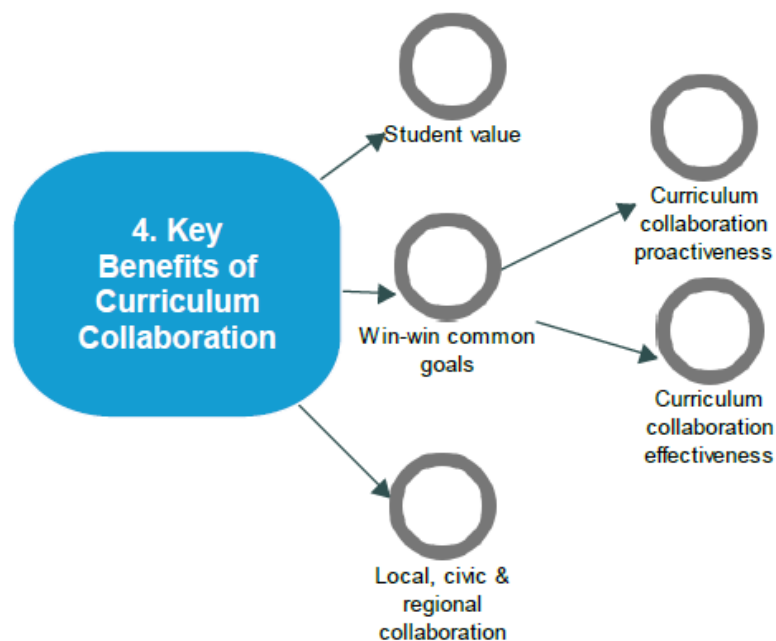
To summarise section 5.7, the development of longer-term initiatives and links in curriculum collaboration was positively regarded by most respondents but hampered by significant issues such as turnover of contacts, guardedness, and lack of systematic approaches to contact capture and sharing. Validation and advisory boards as well as greater use of alumni in longer-term collaborative relationships were regarded as excellent steps in the right direction, but few respondents found that their institutions were geared up for implementing this effectively, either via relevant processes or investment in contact databases. If these issues were addressed, very real benefits to all parties could ensue, as discussed in more detail in section 5.8 below.

## 5.8 Superordinate Theme 4: Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration

### Collaboration

Section 5.7 surfaced several challenging issues relating to maintaining long-term curriculum collaborative relationships such as lack of alumni links and turnover of key contacts, however Section 5.8 suggest some answers to such challenges in discussing respondents' overall perceived positive benefits of business curriculum collaboration. Key subordinate themes discussed with their associated sub themes, as shown in the figure below, include student value, win-win common goals, and local, civic, and regional collaboration.

**Figure 23 - Superordinate Theme 4: Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration**



### 5.8.1 Student Value

One of the main objectives of business curriculum collaboration was felt to be the value this adds to students, particularly learning about the real world of

work, developing employability and transferable soft skills, and showcasing graduates' recruitment potential, as emphasised by employers:

'You're talking to people who are fully on the job, live it day in, day out, and can tell you everything you want about it.' (E2)

'I'm sure universities recognise how valuable it is to get your foot in the door and get experience.' (E3)

Universities also felt that curricular collaborations can add real value to students by connecting them with real career and skills development:

'Students expect practitioner involvement in the course. Every student, every parent, would like to have a league table that doesn't talk about research output, but about the good things we associate with employability and jobs. From a student point of view, getting verbal feedback if it's a presentation, that's valuable. Students like it.' (U1)

'Students being able to say to a potential employer, we did a project with Google, Facebook, Amazon, to which the interviewer is going to say, tell me about that, gives them something to talk about. What is your son or daughter going to say? I learned a lot about textbook models I could have googled? Or, we got hands-on projects with a start-up, Google, and Facebook, we went to their head office and did our presentation, and it was great experience?' (U2)

Academic respondents therefore reported students and parents themselves pushing universities to set up curricular collaborations with employers to add value for students:

'It was very much students themselves, parents. Students were pushy when it came to employability and getting employers on to campus.' (E4)

'I was on a call with potential students from Asia, the two questions top of the list were, which staff have got industry experience, and what do you do in terms of careers, connections, and placements? Students love it. It's always the thing they pinpoint, guest speakers, networking opportunities.' (U10)

'One of the main triggers has been students, because students increasingly want to see an internship in their studies, opportunity to engage with live businesses, to understand the business problems they deal with, case studies which are real.' (U5)

Students openly acknowledge the value of employer collaboration in the curriculum adds to their university studies and skills:



'Students love it when you bring in someone from the outside, a speaker, live case studies. Students love that connection.' (U14)

'Some of the students in their NSS survey commented, it was great, their contact with employers.' (U16)

'They love it. For students, they think what we teach them is rubbish. But if you have an employer who says design an advert, it has more currency. If I say it, they don't believe me. But if my colleague at Disney says it, then that's so. Students love them - if someone works at the company and says, do this, they do it.' (U3)

Several respondents however felt universities need to do more to convince their students the true value employers and professional bodies can add to the curriculum:

'They look at what kind of modules there are, and marketing information on employability, because now students are incurring such a debt for their degree, it's very much evaluating, what's the return on this going to be? What will this course provide me with?' (U5)

If students do not perceive value in universities collaborating with employers, this can result in a lack of student engagement, as discussed in Section 5.9. It is therefore key to establish win-win goals for curriculum collaboration, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.8.2 Win-win common goals**

One of the key benefits cited of business curriculum collaboration was establishing win-win common goals between universities and employer or professional body collaborators. The need to establish win-win outcomes was seen as a pre-requisite for curriculum collaboration by both employers and universities:

'This is our actual business consultants who do this, it's their time they're investing, so that investment has to be worth it. We have to make sure we're getting the most out of the effort we put in.' (E2)

'It's necessary to identify mutual gain, through contacts at university and academic level. I value being connected with employers, and employers have got ideas from the students, a genuine win-win.' (U1)

'What are you going to offer industry? You can't just ask a favour and not have anything in return. It has to be a win-win scenario because that's what industry is. They want to know, what's in it for me? Why should I give you my time? There has to be a balance between expectations, what they're offering, and what you're offering.' (U8)

For professional bodies, having their content and brand embedded within business curricula was a key win-win for enhancing their reputation and student knowledge transfer:

'Where they see the benefits, they will pay for students. It makes a huge difference; they embed it within the curriculum. From a student perspective, it's part and parcel, rather than something that they do as an aside with extra cost.' (P1)

'In working with us, it's about being open-minded, agreeing on common goals, we understand they're trying to achieve something out of it, we're trying to achieve something out of it. I've had academics just wanting the best for their students. I've found them to be the best people.' (P3)

A further key win-win discussed was mutual development of new ideas and thought leadership through working with students:

'There's a lot of commonalities in interest, from a research perspective and a thought leadership perspective.' (E5)

'It's mutually beneficial because the students give them great ideas as well.' (U10)

Another win-win outcome was the opportunity for students to find jobs through curricular collaboration with employers:

'It's symbiotic, we get hires from them, they get business acumen from us for their students, and help with mentoring.' (E8)

Overall, therefore, respondents agreed that establishing a win-win approach on all sides was much likelier to generate successful curriculum collaboration than an ad hoc approach:

'If you do something that's mutually beneficial, you've got a good relationship. But if the only time you talk to them is when you want something from them, it's not going to work.' (U12)

'They were true collaborators, because they got each other's worlds, employers and the regulatory body got what students needed from them.' (U13)

To evidence win-win common goals, however, many interviewees showed a greater requirement for both curriculum collaboration proactiveness and effectiveness, as discussed in section 5.8.2.1 below.

### 5.8.2.1 Curriculum collaboration proactiveness

Both employers and professional bodies agreed that universities were not always sufficiently proactive in creating win-win common benefits around curriculum collaboration, or recognising the extra time and effort that others put in:

'It would be nice for universities to be more proactive.' (E1)

'It's really reactive rather than proactive.' (P2)

'Universities, it would make our lives easier if they played a more active role. It's a big-time investment from our end, it's not our core business, we already work crazy hours, it's on top of our core business, we're having to do a lot of work, it would be nice if universities could match that effort.' (E2)

This concern included universities being too slow to proactively approach employers for curriculum collaboration in the first instance:

'Rarely have I seen universities approach employers cold. Proactivity is key. I don't see universities being as proactive as they potentially can with the private sector.' (E5)

'I don't see a lot of reaching out, to be honest. There is very limited pull from academia on the relevance of curriculum.' (E7)

Professional bodies generally found UK post-92 universities more proactive on win-win collaborative benefits than other types of universities:

'They tend to be post-92s which will be collaborative with us. Some offer their students the opportunity of doing our qualifications, they pay for everything, which is good for universities.' (P1)

In summary, although there was evidence of universities having innovative solutions to proactive collaboration building, employers generally felt that more could be done by universities to be proactive in reaching out and establishing win-win collaborative curriculum goals to be more effective, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.8.2.2 Curriculum collaboration effectiveness**

As well as a lack of proactiveness, both employers and university respondents felt that universities could do more to demonstrate the effectiveness of curriculum collaboration for win-win outcomes for all parties:

‘Businesses know what's coming next, universities need to ask them, and spend time trying to understand the answers, so it's not just paying lip service.’ (U2)

Areas of improvement suggested by employers included universities promoting the importance of external collaborators more effectively in the curriculum to increase student engagement:

‘It's the level of enthusiasm we get. Universities can do a good job of echoing the brand of our company, it's a great potential employer. We get students who are enthusiastic and excited, and have lots of questions, not a boring room where people just sit back and don't ask questions. The university can appreciate our brand and help amplify that.’ (E2)

‘People are eager for universities to succeed, to get expertise and support, and help businesses and individuals grow. You've got to prioritise the relationship. Relationships work best in a network, so if it's just one person and one contact, that's not a strong relationship.’ (U12)

Another suggestion was having an external engagement role working alongside academics to increase collaboration effectiveness:

‘An external engagement person. They bring these contacts in, and they make the process easier.’ (U14)

Such an external engagement role might help build collaboration effectiveness and effective relationships, however this could also be fraught with difficulties in terms of role segregation with academics, as discussed in 5.9 below.

Curriculum collaboration needs to be effective at both national and local level, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.8.3 Local, civic & regional collaboration**

A significant benefit of curriculum collaboration discussed by respondents was the opportunity for students, academics, and employers to build stronger local, civic, and regional collaborative relationships to benefit the local area. This was mainly articulated by regionally based respondents:

‘A lot of people who go to our local University H are locals. So, they are quite likely to apply to our company. University H and nearby University BS, a lot of people who go there live in this area. Whereas a place like Durham, hardly anybody lives near Durham, 95% of the people going to Durham won't live anywhere near it.’ (E6)

‘We tend to not have many from Oxford and Cambridge and will tend to go for our nearest universities in Surrey and London.’ (E8)

Universities that collaborated on curriculum with local employers believed this was a mutual benefit for their own and their students’ skills and graduate recruitment, as well as contributing to local and regional business growth:

‘A civic university, we're an anchor institution in our city in the northeast. We do an awful lot of activity with the city council. We see ourselves very much as part of our city. We are very involved with the city business partnership.’ (U20)

‘I would say our senior leaders’ group is excellent. This is where they actively engage with local leaders. That is excellent.’ (U10)

‘Our growth hub is the second most successful in the UK, 12,000 businesses, all in our county. The makeup of our county is a lot of big public sector organisations, most businesses in the county are SMEs. We don't have big corporates or banks. I could take any decent-sized business in the county, we've probably got their details, I could ring them and say, would you mind doing this for us. They want us to succeed.’ (U12)

The benefits of local, civic, and regional curriculum collaboration were mentioned at both institutional and business school level:

'The Business School is involving themselves with the local business community. It is a civic university. That's really improved the university's engagement with the business sector, there's a strong link with the local mayor. The Vice Chancellor has made a point of getting involved with the City Council and local projects. That's been through having the mayor engaged with the university.' (U5)

'I'd like to see much more. Where my university is, there are so many companies. But you don't see them coming onto campus. We need to bring them in and say, this is what we can do. This is how we can work with our students. This is how you can work with us as academics. It's all about local, we're close to Heathrow. Our county has lots of good companies. (U14)

A number of universities therefore thought that they could benefit much more from collaborating on business curricula with local and regional industry, as discussed as an area for improvement in Section 5.9 below.

To summarise section 5.8 and its superordinate theme of the key benefits of curriculum collaboration, it is important to establish win-win outcomes for all collaborative partners from the outset, including added employment prospects for students, local, civic, and regional collaboration opportunities.

However, the level of effectiveness and proactiveness on the part of universities is not always such that these benefits can be achieved, as discussed in more detail in Section 5.9 below.

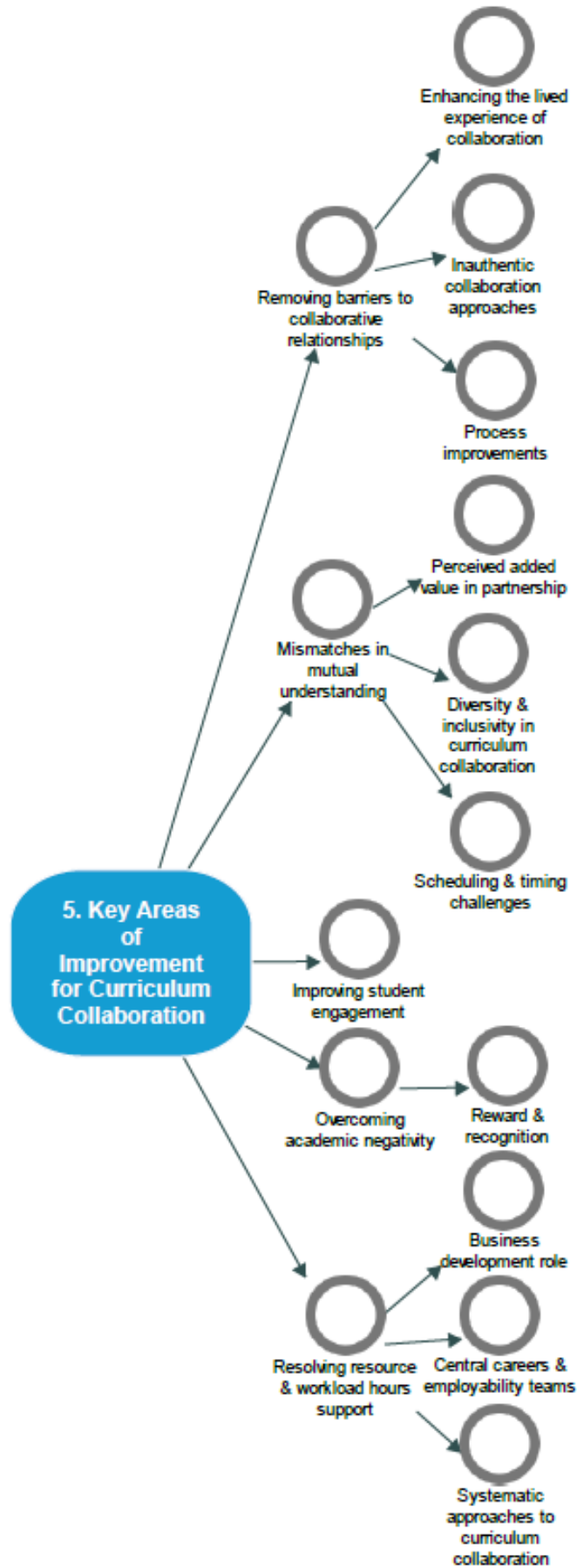
## **5.9 Superordinate Theme 5: Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum Collaboration**

Section 5.8 discussed respondents' key perceived benefits of business curriculum collaborative relationships, including value for students, and local and civic economic benefits.

However, many respondents felt that there were more areas for improvement than benefits in this area for their institutions. Section 5.9 therefore concludes the interview findings by discussing potential areas of improvement for business curriculum collaboration. This was the most discussed topic in the interviews, with 324 coded responses.

Key subordinate themes discussed with their associated sub themes, as shown in the figure below, included removing barriers to collaborative relationships, mismatches in mutual understanding, improving student engagement, overcoming academic negativity, and resolving resources and workload hours support:

**Figure 24 - Superordinate Theme 5: Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum Collaboration**





## 5.9.1 Removing barriers to collaborative relationships

One of the most obvious improvements in curriculum collaboration according to all respondent types would be the removal of existing barriers to collaborative relationships. One barrier was the perception that working with just one or two universities might be perceived as favouritism for large employers. Universities however felt that this should not be seen as a barrier:

‘There is risk of favouritism. If you work with Oxford University to help them around curriculum, or collaborate with them strongly, you're displaying favouritism. In other geographies there's much closer collaboration with target business schools. In the UK we're more sensitive to this idea of favouritism.’ (E2)

Allowing academics or students to access or share employer data was also a barrier for employers, so universities need to provide guarantees and reassurance to employers to remove this barrier:

‘Two main sticking points are data privacy, sharing data and IT information between the institution and a corporate body is difficult, people might be coming across privileged information, agreements that companies have in place with clients prevent them from sharing client data.’ (E5)

‘The bigger the company, the more intellectual property and confidentiality. That is an issue, I've had it with big companies – “I'll come, but you mustn't record, we didn't want anyone else seeing this, we don't want it appearing on YouTube”.’ (U2)

The administrative effort employers put into working with universities is also a barrier to collaboration which could be removed:

‘Having to do legal deals on a piecemeal basis with a university, we're not set up for that, but we can't just ignore that and just say oh we'll be fine. We'll just sign whatever. That only gets done if somebody at our end is prepared to put a lot of energy behind it. For us it's time and effort. I hope the value we get out from the project should outweigh the amount of effort we have to put in during the project getting it set up and done.’ (E7)

Overcoming unrealistic expectations of collaboration on the part of the university was another barrier mentioned by employers.

This could be removed through better upfront communication on both sides:

‘It's difficult, relationships and the university you're involved with. Some universities we have conversations with. It could be about hours, or what's expected. People are expected to work hard at our company. It's not easy, a placement. It's 45 hours a week. It's hard work.’ (E8)

A further barrier was finding the right person to talk to about curriculum collaboration at universities, which can be administratively and politically challenging, and could be signposted more clearly for external collaboration partners:

‘There's a lot of politics involved...finding the right person to deal with within the institution. People that that can make decisions, budget holders.’ (P2)

‘It's very difficult to know what level and where to engage. It's painful.’ (U18)

‘Because they're an SME they can be nervous about approaching a university. We've got lots of people who run wonderful businesses, but never went to university, lacking in confidence. That's key.’ (U12)

Universities regarding professional bodies not as collaborators but rather as fearsome regulators was also cited as a barrier to curriculum collaboration:

‘With professional bodies, members of staff, it's difficult as they are scared of them.’ (U9)

While removing such barriers to collaboration is a first step, respondents felt that this could be helped further by enhancing the experience of collaboration, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.9.1.1 Enhancing the experience of collaboration**

A key sub theme concerning removing barriers to collaborative relationships was that academics could enhance the experience of curriculum collaboration by ensuring more consistency of experience and preventing disasters:

'I've had experience of students and interns who have been disasters. And very good experiences. It boils very much down to individuals.' (E1)

'A mixed bag. You've got pockets of brilliance, then complete and utter disasters.' (E4)

Evidence from the interviews found academics whose own practice and experience of curriculum collaboration was already very positive:

'It has always been positive. It's made my life as an academic more interesting.' (U1)

'The integration, interaction with business has been brilliant, and I've loved it. That's absolutely been my whole work life.' (U12)

Other academics however found their collaborative relationship experience more difficult:

'A necessary evil, hard work finding and maintaining them.' (U10)

'It always comes second, it shouldn't, but that isn't the day-to-day job. You're busy panicking about whatever's on your desk, then suddenly, I really should do that. That's a problem for a lot of academics.' (U20)

'Challenging. Frustrating. Pointless. No matter how hard you try, if you don't have the support of your line manager, infrastructure, funding, you'll be running but not going anywhere. Massively disappointing.' (U8)

In many cases where the collaborative relationship experience was difficult, lack of authenticity was seen as a key area for improvement, as discussed below.

### **5.9.1.2 Inauthentic collaboration approaches**

The challenge of inauthenticity in collaboration approaches emerged as a key sub theme for employers in removing barriers to collaborative relationships.

This includes where universities approach employers to spend research money unnecessarily with them, then only approach curriculum collaboration after that:

'UKRI will say, we've got money for a collaborative, people get excited, there's money attached, find a company - that's a nonstarter, because any well-run business has its own strategic priorities. You're never going

to find a company that's got money it doesn't know what to do with. You must have a relationship first, something mutually beneficial.' (U12)

Universities approaching employers for benefaction rather than collaboration was also seen as inauthentic:

'They want to collaborate with industry because industry has money. I've worked at universities who have whole wings named after benefactors, sponsors and patrons, there's advertising for the sponsor brand there, their name is emblazoned all over the building.' (U2)

Finally, universities approaching employers cold as a tick-box exercise was also seen as inauthentic:

'You can't just approach - you need to target suitable people; it is not just ticking a box. They just wanted to have a ticked box and did not really care about the quality of that relationship, how to nurture it, how to grow that relationship. It is a well-known university. They have many connections, but do they care enough?' (U8)

This kind of approach often takes place because academics are told to set up external relationships by senior management, rather than for authentic curriculum collaboration, with an accompanying lack of process, as discussed below.

### **5.9.1.3 Process improvements**

Several respondents experienced process issues with engaging in collaborative curricula relationships, especially a lack of clear processes for who is responsible for business curriculum collaborations in universities:

'Building links between faculties and business. If there was improved collaboration, a really easy way of doing that is building a link with the auditors, or the actuaries, or the accounting advisors within the top employers in the UK.' (E5)

Being clearer what universities are looking for when reaching out for business curriculum collaboration would also be a process improvement:

'The guys need to reach out and say, these are the kinds of people we want, the skills we need, these are qualifications we need.' (E6)

'We need to build employability into the curriculum. We need to articulate skills we want students to develop, see how those are disciplinary and transferable, then design assessments, teaching and learning accordingly. They should be bringing employers in to be part of that dialogue. That doesn't mean they have to do everything employers say, but their voices need to be more centered in curriculum design.' (U19)

Better communication of the cyclical process based on the academic year was also a needed process improvement:

'Longer term cycle. For the module leader to say to an incoming cohort, last year students did this for this employer, as a result, this employer has made x% more money, or saved these costs, or expanded into this new market. That would really energise the process.' (U1)

'A dedicated place where information is stored and kept live, and the relationship between the university and the business is frequent. There should be engagement with these organisations, once or twice a year at a regular time, so organisations can see this is a long-term process which will benefit them, not just a flash in the pan to get case studies.' (U5)

If process improvements are not made in the above areas, employers can become frustrated that universities expect them to know what academics want from them in advance, alongside other mismatches discussed in the next section.

### **5.9.2 Mismatches in mutual understanding**

A further key area of improvement for the experience and practice of business curriculum collaboration was resolving mismatches in mutual understanding between academics and external collaboration partners.

One such mismatch was universities expecting employers to artificially provide case studies, consultancy, or projects for students at times of the year to fit university teaching requirements, rather than to benefit employers:

'If you have to create a project to give to someone, it's not adding value to your enterprise. Academics have constraints, pressures, and priorities. Those don't marry neatly with the business cycle. One must be very clear in setting expectations.' (E1)

'The challenge between academics and industry is that we work on different timescales, academic papers take a long time to produce, and industry wants answers yesterday. That mismatch causes trouble, academics don't have time and recognition.' (U15)

Employers also felt academics should try harder to understand the pace and expectations of how businesses work, before expecting them to commit to business curriculum collaboration:

'Businesses aren't just sitting there waiting for you to call them, they have their own agenda, their own strategy. They have their own challenges.' (U12)

'There's a gap between the way you work in the university and the private sector. In the private sector you must, in a short space of time, create a product or a piece of work with other people. It's about working with other people to advance work together. It's not a solitary exercise. It would be nice if universities were more aware of that, and helped students prepare for that.' (E2)

A further mismatch was the excessive administrative burden on employers to enable them to collaborate with universities:

'At my previous university a company was brought in via the team engaging with employers. He was ex-IBM; I was ex-IBM... He said, "You're the first academic I've known who can meet a deadline". They expected prevarication. That they wouldn't get what they wanted in the timeframe they wanted. I'd want universities to think critically about what is mutually beneficial. If anything cheeses employers off about working with universities, it's paperwork, "this is how we do it, you're going to fit in". A lot of university administrators don't get that. Senior managers are not prepared to say we want to enhance our engagement with employers. We're going to take it outside the bureaucracy.' (U1)

The above points demonstrate that universities do not always understand that collaboration with employers who are running businesses at the same time needs to eliminate mismatches with the ways external partners work to add value, as discussed in the next section.

### 5.9.2.1 Perceived added value in partnerships

One of the key mismatches in mutual understanding was differences between collaborative partners in the perceived value of business curriculum

collaboration:

‘As an employer we would shy away from getting too involved in curriculum design and delivery. We see that as the job of academics to sense if there is a change in the market, then to start providing it.’ (E1)

‘We know what’s happening in industry, but they don’t consider us collaborators. It’s more where they need help or support. They will just lean in and get the information they need. It isn’t an ongoing collaboration in terms of partnership, it’s more a supplier thing.’ (P4)

Other respondents felt universities talked about long-term collaboration, but only perceived added value in one-off activities:

‘Having more of a formal arrangement, so everyone’s on the same page and manages expectations. Inviting collaboration, rather than just guest speaker spots.’ (E3)

If there is not added value to collaboration on both sides, then universities can end up being viewed simply as graduate recruitment talent pools rather than collaborative partners that add value:

‘Universities are seen mostly as recruitment pools.’ (E5)

‘A source, a supplier. There’s very little contact between our company and any universities. People who put the course content together, universities, they certainly don’t speak to people who employ graduates.’ (E6)

Professional bodies similarly expressed concern that university academics do not perceive added value in curriculum collaboration with PSRBs beyond accreditation:

‘We give free tutor memberships. Sometimes they don’t pick it up because staff don’t see the value.’ (P1)

‘I don’t feel universities value our professional body brand as much as they do accountancy and HR professional bodies. It’s not needed from an employability perspective.’ (P2)

There were also university academics who struggled to see visible examples in their institutions of added value in partnership around business curricula with employers or professional bodies:

‘They would like us, as academics, to view employers as partners, but is it there? We’re not there yet.’ (U14)

‘There are examples of where employer engagement or business engagement works well. But they are quite limited.’ (U10)

‘I think neither the universities care nor the academics unfortunately.’ (U4)

This lack of perception of added value on all sides is therefore a key area for improvement, through improved communication of value for all collaborative partners around business curriculum relationships, however diverse they may be, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.9.2.2 Diversity & inclusivity in curriculum collaboration**

An interesting and unexpected sub theme relating to improving mismatches of understanding was lack of diversity and inclusivity in business curriculum collaboration. Employers pointed out that they are now looking at diversity, and collaborating with FE colleges and schools instead of universities for direct job recruitment:

‘When I first started, everyone came from university. But I’ve seen more effort to widen the net. People who haven’t been to university. That’s diversity, inclusivity. We’re looking elsewhere, to make it more accessible. There’s effort to reach out to people who haven’t gone through higher education. A degree doesn’t mean you’re going to get first dibs on a job.’ (E3)

Academics also felt that while universities appreciate collaboration with employers and professional bodies, both need to show more diversity and inclusivity in who they send into universities:



'I'm hugely interested in diversity, it's important we're seeing diverse employers, people from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, immigrant enterprises. It's always older white guys... Too often employers like a lead person in a top bank who's coming, they've been to a Russell Group university; it's not relatable.' (U16)

'There has been more awareness about the kinds of employers our students go to work for, they are interested in a more diverse and inclusive workforce. That is something the academic community, the careers service, is aware of. What does that mean for our institution, which is fully diverse, but it's quite a privileged diverse community?' (U19)

The above points reflect the growing need for greater diversity and inclusivity in collaborative relationships on the part of both universities and employers as a current area of improvement, to reflect changing student diversity, inclusivity and changing demographics.

### **5.9.2.3 Scheduling & timing challenges**

A final sub theme relating to mismatches in mutual understanding was scheduling and timing, with employers and academics stating that universities can unrealistically expect external partners to fit curriculum collaboration around inflexible academic scheduling and timing:

'I really don't find employers are interested in looking at a year's time. What we would like is preferred partners we work with every year.' (U20)

'How you put that urgency into academic course design which will have a different timeframe associated with it? Many courses don't come up for review over years. How do you marry that to the urgency of a topic in financial services that will only be of relevance for a year, then everyone will be worrying about what's next? That is a challenge.' (E1)

It was also felt inappropriate in scheduling to keep asking employers and professional bodies to come in to do guest talks several times:

'The biggest challenge to industry engagement is everything must be timetabled way in advance. If I want to have a guest lecture, there is no way anyone from industry is going to deliver those three times in person, twice on a Monday and once on a Tuesday.' (U15)

'Timetables, a real issue. I had to compromise because each employer couldn't make one of the sessions. Employers come in, and the size of our cohorts, we have lectures repeated, we can't get them to come in two or three times a week.' (U16)

These types of timing and scheduling areas for improvement are often due to universities expecting employers and PSRBs to simply fit in with academic class timetabling rather than taking external schedules into account for better employer and student engagement, as discussed in the next section.

### **5.9.3 Improving student engagement**

A third key area of improvement for curriculum collaboration relates to improving student engagement with collaborative curriculum activities, which is not always as positive as it could be:

'We have an HR event next week for the Head of HR for Gatwick Airport. He's coming to give a talk to the HR Management MSc programme. Absolutely none of my students will go. Even the ones who say they want a career in HR.' (U15)

'Sometimes it's really embarrassing when students and employers are in proximity. I remember students swearing, so unprofessional. I've had students talk about unprofessional things with employers... Students are rude, they'll chat to each other on social media. It's embarrassing.' (U16)

Student engagement with curriculum collaboration was also a key area of improvement for professional bodies, who work with universities to provide resources as part of their fee:

'Some universities pay for their students, the whole fee, that's amazing. However, they don't get complete buy-in from students. Sometimes you must put a rocket up them. I used to go in, speak to first year students, but by the time they got to third year, they'd forgotten they were on our accredited course.' (P1)

Both professional bodies and universities therefore regarded lack of student engagement with external curricular collaborators as a key area for improvement.

In summary, lack of student engagement with curricular collaboration initiatives is a key area of frustration for improvement, with the onus on universities to ensure students embrace and engage with PSRBs and employers to go to the effort of improving the business curriculum through visits, support material and other curriculum-related initiatives, rather than allowing apathy and even negativity to take over, as discussed in sub section 5.9.4.

#### **5.9.4 Overcoming academic negativity**

A significant area of improvement for curriculum collaboration cited by all respondent types was overcoming academic negativity towards business curriculum collaboration.

One area identified was lack of respect given to employers, with examples of academics leaving the room to do marking when employers come in, or not welcoming them:

'It's always us visiting and just doing a talk. They just left the room. Either they heard it all before, or are busy, but it doesn't give the best impression that you're being valued. I assume they've got something else to get on with. It's demoralising.' (E3)

'I know colleagues who abandoned the guest speaker, I would never do that.' (E4)

'Employers saying when they turn up, they hate it if students walk out, staff walk out and do marking while they're speaking, lack of expectations set in advance.' (U16)

Another area of academic negativity to overcome was academics who had either never worked or researched in industry, or wanted nothing to do with employers or professional bodies:

'Some academics that have been academics all their careers are in a bubble, and don't see how their discipline has real-world context.' (U13)

'For some this is challenging. I don't find it challenging because I'm well networked, but for others who don't have those networks, it's a challenge

to go out to a company and build a relationship. They don't have those skills.' (U14)

'Not all academics have the personality. I'm happy to go up to complete strangers, I'm interested in what they're doing. Many academics are quiet, introverted, they're researchers, they don't have the confidence to do that.' (U16)

'If you're a career academic, you might be brilliant and publish in 4-star journals, and you have value to the institution. As a result, they want to keep publishing to improve rankings, they might be nervous speaking to a marketing manager from Unilever, because it would be an alien world for them.' (U2)

However, academic negativity can also stem from more hostile denial of any need to work with the world of business:

'You've got those who hate networking, haven't worked outside academia, drag their feet, and do not want any employer contacts. They are told by their deans or heads of division that they have to, and just leave it to the careers service.' (E4)

'Russell Groups say we just want our students to focus on their degree. We don't want to distract them with anything else.' (P1)

This issue of academic fear or hostility towards collaboration may result in academics losing touch with business trends:

'Some academics feel maybe they're out of touch with what's going on.' (U18)

'Some business schools I've worked in, career academics are smart, but some are donnish and bookish. There are people trying to make courses practical, but secretly scared they don't know. In marketing, they're relying on marketing strategy written in the 20th century, they've managed to get digital enough to understand jargon, but they're still scared of analytics.' (U2)

The above barriers relating to academic negativity could therefore result in a lack of business curriculum collaboration if not improved, and thereby potentially outdated course curricula.

Ways of overcoming academic negativity are therefore discussed in the next section.

#### **5.9.4.1 Reward & recognition**

A further key sub theme relating to academic negativity towards curriculum collaboration relationships was reward and recognition, with academics frustrated that they had to deal with employers to get promotion, rather than genuinely collaborate:

‘In my school employer engagement is because it's part of promotion criteria. Academics need to engage with employers because it says so in the promotion criteria.’ (U14).

Other academics were happy to collaborate on curriculum, but felt demotivated as their efforts went unrecognised and unrewarded:

‘This is just expected. People who don't do it and turn out the same teaching every year are doing significantly less work than those who are trying. I want hours, acknowledgement that this is something that contributes to you being a future professor, this practice route has value. Lots don't bother, because nobody looks closely and says, why haven't you got an employer working with you? Promotional pathways, they recognise research, they don't recognise these practical things.’ (U16)

‘Unrecognised.’ (U15)

Lack of recognition and reward for academics was therefore a key area needing improvement for effective business curriculum collaboration, as explored further in the next section concerning resources and workload hours.

#### **5.9.5 Resolving resource & workload hours support**

A final key theme around improvement for curriculum collaboration was resolving resource and workload hours support for academics. Several academics felt it was unfair for universities to assume it was their responsibility to manage collaborative relationships with employers or professional bodies, without allocated resource or workload on top of their heavy regular duties:

‘Academic colleagues have huge peaks and troughs. There'll be a period where it would be nice to talk to somebody, then you've got a load of

marking. The relationship with the company isn't a priority, so they don't pick up the query.' (U12)

'There's much more could be done, it's a resource issue. We're left scraping trying to find our own contacts and make our own stuff work.' (U14)

'We're encouraged to have relationships with industry, but there's no model for workload. You need to have time to block. I call it the Cinderella situation, where they give you so much work you are not able to move forward and have that relationship with industry.' (U8)

'Absolutely not. We get 1000 hours a year in teaching, admin, service, we get 605 a year for research, personal development, and everything. It should be recognised. It's deplorable.' (U15)

This lack of responsiveness through work overload can lead to confusion amongst external partners over whether collaboration relationships are the responsibility of academics, careers teams or business development teams:

'Where does that responsibility sit? Faculty staff say, we're researchers, that's not our job. The Careers Office says we're meeting our quotas in terms of graduate employment. That should be worked out, who would be responsible from the university.' (E5)

'Universities giving sensible hours to looking after professional body relationships will help hugely. Lots of universities will not give lecturers hours. A university may say, this is amazing, however I haven't got the hours I need to do my ordinary job, let alone this on top...that is the stumbling block.' (P1)

The need for universities to devote dedicated resource to academics dealing with collaborative curriculum relationships including administrative, careers, or business development roles was therefore a key area for improvement:

'It needs a dedicated person from the employability side, because academics, they're teaching, doing research, this is something on the side which can be overlooked easily during busy periods.' (U11)

'Our MBA programme. They have dedicated staff who support that, not available on undergraduate programmes. The MBA, they do this in a very structured, systematic way, there are resources dedicated to that. Whereas on most programmes, if someone wants a guest speaker, it's just left to you to sort out.' (U10)

Resolving workload and resource support would be seen as enabling academics to manage collaborative relationships more effectively:

'We don't get administrative support to organise people, parking spaces, meet them at the door. We get them wandering around the building to find us. Clunky, hard work, no support, no acknowledgement. Nobody ever says, you've got good links with employers. If only you gave us resource to develop those relationships.' (U16)

'We should be involving employers, external organisations, but business schools do everything on a shoestring. These initiatives need time, attention, dedication. As an academic, you are given teaching and research, there are too many roles on top of that, you look for contacts, do personal tutoring, advise students what happens when they cannot pay their fees, mental health issues. It's overloaded with tasks that don't relate to research, teaching. That should be done by others...It's pointless, a waste of time.' (U3)

The above points show that lack of support around resources and workload is proving a major area needing improvement for academics in business curriculum collaboration. One way of improving this could be via greater business development team involvement, as discussed in the next section.

#### **5.9.5.1 Business development role**

An interesting sub theme in resolving resource and workload support was the potential role of business development colleagues, seen by academics as a potential improvement to take the burden of collaborative relationships off their workload:

'I've got a client development team; they log every interaction with an organisation.' (U12)

'I have been given the go-ahead to hire a central person to do internships and business development for me.' (U13)

This was particularly the case if the business development resource was based in the business school rather than being central:

'At my last university it was professional services colleagues whose main remit is business development. They've always been in the Business School. High level professional support services staff who had links with organisations, their role was to tout for business. Some academics don't have links, they go via business development managers. The BDMs become facilitators. It works well.' (U5)

'We have a business development person. She's running business breakfasts where potential people interested in working with the university come along.' (U16)

However, other academics thought this might dilute the relationship and add levels of bureaucracy:

'In my previous university there were people focused on creating good relationships and partnerships with businesses. Academics were not involved until something had been established, that introduced masses of bureaucracy, which employers did not like. I remember discussing a contract, the administrator was talking down to this person in a way that made me squirm.' (U1)

The use of business development teams to support collaborative relationships can therefore be helpful but has to add to rather than dilute academic relationships with employers and PSRBs, as explored in more detail in the next section.

#### **5.9.5.2 Central careers & employability teams**

A further sub theme around improving resource and workload for curriculum collaboration was how central careers and employability teams could support collaborative relationships to take the burden off academics:

'Major accountancy firms have graduate teams which reach out to universities. Those liaise with the Careers Office. They won't liaise with any department like finance or management.' (E5)

'Our careers team is outstanding. We are regularly Number 1 in graduate outcomes. The connections they build with employers are outstanding.' (U10)

However other respondents felt that careers teams did not understand curriculum sufficiently to be useful in this role:

'There is sometimes competition between people who do employer relations in faculties and academic departments versus the central careers service.' (E4)

'In my previous universities, they had career hubs for employability. I've been underwhelmed by their level of engagement.' (U11)



Using careers teams to support collaborative relationships can therefore be positive but must add to rather than detract from academic relationships with employers and PSRBs, and to be systematic, as explored in more detail in the next section.

### **5.9.5.3 Systematic approaches to curriculum collaboration**

A final sub theme relating to improving workload and resources was the lack of systematic approaches to curriculum collaboration in universities, and of connected approaches towards external curriculum collaboration:

‘Academics have said multiple times we would like a joined-up system where we have executive education, companies for data partnerships, students, placements, advisory boards. Nothing gets launched.’ (U15)

This problem also related to the lack of systems, processes and databases needed to resolve resource and workload support effectively for curriculum collaboration:

‘Be more organised and structured. We have tried in the past, they’ll do an audit, then you never hear anything.’ (U20)

‘If you want to do it in a strategic way, you need a system where you cannot just rely on unpaid labour of practitioners to deliver content. It’s incredible. Why can’t you develop a system where you have a database of practitioners? Have a system, and a dedicated person or a team who maintains it.’ (U3)

To summarise section 5.9, many themes relating to areas of business curriculum collaboration emerged from the interviews, some of which might have been expected to emerge, such as mismatches in mutual understanding between the worlds of business and academia, lack of student engagement, and insufficient academic resource and workload hours support. It was revelatory however that other themes arose which were not anticipated, such as

lack of diversity and inclusivity on the part of employers, and cynicism over the roles of central careers and business development teams.

Section 5 overall therefore provides a comprehensive view of the key themes occupying the minds of academics, professional bodies and employers around the practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration, with many benefits but also concerns such as lack of support and even hostility around initial relationship building, course design and delivery, maintenance of long-term collaborative relationships, win-win common goals, systematic institutional processes and lack of recognition and reward for engaging in business curriculum collaboration, particularly in universities.

Chapter 6 below therefore links these points to the findings of the literature review and the research aims and objectives, with discussion of how these factors contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions, and potential recommendations for ways forward to enhance such collaborative experiences.

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the main findings of this research are cross-linked and related back to the overall research aims and objectives, by considering elements of both structural and operational factors which shape, encourage and even inhibit business curriculum collaboration as effective lived practice. Recommendations based on these results are detailed in Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations.

The concept of curriculum collaboration as a positive response to changing structural sector dynamics impacting on the role of UK universities is discussed and balanced against both the operational HE barriers impeding wider curriculum collaboration, such as IT systems and databases, and the more challenging structural HEI inhibitors blocking longer term curriculum collaboration growth such as lack of collaboration ownership, mutual perceived value and authenticity in curricular collaborative relationships.

This can result in a current state of curriculum collaboration praxis whose framing facilitates only limited impact on student and academic outcomes and curriculum delivery. It is primarily therefore through fresh thinking via new forms of curriculum collaboration relationship frameworks that more lasting curriculum relationships can be effectively formed as a pathway to long-term mutual gain between academics, professional bodies, and employers. This has the potential to achieve the ultimate aspiration of truly connected curriculum collaboration which can transform future HE outcomes, as discussed below.

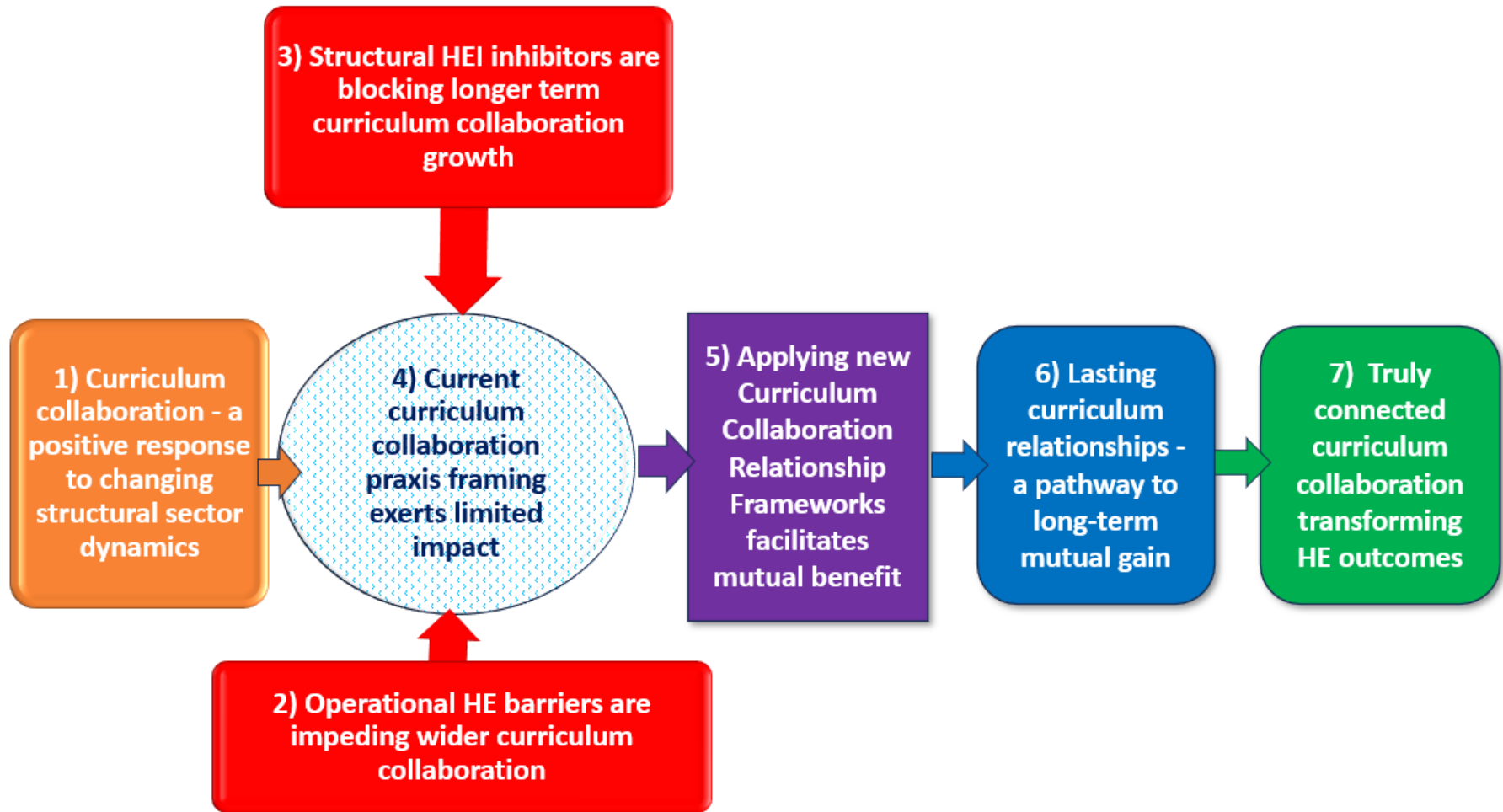
The primary aim of this research study was to achieve phenomenological insight into the practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions, through meeting the following research objectives:

- To explore how the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed in designing and delivering business curricula in UK higher education institutions.
- To explore commonalities across UK higher education institutions in maintaining business curricula collaborations with employers and professional bodies.
- To examine what aspects work effectively in the practice and experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics in collaborating on business curricula in UK higher education institutions.

The study was intended to provide greater understanding of the practice and experience of the collaborative journey in both business curricula design and delivery amongst employers, professional bodies, and academics, and of aspects which work most successfully or need improvement in such collaborations.

Seven significant and interlinked themes which address the research aims and objectives have emerged from this study, framing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing and emerging from the phenomenon of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education institutions. These themes exert a mix of causal and inhibiting effects on each other, indicating that for business curriculum relationships to aspire to transform HE outcomes, innovative thinking and new frameworks for business curriculum collaboration relationships are needed, as illustrated in Figure 25 below:

Figure 25 - Final Causative Research Themes



The key factors discussed under Theme 1) in Section 6.2.1 below are those which most clearly drive and encourage the lived practice of curriculum collaboration in UK business subject areas. The study findings indicate that these factors are primarily weighted towards causation by significant structural dynamic shifts in the interconnected higher education and surrounding industry sectors, including a shift in the perceived role of UK universities towards being more societally useful and linked with industry for knowledge transfer and graduate employment as well as cradles of academic learning, particularly in subjects where curriculum change is highly topical such as finance, marketing, and human resource management.

Curriculum collaboration is a major and complex step for HEIs, professional bodies, and employers, and is rarely triggered simply by practical or operational considerations alone. The most powerful structural factors positively driving business curriculum collaboration arise from the above changes in the role and purpose of universities and professional bodies, increasing demand by employers and professional bodies for improved graduate skills for a new world of work, and structural shifts in UK government expectations for business and management HE curricula to deliver measurably improved graduate outcomes for students, as discussed in Section 6.2.1 below.

Themes 2) and 3) below demonstrate however that the study findings have not only surfaced practical and operational barriers in HE, such as database capture, contact management systems, and academic timetabling requirements, which although surmountable can still impede wider business curriculum collaboration, as discussed in Section 6.2.2, but have also

highlighted that there are far more challenging and even unexpected structural inhibitors actively blocking longer term curriculum collaboration growth.

The weightiest of these causal structural factors are lack of mutual perceived value in curriculum relationships, lack of ownership of the collaboration, inauthenticity, and lack of reward and incentivisation on the part of HEIs when setting up collaborations, as discussed in Section 6.2.3.

When set against each other, the study findings show that the enabling collaborative factors in Theme 1) can often be counterbalanced by the operational barriers in Theme 2), but more especially by the structural and philosophical inhibitors in Theme 3). This can result in a current state of business curriculum collaboration lived practice and experience which is often well-intended, but sufficiently weakly framed at sector level so as to exert only fragmented and limited impact on business curricula delivery beyond basic guest speaker slots, case study application and accredited degree curriculum design, as discussed in Theme 4) in Section 6.2.4 below.

To move beyond this current disparate state of praxis, fresh thinking is needed in the application of curriculum collaboration theories, frameworks, and practice to facilitate greater mutual benefits to employers, PSRBs and HEIs, as discussed in Theme 5) in Section 6.2.5 below.

This could include the concept of a new collaboration relationship framework proposed in Chapter 7 based on the findings of this study. If this can be accomplished, then as discussed in Section 6.2.6 below, more enduring curriculum relationships can be established to provide a longer-term pathway to mutual gain for students, HEIs, employers and professional bodies. This in turn can give rise to achieving truly connected professional practice and lived

experience in business curriculum collaboration relationships, as discussed in Theme 7) in Section 6.2.7 below, which can genuinely transform HE outcomes for all involved. Improvements could include local and civic economic change, tridirectional knowledge transfer, increased academic and student value and employability.

These seven interlinked themes are discussed in more detail in the following sections of Chapter 6.

## **6.2 Analysis & Discussion**

### **6.2.1 Theme 1: Curriculum Collaboration – A Positive Response to Changing Structural Sector Dynamics**

The changing perceived role, purpose and expectations of universities and business schools emerged as one of the key structural factors driving curriculum collaboration between academics, professional bodies and employers in business and management subject areas in this study. Business schools are increasingly seen not only as centres of teaching and research excellence, but also as role models of enhanced real-world HE engagement, triggered by evolving perceptions of UK government, prospective students, parents, and employers regarding the unique social capabilities of HEIs to bridge the worlds of knowledge transfer and graduate acquisition of transferable employability skills and behaviours.

To make sense of these structural changes, academics and employers are slowly moving onwards from the notion of universities as subject-centric specialist teaching and research environments, to embracing an additional third stream of embedding transferable skills and behaviours for graduates via



collaborative curriculum relationships, as acknowledged by researchers such as Collini (2012). This was reinforced in the primary research by academics such as U1, U14 and U15 being increasingly tasked with implementing Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with industry to generate new income, and by employers and professional bodies aspiring to see business curricula changing to incorporate more graduate skills for the world of work.

The increasing advisory role of professional bodies was a further clear but unexpected structural factor driving curriculum collaboration, with researchers such as Jacob, Kearney, and Meek (2022) arguing that PSRBs are moving forward from being pure regulators to curriculum consultants on the future skills needed for students in the business curriculum. Similarly in the primary research, PSRBs such as P1, P2 and P4 are moving towards more of an advisory role in curriculum design rather than a simple regulatory role, owing to their extensive subject knowledge and experience.

In terms of structural changes in industry, graduate employers are also now keener to move more into curriculum skills collaboration in business and management subjects, driven by the desire to inform the business curriculum with new and updated skills such as digital mastery, AI, and agile leadership, as evidenced also by researchers such as Kroon and Franco (2022). This employer enthusiasm was also voiced fervently in the interviews, with employers such as E5 feeling that they were treated well by universities needing collaborative knowledge transfer and research papers.

From a political perspective, structural changes in HE policy and perceptions of the value of a UK HE degree have resulted in HEI metrics such as Graduate Outcomes becoming further broad-based drivers for curriculum collaboration in

business and management subjects, with universities updating their curricula in line with government policy and metrics, and thereby embedding more co-designed employability skills into the curriculum (Frankham, 2017).

The urgency of Graduate Outcomes measures and employment metrics was also acknowledged in the research interviews as a key driver of future curriculum collaboration by employers and academics, with universities such as U12, U14, U5 and U7 seeing Graduate Outcomes as a positive driver for greater business curriculum collaboration with employers and professional bodies to gain more insight into future graduate skills needed.

Social and cultural changes in the subject knowledge and transferable skills required of graduates by employers and professional bodies, through advances in digital and AI technology for example, have also become strongly weighted causal factors in encouraging business curriculum collaboration.

Here students and academics are reaching the philosophical conclusion that business students need to acquire increasing levels of social skills and capital via the curriculum for their career development in an increasingly messy business world. While this linkage between new skills connectivity and the world of work has inspired skills and curriculum-related models such as DOTS (Law & Watts, 1977), USEM (Yorke & Knight, 2003), and the need for new graduate psycho-social skills (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004) and social capital (Tomlinson, 2017), one of the most important models to influence recent academic thinking around the importance of curriculum collaboration, and to bring about true connectedness of business subject research, teaching and the world of work has been the Connected Curriculum Framework (Fung, 2017).

This concept of structural curriculum connectedness was echoed in importance by academics and employers involved in graduate recruitment in the research interviews, including employers E3, E6 and E2, who saw this as a structured way of improving the future talent pool of graduates and soft transferable skills available to employers.

Overall, the study has shown that curriculum collaboration has emerged as a highly positive and proactive response to a powerful combination of changing structural sector dynamics in and around UK HE. This is timely, as social and political thinking around government policy and metrics, employer skills requirements in an evolving digital jobs market, and the increasingly interconnected roles of universities, professional bodies, and employers in knowledge transfer and building graduates fit for the future of business and management is only likely to continue to evolve and to require a more connected and collaborative response from UK HEIs.

### **6.2.2 Theme 2: Operational HE Barriers are Impeding Wider Curriculum Collaboration**

Operational and practical barriers may on the surface appear to be addressable in the short to medium term, however without investment of time and effort, even minor practical considerations have according to the study findings continually impeded wider business curriculum collaboration development.

Key challenges here include disaggregated HEI structures to resource and capture curricular relationships and contacts, consistency in holding database information on employers and alumni, and inflexibility in the structure of academic scheduling and timetabling in relation to more fast-paced and adaptable employer ways of working.

The lack of HEI contractual structures recognising academic time and investment in collaborative activities through business development resource and workload hours was particularly criticised by university academics interviewed, with respondents U15, U16, U8, U12, U14, U3, U17 and U20 all raising this as a key area operationally impeding further development of effective business curriculum collaboration.

Employers and professional bodies also found HE expectations that collaborative projects, advisory groups and student work-based learning opportunities can all be shoe-horned into the timing constraints of a typical academic year both inflexible and unrealistic, with no real evidence that business schools are willing to invest time and effort in adapting to business timings at a practical level.

Overall, therefore, the lived practical experience of business curriculum collaboration is currently fraught with operational and practical challenges for employers, professional bodies, and academics, particularly from the endogenous stance of HEIs, who are not always as outward-looking as they could be in considering practical impediments to effective curriculum collaboration, and particularly in changing more structural barriers, as discussed in Theme 3 below.

### **6.2.3 Theme 3: Structural HEI Inhibitors are Blocking Longer Term Curriculum Collaboration Growth**

Although this research study initially set out to explore common areas of success in the phenomenon of business curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies, the study evidenced that there are many serious structural inhibitors across HEIs which act as blockers to

longer term curriculum collaboration growth. This was an unexpected and challenging research outcome.

In terms of structural changes in UK HE and its relationship with industry, it could be asked whether employers and professional bodies over-expect proactiveness and eagerness from the HE sector to collaborate on curriculum, and therefore behave too instrumentally concerning their expectations from HEIs. However, employers recruit over 65% of graduating business students each year from the study findings, and claim they genuinely want to help universities teach students the employability skills business graduates will need for the future world of work, rather than seeking to simply marketise HE away from its research and teaching more towards a purely societal role.

Students themselves also find comfort and value for money for the fees they pay in interacting with employers and professional bodies, and knowing such organisations are inputting into business curricula to improve graduate employability prospects as well as subject knowledge, according to academics interviewed for the study.

The most heavily weighted structural and psychological factors inhibiting longer term growth of business curriculum collaboration in the study were the lack of ownership, incentivisation and reward for curriculum collaboration in HEIs, inauthenticity in how collaborative partners deal with each other, and a lack of mutual perceived value in curriculum relationships on all sides, as long as such structural and practical barriers as discussed in Theme 2 persist between HEIs and their potential partners.

This challenge is complicated by the new world of work needing to be more connected to HE curricula, yet moving at a much faster and more challenging pace than HE (Rae, 2007).

Interview respondents agreed that these were significant areas for improvement of the collaborative experience, particularly U12 and U2, who raised concerns about only being asked to collaborate inauthentically with employers around curriculum to raise income instead.

Lack of ownership of collaborative practice was particularly significant, with the study findings highlighting academic collaboration-resistant culture towards professional bodies and employers as a major challenge. Cotronei-Baird (2020) for example found that academics often agree with the positive principles of business curriculum collaboration, but then practise their delivery of this phenomenon inconsistently. This is not often because they feel all they should do is teach or research, but rather through feeling it would be impossible to fit such activity if unincentivised into their already heavy academic workloads.

Even though business development and careers teams exist in HEIs, in practice academics often do not deem it worthwhile giving up their own contacts to such colleagues, as this might lead to too much relinquishment of control over their own intellectual capital. Interview respondents U2, E7 and E8 therefore felt that universities need to provide more resources and incentives for academics to fit in collaboration and feel willing to share their contacts internally and externally.

Examples of other main areas of structural challenges from interview respondents such as P1, E6, U8 and U15 included lack of authenticity on the part of universities in collaboration approaches, with academics sometimes told to approach employers to raise money rather than genuine curriculum collaboration.

This can result in a lack of perceived mutual value on both sides of the collaboration, and lack of student engagement without reward, resource, or support from senior levels of HEIs.

In summary, the lived experience and practice of business curriculum collaboration is currently fraught with significant structural as well as operational challenges for employers, professional bodies, and academics, particularly ownership of and investment in curriculum collaboration at senior level within HEIs, which can frame and inhibit the extent to which current curriculum collaboration praxis can have real impact on the curriculum and student outcomes, as discussed in Theme 4 below.

#### **6.2.4 Theme 4: Current Curriculum Collaboration Praxis Framing Exerts Limited Impact**

The interaction of the enabling structural collaborative factors discussed above under in Theme 1) with the operational barriers in Theme 2), and more especially the structural and philosophical inhibitors in Theme 3), have resulted in many business schools in a current state of lived practice and experience around business curriculum collaboration which is often well-meaning and quite successful, but framed so flimsily as to exert only fragmented and limited impact on business curricula in terms of design, delivery and outcomes, compared with the true potential of such collaborations discussed under Theme 7) below.

On the positive side, curriculum collaboration practice seems to work most effectively for employers and academics in, for example, accredited courses and degree apprenticeships, where employers, professional bodies and universities can overcome the structural and operational challenges discussed

above, to come together in designing and delivering apprenticeship and accredited course content and skills.

Researchers such as Nawaz (2023) cite degree apprenticeships as prime examples of effective curriculum collaboration where endogenous drivers such as good will and innovative academic thinking work together to get the right skills and knowledge into the business curriculum. This view was supported in the research interviews by both employers and universities who deliver degree apprenticeships, such as respondents U1, U10 and U12.

In terms of more informal curriculum collaboration, executive education is another area where employers and academics can co-fund their way through university red tape and academic resistance to collaborate on co-designing and delivering future-focused business curricula for the benefit of graduate skills such as agile leadership. Writers on executive education such as Dommett, Howieson and Sturgess (2023) see a bright future for skills growth in this area echoed in the primary research, with academics in many universities consolidating and expanding into executive education such as U14, U18 and U12, while fully endorsing the benefits of collaboration between employers and academics on executive course curricula, particularly for bespoke collaborative course design.

The study findings also indicated high levels of success for employers and academics in curriculum collaboration practice around work-based and work-integrated learning, bringing real world experience and authentic learning as well as social capital to students (Jackson & Wilton, 2016). In the research interviews employers such as E3 and E8, as well as academics whose institutions use WBL such as U12 and U20, gave praise for extra-curricular



WBL such as work shadowing and internships, and respect for curricular-embedded WBL and WIL such as formal placements for modelling key employability skills and increasing graduate capital.

A further unexpected result of the study was that WBL and WIL were also commended by employers and academics for helping to embed a sense of pre-professional identity through curriculum collaboration by researchers such as Forder and Fowlie (2018), which was also considered important as a graduate outcome both in post-1992 and Russell Group universities interviewed such as U19.

More limited curricular impact is however evident in collaborative lived practice and experience in other curricular activities such as non-accredited degree design in new areas such as digital or AI-based subjects. Researchers such as Healy et al (2014) point out endogenous barriers here, including many universities not yet proactively encouraging employers or professional bodies formally into curriculum design and delivery. Initiating curriculum collaboration was also a key hurdle emerging from the primary research, with employers and professional bodies interviewed such as E1, E4, E7 and not feeling that their curriculum input was proactively sought by universities.

The fragility of collaborative curriculum relationships in many HEIs is being eased by the growing role of the practitioner-academic around curriculum co-delivery, with both research by academics such as Dickfos (2019), and in research interviews with post-1992 universities outside London and the south-east region such as U5, U12 and U16 showing more business and management departments leveraging practitioner-academic skills, networks and experience to initiate and maintain relationships with industry employers for

valuable curriculum input and collaboration. Employers and professional bodies such as E4 and P4 also articulated that they could relate better to being approached by practitioner academics who knew how to handle them effectively.

To date, however research by Guild HE (2018) shows that business schools are still not actively seeking such 'pracademics' out systematically, with such academic staff having to negotiate their own opportunities to set up and deliver on curriculum collaboration relationships opportunistically as part of their non-research focused practice, rather than such a role-in-practice becoming a consequence of structural changes in business school practice discussed in Theme 1) above.

The limits of effective collaborative praxis in curriculum co-production and delivery show this being clearly encouraged by employers, professional bodies, and academics at a basic level around for example guest speakers, case studies, projects, or consultancy, but not at a more integrated curriculum level such as co-teaching or assessment, where academics trusted employers less to be competent according to research by academics such as Jackson (2016). Employers interviewed such as E4 and E7 concurred with this view, and felt that universities only tended to approach them on their own terms, and not on a more mutually beneficial basis for curriculum co-delivery.

In summary, current collaborative curriculum practice can be fragmented and of limited impact in many HEIs owing to the impact of inhibiting structure and operational factors discussed in Themes 2) and 3) above. However, trends such as utilisation of more practitioner-academics, bringing employers and professional bodies into course co-creation and delivery early in the design

process, and integrating work-based learning more into the curriculum for pre-professional identity formation appear to be slowly smoothing the path for collaborative effectiveness for many academics and employers.

There is however still a long way to go before these trends become widespread in UK business schools to improve collaborative relationship effectiveness and successful graduate outcomes.

### **6.2.5 Theme 5: Applying New Curriculum Collaboration Relationship Frameworks Facilitates Mutual Benefit**

Themes 1-4 above show that the phenomenon of successful practice of business curriculum collaboration is desirable and positive for academics, employers and professional bodies, particularly as subject knowledge and transferable skills required of graduates by employers and professional bodies have become strongly weighted causal factors in encouraging business curriculum collaboration.

However, the study also shows that there is no clear blueprint or framework to show collaboration partners how to implement collaboration effectively and enduringly, which many potential collaboration partners still struggle with for the reasons discussed in Themes 2-3 above.

The desire for connectivity between graduate skills and the world of work has inspired several skills and broadly curriculum-related models discussed in this study, such as DOTS (Law & Watts, 1977), USEM (Yorke & Knight, 2003), psycho-social skills models (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004) and social capital frameworks (Tomlinson, 2017).

However, none of these frameworks has systematically helped collaborative partners understand what steps to go through to bring about sustainable and transformational praxis in business curriculum relationships.

One of the most important frameworks in the last 10 years to attempt to set out steps leading to effective curriculum collaboration, the Connected Curriculum Framework (Fung, 2017), emphasises the key importance of true connectedness of business subject research, teaching, and the world of work, including multilateral connections between academics, employers, researchers, and students. This concept of structural curriculum connectedness was echoed in its importance by academics and employers involved in graduate recruitment in the research interviews, including employers E3, E6 and E2, who saw this as a structured way of improving the future talent pool of graduates and soft transferable skills available to employers.

Building on the principle of connectedness, therefore, new and innovative framework approaches are likely to be needed to enable collaboration partners to overcome structural and operational challenges to effective collaboration as discussed in Themes 2 and 3 above. This will help to forge a pathway beyond the current disparate collaborative praxis discussed in Theme 4 above, and to progress with confidence to longer-term lasting curriculum relationships with more holistic connectedness across the collaborators involved, to reach the potential to transform HE subject knowledge and graduate outcomes. This study attempts to set out a potential framework for doing so in Section 7.3 below, and to emphasise the goal of planned connected thinking as a key aid to more effective business curriculum collaboration.

## **6.2.6 Theme 6: Lasting Curriculum Relationships – A Pathway to Long-Term Mutual Gain**

Applying fresh thinking and new collaborative frameworks to curriculum collaboration as recommended in Theme 5 in 6.2.5 above not only has the potential to improve the effectiveness of existing practice and lived experience of business curriculum collaboration, but also to inspire more lasting collaborative curriculum relationships for long-term mutual gain in knowledge transfer and graduate talent creation.

Taking a longer-term view seems to be a challenge for many stakeholders according to the study findings, due in part to practical impediments such as turnover and lack of capture of contacts amongst both academics and employers, but also the inability of universities to keep contacts in databases or other formal processes or systems, as emphasised by respondents such as U3, U12, U15 and U8.

However, there are also more structural endogenous HEI praxis challenges that play an inhibiting role here, particularly the need to refocus academic culture and attitudes towards the longer-term benefits of investing time and effort in such collaborations.

Even though academic culture and attitudes overseen by a university shape academics' management of where they invest their own labour and intellectual capital, research by Hansen and Daniels (2023) shows that UK academics neither see collaborations as their role nor are rewarded, incentivised, or resourced sufficiently to maintain collaborative relationships with employers, although they must do so for professional bodies who accredit them.

Even professional bodies who do not have formal accreditation, such as P1 and P4, also complained about the lack of long-term structural dynamics to underpin collaborative curriculum relationships in business schools and universities.

The fact that universities tend to overuse employer and academic good will without always creating a win-win incentive for longer term collaboration is also a factor in inadequate maintenance of long-term collaborative relationships, as researched by Boshoff and Fernandes (2020), and as experienced by employers such as E3 and E7.

Research by Lowden et al (2011) and Osika (2022) does however evidence that curriculum co-design itself can lead to longer-term collaborative gain. This can happen for example through long-term course requirements for mutual relationships with alumni employers for activities such as work-based learning, as well as inviting employers and professional bodies onto curriculum advisory boards and qualification validation events to feel they are genuinely adding value to the business curriculum and student outcomes. This was echoed in the research interviews by universities such as U5 and U17, and professional bodies such as P2 and P3, who engage effectively in such longer-term curriculum collaborative activities.

At a structural sector level, employers and academics agreed that when effective longer term collaborative relationships become normal practice and lived experience, this can result in economic and commercial benefits at local and civic level, including universities U6, U14, U5, U12, U10 and U20. The local and civic benefits of collaborative long-term relationships were also emphasised by researchers such as Brabner (2023).

In summary, developing lasting long-term collaborative curriculum relationships appears to be a desirable aspiration to benefit student employability, academic curriculum quality maintenance and local economies.

However, current HEI structural reward systems, processes, culture for capturing and maintaining such long-term relationships, as well as more addressable practical hindrances such as a lack of partner databases and contact capture approaches, are still not sufficiently well developed for many HEIs and their stakeholders to achieve this aspiration.

### **6.2.7 Theme 7: Truly Connected Curriculum Collaboration**

#### **Transforms HE Outcomes**

The discussions in Themes 1-6 show that if endogenous structural and operational barriers to curriculum collaboration can be overcome, and positive changing sector dynamics capitalised on, then through applying fresh thinking and frameworks around collaborative relationships, lasting collaborations can offer longer term structural mutual gain such as improved student employability outcomes, local and civic economic gain, and industry-university knowledge transfer. This in turn can result in more truly holistic connectedness as advocated in Fung's Connected Curriculum Framework (2017), generating integrated business curriculum collaboration between academics, employers, professional bodies, and students to transform HE outcomes for students and academics in shaping and resourcing the business world of the future.

The concept of evidencing that business curriculum collaboration can bring equal and mutual 'win-win' benefits to all parties in the collaborative relationship was held to be realistic by several interview respondents such as U1, U8, P1, P3, E2, E8 and E1. Such win-win benefits can include opening up new graduate

skills talent pools for employers to draw on for future work skills, increased knowledge transfer into the curriculum at subject level through professional body expertise, and upskilling of academics' own subject knowledge via effective curriculum development for HEIs.

In terms of successful modes of collaborative business curriculum delivery, research by JISC as well as primary research interviews such as E5, P2, U11 and U13 indicate that local and civic partnerships, degree apprenticeships, WBL, WIL, case studies and guest speakers are the modes of collaborative curriculum creation and delivery which employers, professional bodies and academics find effective as collaborative phenomena for improving graduate and university outcomes, and on which to role model new aspirational collaborative business curriculum relationships.

Qualifications which are double-badged, accredited, rely on relationships and networking or deliver executive education qualifications tend to offer employers, professional bodies, and academics the most effective and interactive subject-based collaborative experience to build on for future aspired relationship models, particularly in subjects such as marketing, accounting, and finance, as evidenced in research by Norton and Dalrymple (2021), and in interviews with respondents such as U1 and U9.

In summary, aspiring to a truly interconnected partnership in future curriculum collaboration of business curriculum collaboration can genuinely create transformative HE outcomes, with all parties finding value in contributing to their own and student interests for the future ever-changing worlds of work, research, and teaching, as discussed under future recommendations in Chapter 7 below.



## 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research objectives and key study findings are revisited in the light of the overall research conclusions and findings. Curriculum collaboration in business and management subject areas has emerged throughout this study as a highly topical concept, which links closely to current considerations of how to tackle the rapidly changing UK HE environment in a more connected and holistic manner. A new framework approach is therefore recommended in Section 7.3 below for improving curricular collaboration between academics, employers, and professional bodies to the level of potentially transformational outcomes in key areas such as knowledge transfer and graduate outcomes. Limitations of and recommendations for further research are also put forward. The research questions for this study were:

- What are the key drivers for business curriculum collaboration in and with UK HEIs?
- How does collaborative design and co-creation occur in business curricula, and who takes the lead in initiating collaboration?
- How do collaborative delivery and co-production occur in business curricula?
- How are effective collaborative business curriculum relationships maintained?
- What are the most and least successful aspects of effective business curriculum collaborative relationships?

An inductive and interpretivist approach was taken to answer the research questions, using thematic analysis to effectively explore the influencing factors and aspects of the professional practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK HEIs.

## **7.2 Response to the Research Questions**

### **a) What are the key drivers for business curriculum collaboration in and with UK HEIs?**

Chapter 6 above shows that the key drivers for business curriculum collaboration in and with UK HEIs are primarily structural and endogenous. These revolve firstly around significant shifts in the structure and role of higher education in incorporating research, teaching, and societal value relative to the world of work. They are also driven by a growing employability and graduate outcomes metrics focus by UK government policy shifts, and increasing willingness on the part of employers and professional bodies to advise HEIs on graduate skills required through good curriculum design for future employability, including agile leadership and digital mastery.

### **b) How does collaborative design and co-creation occur in business curricula, and who takes the lead in initiating collaboration?**

Collaborative design and co-creation in business curricula takes place through collaborating with employers and professional bodies ideally as early as possible via curriculum advisory boards and qualification validation events. However, this is still only implemented in a limited number of business schools and universities, owing to practical and operational inhibitors which are slow to be resolved, such as contact capture and HEI timetabling. There are also more structural blockers such as academic resistance to curriculum collaboration, and lack of ownership of collaborative initiatives at senior level within HEIs, resulting in work overload and lack of reward, incentives, and resource to implement any more than a basic and fragmented set of collaborative curriculum outcomes in

many business schools. Increasingly universities are using the goodwill, experience and opportunism of practitioner academics, business development and careers teams to support research and teaching academics in reaching out and initiating collaboration on curriculum with employers and professional bodies, particularly in subjects requiring networking and accreditation, such as degree apprenticeships, accredited courses, executive education, and in marketing, finance, and accounting.

**c) How do collaborative delivery and co-production occur in business curricula?**

Collaborative business curriculum co-production and delivery mainly takes place at a basic level in terms of curriculum, via guest lectures, case studies, projects, and consultancy, rather than co-teaching or assessment. Work-based and work-integrated learning are becoming increasingly important collaborative areas of co-delivery both extra- and in-curriculum, for students to gain real world experience and employability skills, and to facilitate their pre-professional identity development and awareness of their future professional selves. Integrating WBL and WIL more seamlessly into business curricula across the life of a degree alongside employability skills development is likely to be a future focus for many UK HEIs and business schools.

**d) How are effective collaborative business curriculum relationships maintained?**

Maintaining effective collaborative business curriculum relationships is a major challenge for many UK HEIs, who struggle with academic resistance to keeping up contacts through lack of time, turnover of contacts, and lack of systematic

database provision or other forms of capturing relationship contacts. For employers, professional bodies, and academics, collaborating on a regular basis via curriculum advisory boards or qualification validation events helps to maintain longer term collaborative curriculum relationships. Local and civic collaboration relationships also play a key role in maintaining long term curriculum, commercial and economic relationships.

**e) What are the most and least successful aspects of effective business curriculum collaborative relationships?**

In terms of business curriculum delivery modes, the most proactive and effective aspects of collaborative success appear to be in well-planned and executed collaborative delivery modes such as degree apprenticeships, double-badged or accredited degrees, executive education, work-based and work-integrated learning. By subject, the most successful collaborative curriculum relationships appear to occur either in subjects which lend themselves naturally to networking and relationship-building such as marketing, or in subjects where academics are used to working with professional bodies and employers to gain accreditation such as accounting and finance. Aspects of business curriculum collaboration which have emerged with potential for improvement focus primarily on structural and process-driven challenges such as lack of resourcing, reward, recognition, business development support, workload time, database support and win-win outcome recognition on the part of universities and academics. Several cultural aspects of business curriculum collaboration are also in need of improvement, including academic resistance and fearful attitudes towards professional bodies and employers, university rigidity in terms of academic schedules and willingness to engage professionally with employers

in a work-empathetic cultural manner, lack of authenticity in curriculum collaboration where research or KTP income may be the main underlying drivers, and inability to convince students to engage with the outcomes of business curriculum collaboration.

## **7.3 Recommendations & New Curriculum Collaboration**

### **Framework**

This research study demonstrates that the practice and lived experience of curricular collaboration in business and management between employers, academics and professional bodies is positively regarded as having successful potential outcomes for graduates, for employers looking for a skilled graduate talent pool and effective university collaborations in knowledge and research, for professional bodies looking to develop their advisory as well as regulatory role, and for academics looking to improve their own and their students' knowledge of the identity, skills and knowledge needed to interact effectively with the world of work.

Despite many examples of the success of this type of collaboration, however, the study findings have highlighted many potential areas of improvement to address to assure longer-term maintenance of business curriculum collaborative relationships and connectedness in collaboration to truly transform HE outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 6 above. As shown in Figure 17 above, the practice of curriculum collaboration can fail to reach lasting long-term maintenance and realisation of transformational outcomes if structural and operational barriers continue to impact on collaborative curriculum relationships.

The following new Connective Curriculum Collaboration framework arising from this study therefore takes a potentially transformative approach, by building on the concept of collaborative connectedness, and by taking a fresh approach to the planning, design, delivery, and maintenance of business curriculum collaboration between employers, academics, and professional bodies, based on the findings of this research study.

The framework is intended to make a significant contribution to future professional practice in curriculum creation and delivery, by collaboratively improving UK business graduate outcomes through tridirectional knowledge transfer and effective collaboration between academics, professional bodies, employers, and potentially with students.

This framework shows that before curriculum collaboration can take place in a symbiotic manner, consideration of key factors such as desired collaborative outcomes and relationship duration are essential to plan for by academics, employers, and professional bodies at the antecedent stage of collaborative relationship development.

This can be implemented in the first instance by mutually agreeing on the key drivers for collaboration, including enhancing graduate skills and outcomes, knowledge exchange, and future-proofing of business and management curricula through collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies. Secondly, scoping out the parameters of the desired relationship between the collaborating parties with key goals, outcomes and link contacts on each side is key, including frequency of desired contact, potential meeting and event frequency, level and depth of collaboration expected etc. Other key areas to agree at the antecedent stage include agreeing who should be the lead in the

relationship, securing senior level support and resource, and resolving any issues around budget or workload hours arising from curriculum collaboration activities.

The potential for involving university and employer careers and business development teams to support long-term relationship planning and contact development can also prove highly productive at this initial stage of collaboration planning.

The framework then recommends that once collaboration takes place, effective praxis can be delivered by scoping in more detail which elements of collaborative delivery should be led by academics, employers, or professional bodies respectively, including for example projects, work experience, co-teaching or assessment.

At this stage of collaboration, framing of the format of the collaborative relationship structure should also be agreed, for example via curriculum advisory boards, validation panels, alumni workshops etc. Alignment of academic and employer calendars and schedules should also be discussed early on in this stage of the framework, to avoid timing and scheduling mismatches so commonly experienced in curriculum collaboration activities.

As this stage of the framework progresses and effective praxis becomes clearer, progress from curriculum co-design and delivery can start to be considered in a wider and longer-term context, for example executive education and work-based learning, and a throughline of employability skills, inclusivity and diversity enhancements can be built into the curricular collaborative relationship structure.

Finally at the review stage, once the collaborative relationship has been in place for several months, all collaboration partners should be at a stage where they can review and progress with consideration of outcomes of collaboration which have proved transformational. These may include for example long-term contact and relationship capture, database sharing, student engagement, improved graduate skills and outcomes, and improvements in academic and professional body standing, and employer access to improved graduate talent pools.

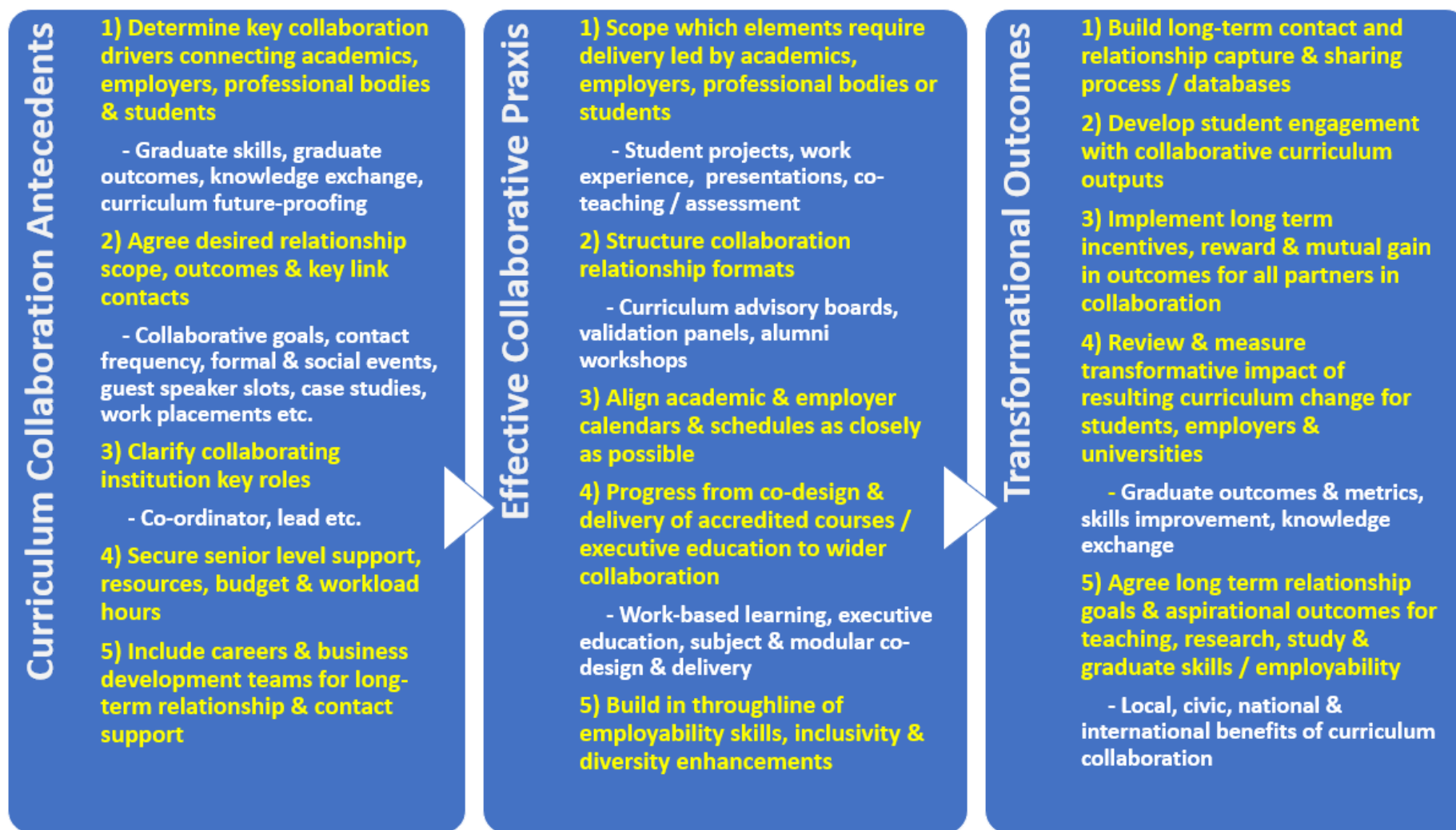
The need to review and measure positive impacts here such as knowledge exchange, student satisfaction or graduate outcome metrics improvement is key to assuring the future of the collaborative relationship, and to communicating key impacts back to senior management in all collaborating institutions for continued future support.

As the outcome stage of the framework is reached, goals and aspirations for maintaining longer term collaborative curriculum relationships and transforming graduate outcomes can also be planned for, potentially including academic research and teaching enhancements, as well as wider local, civic and even international benefits to deeper curriculum collaboration.

Taken together, the three stages recommended in the Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework therefore have significant potential to improve levels of student engagement, relationship and contact capture, and the creation of outcomes for mutual and transformational gain for all collaborative partners engaged in the curricular relationship, as shown in Figure 26 below:



Figure 26 – Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework



The new Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework discussed above links to and strengthens the innovative thinking evident in a number of the models and frameworks discussed in the Chapter 2 Literature Review in this study.

Structurally, for example, the Model of Employer's Perspectives on Higher Education Internships (Kroon and Franco, 2022) discussed at Figure 12 links in terms of key developmental phases to the new framework at Figure 26, but is built on further in the new framework by involving employers and professional bodies more proactively in curriculum planning with academics at the key antecedent stage of collaboration.

The new framework at Figure 26 also acknowledges the inherent linkages between learner characteristics, programme characteristics and workplace characteristics needed for effective graduate skill transfer demonstrated in the Model of Graduate Skills Transfer (Jackson, D., 2016) discussed at Figure 9 above, then develops this concept of connectedness proactively by ensuring that learner, programme and workplace characteristics and discussed at the antecedent stage of curriculum collaboration for greater knowledge integration, rather than as separate stages of collaborative activity.

Finally, the new framework at Figure 26 echoes the significance attributed to collaborative synergy, critical conversations and meaningful interaction between academics and employers through a holistically connected curriculum, enabling students to build their own learning narrative across academic research, the workplace and the wider world for professional work and lifelong learning evidenced in the Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework discussed at Figure 7 (Fung, 2017). These elements of Fung's framework are then built on in

the new framework at Figure 26, by incorporating recommendations for potential barriers to effective collaborative connectivity through key proactive practical considerations, such as relationship scoping, knowledge exchange, contact and relationship capture, impact review and long-term collaborative aspirational goal planning.

Overall, therefore, the new Connective Curriculum Collaboration Framework discussed at Figure 26 has the potential to make a significant theoretical contribution to knowledge concerning curriculum collaboration in business and management subject areas, and to provide a valuable tool for academics, employers, and professional bodies to engage in effective curriculum collaboration, based on the research evidence from this study.

The contribution of this framework and research both in terms of knowledge and professional practice is therefore of high potential significance, in presenting new knowledge and framework recommendations to fill a research gap in conceptualisations of how curriculum collaboration can be effective between academics, employers and professional bodies in business and management subject areas, as discussed in Section 7.4 below.

## **7.4 Contribution of the Research to Professional Practice**

The outcomes of this research and the new Connective Curriculum Collaboration framework arising from the research have the potential to make a significant and topical contribution to professional practice in business and management subject areas. The findings of this research study are intended to underpin development of new knowledge relating to the lived experience and praxis of collaboration between higher education business and management academics, employers, and professional bodies. This may also enable more

transformational collaboration around business curricula design, development, and delivery, in the interests of graduate employability and competency advancement in the UK. Specific contributions of the research by type of collaborative partner may include the following:

**a) UK HE academics**

The outputs and new framework arising from this research may facilitate improved academic ability to identify and overcome barriers to engage in effective collaboration with employers and professional bodies, in the interests of business curriculum validity and graduate outcomes.

**b) Employers**

The outcomes and new framework emerging from this research may be used to enable employers to understand how to collaborate more effectively with university academics to input to business and management curriculum currency and relevance, and thereby to access a talent pool of UK university graduates with more highly transferable employability skills based on relevant business curricula.

**c) Professional bodies**

The research outcomes and new collaborative framework may enable professional bodies in business and management subjects to embed their value and enhance their advisory role, by understanding how to collaborate with university academics more effectively, to add significant subject-related value to future business curricula in addition to their existing regulatory oversight of graduate learning and outcomes.

## **7.5 Limitations of the Research**

The following section sets out the primary limitations of this research project.

### **a) Translation Into Professional Practice**

The research study was conducted using relevant methodological approaches outlined in Chapter 3 above to assure authenticity, transferability, and validity of the results. However, translating interpretivist phenomenological qualitative research with a limited sample size into real-world professional practice may result in academics and practitioners requiring further quantitative research to support the qualitative findings of this single study before being willing to act on the study results, as the institutional participants in this study were not randomised.

The new connective curriculum collaboration framework discussed at Figure 26r 6 above could therefore enhance the adaptability potential of this study by being tested out in more depth utilising a more quantitative approach by a sample of academics, employers, and professional bodies to address this potential limitation.

### **b) Transferability of Findings**

Curriculum collaboration is a subject which may have relevance to many subject disciplines beyond business and management, raising the question of the potential transferability of the thesis findings to other subject areas, and whether the knowledge and concepts gained from this study can be applied effectively in different subject contexts. This would confirm the adaptability and practical utility of this study's findings beyond their original purpose.

However, the nature of collaborative relationships between academics, professional bodies and employers can be very different in other subjects such as medicine or law, where non-academic practitioners are expected to work with and examine the ability of students under regulatory guidelines.

Transferability to other subject disciplines would therefore need to be examined on a per subject basis in terms of relationship parameters before conducting similar research in other HE subject areas such as law, tourism or hospitality.

### **c) Sampling Approach**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the qualitative interviews. While the purposive sampling method used was necessary to reach the target population, it might also be also considered a limitation of this study due to potential to introduce an element of bias in the sampling process.

## **7.6 Recommendations for Further Research**

In further exploring the phenomenon of the collaboration between employers, professional bodies, and academics in business curricula in UK higher education, it is recommended that additional studies could be carried out as follows:

### **a) Comparative Study**

It would be logical to apply and compare this research with curricular collaboration in subject areas adjacent to business and management, for example law, tourism or hospitality, where the notion of how far employers and professional bodies should be involved in curriculum development and change for graduate employability is currently under scrutiny in UK HE.

### **b) Longitudinal Study**

It would be relevant to conduct deeper longitudinal phenomenological research with a small number of UK business schools who adopt or trial the collaborative framework model proposed in Figure 26 above over a series of academic semesters, to gauge whether more effective and planned collaboration results

in improved curriculum quality, student outcomes and university-employer-PSRB relationships in UK higher education.

## **7.7 Summary**

This research study has addressed key research aims and objectives concerning the phenomenological experience of academics, employers, and professional bodies in UK HE business curriculum collaboration. The study has captured significant positive causal drivers which are both structural to HE and industry-based for co-design and delivery of effective business curriculum collaboration, such as knowledge exchange, enhanced graduate employability skills and outcomes, and future-fit curriculum design.

However, the study shows that there are also both structural and operational inhibitors which act as barriers to business curriculum collaboration at exogenous and endogenous levels in HE and industry, such as weak contact capture systems, lack of rewards, incentives, ownership, and recognition for investing effort into business curriculum collaboration relationships. Lack of resolution of both operational and structural inhibitors has meant that business curriculum collaboration to date, while successful in many HEIs in terms of co-design and delivery of for example degree apprenticeships and executive education, can lack rigour and effectiveness in the 'stuck' lived experience of many academics, employers and professional bodies researched.

The findings of this study have however highlighted key innovative and connective potential approaches to creating more effective and enduring lived experience and professional practice of business curriculum collaboration relationships. This includes the need for fresh approaches in collaborative thinking, and a new frameworks for connective business curriculum

collaboration which has the potential to be measurably successful in terms of curriculum and HE transformation, mutual goal achievement for collaborative partners, and significantly improved knowledge exchange and employability outcomes for HE business and management students and academics.

This research study therefore has the potential to inform further research in this area of HE professional practice, and to enable researchers to understand more clearly how the phenomenon of business curriculum collaboration can be shared by academics, professional bodies, and employers, to truly influence university and employer professional practice and graduate outcomes in a more transformational manner in the future. The findings of this study therefore have significant implications for the long-term success of UK HEIs, their graduates, and for broader curriculum collaboration with employers and professional bodies. This study also has the potential to contribute to the wider field of phenomenological research in UK higher education, opening new avenues for exploration and understanding of lived experiences for future business and management education and professional practice.



## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Coopers Taxonomy of Literature Review

| Characteristic     | Category   | Response  |
|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>Focus</b>       | Research outcomes<br>Research methods<br>Theories<br>Practices or applications   | <p>Primary focus is on outcomes as in the literature review it is critical to ascertain whether there is a lack of information on the thesis topic.</p> <p>Methods will be important to support the credibility of the review and chosen methods.</p> <p>Theories will also feature, as many theories have been developed around higher education collaboration, although not necessarily around business curriculum collaboration.</p> <p>There will also be a focus on practices, as the thesis is looking at the phenomenological experience of business curriculum collaboration.</p> |
| <b>Goal</b>        | Integrations<br>Generalisation<br>Conflict resolution<br>Linguistic bridge-building<br>Criticism<br>Identification of central issues | The primary goal is to critically analyse the literature and explicate the relationship between the practice and experience of business curriculum collaboration and the research to support this.  |
| <b>Perspective</b> | Neutral representation<br>Espousal of position   | I have a neutral position on the thesis topic.  |
| <b>Coverage</b>    | Exhaustive<br>Exhaustive with selective criteria<br>Representative<br>Central or pivotal   | As there is unlikely to be an existing extensive body of work on this topic, I plan to do an exhaustive review with selective criteria.   |

|              |   |   |
|--------------|---|---|
| Organisation | Historical<br>Conceptual<br>Methodological  | Mix of these formats, to show the development and growth of business curriculum collaboration and the results and implications of this.                                 |
| Audience     | Specialised scholars<br>General scholars<br>Practitioners or policymakers<br>General public | The audience will not include the general public or general scholars. This study is intended to make a practical difference to HEIs, employers and professional bodies. |

(Cooper, 1988)

## Appendix 2 – Analysis and critique of research-based literature

(Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019)

**Title:**

**Type of source:**

**Author/researcher:**

**Publication date:**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Methodology including data collection                 |  |
| Research sample/participants                          |  |
| Research problem/purpose                              |  |
| Research question                                     |  |
| Key findings  |  |
| Limitations of the study                              |  |
| Conclusions   |  |
| Controversies / disagreements with other research/ers |  |
| Recommendations / implications for practice           |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Overall impressions   |  |
| Value/relevance for my research<br>(Very important, important, moderately important, mildly important, not important) |  |

### Appendix 3 – Analysis and critique of theoretical literature

(Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019)

Title:

Author/researcher:

Publication date:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Overview of concept / theory</p>  |  |
| <p>Key premise / claim</p>   |  |
| <p>Reasoning<br/>Evidence is provided that clearly supports the claim.<br/>Opposing claims are recognised and addressed.</p>   |  |
| <p>Relevance<br/>Extent to which the information directly supports my topic and is useful.<br/>What are the implications for my current research?</p>                        |  |
| <p>Overall impression/evaluation. Does the author suggest the findings can be applied in theory and/or practice?<br/>How useful does this work seem to me with regard to</p> |  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>theoretical and/or practical applications?<br/>(Very important, important, moderately important, mildly important, not important)</p>  |  |
| <p>Synthesis<br/>Synthesise the pieces of my critique to emphasise my own points about the author's work; its relevance and/or application to other theories I have reviewed and to my study.</p> |  |

## **Appendix 4 – List of QAA Recognised UK Business & Management PSRBs**

Association for Project Management (APM)  
Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)  
Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)  
Association of MBAs (AMBA)  
Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB)  
Chartered Financial Analyst Institute (CFA)  
Chartered Institute for Securities and Investment (CISI)  
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)  
Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM)  
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)  
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)  
Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)  
Chartered Insurance Institute (CII)  
Chartered Management Institute (CMI)  
European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD)  
Financial Reporting Council  
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)  
Institute of Data and Marketing (IDM)  
Institute of Economic Development  
Institute of Financial Accountants (IFA)  
Market Research Society (MRS)  
(QAA, 2020)

## **Appendix 5 – Leading Graduate Employers of UK HEI Students**

**2021**

Accenture

Admiral

Airbus

Aldi

Allen & Overy

Amazon

American Express

Apple

Army

Arup

ASOS

AstraZeneca

Atkins

BAE Systems

Bain & Company

Bank of England

Barclays

BBC

BlackRock

Bloomberg

BMW

Boots

Boston Consulting Group

BP

BT

Capital One

Channel 4

Citi

Civil Service



Clifford Chance  
Deloitte  
Deutsche Bank  
Dyson  
Enterprise Rent-a-Car  
Environment Agency  
ExxonMobil  
EY  
Facebook  
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer  
GCHQ  
Goldman Sachs  
Google  
Grant Thornton  
GSK  
Hogan Lovells  
HSBC  
Huawei  
IBM  
Jaguar Land Rover  
JP Morgan  
KPMG  
L'Oréal  
Lidl  
Linklaters  
Lloyds Banking Group  
Marks & Spencer  
Mars  
McDonald's  
McKinsey & Company  
MI5  
Microsoft  
Morgan Stanley

NatWest Group  
Network Rail  
NHS  
Penguin Random House  
Police Now  
Procter & Gamble  
PwC  
RAF  
Rolls-Royce  
Royal Navy  
Samsung  
Savills  
Shell  
Siemens  
Sky  
Slaughter and May  
Teach First  
Tesco  
Tesla  
UBS  
Unilever  
Vodafone  
Wellcome

(High Fliers Research Limited, 2021)

## **Appendix 6 - Criteria for Research Participants**

To participate in this research, participants had to meet the following criteria:

### **Academics**

- Involved with curriculum design and/or delivery in business or management subject area(s).
- Involved with and/or has individual views around employer relationships with the university in business or management subject area(s).

### **Professional Bodies**

- Involved in regulation or standard setting for business or management subject(s).
- Involved with and/or has individual views around professional body relationships with universities in business or management subject area(s).

### **Employers**

- Involved with recruiting and/or working with university graduates from business or management discipline(s).

## **Appendix 7 – Invitation to Research Participants**

### **Invitation to take part in Academic Research: Information Sheet & Consent Form**

Dear (Name of Participant),

I am currently carrying out academic research with the University of Wales Trinity St David (UWTSD) around changing relationships between university academics, employers and professional bodies relating to graduate employability, and I am currently undertaking research interviews as part of this study.

I would very much like to invite you to be part of this research, by agreeing to an anonymised research interview which I would like to arrange with you.

The information below is intended to give you as much of the information you may need to make an informed decision about whether or not you would agree to this invitation.

The proposed dates for the interviews are between late January – mid March 2023, and the interviews can be conducted at your convenience either via MS Teams online, face-to-face or via telephone.

I very much hope that you would be happy to take part in a research interview as part of this study. If you could let me know your decision if possible by late January 2023 together with your availability, I would be very grateful.

If you have any questions regarding this email, please let me know and I would be happy to respond.

Kind regards

Angela Dalrymple

Research project email address: [2014645@student.uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:2014645@student.uwtsd.ac.uk)

## **Background and context**

This research is intended to explore the practice and experience of collaboration between employers, professional bodies and academics in designing and delivering the business and management curriculum in UK higher education institutions.

The objectives of the research interview are therefore:

- To explore how the collaborative journey between employers, professional bodies and academics is developed;
- To explore commonalities and challenges in designing, delivering and maintaining business curriculum collaborations between academics, employers and professional bodies;
- To examine which aspects work well or could be improved in collaborating on the business curriculum in the experience of employers, professional bodies, and academics.

## **Methodology and Confidentiality**

The interviews are intended to last 30-45 minutes. The purpose of the interviews will be to gather views on the interview questions. The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. For interview participants, anonymity is guaranteed. Participants will not be named in the research study, and any identifying information will be removed. All interview results will be recorded under a set of numeric codes to protect participant identity and stored as confidential documents on a password protected university storage drive. Access to the interview data will be limited to myself and the UWTSD director of studies. The interview data will be securely archived then securely deleted within 12 months in accordance with UWTSD research ethics policies. Interview transcripts will not be published.

You are invited to contribute from your organisational stance, which may also be informed by your personal stance. Your organisation and personal identity will not be shown in the research study.

The research will be run in an ethical and professional manner under the governance of University of Wales Trinity Saint David, as well as being compliant with Market Research Society Codes of Conduct.

You will be given the opportunity to review, confirm the content of or withdraw from the interview should you wish to do so.

If you have any further questions, please contact myself or the UWTSD Director of Studies, Professor Annette Fillery-Travis at [a.fillery-travis@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:a.fillery-travis@uwtsd.ac.uk).

### **Consent to participate**

If you agree to participate in the research, please would you:

- Complete, sign and date the consent form set out below;
- Retain a printed and/or electronic copy of the consent form for your own files;
- Email this document back to myself so that I can retain a printed and electronic copy of the consent form, using the research project email address at [2014645@student.uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:2014645@student.uwtsd.ac.uk).

## Consent Form

### **Research Title: A Phenomenological Exploration of Collaboration Between Employers, Professional Bodies and Academics in Business Curricula in UK Higher Education Institutions**

This consent form is designed to check you understand the purpose of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant, and to confirm you are willing to take part.

| Please write Yes or No as appropriate:  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1. I have read the information provided describing the nature and purpose of the research project and agree to take part.   |  |  |
| 2. I understand the purpose of the research project, and that the nature of my involvement in it will be limited to an interview.   |  |  |
| 3. I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage.   |  |  |
| 4. I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and that no specific comments or information will be able to be linked to me.   |  |  |
| 5. I understand that I may be audio taped during the interview and I reserve the right to terminate the recording at any point of time during the interview.  |  |  |
| 6. I understand that the data will be held confidentially, in a secure place and in a password protected computer in the form of hard and electronic copies of transcripts and audio tapes. These data will be accessible to the researcher and study supervisors only.               |  |  |
| 7. I understand that I can ask for a debriefing session following the interview.  |  |  |
| 8. I understand I may contact the Director of Studies if I require further information about the research, and I may contact the Research Ethics Committee Chair at University of Wales Trinity Saint David if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research. |  |  |
| 9. I agree to take part in this study.  |  |  |
| 10. I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research output and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that individual respondents will not be identified.  |  |  |
| Researcher Signature & Date:  |  |  |
| Print name in block letters:  |  |  |

|                               |  |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Participant Signature & Date: |  |  |
| Print name in block letters:  |  |  |



## **Appendix 8 – In-Depth Interview Structure**

### **Introduction**

Collaborative relationships between employers, professional bodies and academics which shape the graduate attributes, employability and the curriculum are of increasing interest in UK higher education and graduate employment. This research therefore aims to provide a greater understanding of how the experience of this type of collaboration in curriculum design and delivery is perceived by employers, professional bodies, and academics, and to explore what works well in such collaborations, particularly in business and management subject areas.

### **Demographic Information**

Before we start the main interview questions, could you please provide some background information for classification purposes only, by providing one answer for each of the following categories:

#### **a. Main Profession**

1. University Academic
2. Employer
3. Professional Body

#### **b. Main Work-Based Region of the UK**

1. London
2. South East England
3. East of England
4. South West England
5. North West England
6. West Midlands
7. Yorkshire & The Humber
8. East Midlands
9. North East England
10. Scotland
11. Wales
12. Northern Ireland

**c. Primary Area of Business Specialism**

1. Marketing
2. Accountancy
3. Finance
4. Human Resources
5. Insurance
6. Public Relations / Media
7. Economics
8. Project Management
9. Corporate Governance
10. Business Management

**d. Level in Organisation**

1. Executive Role
2. Senior Management
3. Middle Management
4. Junior Management

**Interview Questions**

1. I'd like to start by asking you to tell me about **your role in your organisation**, and any ways in which you or your colleagues are **already involved in any collaborations** between UK university academics / employers / professional bodies?

*(Examples if prompts needed – research and innovation, careers or recruitment events, student work experience, attending graduation ceremonies)*

2. What does the concept of collaboration with partners such as universities / employers / professional bodies mean to you and your organisation?

*(Examples if prompts needed – research partnerships, graduate recruitment etc.)*

3. In your experience, what do you think are the main reasons or triggers why academics / employers / professional bodies **initially recognise the need to collaborate with each other?**

*(Examples if prompts needed – research links, government metrics, employer skills needs, graduate outcomes targets, requests from students)*

4. In your experience, under what type of circumstances does any collaboration **take place around course curriculum or subject content**, particularly in business and management subject areas?

*(Examples if prompts needed – course reviews or validation, launch of new courses etc.)*

5. **Who would you say tends to take the lead and make the first move** when academics / employers / professional bodies collaborate in curriculum design or delivery?

*(Examples if prompts needed – one collaboration partners hard to get hold of, difficult to find who to contact, collaboration partners don't care / indifferent, collaboration partners who are dominant for their own benefit etc.)*

6. How straightforward do you find the process of setting up collaborations between academics / employers / professional bodies, and why?

*(Examples if prompts needed - online, face to face, process on all sides)*

7. In your experience, **which aspects of curriculum design** do academics / employers / professional bodies collaborate with each other on most frequently?

*(Examples if prompts needed - new course design, revalidations, assessment, case studies, work experience etc.)*

8. In your experience, **which aspects of curriculum delivery** do academics / employers / professional bodies collaborate most frequently?

*(Examples if prompts needed – case studies, guest lectures, work-integrated learning, placements, internships, projects, consultancy etc.)*

9. In your experience, how do academics / employers / professional bodies **maintain collaborations with each other on business curriculum** in the longer term?

*(Examples if prompts needed - advisory boards, building relationships / networking with each other, qualification validation)*

10. How would you **describe the lived experience of your or your colleagues' collaboration** between academics / employers / professional bodies on business curriculum aspects so far?

*(Examples if prompts needed – useful, relevant, pointless, challenging etc.)*

11. Are there any aspects of business curriculum collaboration which you believe work particularly well between academics / employers / professional bodies, and why?

(Ask for **examples**)

12. In an ideal world, are there any **opportunities for business curriculum collaboration which you believe could work better** between academics / employers / professional bodies, and why?

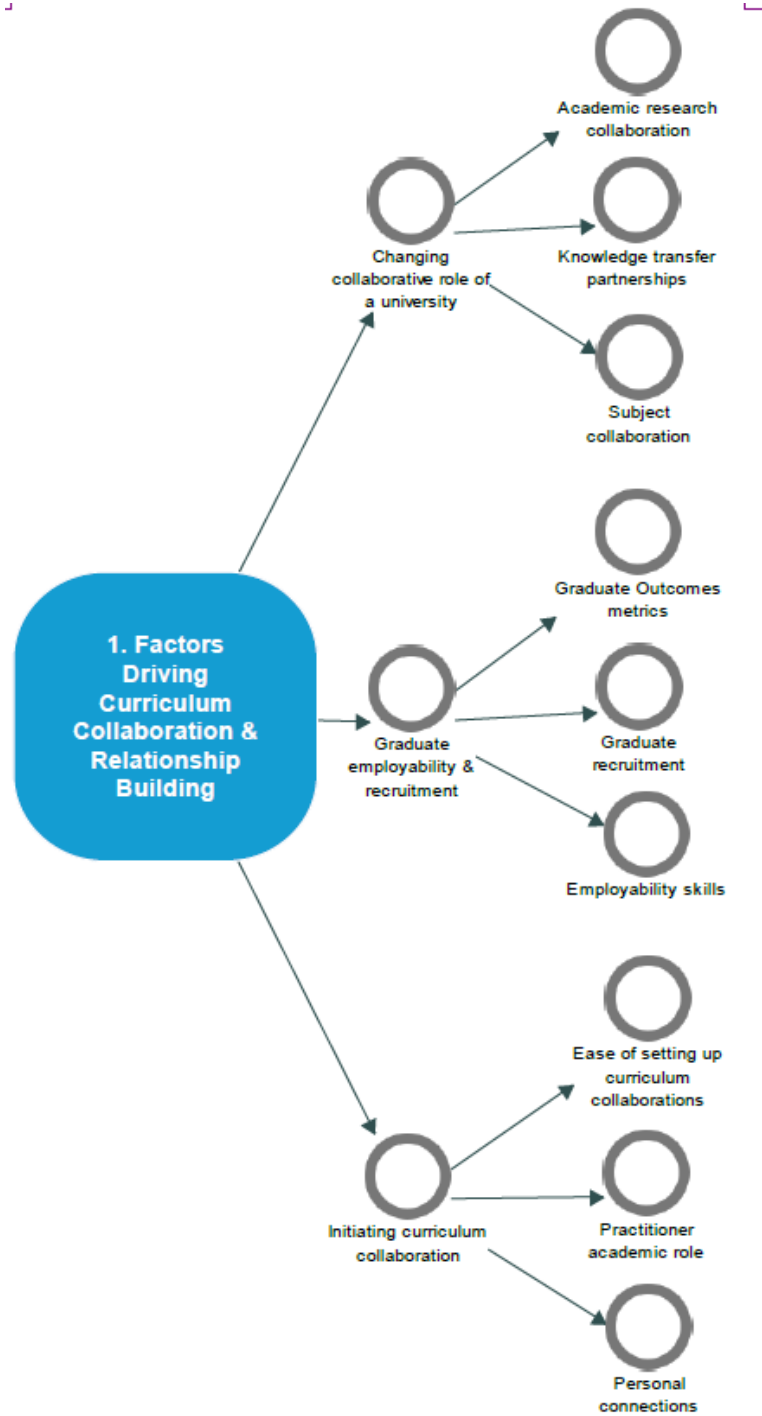
(Ask for **examples**)

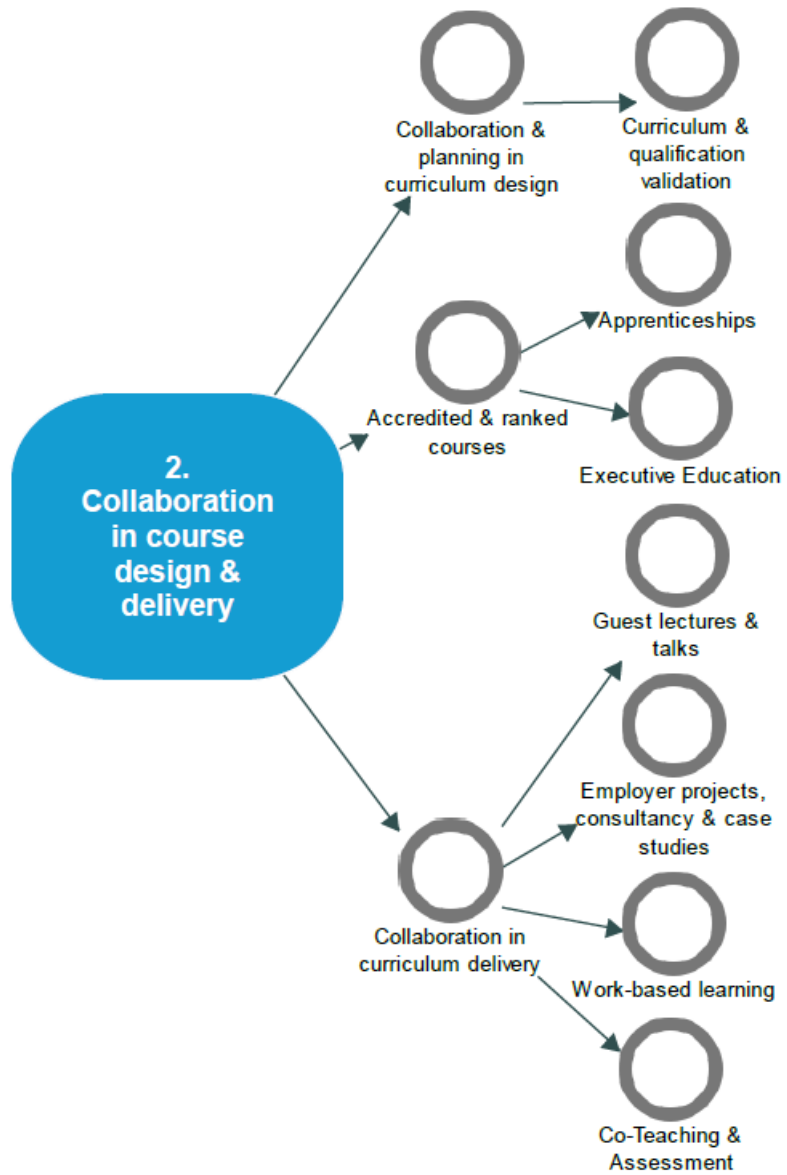
13. Finally, is there anything further, or are there any areas I have missed that you would like to add?

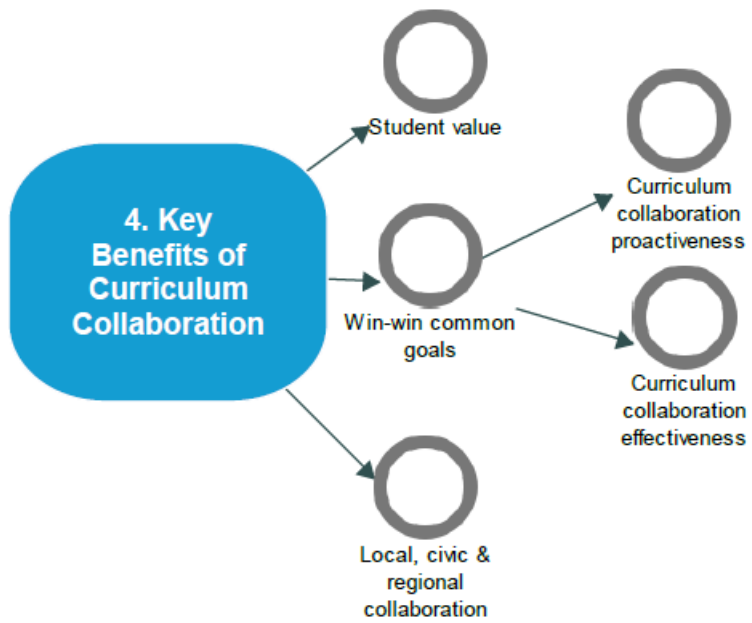
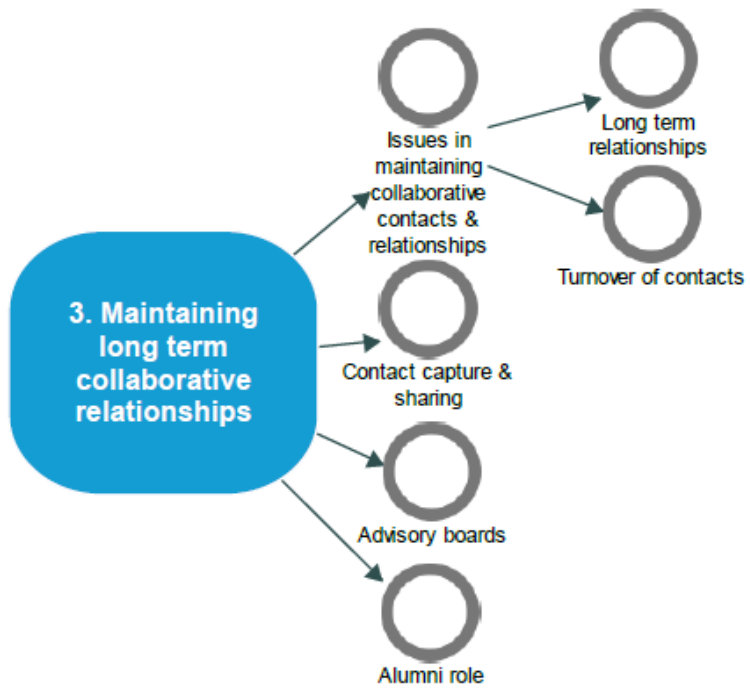
Thank you for your time, your views are extremely useful, I would be happy to follow up with you as you prefer in line with the information sheet and consent form sent to you prior to our meeting.

# Appendix 9 – Thematic Coding Concept Structure & Codebook

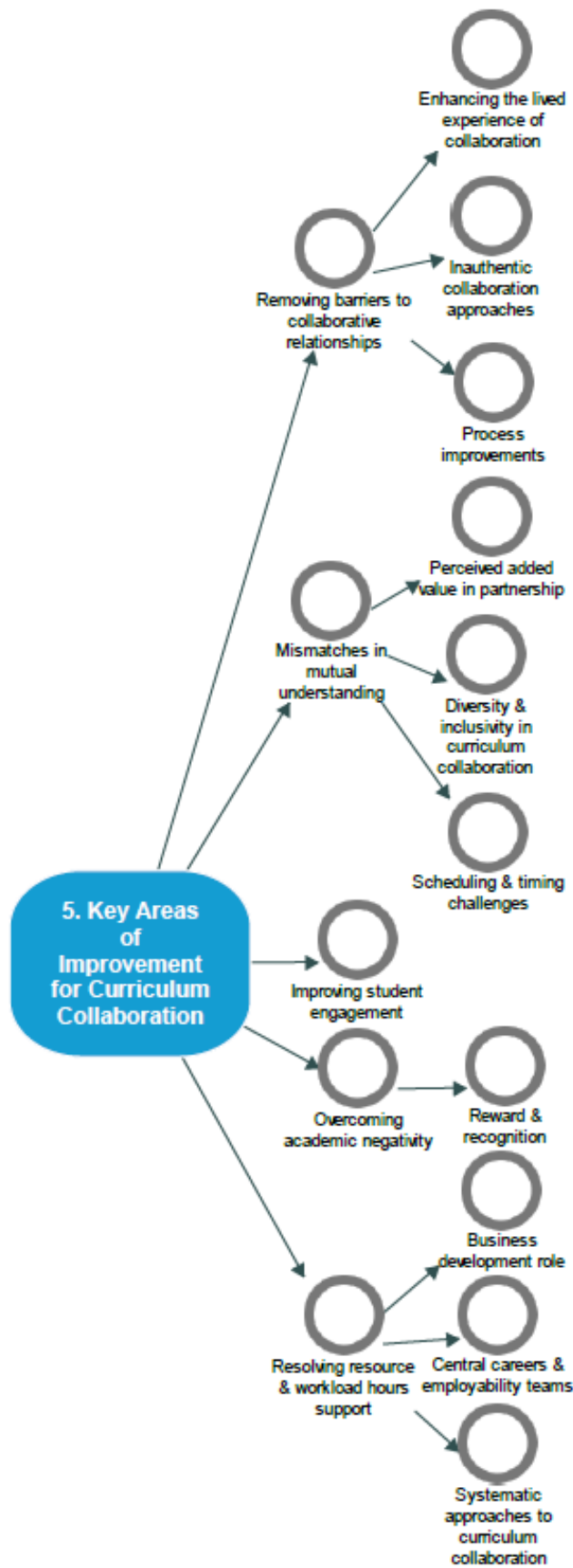
## i) Thematic Coding Concept Structure











## ii) Codebook

Codes in the codebook are shown in alphabetical order of subordinate themes with their supporting sub themes.

| Name  | Description  | Files | References |
|---|--|-------|------------|
| <b><u>Accredited &amp; ranked courses</u></b>             | Role of course accreditation and ranking by professional bodies and international bodies in curriculum collaboration with academics.     | 14    | 28         |
| Apprenticeships   | Issues relating to apprenticeships in curriculum collaboration.  | 4     | 13         |
| Executive Education                                       | Role of executive education in curriculum collaboration  | 4     | 6          |
| <b><u>Advisory boards</u></b>                             | Purpose and frequency of external advisory boards for curriculum and academic input.   | 10    | 15         |
| <b><u>Alumni role</u></b>                                 | Use of alumni in roles connected with curriculum collaboration.  | 11    | 25         |
| <b><u>Changing collaborative role of a university</u></b> | Perceived changing role of a university related to collaborative relationships with employers and professional bodies.                   | 4     | 7          |
| Academic research collaboration                           | Role of collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies on academic research  | 14    | 26         |
| Knowledge transfer partnerships                           | KTPs for knowledge transfer between academics and industry   | 8     | 10         |
| Subject collaboration                                     | Approaches in business and management subject areas to collaborate externally compared with other subject areas in a university.         | 18    | 33         |
| Collaboration & planning in curriculum design             | Extent to which employers and professional bodies are involved from the early stages of curriculum design.                               | 22    | 42         |
| Curriculum & qualification validation                     | Process of validating curriculum and qualifications  | 13    | 22         |
| <b><u>Collaboration in curriculum delivery</u></b>        | Key aspects of curriculum delivery in business and management where academics, employers and professional bodies collaborate most often. | 18    | 25         |

| Name   | Description   | Files | References |
|--|---|-------|------------|
| Co-Teaching & Assessment   | Involvement of employers and professional bodies in curriculum through co-teaching and assessment.  | 3     | 4          |
| Employer projects, consultancy & case studies                                  | Projects, consultancy and case studies with employers in collaborative curriculum delivery  | 20    | 43         |
| Guest lectures & talks   | Speaker slots by external employers or professional bodies delivered to students in connection with the business and management curriculum. | 20    | 56         |
| Work-based learning  | Curriculum collaboration between employers and academics in business and management around aspects of work-based learning.                  | 18    | 46         |
| <b><u>Contact capture &amp; sharing</u></b>                                    | Formal and informal processes to capture and share contacts internally  | 10    | 17         |
| <b><u>Graduate employability &amp; recruitment</u></b>                         | Importance of student employability skills in the curriculum for graduate recruitment.  | 11    | 22         |
| Employability skills   | Graduate skills which contribute to student employability   | 12    | 27         |
| Graduate Outcomes metrics  | Importance of Graduate Outcomes measure as a key driver   | 13    | 16         |
| Graduate recruitment   | Recruitment of graduates and talent acquisition by employers  | 9     | 20         |
| <b><u>Improving student engagement</u></b>                                     | Impact on student engagement of involving employers and professional bodies in curriculum.  | 6     | 14         |
| <b><u>Initiating curriculum collaboration</u></b>                              | Who takes the lead in curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies.  | 18    | 30         |
| Ease of setting up curriculum collaborations                                   | Level of ease in setting up curriculum collaborations   | 8     | 8          |
| Personal connections   | Importance of personal connections held by individuals.   | 22    | 57         |
| Practitioner academic role   | Role and importance of academics who have also been industry practitioners.   | 18    | 31         |
| <b><u>Issues in maintaining collaborative contacts &amp; relationships</u></b> | Issues faced by universities, academics and professional bodies in maintaining collaborative contacts and relationships.                    | 27    | 46         |

| Name   | Description  | Files | References |
|--|--|-------|------------|
| Long term relationships  | Impact of long term relationships on curriculum collaboration  | 8     | 9          |
| Turnover of contacts   | Impact of contacts leaving their organisations.  | 10    | 12         |
| <b><u>Local, civic &amp; regional collaboration</u></b>        | Collaboration between local universities and employers   | 12    | 35         |
| <b><u>Mismatches in mutual understanding</u></b>               | Mismatches in understanding between collaboration partners.  | 13    | 17         |
| Diversity & inclusivity in curriculum collaboration            | Aspects of diversity and inclusivity in curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies.                                     | 5     | 10         |
| Perceived added value in partnership                           | Perception by one or more collaborative partners whether collaborative relationship delivers sufficient added value.                                       | 19    | 37         |
| Scheduling & timing challenges                                 | Issues and challenges relating to timing and scheduling in curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies.                  | 12    | 23         |
| <b><u>Overcoming academic negativity</u></b>                   | Overcoming reasons why academics are negative towards employer and professional body collaboration around curriculum.                                      | 13    | 24         |
| Reward & recognition   | Rewarding and recognising individuals who contribute to curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies.                     | 3     | 5          |
| <b><u>Removing barriers to collaborative relationships</u></b> | Removing barriers to building collaborative relationships between academics, employers and professional bodies.  | 17    | 26         |
| Enhancing the lived experience of collaboration                | Enhancements required to the lived experience of curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in business and management. | 23    | 33         |
| Inauthentic collaboration approaches                           | Collaboration approaches between academics, employers and professional bodies which are lacking in rigour, proactiveness, commitment or authentic.         | 8     | 15         |
| Process improvements   | Aspect of curriculum collaboration process between academics, employers, and professional bodies in need of improvement.                                   | 13    | 19         |

| Name  | Description   | Files | References |
|---|---|-------|------------|
| <b><u>Resolving resource &amp; workload hours support</u></b> | Need for academics to have improved resourcing and workload hours support to develop curriculum collaboration with employers and professional bodies. | 17    | 52         |
| Business development role                                     | Role of teams or individuals involved in business development for external contacts.  | 10    | 15         |
| Central careers & employability teams                         | Central careers and employability teams within a university tasked with employability for students  | 11    | 24         |
| Systematic approaches to curriculum collaboration             | Systematic needed to support curriculum collaboration.  | 8     | 10         |
| <b><u>Student value</u></b>                                   | Value gained by students from curriculum collaboration between academics, employers, and professional bodies.   | 16    | 30         |
| <b><u>Win-win common goals</u></b>                            | Importance of having common goals for a win-win for all partners in the collaboration   | 15    | 20         |
| Curriculum collaboration effectiveness                        | What works effectively in curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies in business and management subjects.          | 20    | 36         |
| Curriculum collaboration proactiveness                        | Proactive collaboration by academics with employers around curriculum.  | 20    | 40         |

## Appendix 10 – Research Timetable

| Research Timetable  | Dates                     |
|---|---------------------------|
| Enrolment onto Professional Doctorate<br>Part 2 – Part Time Study Mode        | October 2020              |
| Research Proposal Approved  | April 2021                |
| Ethics Form Approved  | May 2021                  |
| Introduction & Literature Review<br>Research & Write-Up                       | June 2021 - December 2022 |
| Qualitative Discussion Guide Design<br>finalised                              | January 2023              |
| 32 Qualitative Interviews with Employers /<br>Professional Bodies / Academics | January – March 2023      |
| Thematic analysis of interviews   | March – May 2023          |
| Coding into thematic categories<br>including NVivo categorisation             | May–June 2023             |
| Project Findings chapter written  | June 2023                 |
| Research Methodology & Project<br>Activity chapters written                   | July 2023                 |
| Final draft of Literature Review<br>written                                   | August 2023               |
| Discussion, Conclusions and Abstract<br>written                               | August 2023               |
| First full draft of Thesis Submitted  | August 2023               |
| Second full draft of Thesis<br>Submitted                                      | October 2023              |
| Final draft of Thesis Submitted   | December 2023             |
| Thesis Viva   | March 2024                |

## Appendix 11 – Key Characteristics of Research Constructs

### Analysed

| Construct Characteristic   | Analysis Chapter / Section  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dynamics and size of UK HEI environment</li> <li>• Background and context of educational and political change</li> <li>• Changing role of the university</li> <li>• Importance of professional bodies in relation to HEIs</li> <li>• Changing role of graduate employers and input to UK HEI curricula</li> </ul>   | Section 2.1.1.1 – HEIs, Business Professional Bodies & Graduate Employers         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key business and management subject area characteristics</li> <li>• Overview of business and management graduate skills development</li> </ul>  | Section 2.1.1.2 – Business & Management Subject Areas & Skills                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is curriculum?</li> <li>• Business curriculum design and government policy changes</li> <li>• Employment and employability</li> <li>• Inclusivity and diversity in the business and management curriculum</li> <li>• Key curriculum and skills frameworks – DOTS, USEM, Psycho-Social, Connected Curriculum and Graduate Employability models</li> </ul> | Section 2.1.2.1 – Changing Role of Curriculum                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key HEI metrics and measures driving curriculum collaboration</li> <li>• Impact of Graduate Outcomes</li> <li>• Impact of Ranking Tables</li> <li>• Impact of Accreditation</li> </ul>  | Section 2.1.2.2 – HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking & Accreditation Drivers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate skills</li> <li>• Curriculum models</li> </ul>   | Section 2.1.2.3 Graduate Skills, Frameworks & Models                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context around business curriculum design and co-creation</li> </ul>  | Section 2.2.1 – Curriculum Design & Co-Creation Context                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic support and resistance to collaboration</li> </ul>   | Section 2.2.1.1 – Initiating & Resisting Curriculum Collaboration                 |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges in initiating curriculum collaboration – academics, professional bodies, and employers</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changing role, importance, and expectations of practitioner academics in curriculum collaboration</li> </ul>  | Section 2.2.1.2 – Role of the Practitioner Academic                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business subjects requiring formal curriculum co-creation</li> <li>Role of academics, employers, and professional bodies in co-creating degree apprenticeships</li> <li>Role of academics and professional bodies in co-designing accredited courses</li> </ul> | Section 2.2.2 - Formal Curriculum Co-Creation                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role of curriculum collaboration in non-apprenticeship or accredited business courses</li> <li>Differing curriculum collaboration priorities at undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education levels</li> </ul>   | Section 2.2.3 – Informal Curriculum Co-Creation                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Context of business curriculum in co-production and delivery</li> </ul>   | Section 2.3 - Collaborative Curriculum Delivery & Co-Production          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differing levels of curriculum co-production and delivery – guest speakers, case studies, projects, consultancy, co-teaching, and assessment</li> </ul>   | Section 2.3.1 – Curriculum Co-Production & Delivery Context & Approaches |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and integration of work-based learning around business curricula</li> <li>Development of student pre-professional and professional identity through work-based learning</li> </ul>  | Section 2.3.2 - Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining effective long term business curriculum relationships, relationships with academic staff and alumni</li> </ul>  | Section 2.4.1 - Relationships with Academic Staff & Alumni               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining long term business curriculum relationships with employers and professional bodies through curriculum advisory boards and qualification validation</li> </ul>   | Section 2.4.2 - Curriculum Advisory Boards & Qualification Validation    |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits of local and civic collaboration in maintaining long term business curriculum relationships</li> </ul>  | Section 2.4.3 - Local & Civic Collaboration              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery modes evidencing successful aspects of business curriculum collaboration</li> <li>• Subject areas evidencing successful aspects of business curriculum collaboration</li> </ul> | Section 2.5.1 - Most Successful Aspects of Collaboration |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEI structural and process aspects for business curriculum collaboration improvement</li> <li>• Academic culture aspects for business curriculum collaboration improvement</li> </ul>    | Section 2.5.2 - Collaboration Areas For Improvement      |

## Appendix 12 – List of Main Research Journals Used

| Journal Name  | Sections Used   |
|---|---|
| British Educational Research Journal                                | 2.2.2.1 Degree Apprenticeships & Accredited Courses   |
| Business Horizons   | 2.1.2.1 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking Tables & Accreditation  |
| Business Educator   | 1.1 Overall Introduction<br>2.1.1.2 Business & Management Subject Areas & Skills<br>2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration  |
| Education + Training  | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.5.2 Collaboration Aspects for Improvement   |
| Educational Research for Social Change                              | 2.4.1 Relationships with Academic Staff & Alumni  |
| e-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching           | 2.2.3 Informal Curriculum Co-Creation   |
| Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences                           | 2.2.3.1 Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Executive Education<br>2.2.1.1 Initiating Curriculum Collaboration  |
| Globalisation, Societies and Education                              | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Higher Education  | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.5.2 Collaboration Aspects for Improvement   |
| Higher Education Research & Development                             | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.1.2.1 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking Tables & Accreditation<br>2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment<br>2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity |
| Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning                    | 2.2.1.1 Initiating Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity  |
| Industry & Higher Education   | 2.1.2.1 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking Tables & Accreditation<br>2.2.1.1 Initiating Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment<br>2.4.1 Relationships with Academic Staff & Alumni                               |
| International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.1.2.1 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking Tables & Accreditation  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| International Journal of Management Education                                     | 1.3 Research Aims & Objectives<br>2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration  |
| International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning                                 | 2.2.1.2 Role of the Practitioner Academic   |
| Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education                                   | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Journal of Education and Work   | 2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment<br>2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Journal of Education for Business   | 2.1.1.2 Business & Management Subject Areas & Skills  |
| Journal of Education Policy   | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration  |
| Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change                         | 2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment  |
| Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education                               | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration  |
| Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability                       | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration  |
| Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice                              | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Journal of Vocational Behavior  | 2.1.2 Key Catalysts for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity  |
| Journal of Work-Applied Management  | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Knowledge in Society  | 2.1 Introduction  |
| Nursing Open  | 4.4 Thematic Data Analysis & Coding   |
| Practice and Evidence of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education | 2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment  |
| Quality Assurance in Education  | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |
| Qualitative Inquiry   | 4.2 Participants and Sampling   |
| Studies in Higher Education   | 2.1.1.1 HEIs, Business Professional Bodies & Graduate Employers<br>2.1.2 Key Catalysts & Frameworks for Business Curriculum Collaboration<br>2.3.2.1 Co-Delivery: Guest Speakers, Case Studies, Projects, Consultancy, Co-Teaching & Assessment |

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Teaching & Learning Inquiry  | 3.8 Confidentiality and Ethics  |
| Teaching in Higher Education | 2.1.2.1 HEI Metrics, Graduate Outcomes, Ranking Tables & Accreditation<br>2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity |
| The Marketing Review         | 2.4.2 Curriculum Advisory Boards & Qualification Validation   |
| Vocations and Learning       | 2.3.2.2 Work-Based Learning & Professional Identity   |

## **Appendix 13 – Further Detail on Confidentiality & Ethics**

Due care and attention were given to ensure the participant research was ethical, reliable, and robust. The purpose of the interview and the role of interviewer were communicated to all participants, to ensure that colluding, agreeing, or judging participants' contributions were avoided. Confidentiality steps were agreed and communicated with participants before they took part in the research.

Respondents were asked to sign a formal consent form agreeing to participate in the research interviews. In cases where a participant was representing an organisation, it was ensured that appropriate permission was in place in writing.

Anonymity was a key feature of participating in the interviews, in accordance with UK MRS guidelines that respondent anonymity must be preserved unless respondents gave informed consent for their details to be revealed (Market Research Society, 2023).

All participant contact details are held securely. Participant comments have been anonymised in the thesis submitted. Participants were asked if they would give permission for the interview to be recorded to refer to when analysing interview contents, to which all participants agreed.

Participants were not paid for the interviews. Participation in the research interviews presented no potential risks to participants. All participants were of adult age and not of a vulnerable classification. DBS certification was therefore not required.

All electronic data has been held in a password protected computer and in the UWTSO cloud-based OneDrive repository.

## Potential Risks to Participants

The participant research was conducted professionally, following guidelines and policies of UWTSD and the Market Research Society, ensuring that none of the following potential risks formed part of the research:

- Participants were not observed, with or without their knowledge;
- There was no access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent;
- There was no administration of any questions that may have been experienced as physically, mentally, or emotionally harmful or offensive;
- There was no performance of any acts which may have caused embarrassment or affected self-esteem;
- There was no investigation of participants involved in illegal activities;
- There was no administration of any substance, agent or placebo;
- The research activity did not involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or partial or full concealment of the study aims;
- Participants had the main research procedures described to them in advance, and informed about what to expect from the interview;
- Participants were told their participation was voluntary;
- Participants were reassured that refusal to participate in the research would not affect them in any way;
- Participants were assured they had the option of not answering any questions they did not want to answer;
- Participants were told their data would be treated with full confidentiality and, if published, would not be identifiable as theirs. Responses were anonymised before analysis by the use of codes, and personal data such as participant / company names, email addresses and/or telephone numbers were removed from the results;
- Participants were debriefed at the end of their participation in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken.

To mitigate any potential risk of conflict of interest, it was ensured that there were no potential conflicts of interest relating to any of the participants invited to take part in the research. All communications relating to the research were kept separate to any other possible work-related communications and sent from my UWTSD email address. It was also made clear to participants that the research would not be used for business development, and those who participated would be able to request not to be contacted again for any other reason. A critical friend was also invited to review the interview questions and analysis, thereby testing the integrity of both.

### **Potential Risks to the Investigator**

To ensure minimisation of investigator risks, the following were in place:

- All interviews were conducted online rather than face to face interviews on participant premises;
- Colleagues and family had full knowledge of and access to the interview schedule, so were aware of when and who I was interviewing at all times should there be an issue;
- I wore appropriate business dress when interviewing participants, and behaved in accordance with professional business protocols;
- Meetings were diarised electronically, so there was evidence of the meetings being arranged.

### **Potential Risks to the University**

The research was conducted professionally, with relevant data protection guidelines including the MRS Code of Conduct, UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice and UWTSD Research Data Management Policy fully adhered to by the researcher and respondents, ensuring no financial, data protection or reputational risk to the university. It was ensured that none of the following potential risks formed part of the research:

- There were no research procedures which might have had a negative impact on the environment. The research took place online;
- The research did not involve any involvement with pollutant or other environmentally risky materials, or local ecosystems;
- No live vertebrate animals were involved in the research;
- No procedures were used which involved deception;
- There are no financial or other interests to the investigator or the University arising from this research.

Clear briefing notes were sent out inviting respondents to participate, so they would know exactly what to expect in the process of the research and content. This offered participants the opportunity to self-select in or out of the research.

Participants also had the opportunity to terminate their participation in the research at any point.

### **Adverse Outcomes**

Availability of respondents could have been an issue. If participants had not been available on the day of the interview, a pool of further potential interview candidates was identified by the researcher to approach for an interview instead. This situation did not occur.

The final risk was that the planned project timetable might fall behind. The timetable had in-built contingency, so data collection and analysis were conducted in a timely manner, ensuring that timing was not a problem.

### **Confidentiality**

### **Interviews**



Interview participants were offered anonymity as part of the interview. Each interview was coded, and the coded data used in the thematic analysis. Only the researcher had access to the participant details stored on a password protected computer. MS Teams recordings and transcripts were requested for permission by the researcher from participants to generate output of the qualitative research meetings. All transcripts were offered back to each participant to check and approve before being analysed by the researcher. One participant requested the transcript to review and did not make any significant changes. Results from the transcripts were fully anonymised in compliance with the GDPR 2016 and Data Protection Act 2018, and with the MRS Code of Conduct, UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice and UWTSD Research Data Management Policy. The interviews did not involve any special category data as defined by the GDPR.

Data generated by this research has been stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is fully virus and password protected, and encrypted via secure logons. The data has been backed up directly to the researcher's allocated UWTSD OneDrive platform which is cloud-based, and fully anonymised to ensure participant confidentiality, including participant names, organisations, email addresses and telephone numbers.

Electronic transfer of data has only taken place between the researcher's personal computer, where interview transcripts were generated, and the UWTSD OneDrive space, which is fully password protected in accordance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act, which allow the right to data portability in moving, copying or transferring data from one IT

environment to another in a safe and secure way, without affecting its usability. Only the researcher and if required UWTSD supervisors have had access to the data generated by the research activity. Only the researcher has control of, and acts as custodian for, data generated by the research activity.

In compliance with the UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice Section 2 operational principles, the research data has been stored in a secure manner via the researcher's UWTSD OneDrive space in consonance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, and will be archived on UWTSD storage space after completion of the thesis in such a way that it will be accessible for future audit purposes if required.

The research data itself is not currently planned to be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository. The final thesis may be stored in this repository with fully anonymised data references. All data will be kept until after the research has been completed. Data confidentiality, handling and storage therefore complies with the UWTSD Research Data Management Policy and with the UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice.

Necessary steps will continue to be taken to maintain the integrity of the research data, and to ensure that appropriate security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access to the data, in compliance with Section 4.5 of the UWTSD Research Data Management Policy.

## Appendix 14 – Interview Themes: Detailed Description

| Superordinate Theme   | Subordinate Themes                            | Description   | No. of References incl. sub themes |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Factors Driving Curriculum Collaboration & Relationship Building | Changing collaborative role of a university   | Perceived changing role of a university related to collaborative relationships with employers and professional bodies. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic research collaboration</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer partnerships</li> <li>• Subject collaboration</li> </ul> | 76                                 |
|   | Graduate employability & recruitment          | Importance of student employability skills in the curriculum for graduate recruitment. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate Outcomes metrics</li> <li>• Graduate recruitment</li> <li>• Employability skills</li> </ul>   | 85                                 |
|   | Initiating curriculum collaboration           | Who takes the lead in curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of setting up curriculum collaboration</li> <li>• Practitioner academic role</li> <li>• Personal connections</li> </ul>             | 126                                |
| 2. Collaboration in Course Design & Delivery                        | Collaboration & planning in curriculum design | Extent to which employers and professional bodies are involved from the early stages of curriculum design. Includes sub theme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum &amp; qualification validation</li> </ul>  | 64                                 |
|   | Accredited & ranked courses                   | Role of course accreditation and ranking  | 47                                 |

|  |  |  |     |
|--|--|--|-----|
|  |  | by professional bodies and international bodies in curriculum collaboration with academics. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprenticeships</li> <li>• Executive Education</li> </ul>  |     |
|  | Collaboration in curriculum delivery                         | Key aspects of curriculum delivery in business and management where academics, employers and professional bodies collaborate most often. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guest lectures &amp; talks</li> <li>• Employer projects, consultancy &amp; case studies</li> <li>• Work-based learning</li> <li>• Co-Teaching &amp; Assessment</li> </ul> | 174 |
| 3. Maintaining Long Term Collaborative Relationships | Issues in maintaining collaborative contacts & relationships | Issues faced by universities, academics and professional bodies in maintaining collaborative contacts and relationships. Includes sub themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long term relationships</li> <li>• Turnover of contacts</li> </ul>  | 67  |
|  | Contact capture & sharing                                    | Formal and informal processes to capture and share contacts internally   | 17  |
|  | Advisory boards  | Purpose and frequency of external advisory boards for curriculum and academic input  | 15  |
|  | Alumni role  | Use of alumni in roles connected with curriculum collaboration   | 25  |
| 4. Key Benefits of Curriculum Collaboration          | Student value  | Value gained by students from curriculum collaboration between academics, employers and professional bodies  | 30  |
|  | Win-win common goals   | Importance of having common goals for a win-win for all partners in the  | 96  |

|  |  |   |     |
|--|--|---|-----|
|  |  | <p>collaboration. Includes sub themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum collaboration proactiveness</li> <li>• Curriculum collaboration effectiveness</li> </ul>   |     |
|  | Local, civic & regional collaboration            | Collaboration between local universities and employers  | 35  |
| 5. Key Areas of Improvement for Curriculum Collaboration | Removing barriers to collaborative relationships | <p>Removing barriers to building collaborative relationships between academics, employers and professional bodies. Includes sub themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing the experience of collaboration</li> <li>• Inauthentic collaboration approaches</li> <li>• Process improvements</li> </ul> | 93  |
|  | Mismatches in mutual understanding               | <p>Mismatches in understanding between collaboration partners. Includes sub themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived added value in partnership</li> <li>• Diversity &amp; inclusivity in curriculum collaboration</li> <li>• Scheduling &amp; timing challenges</li> </ul>                         | 87  |
|  | Improving student engagement                     | Impact on student engagement of involving employers and professional bodies in curriculum.  | 14  |
|  | Overcoming academic negativity                   | <p>Overcoming reasons why academics are negative towards employer and professional body collaboration around curriculum. Includes sub theme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward &amp; recognition</li> </ul>   | 29  |
|  | Resolving resource &                             | Need for academics to have improved resourcing  | 101 |

|  |                        |  |  |
|--|------------------------|--|--|
|  | workload hours support | <p>and workload hours support to develop curriculum collaboration with employers and professional bodies.<br/>Includes sub themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business development role</li> <li>• Central careers &amp; employability teams</li> <li>• Systematic approaches to curriculum collaboration</li> </ul> |  |
|--|------------------------|--|--|

## References

AACSB International (2017) *Business School Data Guide* Tampa, Florida: AACSB International.

Advance, H.E. (2011) *Inclusive curriculum design in higher education: Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance*. York, UK: Advance HE. Available at: [https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/business\\_management\\_accountancy\\_and\\_finance\\_1568037037.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/business_management_accountancy_and_finance_1568037037.pdf) (Accessed: 10th October 2023).

AdvanceHE (2016) *Essential frameworks for enhancing student success frameWORKS 02 Embedding employability in higher education Essential frameworks for enhancing student success frameWORKS 02 Embedding employability in higher education*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education> (Accessed: 15th June 2022).

AGCAS (2020) *Evaluating the effectiveness of employer engagement - summary report September 2020*. Sheffield: AGCAS. Available at: <https://www.agcas.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/4a3ddd61-3900-4dc8-915c-f67185cea256> (Accessed: 15th June 2022).

Al-Majeed, S. (2022) *Half of students feel they're not ready for a job – we must solve the HE-industry disconnect*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/half-students-feel-theyre-not-ready-job-we-must-solve-heindustry-disconnect> (Accessed: 21st June 2022).

Andrews, M. (2023) *We're asking questions about curriculum transformation*. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/were-asking-questions-about-curriculum-transformation/> (Accessed: 15th May 2023).

Association of MBAs (2021) *INTERNATIONAL MBA SURVEY 2020* London: Association of MBAs, pp. 1-20.

Association of MBAs (2020) *AMBA\_BGA\_Employer-report\_2020\_final*. London: Association of MBAs. Available at: [https://www.associationofmbas.com/app/uploads/2020/08/Employer-report.final\\_.pdf](https://www.associationofmbas.com/app/uploads/2020/08/Employer-report.final_.pdf) (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Atfield, G., Hunt, W. and Luchinskaya, D. (2021) *Employability programmes and work placements in UK higher education*. London: Department for Education. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1035200/employability\\_programmes\\_and\\_work\\_placements\\_in\\_UK\\_HE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1035200/employability_programmes_and_work_placements_in_UK_HE.pdf) (Accessed: 2nd January 2023).

Atkinson, S.P. (2015) 'Graduate Competencies, Employability and Educational Taxonomies: Critique of Intended Learning Outcomes', *Practice and Evidence of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 10(2), pp. 154-177.

Baker, S.E. and Edwards, R. (2012) *How many qualitative interviews is enough?* Southampton, UK: NCRM. Available at: [https://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/id/eprint/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](https://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/id/eprint/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf) (Accessed: 1st December 2023).

Bass, T. (2014) *Not Everything in Textbooks is True: teaching discourse analysis to undergraduate business students*. Available at: <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/publications/not-everything-in-textbooks-is-true-teaching-discourse-analysis-t-2> (Accessed: 12th November 2023).

BBC News (2003) *Irresponsible Hodge under fire*. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2655127.stm> (Accessed: 10th October 2023).

Bloomberg, L. and Volpe, M. (2019) *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End, 4th Edition*. 4th edn. Beaverton: Ringgold Inc.



Bobeva, M. and Ngugi, I.K. (2017) *Embracing The Challenge: Reflections On Teaching Innovation Management Through Live Business Projects* Bournemouth: Bournemouth University.

Bobeva, M., Landmark, K. and Khaled, A. (2020) *Developing global talent for the world of work through staff-student-industry collaboration and co-creation on a global scale.*

Boeije, H. (2010) *Analysis in qualitative research.* 1st edn. Los Angeles: SAGE, pp. 1-223.

Boshoff, S. and Fernandes, N. (2020) 'Connecting the Classroom to the Business World: Evolvement of a PALAR Journey in a Disciplinary Environment', *Educational Research for Social Change*, 9(1), pp. 58-75 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2020/v9i0a5>.

Boud, D. and Solomon, N. (2001) *Work-based learning : a new higher education?* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Brabner, R. (2023) *Proving commitment to a civic agenda.* Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/proving-commitment-to-a-civic-agenda/> (Accessed: 10th May 2023).

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful qualitative research : a practical guide for beginners* Los Angeles, California: SAGE.

Bravenboer, D. (2023) *Apprenticeship progression could be a model for all of higher education.* Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/apprenticeship-progression-could-be-a-model-for-all-of-higher-education/> (Accessed: 6th February 2023).

Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (2016) *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis : elements of the sociology of corporate life.* 3rd edn. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

CABS (2023a) *Graduate Outcomes in Business & Management: Analysis of HESA data for 2019/20.* London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at: <https://charteredabs.org/publications/chartered->

[association-of-business-schools-publishes-analysis-of-latest-graduate-outcomes-data/](#) (Accessed: 18th August 2023).

CABS (2023b) *STUDENT ENROLMENTS IN BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT STUDIES Analysis of 2021/22 data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency*. London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at: <https://charteredabs.org/publications/student-enrolments-in-business-management-studies-2021-22-our-latest-report/> (Accessed: 14th April 2023).

CABS (2017) *THE IMPACT OF EXECUTIVE EDUCATION A review of current practice & trends* London: CABS.

Callaghan, P. (2022) *Graduate employment is not an ignoble pursuit for universities*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/graduate-employment-not-ignoble-pursuit-universities> (Accessed: 22nd August 2022).

Cantafio, G.U. and Ikoawaji, A.M. (2022) 'Securing the future of work: an analysis on skill gaps between Business Education and industry needs in the UK', *Business Educator*, 2(2), pp. 1-21.

Carlile, P.R., Davidson, S.H., Freeman, K.W., Thomas, H. and Venkatraman, N. (2016) *Reimagining Business Education*. 1st edn. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 1-97.

Carnell, B. and Fung, D. (2017) *Developing the Higher Education Curriculum; Research-Based Education in Practice*, in Carnell, B. and Fung, D. (eds.) . 1st edn. London: UCL Press, pp. 243-244.

Cashian, P., Clarke, J. and Richardson, M. (2015) *Perspectives on: Employability Is it Time to Move the Employability Debate on?* London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at: [https://explore.openaire.eu/search/publication?articleId=61;core\\_ac\\_uk::66df445a54e019f5552a1bb1f03f84b6](https://explore.openaire.eu/search/publication?articleId=61;core_ac_uk::66df445a54e019f5552a1bb1f03f84b6) (Accessed: 7th October 2021).

Chadha, D. and Toner, J. (2017) 'Focusing in on employability: using content analysis to explore the employability discourse in UK and USA

universities', *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 14(1), pp. 1-26 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0071-0>.

Chartered Association of Business Schools (2022) *Chartered-ABS-Annual-Membership-Survey-2021-Final (1)*. London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at: <https://charteredabs.org/results-from-the-2022-chartered-abs-annual-membership-survey/> (Accessed: 13th November 2022).

Chartered Management Institute (2021) *employability-skills-research\_work-ready-graduates (1)*. London: Chartered Management Institute. Available at: [https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/employability-skills-research\\_work-ready-graduates.pdf](https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/employability-skills-research_work-ready-graduates.pdf) (Accessed: 21st June 2022).

Cheng, M., Adekola, O., Albia, J. and Cai, S. (2022) 'Employability in higher education: a review of key stakeholders' perspectives', *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, 16(1), pp. 16-31 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/HEED-03-2021-0025>.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2017) 'Thematic analysis', *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), pp. 297-298 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>.

Clayton, P.R. and Clopton, J. (2019) 'Business curriculum redesign: Integrating data analytics', *Journal of education for business*, 94(1), pp. 57-63 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2018.1502142>.

Cole, D. and Tibby, M. (2013) *Defining and developing your approach to employability*. York: Advance HE. Available at: [https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/employability\\_framework\\_1568037213.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/employability_framework_1568037213.pdf) (Accessed: 3rd November 2021).

Collini, S. (2012) *What are universities for?*. 1st edn. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 1-240.

Cook, D.A. (2019) *Healthcare Simulation Research, A Practical Guide*. 1st edn. Switzerland: Springer, pp. 55-60.

Cook, E. (2022) 'A narrative review of graduate employability models: their paradigms, and relationships to teaching and curricula', *Journal of teaching and learning for graduate employability*, 13(1) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2022vol13no1art1483>.

Cooper, H.M. (1988) 'Organizing knowledge syntheses: A taxonomy of literature reviews', *Knowledge in Society*, 1(104), pp. 1-21 Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03177550>.

Cotronei-Baird, V.S. (2020) 'Academic hindrances in the integration of employability skills development in teaching and assessment practice', *Higher education*, 79(2), pp. 203-223 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00405-4>.

Council on Higher Education (2011) *Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education. Available at: [https://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/Higher\\_Education\\_Monitor\\_12.pdf](https://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/Higher_Education_Monitor_12.pdf) (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design : choosing among five approaches* / Los Angeles : SAGE Publications.

Crotty, M. (1998) *The foundations of social research : meaning and perspective in the research process*. 1st edn. London: SAGE, pp. 1-248.

Dahlin, B., Ostergard, E. and Hugo, A. (2009) 'An Argument for Reversing the Bases of Science Education, A Phenomenological Alternative to Cognitionism', *Nordic Studies in Science Education*, 5(2), pp. 185-199.

Dandridge, N. (2023) *The relationship between teaching and research in UK universities - what is it and does it matter?* Oxford, UK: Higher Education Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-relationship-between-teaching-and-research-in-UK-universities-what-is-it-and-does-it-matter.pdf> (Accessed: 14th October 2023).

Daubney, K. (2022) "Teaching employability is not my job!": redefining embedded employability from within the higher education curriculum', *Higher education, skills and work-based learning*, 12(1), pp. 92-106  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-07-2020-0165>.

Davey, T., Baaken, T., Galan-Muros, V. and Meerman, A. (2011) *The State of European University Business Cooperation. Part of the DG Education and Culture Study on the Cooperation between Higher Education Institutions and Public and Private Organisations in Europe*. Brussels: Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre, Munster University of Applied Sciences. Available at:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257926060\\_The\\_State\\_of\\_European\\_University\\_Business\\_Cooperation\\_Part\\_of\\_the\\_DG\\_Education\\_and\\_Culture\\_Study\\_on\\_the\\_Cooperation\\_between\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Institutions\\_and\\_Public\\_and\\_Private\\_Organisations\\_in\\_Europe](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257926060_The_State_of_European_University_Business_Cooperation_Part_of_the_DG_Education_and_Culture_Study_on_the_Cooperation_between_Higher_Education_Institutions_and_Public_and_Private_Organisations_in_Europe) (Accessed: 26th October 2022).

David, F.R., David, M.E. and David, F.R. (2011) 'What are business schools doing for business today?', *Business horizons*, 54(1), pp. 51-62  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2010.09.001>.

Department for Education (2023) *Top UK apprenticeship employers celebrated*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/top-uk-apprenticeship-employers-celebrated> (Accessed: 4th July 23023).

Dickfos, J. (2019) 'Academic professional development : Benefits of a pracademic experience', *International journal of work-integrated learning*, 20(3), pp. 243-255.

Dommett, D., Howieson, B. and Sturgess, A. (2023) *The Future Is Now: Redefining Executive Education for Turbulent Times*. London: Chartered Association of Business Schools. Available at:  
<https://charteredabs.org/publications/the-future-is-now-redefining-executive-education-for-turbulent-times/#:~:text=The%20authors%20of%20this%20paper,positive%20opportunities%20presented%20by%20new> (Accessed: 12th June 2023).

DWP (2012) *Early impacts of work experience*. London: Department of Work and Pensions. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/222943/early\\_impacts\\_of\\_work\\_experience.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/222943/early_impacts_of_work_experience.pdf) (Accessed: 2nd January 2023).

Exeed, E. (2023) *Quality of UK Education*. Available at: <https://myexeed.com/quality-of-uk-education/#:~:text=UNIVERSITIES%20WITH%20A%20GLOBAL%20REPUTATION,the%20best%20in%20the%20world>. (Accessed: 8th August 2023).

Fletcher-Brown, J., Knibbs, K. and Middleton, K. (2015) 'Developing "employability": the 3Es case for live-client learning', *Higher education, skills and work-based learning*, 5(2), pp. 181-195 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-05-2014-0011>.

Forder, C. and Fowlie, J. (2020) *Employability for All: How Focusing on Pre-Professional Identity Formation Can Boost Inclusivity*. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/546022170/a337ec5879> (Accessed: 13th October 2023).

Frankham, J. (2017) 'Employability and higher education: the follies of the 'Productivity Challenge' in the Teaching Excellence Framework', *Journal of education policy*, 32(5), pp. 628-641 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1268271>.

Fugate, M., Kinicki, A.J. and Ashforth, B.E. (2004) 'Employability: A psycho-social construct, its dimensions, and applications', *Journal of vocational behavior*, 65(1), pp. 14-38 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.10.005>.

Fung, D. (2017) *Connected Curriculum for Higher Education*. 1st edn. London: UCL Press, pp. 84-100.

Gordon, C. (2019) *Workplace lessons for assessing group work*. Available at: <https://charteredabs.org/workplace-lessons-for-assessing->

[group-work/#1574352545001-5208d2ba-a3e4](#) (Accessed: 9th August 2023).

Gordon, C. (2018) *Assessment confidence in the transition to business and management studies in HE*. . ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

GOV.UK (2021) *Participation measures in higher education*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-measures-in-higher-education#explore-data-and-files> (Accessed: 5th November 2022).

Gray, D.E. (2022) *Doing research in the real world*. 5th edn. London: SAGE, pp. 17.

Greener, S. (2008) *Business Research Methods*. 1st edn. UK: Ventus Publishing, pp. 1-110.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. 1st edn. London: Sage Publications, pp. 1-294.

GuildHE (2018) *Practice-Informed Learning The Rise of the Dual Professional*. London: Guild HE. Available at: [https://guildhe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Practice-Informed\\_Learning- Final\\_Nov\\_18.pdf](https://guildhe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Practice-Informed_Learning- Final_Nov_18.pdf) (Accessed: 8th March 2021).

Hansen, S.L. and Daniels, K. (2023) *How to enable the employability of university graduates*. 1st edn. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 1-249.

Hatch, J.A. (2002) *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. 1st edn. New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 148.

Hatt, L. (2019) 'Threshold Concepts at the Sharp Edge' *Threshold Concepts on the Edge* Online: BRILL.

Healey, R.L., Bass, T., Caulfield, J., Hoffman, A., McGinn, M.K., Miller-Young, J. and Haigh, M.J. (2013) 'Being Ethically Minded: Practising the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in an Ethical Manner', *Teaching*

and learning inquiry, 1(2), pp. 23-33 Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearning.1.2.23>.

Healy, A., Perkmann, M., Goddard, J. and Kempton, L. (2014) *Measuring the Impact of University-Business Cooperation: Final Report Creative Fuse North East: Initial Report of the Project View project Decentralisation and Local Growth View project*. Luxembourg: European Commission. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8c3b24c9-2135-4436-993f-6d09ca87fc5f/language-en/format-PDF/source-196991702> (Accessed: 28th March 2021).

HEFCW (2023) *Good quality work experience crucial for student employability*. Available at: <https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/en/news/good-quality-work-experience-crucial-for-student-employability/> (Accessed: 4th May 2023).

HESA (2023) *Graduate Outcomes data and statistics 2020/21*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/31-05-2023/graduate-outcomes-data-and-statistics-202021> (Accessed: 2nd June 2023).

HESA (2021) *Graduate-Outcomes-statistical-measure-design-nature-of-work-20210608*. Cheltenham: HESA. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/files/Graduate-Outcomes-statistical-measure-design-nature-of-work-20210608.pdf> (Accessed: 7th November 2022).

Hicks, O. (2018) 'Curriculum in higher education: Confusion, complexity and currency', *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*, 5, pp. 5-30 Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332932848\\_CURRICULUM\\_IN\\_HIGHER\\_EDUCATION\\_CONFUSION\\_COMPLEXITY\\_AND\\_CURRENCY\\_in\\_Kandlbinder\\_P\\_Ed\\_2018\\_HERDSA\\_Review\\_of\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Vol\\_5\\_pp\\_5-30\\_Downloadable\\_at\\_herdsaorgau/link/5ce380faa6fdccc9ddc15135/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332932848_CURRICULUM_IN_HIGHER_EDUCATION_CONFUSION_COMPLEXITY_AND_CURRENCY_in_Kandlbinder_P_Ed_2018_HERDSA_Review_of_Higher_Education_Vol_5_pp_5-30_Downloadable_at_herdsaorgau/link/5ce380faa6fdccc9ddc15135/download).

High Fliers Research Limited (2021) *GM21-Report*. London: High Fliers Research Limited. Available at:



[https://www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2021/graduate\\_market/GM21-Report.pdf](https://www.highfliers.co.uk/download/2021/graduate_market/GM21-Report.pdf) (Accessed: 5th November 2022).

Higher Education Academy (2006)

*Learning and employability\_Series\_Two (1)*. York: Advance HE.

Available at:

[https://www.academia.edu/5364518/Learning\\_and\\_employability\\_Series\\_Two](https://www.academia.edu/5364518/Learning_and_employability_Series_Two) (Accessed: 1st November 2021).

Holden, M.T. and Lynch, P. (2004) 'Choosing the Appropriate Methodology: Understanding Research Philosophy', *The Marketing Review*, 4(4), pp. 1-18 Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1362/1469347042772428>.

House of Commons Library (2023) *Higher education student numbers*.

Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7857/> (Accessed: 22nd February 2023).

Hughes, J.A. and Sharrock, W.W. (1998) *The philosophy of social research*. 1st edn. London: Routledge, pp. 228.

Husbands, C. (2022) *Don't forget that the 'academic' and the 'vocational' are deeply intertwined*. Available at:

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/dont-forget-academic-and-vocational-are-deeply-intertwined> (Accessed: 21st April 2022).

Inceoglu, I., Selenko, E., McDowall, A. and Schlachter, S. (2019) '(How) Do work placements work? Scrutinizing the quantitative evidence for a theory-driven future research agenda', *Journal of vocational behavior*, 110, pp. 317-337 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.09.002>.

Institute of Student Employers (2022) *Introducing the new Work Experience Standard*. Available at: <https://insights.ise.org.uk/work-experience-internships/blog-introducing-the-new-work-experience-standard/> (Accessed: 21st August 2023).

Jackson, D. (2019) 'Students' and their Supervisors' Evaluations on Professional Identity in Work Placements', *Vocations and Learning*, 12(2), pp. 245-266 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-018-9207-1>.

Jackson, D. (2016) 'Modelling graduate skill transfer from university to the workplace', *Journal of education and work*, 29(2), pp. 199-231 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2014.907486>.

Jackson, D. (2015) 'Employability skill development in work-integrated learning: Barriers and best practice', *Studies in higher education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 40(2), pp. 350-367 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842221>.

Jackson, D. (2014) 'Factors influencing job attainment in recent bachelor graduates: Evidence from Australia', *Higher education*, 68(1), pp. 135-153 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9696-7>.

Jackson, D. (2013) 'Business graduate employability - where are we going wrong?', *Higher education research and development*, 32(5), pp. 776-790 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.709832>.

Jackson, D. (2012) 'Business Undergraduates' Perceptions of Their Capabilities in Employability Skills: Implications for Industry and Higher Education', *Industry & higher education*, 26(5), pp. 345-356 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5367/ihe.2012.0117>.

Jackson, D. (2010) 'An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skill gaps in modern graduates', *The international journal of management education*, 8(3), pp. 29-58 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3794/ijme.83.288>.

Jackson, D. and Bridgstock, R. (2018) 'Evidencing student success in the contemporary world-of-work: renewing our thinking', *Higher education research and development*, 37(5), pp. 984-998 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1469603>.

Jackson, D. and Chapman, E. (2012) 'Non-technical competencies in undergraduate business degree programs: Australian and UK

perspectives', *Studies in higher education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 37(5), pp. 541-567 Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.527935>.

Jackson, D. and Dean, B.A. (2022) 'The contribution of different types of work-integrated learning to graduate employability', *Higher education research and development*, ahead-of-print(-), pp. 1-18 Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2048638>.

Jackson, D. and Wilton, N. (2016) 'Developing career management competencies among undergraduates and the role of work-integrated learning', *Teaching in higher education*, 21(3), pp. 266-286 Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1136281>.

Jackson, P. and Cox, E. (2020) *Doing Coaching Research*. 1st edn. London: Sage Publications Limited, pp. 1-208.

Jacob, M., Kearney, M. and Meek, V.L. (2022) *Higher Education and Research in the Post-Knowledge Society: Scenarios for a Future World*. 1st edn. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 48-67.

Jegade, F. (2021) *Doing a PhD in the Social Sciences*. 1st edn. London: Routledge, pp. 1-262.

JISC (2020) *Employer-university collaboration Jisc and Emerge Education insights for universities and startups Report 5*. Bristol: JISC. Available at: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/reports/the-future-of-employer-university-collaboration#> (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Jones, F. (2022) *What 2022 meant for business-university collaboration*. Available at: <https://www.ncub.co.uk/insight/what-2022-meant-for-business-university-collaboration/> (Accessed: 2nd December 2023).

Jones, K., Christie, F. and Brophy, S. (2023) 'Getting in, getting on, going further: Exploring the role of employers in the degree apprentice to graduate transition', *British educational research journal*, 49(1), pp. 93-109 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3831>.

Kernohan, D. (2023) *The UK's shadow higher education regulators*. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-uks-shadow-higher-education-regulators/> (Accessed: 11th May 2023).

Komljenovic, J. (2019) 'Linkedin, platforming labour, and the new employability mandate for universities', *Globalisation, societies and education*, 17(1), pp. 28-43 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2018.1500275>.

Kroon, N. and Franco, M. (2022) 'Antecedents, processes and outcomes of an internship program: an employer's perspective', *Journal of applied research in higher education*, 14(2), pp. 556-574 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-09-2020-0315>.

Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing interviews* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Lanford, M. (2019) *The Idea of a University* *The Literary Encyclopedia* US: The Literary Encyclopedia, pp. 1-6.

Lem, P. (2022) *Universities cream off cash as UK business school income rebounds*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/universities-cream-cash-uk-business-school-income-rebounds> (Accessed: Nov 7, 2022).

Levy, P. and Petruilis, R. (2012) 'How do first-year university students experience inquiry and research, and what are the implications for the practice of inquiry-based learning?', *Studies in higher education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 37(1), pp. 85-101 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.499166>.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry* Beverly Hills, Calif. ;: Sage.

London Higher (2023) *Powering London: How Universities Drive Growth Through People, Place and Knowledge*. London: London Higher. Available at: [https://londonhigher.ac.uk/resource/powering-london-how-universities-drive-growth-through-people-place-and-knowledge/#:~:text=Powering%20London%3A%20how%20universities%](https://londonhigher.ac.uk/resource/powering-london-how-universities-drive-growth-through-people-place-and-knowledge/#:~:text=Powering%20London%3A%20how%20universities%20)

[20drive%20growth%20through%20people%2C%20place%20and%20knowledge,-  
Type%3A%20Reports&text=This%20report%20shows%20the%20enormous,the%20rest%20of%20the%20country.](#) (Accessed: 18th June 2023).

Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D. and Lewin, J. (2011) *Employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates*. London: Edge Foundation. Available at: [https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/employability\\_skills\\_as\\_pdf\\_-\\_final\\_online\\_version.pdf](https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/employability_skills_as_pdf_-_final_online_version.pdf) (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Lowe, T. (2023) 'Embedding employability into the curriculum: five recommendations to improve widening participation students' graduate employability', *Journal of learning development in higher education*, (26) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi26.925>.

Major, D. (2016) 'Models of work-based learning, examples and reflections', *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 8(1), pp. 17-28 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-03-2016-0003>.

Manchester University (2021) *Internships, Placements & Work Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University. Available at: <https://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/services/> (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Market Research Society (2023) *MRS-code-of-conduct-2023*. London: Market Research Society. Available at: <https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code-of-conduct> (Accessed: 19th July 2023).

McEwan, C. (2023) *Teamwork, support and structure: the core principles of rewarding student internships*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/teamwork-support-and-structure-core-principles-rewarding-student-internships> (Accessed: 14th August 2023).

McKinsey & Company (2021) *Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work*. New York: McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work#/> (Accessed: 12th August 2023).

Mikecz, R. (2012) 'Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues', *Qualitative inquiry*, 18(6), pp. 482-493 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800412442818>.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldaña, J. (2013) *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook*. 3rd edn. Los Angeles, California: SAGE.

Millican, J. and Bourner, T. (2014) *Learning to Make a Difference: Student-community engagement and the higher education curriculum* Brighton: NIACE, pp. 1-249.

Morgan, G. and Smircich, L. (1980) 'The Case for Qualitative Research', *The Academy of Management review*, 5(4), pp. 491-500 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/257453>.

Morgan, J. (2022a) *English regulator to push ahead with numerical 'quality' measures*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/english-regulator-push-ahead-numerical-quality-measures> (Accessed: 27th July 2022).

Morgan, J. (2022b) *Eight providers face 'boots-on-the ground' OfS investigations*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/eight-providers-face-boots-ground-ofs-investigations> (Accessed: 30th December 2022).

Morgan, J. (2022c) *'Virtually all' universities risk OfS sanction under new rules*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/virtually-all-universities-risk-ofs-sanction-under-new-rules#:~:text=Large%20numbers%20of%20English%20universities,be%20singled%20out%20for%20scrutiny>. (Accessed: 1st February 2022).

Morley, D.A. and Jamil, M.G. (2021) *Applied Pedagogies for Higher Education Real World Learning and Innovation across the Curriculum*. 1st edn. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 1-425.

National Statistics (2023) *Apprenticeships and traineeships*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2022-23> (Accessed: 27th January 2023).

Nawaz, R. (2023) *Degree apprenticeships: a great UK invention that needs better nurture*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/degree-apprenticeships-great-uk-invention-needs-better-nurture> (Accessed: 26th January 2023).

Neubauer, B.E., Witkop, C.T. and Varpio, L. (2019) 'How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others', *Perspectives on medical education; Perspect Med Educ*, 8(2), pp. 90-97 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>.

Norton, S. (2022) *Employability in the curriculum report*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/hefcw-publishes-its-employability-curriculum-report> (Accessed: 4th May 2023).

Norton, S. and Dalrymple, R. (2021) *Employability: breaking the mould - A case study compendium*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/employability-breaking-mould> (Accessed: 26th October 2022).

Norton, S. and Dalrymple, R. (2020) *Enhancing Graduate Employability: a case study compendium*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/enhancing-graduate-employability-case-study-compendium> (Accessed: 28th October 2021).

Norton, S. and Penaluna, A. (2022) *3 Es for Wicked Problems: Employability, Enterprise, and Entrepreneurship: Solving Wicked Problems*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/3-es-wicked-problems-employability-enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-solving->

[wicked#:~:text=3%20Es%20for%20Wicked%20Problems,Solving%20Wicked%20Problems%20%7C%20Advance%20HE](#) (Accessed: 31st January 2022).

Office for Students (2022) *Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England*. Available at:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/>

(Accessed: 20th August 2023).

OfS (2021) *Place matters: Inequality, employment and the role of higher education*. London, UK: Office for Students. Available at:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/e7b7531f-f61b-4641-9952-8d38ff12a321/ofs-insight-brief-11-updated-10-may-2022.pdf> (Accessed:

11th October 2023).

O'Leary, S. (2013) 'Collaborations in Higher Education with Employers and Their Influence on Graduate Employability: An Institutional Project', *Enhancing learning in the social sciences*, 5(1), pp. 37-50 Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.11120/elss.2013.05010037>.

Osika, A., MacMahon, S., Lodge, J. and Carroll, A. (2022) *Contextual learning: linking learning to the real world*. Available at:

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/contextual-learning-linking-learning-real-world> (Accessed: 21st April 2022).

Pegg, A., Waldock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S. and Lawton, R. (2012a) *Employability and Good Learning in Higher Education*. York: Higher Education Academy. Available at: [https://s3.eu-west-](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012_1568036839.pdf)

[2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/pedagogy\\_for\\_employability\\_update\\_2012\\_1568036839.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012_1568036839.pdf) (Accessed: 22nd April 2021).

Pegg, A., Waldock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S. and Lawton, R. (2012b) *Pedagogy for employability*. York: Advance HE. Available at:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/pedagogy-employability-2012> (Accessed: 4th November 2021).



Pereira, E.T., Vilas-Boas, M. and Rebelo, C.F.C. (2020) 'University curricula and employability: The stakeholders' views for a future agenda', *Industry & higher education*, 34(5), pp. 321-329 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220901676>.

Perez, J., Nieto-Bravo, J. and Santamaria-Rodriguez, J. (2019) 'Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Human and Social Sciences Research', *Civilizar: Ciencias sociales y Humanas*, 20(38), pp. 137-146 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.22518/jour.ccsch/2020.1a10>.

Philpotts, E. (2022) *More UK graduates ending up in low-skilled work, HR body warns*. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/more-uk-graduates-ending-low-skilled-work-hr-body-warns> (Accessed: Nov 7, 2022).

QAA (2020) *impact-of-covid-19-analysis-of-surveys-of-psrbs (1)*. London: QAA. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-work-with/professional-statutory-and-regulatory-bodies#> (Accessed: 5th November 2022).

QS (2022) *QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022*. Available at: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/employability-rankings/2022> (Accessed: Nov 16, 2022).

Rae, D. (2007) 'Connecting enterprise and graduate employability', *Education & training*, 49(8/9), pp. 605-619 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400910710834049>.

Riebe, L., Sibson, R., Roepen, D. and Meakins, K. (2013) 'Impact of Industry Guest Speakers on Business Students' Perceptions of Employability Skills Development', *Industry & higher education*, 27(1), pp. 55-66 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5367/ihe.2013.0140>.

Roller, M.R. and Lavrakas, P.J. (2015) *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. 1st edn. New York: The Guilford Press.

Russell Group (2023) *Education and Skills for Growth*. London: The Russell Group of Universities. Available at: [https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/6129/educationandskillsforgrowth\\_final.pdf](https://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/6129/educationandskillsforgrowth_final.pdf) (Accessed: 21st April 2023).

Salford University (2022) *Making Career Decisions*. Available at: [https://www.salford.ac.uk/careers/career-planning/making-career-decisions#:~:text=The%20DOTS%20Model%20\(Law%20%26%20Watts,Decision%20making](https://www.salford.ac.uk/careers/career-planning/making-career-decisions#:~:text=The%20DOTS%20Model%20(Law%20%26%20Watts,Decision%20making) (Accessed: 30th December 2022).

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2012) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 6th edn. London: Pearson.

Sheridan, L., Price, O., Plumb, M., Curial, R., McDonnell, T. and Pocius, R. (2021) 'Uncovering WIL practices to enable WIL's expansion in higher education', *Journal of university teaching & learning practice*, 18(6), pp. 54-68 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.6.05>.

Shibayama, S. and Lawson, C. (2021) 'The use of rewards in the sharing of research resources', *Research policy*, 50(7), pp. 104260 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2021.104260>.

Sin, C. and Neave, G. (2016) 'Employability deconstructed: perceptions of Bologna stakeholders', *Studies in higher education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 41(8), pp. 1447-1462 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.977859>.

Southwark Chamber of Commerce (2023) *Our executive committee*. Available at: <https://southwarkcommerce.com/executive-committee/> (Accessed: 1st January 2023).

Study International (2023) *The real-world value of university guest speakers*. Available at: <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/real-world-value-university-guest-speakers/> (Accessed: 12th October 2023).

Sundler, A.J., Lindberg, E., Nilsson, C. and Palmér, L. (2019) 'Qualitative thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology', *Nursing open*, 6(3), pp. 733-739 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275>.

Talbot, J., Perrin, D. and Meakin, D. (2014) 'Risk management and cultural virtue in HE co-delivery arrangements', *Quality Assurance in Education*, 22(2) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-12-2012-0047>.

Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (2010) *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, Calif. ;: SAGE.

The British Academy (2021) *Business-and-management-provision-in-UK-higher-education* London: The British Academy, pp. 1-55.

The Sutton Trust (2021) *The-University-of-Life*. London: The Sutton Trust. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/the-university-of-life-skills-employability-students/> (Accessed: 3rd November 2021).

Tomlinson, M. (2017) 'Forms of graduate capital and their relationship to graduate employability', *Education & Training*, 59(4) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2016-0090>.

Tracy, S.J. (2010) 'Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research', *Qualitative inquiry*, 16(10), pp. 837-851 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.

UCAS (2019) *Business, management, and administrative studies*. Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/explore/subjects/business-management-and-administrative-studies> (Accessed: Nov 6, 2022).

UKRI (2023) *Knowledge Exchange Framework*. Available at: (Accessed: 10th October 2023).

Uniguide (2023) *Should you choose an accredited course*. Available at: <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/choosing-a-course/accredited-courses> (Accessed: 11th October 2023).

UniversitiesUK (2021) *Higher Education in Numbers*. London: UniversitiesUK. Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/insights-and-analysis/higher-education-numbers> (Accessed: 28th March 2021).

University of Manchester (2023) *Co-designing the curriculum with students and employers*. Available at: <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/humteachlearn/2021/06/28/co-designing-curriculum-students-employers/> (Accessed: 12th October 2023).

University of Plymouth (2023) *External examining (taught programmes)*. Available at: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/students-and-family/governance/central-quality-office/external-examiners> (Accessed: 1st January 2023).

University of South Australia (2023) *Social Philosophy for Businesses, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Available at: <https://lo.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=6745&sectionid=112361#symbolic%20interactionism> (Accessed: 15th October 2023).

University of Wales Trinity Saint David (2023) *Professional Doctorates*. Available at: <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/courses/professional-doctorates/> (Accessed: 14th October 2023).

van Manen, M. and van Manen, M. (2021) 'Doing Phenomenological Research and Writing', *Qual Health Res*, 31(6), pp. 1069-1082 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323211003058>.

Vitali, J. (2023) *More Help To Grow*. London: Policy Exchange. Available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/more-help-to-grow/> (Accessed: 6th July 2023).

Warwick, J. and Howard, A. (2014) 'Strengthening student engagement with quantitative subjects in a Business Faculty', *e-journal of business education & scholarship of teaching*, 8(1), pp. 32-43.

Wharton, C.Y. and Horrocks, J. (2015) *Students' perceptions of employability within their degree programme: highlighting the disparity between what academics believe is included and the student experience*. , Glasgow. June 2015. Glasgow: QAA Scotland, pp. 1.

Whistance, D. and Campbell, S. (2018) *Seven ESE Factors for Career-Ready Students*. Southampton: Higher Education Careers Service Unit.

Available at: <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/investigating-the-impact-of-a-careers-development-model> (Accessed: 25th January 2021).

Whiting, R. and Pritchard, K. (2021) *Collecting Qualitative Data Using Digital Methods* London: Sage Publications Limited, pp. 12.

Whitton, D. (2019) *A MODEL OF EMPLOYABILITY FOR PART-TIME LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES.* . Northumbria University.

Wijayaratna, K. and Cottam, E. (2022) *External engagement in academia: lessons from the business world.* Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/external-engagement-academia-lessons-business-world> (Accessed: 21st April 2022).

Williams, S. (2014) *Business schools have lost a staggering amount of credibility in the business community.* Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/30/business-school-credibility/> (Accessed: 10th October 2023).

Williams, T. (2023a) *Are degree apprenticeships ready to graduate?* Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/depth/are-degree-apprenticeships-ready-graduate> (Accessed: 13th April 2023).

Williams, T. (2023b) *Unpredictable business school enrolment poses threat to finances.* Available at: Third of business schools expecting income drop | Times Higher Education (THE) (Accessed: 13th November 2023).

Williams, T. (2022a) *Do universities teach students to think critically?* Available at: <https://bluesyemre.com/2022/09/08/do-universities-teach-students-to-think-critically/> (Accessed: 23rd September 2022).

Williams, T. (2022b) *Six in 10 graduates must find work in 15 months, OfS confirms.* Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/six-10-graduates-must-find-work-15-months-ofs-confirms> (Accessed: 30th September 2022).

Wilson, T. (2012) *A Review of Business-University Collaboration*. London: HEFCE. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-university-collaboration-the-wilson-review> (Accessed: 31st December 2022).

Wilson., A. (2012) *Marketing Research: An Integrated Approach*. 3rd edn. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, pp. 158.

Yorke, M. and Knight, P.T. (2006) *Learning & Employability Embedding employability into the curriculum*. York: Advance HE. Available at:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/embedding-employability-curriculum> (Accessed: 7th November 2021).

Zahra, A. and Ryan, C. (2005) 'Reflections on the Research Process: The Researcher as Actor and Audience in the World of Regional Tourist Organisations', *Current issues in tourism*, 8(1), pp. 1-21 Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500508668202>.