

Elite UK Business Schools: from Cathedrals of Learning to Cathedrals of Earning?

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KEYWORDS: Higher education; Business Schools; corporatisation; academic capitalism; morality in education; care ethics.

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Abstract

Changes in government policy and funding structures, alongside a rapidly evolving (international) market for education have made education provision a key revenue driver for UK higher education institutions. In this setting, the Russell Group of Universities (RGU), a self-selected association of elite, research intensive universities and Business Schools (BSs) appear to be at the forefront of commercialising their educational activities at an institutional and a discipline level to enhance revenues. Using interview evidence from established academics, and drawing on the framework of academic capitalism and notions of morality in higher education, respectively, this study explores the play-out of the commercialisation of educational activities at a selection of RGU BSs and its implications for education provision. Results suggest major shifts in university cultures and systems – aligning them to capitalise on the market for (international) education. Activities include the creation of a suite of demand- and efficiency- led programmes in response to market intelligence, establishment of financial targets to nurture growth, efforts to seek out new markets and influencing admissions practices. The ensuing changes have disrupted extensively the educational spaces at the micro level in which meaningful learning for business students, as nurtured by values of academic care and responsibility, can take place. Operating at a distance from their students and in restrictive ways in response to large student numbers, faculty are limited in the extent to which they can enrich these students' experiences and enable them to reach their full potential.

Keywords: Higher education, Business Schools, corporatisation, academic capitalism, morality in education, care ethics.

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Introduction

Universities in countries such as the US, UK and Australia have recently undergone radical and fundamental changes in response to multiple, inter-related factors: neoliberalisation and its resulting market-oriented framework; a shift from an elitist tradition of education to mass education; and the emergence of a global economy for education (Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Natale and Doran 2012). The ensuing changes have culminated in what has been variously labelled as the marketization, massification and commodification of higher education (HE), whereby governments enjoin universities to raise their own income by capitalising on the global market for education, and competing aggressively for students and research opportunities (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Bok 2003). In turn, universities in these jurisdictions have become increasingly commercialised and corporatized to raise their own finances (McCarthy and Dragouni 2021; Parker 2011; Slaughter and Rhoades 2009). Elsewhere, in countries such as France, Germany and China, where HE has been preserved as a public good, fewer such changes have ensued.

Today, in the UK, education provision is the biggest driver of university revenues. Tuition fees are the single largest income source for HE institutions (HEIs) – they comprise over 50% of total sector revenue (£20.8bn/£40.6bn: 2019/20ⁱ) and rose by just over a third between 2014/15 and 2019/20 – a period during which funding body and research grants stagnated (HESA 2020). The fee rise is attributable to the introduction of tuition fees for domestic students; removal of tight government controls of the number of international undergraduate students (UG) universities could enrol; and the growing international education market at the UG and postgraduate taught (PGT) levels (Turner et al. 2021). On the latter, the sector has been dubbed an important ‘exporter’ for the UK - international students contributed £20bn to the economy in 2017, a rise of almost 50% in an eight-year period, and the government plans to raise these contributions to £35bn by 2030 (DforE and DforIT 2019).

Within this context, members of the Russell Group of Universities (RGU), a self-selected association of 24 elite, research-intensive institutions (Boliver 2015) appear to have been the

biggest winners. Despite its research focus, education commercialism at the RGU appears to have reached new heights – members teach a quarter and a third of UG and PGT students, respectively and between 2008 and 2019, their teaching-related income rose by almost 300% as compared to the 180% of their more teaching-oriented counterparts (Bell, Brooks, and Urquhart 2022). Regardless, the RGU remains committed to its teaching practices - promising the highest achieving students an outstanding teaching and learning experience that includes quality teaching from field experts; traditional university values including independent learning and creative and analytical thinking; and a broader supportive environment (Russell Group 2014, 2016, 2021). At a discipline level, UK business schools (BSs), like their counterparts in other English-speaking countries appear to have been at the forefront of commercialisation (Bell, Brooks, and Urquhart 2022) – admitting more students than any other discipline at both the UG and PGT levels with international students making up 85%+ of the PGT cohorts (HESA 2020).

The encroachment of the commercial values in HE from the perspective of education provision, scholars reflect compromises the commitment that HEIs owe to their students – to offer them the best learning experience - as institutions prioritise the management of university finances (Bok 2003; Vican, Friedman, and Andreasen 2020). Moreover, the resulting student and peer experiences, Natale and Doran (2012) and Parker (2011) reflect, may reinforce the utilitarian, individualistic tendencies that marketization has nurtured amongst students, and in turn disrupt the traditional ideals that universities have aspired to in shaping student identities and making them active citizens of the world (Harkavy 2006; Barnacle and Dall’Albab 2017; Murillo and Vallentin 2016).

In turn, and inspired by the authors’ own experiences of HE teaching, this paper explores the play-out of the commercialisation of educational activities at a selection of RGU BSs and its implications for teaching practice. To this end, the study first draws on Slaughter and Rhoades’ (2009) framework of academic capitalism (AC) that captures the encroachment of business logics into the academy and changes to the cultural systems that ensue to understand the play-out of BS commercialisation. AC has predominantly sought to explain the development of academic research in science and engineering and here the paper explores its wider impact - specifically on developments in education – in social sciences. Second, to address the

consequences of AC at a micro-level, the paper draws on ideas of morality of education - centred round care for and responsibility towards students (Fitzmaurice 2008 2013; Walker and Gleaves 2016), as a lens through which to understand teaching practice. This focus acknowledges that students' learning experiences are not only guided by pedagogical proficiencies and effectiveness but a moral disposition of educators and academic care that make education effective as well as responsible (Fitzmaurice 2008). Ultimately, both models reflect on the cultural systems underpinning HEI activities.

Prior research into HEI activities in an increasingly commercialised environment has been examined from the perspective of marketization (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon 2011; Parker 2011), and studies have examined the adoption of corporate-style behaviours such as sophisticated marketing and branding exercises and schematic activities to influence league table rankings that enable institutions to compete in the intense student marketplace (Balmer, Liao, and Wang 2010). On education provision, discussions around commercialisation and its implications for teaching and learning have been dominated by personal reflections of senior academics (see Bok 2003; Robertson 2010; Parker 2011), with limited empirical research. In a rare foray, Gebreiter (2021) inquired into the effects of university corporatisation on education provision at a UK BS that embraced managerialist and marketized logics. The author noted how the accounting discipline came to be a 'teaching only' operation that designed and delivered a standardized, highly technical accounting education that, in turn, threatened traditional university values as defined by critical thinking and research and research-led teaching.

Theoretical framing and prior research

Framework of academic capitalism

In their original version of AC, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) drew on resource dependency theory to explain the encroachment of the profit motive and business logics into the academy. Specifically, they explored how HEIs aligned themselves to the knowledge economy and turned to (research-related) revenue generating activities in response to diminished government funding. In this version, they depicted HEIs as victims of neoliberalisation - coerced to react to the environment created by governments.

In a more recent iteration, Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) move away from resource dependency theory to capture and explain the unprecedented levels of academic capitalist activities in HE. The authors highlight the conscious and proactive approach of university managers to leverage institutional resources to generate new sources of income. This iteration recognises the new and intensified ways in which HEIs interact with the state, the market and globalisation, and within this context, calls attention to their changing cultural systems including the behaviours and performances of the various actors within it (Gonzales, Martinez, and Ordu 2014).

AC was originally developed and has principally been deployed to understand the commercialisation of university research and by implication science and engineering (Kauppinen and Kaidesoja 2014; Slaughter and Rhoades 2009). While more recent work has been extended to attend to the micro-foundations of AC including examining the tensions between research and teaching, and work-life balance in academic life (Gonzales, Martinez, and Ordu 2014), focus on research has remained central to these discussions (see, for example, Sigahi and Saltorato 2020).

On educational activities, while there is a clear sense that HEIs act as agents initiating acts of AC through their commercialist style practices of branding and marketing (Balmer, Liao, and Wang 2010), academic research that formally links AC – the HEI, market and state dynamic – to education provision is limited (see Slaughter 2015; Jones and Andrews 2019). Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) offer personal reflections to explain how HE programme prospectuses serve as publicity materials to attract students rather than as informative documents to guide students' choices. Similarly, Kauppinen, Mathies, and Weimer (2015) reflect on how universities from a small number of countries have capitalised on their reputations as HE providers to attract international students, and how these developments have created a new profession of academic agents who facilitate arrangements between universities and prospective students. More recently, Jones and Andrews (2019) reflect on the use of 'personal coaching' in management education as an academic capitalist act to market to students and raise satisfaction levels, and in turn influence league table rankings.

This study draws on the framework of AC to examine the play-out of commercialist practices in education provision in UK BSs - focusing attention on the interactions between HEIs and the

markets, and the associated adaptations of HEI cultural systems to capitalise on the increasing demand for HE in accordance with Slaughter and Rhoades' (2009) renewed idea of AC. In so doing, it shifts the focus of AC from seeking to understand developments in university's research practices to understanding education provision in social sciences, particularly BSs. The paper then progresses to understand the micro-foundations of AC, exploring how AC has affected teaching provision. As with prior research attending to the micro-level analysis of AC (see for example, Gonzales, Martinez, and Ordu 2014), the paper draws on additional theorisation, namely the moral disposition of educators centred round their care for and responsibility towards students (Fitzmaurice 2008) that forms an important part of HE teaching provision (Fitzmaurice 2008; Macfarlane 2004; Walker and Gleaves 2016).

Morality in teaching practice

HE researchers (Fitzmaurice, 2008; Macfarlane, 2004; Walker and Gleaves, 2016) recognise the commitment that educators need to make towards their students. Following Aristotle's ideas of *techne* and *praxis*, Fitzmaurice (2008), respectively, distinguishes between two indispensable dimensions of education provision: the proficient use of pedagogical methodologies and strategies for teaching effectiveness; and an educator ethic that is relational and entails caring for and responsibility towards students. The latter has a moral orientation and resonates with care ethics – a philosophical framework that prioritises relationships and emphasises characteristics such as concernment and compassion for others, attending and responding to them and within this context, reflection and reflexivity (Noddings 2003; Tronto 1993).

In practice, care in education entails a deep obligation to help students learn; developing the whole person; and concernment for student welfare - to enable students to reach their full potential (Fitzmaurice 2008; Noddings 2003; Walker and Gleaves 2016). This, research suggests, is enacted by actively fostering learning in classes; creating positive learning environments and nurturing trust; facilitating student voice; taking students through a variety of learning experiences; and being culturally sensitive (Fitzmaurice 2013; Lomer and Anthony-Okeke 2019; Macfarlane 2004; Noddings 2003; Walker and Gleaves 2016).

At a personal level, being a good academic entails having a strong moral dimension that enables scholars to forge a work-based identity and cultivate a sense of professionalism (Archer 2008; Fitzmaurice 2013). Professionalism is itself a core academic value which Archer (2008) explains is constructed as the ‘embodiment of a principled, ethical and responsible approach to work and work relationships’ (p. 270). As such, in an educational context, caring for and responsibility towards students contributes to academics’ sense of identity and professionalism.

For students, a sustained commitment to caring nurtures students’ development – both subject specific knowledge and wider development that empowers them to become global citizens as they take a stand on who ‘they are becoming’ (Barnacle and Dall’Albab 2017; Walker and Gleaves 2016). Ultimately, as Riivari et al. (2019) note, care underlies the meaningfulness of work for students and staff, alike.

At an institutional level, caring and morally informed practices work best when organisations provide open, supportive and trustful working environments (Liedtka, 1996). For HEIs, this translates into conscious and proactive efforts to foster appropriate cultures where teaching and learning can take place and having sufficient resources that support and enable faculty to exercise their felt responsibilities (Kahu 2013; Liedtka 1996). As such, academics’ moral practices are entwined with organisations’ support structures.

Research approach

This qualitative study was set in five RGU BSs that offered taught programmes at the UG and PGT levelsⁱⁱ. Recognising stratification within the RGU (Wakeling and Savage 2015), schools were selected to reflect the variation in ranking within the Group.ⁱⁱⁱ

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with long-serving faculty members from Accounting and Finance, a specialism in BSs considered to be affected by commercialist practices (Parker 2011). Long-serving faculty, defined as individuals holding the title of senior lecturer or above, including individual institutional variations^{iv}, were selected given their extensive experience and established professional views. Potential candidates were located from their university websites and invited to participate via a generic email that promised

participant anonymity and confidentiality. A personalised reminder email followed to increase participation.

Interviews were loosely guided by an interview guide^v, itself finalised by a pilot study that assessed the feasibility of the research. Themes of discussion included institutional provision of programmes at the UG and PGT levels; heightened student numbers; changes to class sizes and cohort dynamics, including quality of students; and developments in and changes to admissions practices. Moreover, participants were asked about their philosophies of education including care and responsibility in teaching provision and responses to the ensuing changes of student intakes in terms of engagement in teaching, assessment practices and wider supportive arrangements that captured their relationships (or lack of) with students.

Interviews were conducted by two members of a team of three - the two authors and a third interviewer, and with the participants' permission, recorded and transcribed. Interview sampling continued until it was felt that no new themes were emerging in later interviews. Overall, 25 interviews were undertaken with broadly equal representation from each School and lasted, on average, for 1 hour and 4 minutes (range 43 - 100 minutes)^{vi}.

Participants had extensive academic experience: two with 8 and 10 years and the remaining with 12+ years. They varied by gender (7 female; 18 male), contract type (18 teaching and research; 7 teaching-focused), and seniority (13 senior lecturers/equivalent; 12 professors), which enabled the authors to capture a cross-section of views. Several respondents also held management roles alongside their teaching responsibilities, such as head of department, programme director and head of teaching at the departmental/School level, which enabled them to offer insights on activities such as programme development and resource usage.

Consistent with Fitzmaurice (2008), interviewees were generally passionate about teaching and their students and several explicitly welcomed this study as highly relevant, valuable and thought-provoking. This said, self-selective participation in the study may not reflect the positions of BS faculty more generally, especially given the often cited tension between teaching and research - created at least in part by the greater (self-imposed) importance attached to the latter in the UK and elsewhere (McCarthy and Dragouni 2021; Vican,

Friedman, and Andreasen 2020). Indeed, on occasion, interviewees in their discussions of teaching provision reflected on how academic pressures beyond education commercialism affected their teaching practices.

Data analysis was conducted in NVivo using a thematic analytical approach (Braun and Clarke 2013; Nowell et al. 2017). Following familiarisation with the transcripts, the data within was systematically coded with codes and sub-codes generated from the data itself. The aggregated, code-level data was then considered through the lenses of AC and care ethics, and themes, as reported on below, were developed. The coding process and theme development were non-linear with 'toing and froing' between the coding process, theoretical lenses applied and themes generated such that the final theme selection reflects the recreation, adjustment, aggregation and even omissions of the original themes developed. Both researchers were engaged in the coding process – working independently and then collaboratively to agree the codes and work through the themes. Given the role of the authors as educators, the systematic thematic approach also entailed an element of reflexivity which Braun and Clarke (2013) consider integral to qualitative research.

Results

Business School commercialisation

...In the past, a BS used to be a school. Now it is more a business... (I7)

...Meeting prospective students [at an international PG education fair] .. the first question every student asked me is, "How much is the fee?"... When you have to verbalise that in an answer ...you start thinking, "What are we really providing for £XXX?... (I9)

Eighty per cent of the respondents referred, unprompted, to their Schools as the 'cash cows' of their universities, with one interviewee noting that the reliance on this income had become somewhat of an 'addiction' for their institution. Accounting and Finance departments as anticipated served as important contributors. Student numbers swelled at the institutions for both UG and PG albeit to varying degrees: '*...So it's [volume of UG students] quadrupled in three years. That's the scale .. it's double[d] every year...*' (I13). Similarly, at the PG level, an

interviewee explained that a PG programme at their institution attracted 30 students in its first year – a decade later, it had some 800 PG students across a suite of newly developed programmes. Increased student numbers appeared to continue unabated, with rises once considered by management as ‘blips’ becoming the new norm. Based on their wider experiences, interviewees considered these developments not unique to their own institutions but applicable across RGUs, more generally.

In accordance with AC, university centres appeared to nurture this growth to enhance institutional incomes. Centres actively navigated Schools to develop new programmes including from market intelligence gathered from the close relationships established with external international agents:

..All the international agents are brought on campus once a year ... [from that came] “We’ve just had all the agents here, all ... saying your BS has a really limited offering in ... that kind of area.” Then, the Head of College ... said, “Sorry BS. You’ve got to develop a programme in this area”... (I23)

HE agents here operated as intermediaries not only to connect students with institutions (Kauppinen, Mathies, and Weimer 2015), but in accordance with AC also to gather and share intelligence, that HEIs subsequently capitalised upon.

Centres, like commercial entities, also operated target driven cultures that called on School deans to enhance student-driven income:

...clearly I think ... a lot of pressure comes from the university on the level of surplus [a return to the centre] that we’re required to give and .. I think quite genuinely, the senior management team here do feel under a lot of pressure to deliver that surplus... (I11)

As a consequence, programme offerings, particularly at the PG level often resulted in offering a suite of ‘*pure market driven*’ (I4) programmes to capitalise on lucrative market opportunities. Programmes were created/rebranded to cater for an expansive international market that catered for students of differing abilities. New ‘purpose-built’ programmes included reliance on sharing modules across programmes that enabled Schools to, in academic capitalist terms,

create corporate-style efficiency that quickly and easily enabled Schools to expand their offerings. Moreover, the diverse range of programmes offered enabled Schools not only to appeal to a wide range of prospective students but also allowed them to offer students alternative choices when they were deemed unsuited for their chosen programmes. Unsurprisingly, as Moules' (2018) notes, the number of degrees offered by UK BSs rose by 44% between 2000 and 2018.

UG programmes, interviewees believed, were oriented predominantly towards the already established domestic student market and appeared to be more 'faculty-led' than 'market-led'. Universities, nevertheless, identified different feeder systems to raise student numbers, particularly from international markets. They, for example, developed thriving international foundation programmes; linked up with other such providers; and/or engaged in formal agreements with foreign universities to offer dual-university degree programmes – creating captive audiences from which to recruit.

Finally, university centres were involved in student admissions, not only to market programmes (Slaughter and Rhodes, 2009) and manage student intakes but also by influencing academic admissions criteria - at a subject level and/or English language to bolster student numbers:

...When I ran the programme, we'd be asked for our [admissions criteria] view and we give it .. then you'd get to the weeks in August and I'm sure like you, we suddenly found we were gifted a large number of extra students [all laughing].. (I20)

Similarly, in response to high PGT student failure rates, I23 noted:

...So the admissions stuff is very much dictated to us ... Schools can make requests we've twice put in proposals .. and both times this Committee .. kicked it out saying, "No. Too risky"...

Furthermore, the international student market, where many of the academic capitalist practices referred to above lay, were subjected to significantly higher fees than those paid by

domestic students, particularly at the PG level. There were variations in fees across the institutions that reflected their respective status within RGUs (Wakeling and Savage 2015) and *within* individual Schools:

...they used to be on this module ... with seven hundred students and that didn't go [laughter] down very well and they complained .. 'We share a lot of modules with XXX [degree] students. Why do we pay .. more?' So it was very difficult to justify that difference. As Programme Director I said, 'The entry requirements are higher. That's why.' [Laughter] Taking the same modules, but you're better and you pay for that... (I1).

As such, the results suggest that practices at all five of the examined institutions closely fit with Slaughter and Rhoades' (2009) renewed version of AC: they appeared to be fully immersed in the market for (international) education and university cultures were geared towards this development with centres using corporate-style target systems that School deans and faculty attended to; engaging with traditionally academic processes – influencing admissions criteria; and nurturing 'market-driven' programme development. Institutions deployed different strategies to raise student numbers including the provision of efficiently created programmes and different feeder systems.

Moreover and significantly, consistent with prior research (Bok 2003; Ellis et al 2014; Natale and Doran 2012), interviewees alluded to the failure to invest adequately in the corresponding infrastructure to support the Schools' educational activities, misaligning, in turn, the high tuition-fees with resource investment – predominantly staffing and programme-level budgets.

Business School commercialisation: implications for academic provision

...an academic might have one course, give two hours of lectures for 11 weeks... That might be to 400 people and that's their teaching for the year then... the tutorials are delivered in groups of 30 at postgraduate [level] by PhD students. Terrible service generally. Shouldn't do it, but we do. Then the scripts are marked by anybody we can find. So that's an efficient model by any standard [laughing]

... they're paying [twenty something] grand each... there's 1,500^{vii} of them ... It's a lot of money... (I18).

Consistent with prior research (Fitzmaurice 2008 2013), interviewees were passionate about teaching and their students with teaching philosophies frequently centred round offering a liberal education, *'teaching students how to learn'* (I3), *'shaping who they are and who they're going to become .. [and] 'a responsibility and engagement with accounting ... getting them to think about the power of what they are doing [through accounting]'* (I14), that is, critical reflection and reflexivity in relation to the discipline. Moreover, care for and responsibility towards their students was considered central to being an academic. In turn, in this context, consequences of education commercialism on teaching provision were frequently met with statements such as *'terrible service generally ... shouldn't do it, but we do'* (I18); *'... it is not fair...'* (I1); and *'...it is not right...'* (I9), reflecting academics' crises of professionalism (Archer 2008) and duty of care (Walker and Gleaves 2016).

In turn, three key, inter-related themes linked to compromised care and responsibility towards students were identified from the interviews: (i) limited scope to undertake valuable and varied educational practices at scale; (ii) limited or even absent contact time with students that offered spaces for 'learning and student voice'; and (iii) limited scope for generalised support and valuing students in a wider sense. While many of the developments befitting these themes resulted from university/School-led initiatives (for example a decision to under-resource an arrangement), interviewees themselves had also instituted changes. Despite their ideas of academic professionalism and values, faculty had become more protective of their time (Dugas et al. 2020), reorienting the idea of 'care for students' to one of 'care for self'. This change in care orientation had also been encouraged by line managers who negotiated between care and responsibility towards students and that towards staff.

First, on unscalable teaching activities, interviewees reflected on how they were unable to take their students through a variety of experiences linked to teaching delivery and assessment and feedback practices to nurture student learning as reflected in Fitzmaurice (2008) and Walker and Gleaves (2016):

... I find it soul destroying to listen to people about all these wonderful ways of teaching .. We have special institutes on learning and teaching .. promoting new ways of doing things ... but you have no chance of doing that with the vast numbers of students ... we're tied into the big lectures and tutorials with none of the innovation that others are doing ... (I24)

Frustration here lay not only with the pedagogical value of such approaches but also interviewees' felt care and responsibilities to enrich their students' learning with varied opportunities for experiences as advocated in Fitzmaurice (2008). Importantly, there was also a sense that as business educators, interviewees felt constrained in their desired teaching-practices relative to other disciplines, and in other instances, non-RGU BSs. As such, care was considered in terms of the 'lack of' for their own students. Restrictions were experienced across a variety of activities, including 'practice focused' teaching that has been considered increasingly pivotal in nurturing business students' learning (Calma 2021). I11, for example, reflected on a law module assignment on their UG accounting programme:

...used to do some wonderful assessments .. they'd get barristers in to come and sit in and have presentations ... they all said, "This is really time-consuming, but the students love it", and they [faculty] were willing to do it. That has changed ... they just said, "We're just going to put a mid-term test in instead",... take out all that wonderful innovative sort of students standing up .. like in a mock court and things like that having to argue a case ...

Faculty in this instance had willingly engaged in the time-intensive task to facilitate students' learning and enrich their experiences (Walker and Gleaves 2016) but this had become untenable with growing student numbers. Similarly, I9 reflected on a University-level decision not to fund additional licenses for a financial platform to accommodate growing PGT student numbers which had disrupted 'in situ' teaching and assessment – going forward, faculty were charged with the responsibility to consider artificial ways to restrict numbers on the module.

Second, with reference to Fitzmaurice's (2008) idea of creating spaces for 'learning and student voice', interviewees identified small group sessions that accompanied formal lecture sessions as critical spaces through which to create the positive and supportive learning environments needed to nurture and facilitate student development that focused not only on subject specialism, but nurturing student development more widely:

*...For me, the training of the mind requires much more ability on the part of the academic involved to structure a course, **to assess, to interact, to sit, to engage and discuss with students** in a way that...tends to nurture and facilitate the students' intellectual development... (I19, emphasis added).*

...A liberal education is all about small groups. It's nothing to do with technical learning. .., they're almost mutually exclusive. ... It's not economies of scale - "Let's get loads of people into a big lecture theatre and we'll teach them how to do a profit and loss account." That's not what liberal learning's about... (I3).

These spaces centred round student-led activities, consistent with the notion of care ethics (Tronto 1993) and as seen in Fitzmaurice (2013) and Walker and Gleaves (2016), emphasised interacting with and forging relationships with students – motivating them, attending and responding to them and their needs (Noddings 2003) to enable individual growth. At the PGT level, interviewees similarly recognised the role of the dissertation as a transformational space for student voice and dialogue - to influence students' thinking and development of arguments and contribute to wider attributes such as confidence (Ginn 2014).

Critically, however, several interviewees noted they were at best only marginally involved in small group teaching. As noted in Levin and Aliyeva (2015), institutions relied extensively on adjunct staff and/or graduate students to deliver such sessions to raise productivity - I3, for example, was directly engaged with only one of their small groups from the 25 that operated across their diverse modules. As such, faculty operated at a distance from their students and opportunities to develop relationships that enable the enactment of care and responsibility for student learning were broadly absent. In turn, interviewees were unable to connect with

students to attend to and respond to in Noddings' (2003) and Tronto's (1993) views, students' educational concerns, let alone more personal concerns (see Walker and Gleaves 2016). Moreover, in this instance, while faculty valued the contribution and commitment of adjuncts and graduate students, there was a sense that casualised staff emphasised subject specialism and knowledge delivery over wider student development.

Interviewees who ran their own small group sessions valued these opportunities but reflected on the implications of the large group dynamic that had filtered into small group sessions as a consequence of rising student numbers. In particular, simple acts such as knowing student names to nurture a sense of belonging and concernment (Walker and Gleaves 2016) had proven difficult; and student silences and/or opportunities to 'hide', problematic - opposing Fitzmaurice's (2008) idea of giving students a voice to nurture their development:

... Each year I get more and more frustrated in that the groups are too big to get them talking. .. it kind of just falls flat ... it silences them, you know .. that bigger group dynamic. ... They want to ask stuff but they, you know, they don't... (I14)

... there's a hiding place in the classroom. ... You just do not know what proportion of people going out of that room having learnt what you expected... (I4)

Paradoxically, three institutions used student silence as a justification to replace traditional seminars with larger exercise classes (with up to 100 students) - particularly on PGT programmes with predominantly international students. Consistent with Lomer and Anthony-Okeke (2019), there was recognition that student passivity may have reflected the non-conducive environment in which students were placed, but in the absence of opportunities to revert to traditional, smaller group sessions, Schools opted for further efficiency afforded by even larger groups. Interviewees believed that the curtailed interactions with students undoubtedly interfered with students' abilities to achieve their true academic potential – a fundamental value of care ethics (Fitzmaurice 2008).

Similarly, student voice and development in PGT dissertations had become limited as Schools at the research-intensive institutions wrestled to accommodate large student numbers. While Grant (2005) and Ginn (2014) have reflected on supervisors as caring, expert professionals, one School had experimented with a group supervision approach. Some 70 students had been collectively taken through a 'standardised dissertation' – they were taught en masse about how to approach each stage of the dissertation and interaction with the supervisor broadly limited to brief written feedback. At others, there was an extensive reliance on outsourcing supervision in which the 'pay by piece' arrangement emphasised a formulaic approach to a management dissertation:

... So it's a bog standard type of - just a bit of regression analysis on what has been done before, just show competence and away you go...' (I19)

Finally, on care 'outside classrooms', interviewees reflected on the loss of the informal spaces where care could nurture feelings of belonging and being valued as captured in Walker and Gleaves (2016):

...in the past.. I'd be able to hang around outside the classroom after and you'd start to soon get a little cluster of the ones that like to come and talk to you ... Now, I feel my whole kind of body language is, '.. Got to dash'.... I absolutely hate that because I think those conversations where they feel that they're valued, that their interest matters, that you're someone that they can get something from individually ... that is at the heart of student experience and that's what I feel I can't give anymore, likewise with colleagues. .. (I14)

Burdened by large student numbers, a similar situation materialised in the traditional personal tutoring system, particularly at the PGT level. At two institutions, the system took a perfunctory nature for PGT students – failing to connect students and tutors:

..Our postgraduate students get treated like dirt on personal tutoring. ..I feel like if you wandered round and randomly asked, "Who is your personal tutor?", they wouldn't be able to name them quite honestly. ...(I23)

Another two institutions had replaced the system with a small team of senior tutors who principally attended to academic matters – working with students who had failed elements of their programme. In these instances, the institutional spaces designed to care had been redefined – forgoing general student welfare and concernment as noted in Walker and Gleaves (2016).

Overall, while research into the educational practices of HEIs makes a compelling case for recognising the moral disposition of academics and more specifically care for and responsibility towards their students which faculty as seen in this study and prior work identify with, academic capitalist practices at RGUs that have swelled student numbers have, at a micro-level, crowded out the spaces and scope for meaningful care and student learning. In contrast to the open and supportive working environments that enable care (Kahu 2013; Liedtka 1996), RGU BS faculty operate in constrained environments that limit their scope to exercise their felt responsibilities.

Discussion and Conclusions

...Our universities prioritise providing an excellent education and student experience ... (Russell Group, 2016, p. 11)

Education provision is the biggest driver of income in UK HEIs and within this setting, the RGU and BSs have been amongst the biggest winners. This study drew on Slaughter and Rhoades' (2009) idea of the renewed view of AC - calling attention to the macro-level changes in the cultural systems of HEIs - to explore the ensuing commercialisation of business education at a sample of RGU BSs; and ideas of morality of education centred round care for and responsibility towards students to understand the micro-foundations of AC on student education and experience. While AC was developed and has traditionally sought to address research developments of HEIs and in turn a focus on science and engineering, this paper demonstrates its importance to HE provision in social sciences. Contrary to prior research that has evaluated relatively minor developments such as the use of personal coaching on management programmes as practices of AC, results here suggest major shifts in university cultures and systems to capitalise on the market for (international) education through a

myriad of activities including the creation of a suite of demand- and efficiency- led programmes in response to market intelligence, establishment of financial targets to nurture growth, efforts to seek out new markets and centrally informed admissions practices to further heighten student numbers.

Simultaneously, the ensuing changes have not been complemented with suitable infrastructure investment to accommodate large student numbers, disrupting extensively the educational spaces at the micro level in which meaningful learning for business students - nurtured by values of academic care and responsibility – can take place. While a small pedagogical literature has focused attention on the ideas of morality in education in shaping student development and outcomes, this study calls attention to the limitations that AC practices place on values-driven education. Operating at a distance from their students and in restrictive ways in response to large student numbers, faculty are limited in the extent to which they can enrich their students' experiences and contribute meaningfully to their development and achievement of full potential. Formal spaces such as the design of teaching and assessment practices, small group sessions, dissertations and pastoral care have been redesigned / morphed to accommodate large student numbers – redefining in turn the possible scope and nature for care. While some faculty actions have been directly informed by institutional developments, in other instances, faculty and line managers have responded to AC practices by turning the lens from student-oriented care to staff/self-care (see Dugas et al 2020).

Ultimately, members of the RGU appear to have used their elitist position to engage in academic capitalist practices with respect to their provision for business education and the Group's implicit and explicit considerations to care as evidenced from its commitment to world-leading teaching, student support and wider development, low student-staff ratios and a bespoke personal tutoring system (Russell Group 2016) do not appear to apply to business education. Further, academic capitalist practices and consequences of these practices appear to be more acute for international students who make up significant proportions of PGT programmes. Faculty appear to be even more restricted in engaging in values-driven teaching and supportive activities at this level as compared to UG programmes as seen for example, through the absence of interactive small group sessions and the

changing role of the dissertation through which faculty can nurture learning and exercise cultural sensitivities. Yet, academic capitalist practices mean that these students pay vast, market-driven fees and they are often enrolled on university informed admissions arrangements with lower admissions criteria which call for a more, not less supportive academic environment. As such our work speaks to research seeking to protect international student interests (Lomer and Anthony-Okeke 2019; Yang 2020).

While prior marketization research has alluded to the increasingly transactional manner in which students consider their education (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon 2011), this study highlights how an AC context results in institutions delivering an instrumental education. Such outcomes are not necessarily a consequence of a deliberate school strategy (Gebreiter 2021) but an inevitable consequence of commercialisation, unsupported by corresponding infrastructural investment. While scholars have identified strategies to maintain teaching quality amidst large student numbers and shrinking budgets (Ryan, French, and Kennedy 2021), these efforts emphasise the proficient use of pedagogical methodologies and strategies for teaching effectiveness (Aristotle's idea of *techne*) rather than a deeper sense of enabling student learning. Ideas such as student engagement are, for example, considered in superficial ways - varying teaching practices at lecture sessions (use of videos, for example) to maintain student interest rather than a deeper level engagement that prioritises student voice and building trust.

Moreover, prior marketization research has alluded to tendencies towards a technical, discipline-specific education - with Parker (2011) dubbing universities as training centres to prepare students for the market place. The instrumental education, that the consequences of AC from a care perspective fosters, reinforces the technical as the wider development of students and shaping who they become are disrupted. Barnacle and Dall'Albab (2017) go as far as to say that the absence of sustained care for students restricts the scope to nurture them to become active global citizens, and indeed, as aforementioned, such experiences may reinforce the utilitarian tendencies that marketization has nurtured amongst students (Natale and Doran 2012). This is particularly critical if HEIs and BSs are serious about addressing the grand challenges of society in accordance with their traditional values (Côté

and Allahar 2011) especially because BS students exhibit notable tendencies of narcissism as compared to students from life sciences (Westerman et al 2012).

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Endnotes

ⁱ Since 2018/19, HESA has included the financial data of Alternative Providers (APs). For consistency, we include only the income of institutions that were presented within the HESA dataset from the 2017/18 financial year.

ⁱⁱ The study had ethical approval from the first author's institution. To ensure that participants felt comfortable and 'safe' to participate openly and honestly, they were offered face to face interviews at a venue of their choice as well as telephone / videoconference opportunities.

ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish institutions were excluded from the study given the differing tuition fee arrangements for Scotland-domiciled and EU students as compared to elsewhere in the UK.

^{iv} UK institutions typically recruit faculty on the teaching and research pathway and/or teaching and other responsibilities such as management or scholarship. At each of the institutions we engaged with, faculty were promoted via both streams, and our selection approach ensured that we attracted both types of participants.

^v Available upon request from the corresponding author.

^{vi} Due to anonymity concerns, participants were solely labelled numerically with no further grouping, e.g. institution membership.

^{vii} 1,500 students referred to School-wide PGT student numbers, not just to Accounting and Finance.