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UNIVERSITY OF WEST LONDON

Collaborative provision within UK higher education: perceptions of stakeholders of UK and Sri Lankan private colleges offering university degrees in business and management

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of The University of West London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative provision within UK higher education: perceptions of stakeholders of UK and Sri Lankan private colleges offering university degrees in business and management

Collaborative higher education refers to an array of different arrangements between higher education institutions (HEIs) and other providers - private providers in the case of this thesis. The main focus of the thesis is to understand stakeholders' perspectives on collaborative partnerships between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the provision of UK degree courses in business and management.

Recent decades have seen the massification of HE. The demand for HE in the UK has been growing significantly. But the state has begun to disengage itself from financing HEIs and thus their continuing state funding is under challenge. Market mechanisms have been introduced. Collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers can be seen as an activity undertaken as part of an increasingly marketised UK HE landscape.

Management, staff such as link-tutors, and policy-makers in quality organisations were interviewed: thirteen in the UK and six in Sri Lanka. Five former non-European Union (EU) private college international students were interviewed in the UK. Three focus groups were conducted with non-EU private college international students in the UK.

This is an exploratory study, from which it is not possible to generalise, but findings indicate that:

- a. Non-EU international students choose to study in private HE colleges because it enables them to acquire a UK degree at a lower cost.
- b. Working with private partners in the UK and overseas is perceived to have an economic motive and collaborative partnerships are seen as a partial solution to the difficult financial situation of HEIs.
- c. Collaborative HE partnerships help UK HEIs to expand their market.
- d. Government intervention in the private for-profit HE sector is discernible, for example through the Educational Oversight Review of private providers. This is blurring the boundary between what is described as public and private.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research

Collaborative arrangements in Higher Education (HE) essentially involve crossing of organisational and/or national boundaries and hence, Beerkens (2002) uses the terms international and inter-organisational arrangements to indicate such movements. Collaborations in academe are becoming more common for a variety of reasons: (a) 'policymakers view collaboration as a strategic way of meeting the state's education and economic goals' (Amey et al. 2007, p.5); and (b) the willingness of HEIs to collaborate with private providers for financial benefits (Hodson and Thomas, 2001; Beerkens, 2002).

This study aims to understand stakeholders' perceptions on the collaborative HE provision between Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded HEIs and private for-profit HE providers in the provision of UK degree courses in business and management.

In the context of UK HE, a considerable number of non-European Union (EU) students who graduate from the United Kingdom's (UK) universities never actually attend the universities in person. Some study at private higher education colleges in various parts of the United Kingdom. Others study at private higher education colleges in their home countries that have

collaborative links with UK universities. So, why do universities in the UK collaborate with private providers? Why do private providers collaborate with universities? Why do non-EU (international) students choose to study in such private higher education colleges?

Between 2003 and 2005 I worked for a UK institution (a recipient of significant public funding) that promoted UK HE to international students. One of my key roles was to promote the Education UK brand to students in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. It was during this time that I began to fully understand UK HE and the demand it commanded amongst the local students. I witnessed a relentless appetite for education in the UK. But I also observed similar determination and enthusiasm of UK universities towards the recruitment of these non-EU international students. As Maringe (2006, p.476) suggests, HEIs were effectively positioning themselves in these markets as 'recruiting institutions'. Although I was perplexed initially, I soon began to comprehend the situation. In 2005, I came to the UK as a non-EU student and whilst in the UK, after a brief work experience with a financial institution, I began to work for several private colleges as a part-time lecturer. During this time I have begun to feel a discord between my lived experiences and my perceptions regarding UK HE. Thus, I have begun to explore the rationales driving HEIs to collaborate with private providers.

Education has a special place in a society and it plays a major role; it creates a productive workforce, offers social mobility and contributes to the economic growth and prosperity of a nation. It also creates personal and societal

development. Agasisti and Catalano (2006) identify these benefits of education as the positive externalities of education. But, like many other sectors in the UK, the HE sector too has been witnessing major reforms and challenges. Ball (2007, p.18) commenting on the public sector reforms in the UK states that 'during Thatcher's terms as prime minister the landscape of economic and political understandings of welfare changed irrevocably'; the boundaries between the state, the economy and the public sector were 'discursively reconstituted'. This meant that some public sector systems were subjected to new modes of management that closely matched other commercial market institutions (Ball, 2013).

One of the major reforms that can be observed in the UK HE sector is the deliberate attempts by successive UK governments to reduce their public expenditure on HE. Governments across the world have to re-think the ways in which they manage public sector institutions and the recent financial crisis has further focused that thinking. This has fundamentally changed the state's approach to managing public institutions. I use the concept of managerialism to explain the current forms of public sector management. Managerialism contains broad ideological perspectives that typify the new ways of managing today's public sector organisations (Deem and Brehony, 2005; Deem et al. 2007; Kim, 2008). Managerialism sees management and managing as the essential components of the efficient governance of organisations. It focuses on the attainment of targets (financial and other) and introduces ideas and practices that are common in the world of business into the public sector (Johnson and Deem, 2003; Deem and Brehony, 2005; Deem et al. 2007). As

a result, the sectors (including HE) that had close government steering in the past have now been embracing marketisation and market-like behaviours (Jongbloed, 2003, p.113). These new modes of management have emerged from neoliberal forms of governance (Fanghanel, 2012a). Neoliberalism is seen here as a mode of 'governmentality' (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p.314) that seeks solution to problems.

Moreover, elements of globalisation in HE are constantly shifting the boundaries in HE and as Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006, p.316) indicate the HE market is now well-established as a global phenomenon. It has been estimated that around 4.3 million students were enrolled in HE outside their country of citizenship during the year 2011 (OECD, 2013). It has also been established that 435,235 non-UK students (non-EU: 302,680 and other EU: 132,550) were studying in UK HEIs during the year 2011/12 (HESA, 2013a). In addition, 408,685 students were also studying for UK qualifications offered overseas during the year 2009/10 (UK HE International Unit, 2011).

Given this background, the reduction in the level of government funding has compelled HEIs in the UK to review their financial situation (Hodson and Thomas, 2001). As a result HEIs have begun to both diversify income streams and control costs. In this context, HEIs have recognised that 'their course portfolio and awards have commercial value and have taken a decision to realise some of this value by marketing their courses through collaborative provision' (Hodson and Thomas, 2001, p.102; De Vita and Case, 2003). HEIs

in the UK are engaged in establishing collaborative arrangements¹ with privately owned and/or funded HE providers both in overseas and in the UK (Mazzarol, 1998).

1.1 Private HE Provision: UK

Slantcheva and Levy (2007, p.4) state that 'private higher education has had little history or resonance in modern Europe'. That is, in many western European countries, the private sector has played only a marginal role (Slantcheva and Levy, 2007). In the UK, the debates concerning the role and shape of private providers have taken centre stage in recent times, especially after the publication of the White Paper - Students at the Heart of the System (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). In the past, the debates on private HE have had limited interest at the academic or policy levels as the UK HE sector has been controlled by the publicly-funded HEIs (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011).

There are around 674 private providers operating in the UK and the majority of private HE providers operate as for-profit organisations (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b). Although it is changing gradually, international students play a major role in sustaining the private provision in the UK. The above study also confirms that the majority of privately funded

¹ See chapter 8, section 8.1: Collaborative HE is seen as 'arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body' (QAA, 2012a)

HE providers in this country are newly established as compared to HEFCE funded universities or HEIs.

But the following excerpt from the announcement made in 2010 by the Minister of State for the Universities and Sciences, David Willetts, captures the current Coalition Government's thinking on private HE at the policy level:

It is healthy to have a vibrant private sector working alongside our more traditional universities. International experience shows a diverse range of higher education providers helps widen access, focuses attention on teaching quality and promotes innovative learning methods, such as web-based distance learning. We want to see a higher education sector that is dynamic and flexible and focussed on the needs of students and employers (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010)

The above contention depicts the government's aspiration pertaining to the future trajectory of HE in the UK. The government intends to drive competition and innovation in the HE sector. It hopes to achieve these means through the market-centric reforms that transfers power in the hands of students. But, the government's policy aspirations seem to place significant hope on the private sector to deliver. But it is little premature to test the robustness of the private sector – especially when we know very little on the sector.

Given this background, this study aims to understand the rationale for collaboration between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the provision of UK HE courses. While it aims to determine the attractiveness of such provision to non-EU students, it also attempts to understand the stakeholders' perception on the private for-profit colleges that offer UK HE courses. Significantly it aims to spell out any strategic implications it may place on UK HE.

This present study is exploratory in nature. There is a significant shortage of empirical studies on the existence, growth and the role of growing small scale private HE provision in the UK. The debates have only just been emerging in the UK and gaining momentum especially amongst the policy makers. In this respect this thesis presents a timely investigation in examining the nature of private for-profit providers from its stakeholders' perspectives. This study uses a qualitative research framework and utilises semi-structured interviews and focus groups to collect data in order to address its research questions. The following research questions framed the study:

- a. What is the rationale for collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the UK and overseas from the perspectives of both HEIs and private for-profit providers?
- b. To what extent is this private higher education provision attractive to students from non-EU destinations?
- c. What are the students' perceptions of the value they receive from such private provision?

d. What are the strategic implications of such collaborations for UK higher education?

This exploratory investigation contributes to creating new knowledge by enhancing the current understanding of collaborative HE provision and of the role of private providers, especially the private for-profit HE providers.

1.2 Sri Lanka

In addition to collaborative HE provision within the UK itself, overseas collaborative provision is studied in the context of Sri Lanka. The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is strategically located in the fast growing Indian sub-continent with close proximity to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. In 2010, Sri Lanka had the most literate population in South Asia and one of the highest in the developing world with a literacy rate of 91.9% (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013).

The education structure in Sri Lanka is divided into: primary, secondary, senior secondary, college and tertiary levels. The education is state funded in Sri Lanka and provided for free (at all levels). But, Sri Lanka has only 17 state-funded public universities for the population of 19.5 million. Admission to public universities at the undergraduate level is based on the results of the Sri Lankan G.C.E Advanced Level examination (G.C.E A/L). The number of places in universities is limited and thus only a few students who pass the G.C.E A/L examinations get the opportunity to enter state universities

(National Education Commission, 2009). Due to the limited number of placements in state funded universities, only 17% of those who qualify for university education gain admission (Jayawardena, 2012). As a result, each year more than 100,000 qualified students are forced out of the state HE system (Jayawardena, 2012). The majority of students who do not secure a place in a public university choose to study in private HE institutions/or colleges. Hence Sri Lanka remains an attractive market for overseas HE institutions because of its unmet demand for HE.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis contains nine chapters in total. There are two chapters allocated to the literature review and three to the findings that address the research questions.

Chapter 1 provides an outline to this thesis and introduces the reader to the study background and scope. It introduces the reader to the research questions that framed this investigation.

Chapter 2 and **Chapter 3** review the literature. Chapter 2, in particular, focuses on the changing landscape of the UK HE and examines some of the discourses that are closely associated with the nature and role of the state in HE and its marketisation. In the later sections, the review examines the literature on international students (non-EU) in UK HE and deliberates on the immigration policies that impact on the present and future shape of the UK's international education. Chapter 3 focuses on the recent literature pertaining

to the existence, growth and role of private HE providers in a wider HE context.

Chapter 4 explains and justifies the methodology for this study. This chapter includes discussions that establish the suitability of the selected methodology by describing the type of data required to answer the research questions. Importantly, it explains to the reader the difficulties involved in exploring a sensitive and evolving subject. The reader is also made aware of the position of the investigator in relation to the subject under investigation, and of the ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 outline the findings from 19 interviews conducted with the key stakeholders of the collaborative HE provision in the UK and Sri Lanka studied in this thesis.

Chapter 7 outlines the students' perspectives. It outlines the findings gained from the three focus groups conducted with the non-EU international student participants in the UK. In addition, this chapter also outlines the findings from the five interviews conducted with former students of the private for-profit HE institutions in the UK.

Chapter 8 provides a commentary on, and an interpretation of, the diverse set of data that were gathered in the course of this study (Chapter 5, 6 & 7) and uses these to reflect on the literature that had been previously explored (Chapter 1 & 2). This chapter also discusses the rationales, perceptions and

contradictions that are increasingly discernible within UK collaborative HE provision.

Chapter 9 summarises and records several key conclusions arising from this exploratory study. It offers answers to each of the research questions for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review I: The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

2.0 Introduction

I start this chapter from the recognition that the role of Higher Education (HE) in the economy is significant and that it is seen as a key driver for economic growth and development, especially in the context of the recent economic crisis. The economic growth and development of a nation depends on a wide array of human skills (Schultz, 1981). As per this human capital view, a highly qualified and skilled workforce can trigger economic growth. But, higher education based on Humboldt's vision also promotes the development of the inner self (i.e. 'personality development through education', Pritchard, 2004, p.510). Interestingly, the focus on the inner self encourages independence and to some extent is in contradiction with the dependence of individuals (i.e. students) upon employers (Pritchard, 2004). The notion of relating education solely to the world of work and to economic development is restrictive. Education can also be conceptualised as a liberating force that focuses on 'social justice, equity, criticality and self-development' (transformation ideologies - Fanghanel, 2012a, p.9). In this view, education and institutions are challenged and urged to create the larger 'we' which eradicates social injustices and inequalities (Apple, 2013, p.53). Transformation ideologies recognise education as a force to empower the neglected and socially disadvantaged. However, these different ways of conceptualising education

are being fenced or re-shaped by the externally imposed boundaries and expectations (i.e. the state, its market-oriented policies and students).

The last few decades have seen the massification of HE and the demand for it has been growing significantly in the UK. For example, the number of 17-30 year olds in HE rose from 12% in the 1980s (Shelley, 2005) to 49% by 2011/12 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013a). Yet, the continued presence of state funded HEIs is challenged in the UK and the state has begun to distance itself - it is often identified as the 'divestiture' of certain functions of the state (Neave, 1990, p.106). There has been a shift in the nature and sources of funding for HEIs and a general move towards a graduate contribution system. In this chapter, I first discuss the changing mode(s) of university governance in the UK. As pointed out in chapter 1, I use managerialism to account for the prevailing forms of public sector management which has its origins in neoliberal forms of governmentality (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Fanghanel, 2012a). Secondly, this chapter focuses on the effects of the state disengagement and the increasing influences of privatisation and market theory in HE. I argue that HEIs are now caught-up in a complex set of ideals that expect them to play a dual role and this is creating additional burdens and tensions within the sector. Thirdly, my discussion centres on international students and internationalisation. Here, I focus on the changing rationale for internationalisation and the growing space for private for-profit providers. Finally, this chapter turns to student choice and examines the viability of using value concepts borrowed from business models to understand students' choice related judgements.

2.1 The Governance of Higher Education: UK

This section considers university governance and the management of HE in the UK in the context of neoliberal, public sector reforms (Kim, 2008). Governments across the world have changed the way they manage public sector institutions. The last decades of the 20th century saw governments across the world beginning to 'reappraise the nature and role of the state' (Henkel, 2007, p.1). Substantial budget deficits and the emergence of New Right ideas promoted responses such as 'privatisation, emphases on efficiency and effectiveness, and managerialist approaches to the public sector' (Bochel and Duncan, 2007, p.15). Moreover, the international financial crisis of 2008 has questioned the government's ability to sustain the levels of public expenditure in the UK and has rejuvenated the discourse on the efficient management of public sector institutions. As a result, in the UK domestic economic management priorities have begun to favour market forces and the state has begun to reduce its direct role in the management of public organisations (Hardiman, 2010). As Ball (2013, p.173) argues, 'social and educational policies are collapsed into economic and industrial policy' and these policy developments reflected the influence of neo-liberal principles (Ozga, 2009).

According to Kim (2008, p.34) 'university governance in the UK currently can be understood in terms of an explosion in the scale and size of what has to be managed; changes in the way public money is given to universities and how this is monitored; and who manages what, and how'. Kim's observation characterises the contemporary features of university governance in the UK

and, in particular, it describes the contradictory modes of governance (applied by the state), which feature a 'combination of control and disengagement' (Fanghanel, 2012a, p.16). For example, the establishment of efficient public sector institutions is promoted through the reductions in public spending, privatisation and the introduction of market mechanisms (Henkel, 2007). In the UK, Lord Browne's review (2010) ushered in new challenges to HEIs; the funding (public) for HEIs has been significantly curtailed and it is replaced by the graduate contribution system which has placed greater emphasis on the needs of the student. For example, according to HESA (2013b) statistics, the total income of HEIs was £27.9 billion in 2011/12. Funding bodies provided £8.3 billion of this income, while tuition fees and education contracts achieved £9.7 billion. However, according to the same source, the total income of HEIs was £27.6 billion in 2010/2011. Funding bodies provided £8.9 billion of this income, while tuition fees and education contracts earned £9.0 billion. The comparison of the above data provides a glimpse of the future funding trends in the UK; it outlines the gradual but clear replacement of state funding and the need for HEIs to diversify income sources.

Moreover, HEIs became free organisations to set their own strategic directions and they are expected to respond to a more market-like environment (Jongbloed, 2007). HEIs compete for students, income, league table ranking and more importantly, they are compelled to seek solutions to the problems in the market(s) through market forces (Hemsley-Brown, 2011). HEIs in the UK have begun to operate like any other commercial organisation. For example, university departments are expected to generate income from

their activities; most business schools operate like any other strategic business units with decision making powers over their own portfolio of products (courses), services and budgets. The most sought after business programmes such as MBAs, are marketed at a premium price with quality endorsements by AMBA (Association of MBA) accreditation. Like commercial entities, HEIs in the UK have begun to concentrate on their marketing efforts (Kinnell, 1989, Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003) and focus on building strong global brands. My above observation on the one hand depicts the application of market theory in HE. On the other hand it outlines the application of organisational management structures within HEIs that lean towards decentralisation.

HEIs can be seen as 'business enterprises' that produce educational and research services (Bleiklie, 2004, p.48). In this perspective, Bleiklie suggests that HEIs are seen as 'service providers for different user groups' (i.e. students, employers, governments and academic staff) and meeting the needs of these user groups has become the priority of HEIs (Bleiklie, 2004, p.48). Further, this notion of a business enterprise implies that 'universities as business enterprises ought to be able to operate with as few limitations as possible' (Bleiklie, 2004, p.51). But in contrast, the current governance of HEIs (in the name of efficiency) calls for robust organisational leadership and self-monitoring. Conversely Jongbloed (2007) uses the term 'social enterprise' (p.134) to characterise HEIs. 'Social enterprises are organisations which link their production of goods and services to a social mission' (Jongbloed, 2007, p.134). HEIs are expected to deliver excellent education and research, but

they are also expected to 'contribute to the solving of important problems facing society' (Jongbloed, 2007, p.134). However as stated before, the gradual replacement of state funding, privatisation and the introduction of market forces in HE are transforming the nature of HEIs. As a result, HEIs are seen as performers of public tasks (i.e. contribution to the economy and society) with private undertakings (i.e. income and meeting the needs of students). Jongbloed (2007) uses the term 'hybrid organisations' (p.135) to identify the emerging nature of HEIs. As per his perspective, HEIs are attempting to accomplish 'public tasks with private undertakings' (Jongbloed 2007, p.135) and by doing so they find themselves 'pursuing multiple goals, serving various constituencies and interest groups' (Bleiklie, 2004, p.55).

HEIs are still public institutions with public responsibilities. Education and skills are important for the global economy and it is necessary that states encourage educational development (Olssen et al 2004, p.249). It is imperative that educational policies address such perspectives. However 'the discourse of affordability (i.e. welfare) continues to dominate welfare debates' and educational policy is positioned as 'a supply-side driven economic policy rather than as social policy' (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p.31; Ball, 2013). Thus emerges a contradiction in public policy that links HEIs with market order (Olssen et al 2004). The deliberate distancing of the state and its privatisation efforts are re-shaping the governance of HEIs in the UK. At the risk of oversimplifying I view the emerging hybrid nature of HEIs as an outcome of this paradoxical policy landscape. That is, at the policy level, education is seen as a solution to the key problems facing society. Education

creates a productive workforce, offers social mobility and contributes to the economic growth and prosperity. Agasisti and Catalano (2006, p.247) label these benefits as 'positive externalities' of education. But, the distancing of the state from its financial commitments and the increasing preference for privatisation and market theory in HE have compelled HEIs to perform private undertakings i.e. serve various users and/or stakeholders. In this context, HEIs are forced to pursue multiple goals and this is creating additional burdens and tensions within the sector and institutions.

The rise of the 'evaluative state' (Neave, 1988, p.8, 1998, 2004) has entered a new phase; HEIs are being challenged to introduce new structures of governance and accountability (Jongbloed, 2007). I use managerialism to describe the current forms of public sector management. Deem et al. (2007, p.6) define managerialism as a 'general ideology or belief system that regards managing and management as being functionally and technically indispensable to the achievement of economic progress, technological development, and social order within any modern political economy'. Scott (2007) asserts that more attention has been paid to developing management capacity in HEIs at the expense of traditional collegiality. I see three important aspects of managerialism that are relevant to this present study (Johnson and Deem, 2003; Deem and Brehony, 2005; Deem et al. 2007). Firstly, it focuses on the attainment of targets (financial and other); secondly, managerialism introduces ideas and practices that are prevalent in the world of business into the public sector; and finally, managerialism enables the progress of public-private partnerships. In this context, the growth in collaborative HE provision

between HEIs and private for-profit providers can be seen as a corollary of the 'phenomenon of managerialism' (as described by Scott, 2007, p.63). For example, the collaborative HE provision helps HEIs to achieve their financial targets (Hodson and Thomas, 2001; De Vita and Case, 2003). So, the growth in managerialism underpinned by management and managing may result in the expansion of similar collaborative HE arrangements.

Various aspects of the welfare state and of traditional HE have been challenged since 1979, when a Conservative government came to power. Under the Conservatives policy making was largely driven by a commitment to competition and the market (Bochel and Duncan, 2007, p.9). This led to a new political vocabulary (Amaral and Magalhaes, 2007). In essence public institutions came to be viewed as a drain on the state. This marks a sharp departure from the statist tradition. According to Pritchard (1994, p.253), antistatism 'underpins devolution of choice to individuals and deregulation of industry'. I use the term statist tradition to describe a notion that expects welfare to be funded by the state (Levy, 2012). In chapter 3, I outline a perspective that associates the diminishing statist tradition to the growth of private providers.

Harvey (2005, p.2) sees neoliberalism as a theory of 'political economic practices' that promote 'entrepreneurial freedoms and skills'. Neoliberalism underpins three beliefs: preference for free market(s); less state intervention or state as a facilitator (Rutherford, 2005); and the individual is seen capable of making market based choices based on his/her own best economic

interests and needs (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p.314). The role of the state is to facilitate and enhance opportunities for individuals to make choices (Rutherford, 2005). But, the application of this particular perspective in HE has drawn significant debate. These debates often centre on the unique purpose and nature of education. Many have questioned the ability of students to act in their own best interest in terms of their education related choices (Nixon et al 2011; Brown, 2012; see also section 2.3). And yet, the recent HE reforms have focused on the empowerment of students and the government's efforts have focused on student choice (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). The recent changes to the student fee arrangements exemplify this approach; students have become the new investors of HEIs and the focus is on maximising return for their money (Allen, 2012). Here, I use the term economic interest to denote students' need for employment opportunities and skills for the labour market(s).

Given this background, teaching and learning may adopt a narrow consumer-oriented approach where students and institutions will use teaching and learning to increase their own income opportunities. Giroux (2005, p.2) suggests that in 'neoliberalism everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit'. HE serves society at large and as a public good it cannot simply be traded in domestic and international markets like any other service or product (Tilak, 2008, p.461). And yet, for example, HEIs' approach towards non-EU international students and markets has long been positioned adjacent to such commercial aspirations. At the policy level several initiatives have been implemented to encourage HEIs to exploit similar export opportunities (see

also section 2.2). At the risk of oversimplifying I suggest that what we witness in HE today is the gradual extension (or deepening) of similar commercial aspirations and that these are not anymore confined to international students and markets.

In this context, neoliberalism can be seen as a process - a process that often has deepened over time to prioritise market-based or market-oriented responses (Brenner et al. 2010). As part of this process, the marketisation of universities has emerged and has its origins in neoliberal politics (Lynch, 2006, p.3). The term marketisation is often used interchangeably. Marketisation is a complex notion often intertwined with various developments and meanings, which I now turn to.

One way of understanding marketisation is related to enhancing student choice and the liberalisation of HE markets to encourage competition. The intense competition generated within the HE market is in return expected to enhance the quality of HE provision to students. This idea is encapsulated in the definition put forward by Jongbloed (2003, p.113) who defines marketisation policies as those that are 'aimed at strengthening student choice and liberalising markets in order to increase quality and variety of services offered by the providers of higher education'. This way of understating marketisation is closely linked to the supply-side drivers in a HE market. Moreover, HEIs orientation towards market principles is often influenced by the continuous state intervention (Brenner et al. 2010) and, for example, in the UK there has been a steady stream of actions proposed by

successive governments to align HEIs towards market principles (see discussions above). In this context marketisation can also be linked to a process by which the state attempts to create efficiencies within the public sector institutions.

In a more generic view, marketisation could be defined as strategies aimed at generating revenue from private sources (Wangenge-Ouma, 2008, p.458). Teixeira (2006, p.1) states that 'markets or market-like mechanisms are playing an increasing role in higher education', and these policies have an impact on the regulation of HE systems and on the governance of individual institutions (see discussions on managerialism). According to Slaughter and Leslie (2001, p.154) 'market-like behaviours refer to institutional and faculty competition for monies' and these competitive behaviours seek to source funds from various institutional activities. They use the term 'academic capitalism' (p.155) to describe the responses and behaviours of public HE institutions. In this context, collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers can also be seen as an activity undertaken as part of an increasingly marketised UK HE landscape.

2.2 International Students in UK Higher Education

As mentioned in chapter one, a considerable number of non-EU students who graduate from UK's HEIs never actually attend these institutions in person. Instead, some students choose to study at private for-profit HE colleges that have collaborative links with UK HEIs. This could be in the UK or in their own

country. For example, it has been established that 341,685 non-EU students were studying for UK qualifications offered overseas during the year 2009/10 (UK HE International Unit, 2011). One of the main aims of this study is to understand the perspectives of these non-EU international students studying in such private for-profit HE colleges. International students' take-up is about 95% within these collaborative HE provisions (Universities UK, 2010) and it is imperative that their perceptions are explored and understood.

Defining who can be termed as an international student is not straightforward; for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides the following definition:

'International students are those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study' (OECD, 2013, p.314).

But, the above definition is not specific and does not take into account many practical difficulties in categorising international students into a single group (for example, tuition fee and immigration status). So, given the scope of this study (i.e. collaborative HE), I use the term international student(s) and/or non-EU student(s) to denote:

1. students who have left their country of origin (*non-EU*) and moved to another country (UK) for the purpose of study (OECD, 2013)

and/or

2. those who are in the country of their origin (*non-EU*) but studying for courses awarded by HEIs (UK).

It is widely acknowledged that international students (both non-EU and EU) contribute substantially to the UK economy and this contribution is not merely based on their tuition fee expenditures rather it includes their direct and indirect expenditures within the UK economy. For example, HE as an export industry has the potential to contribute to the economy almost £17 billion by 2025 (Universities UK, 2012b). Successive UK governments have realised this importance of international students to the UK economy and have made several attempts to facilitate the recruitment of international students.

One such attempt is the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI); launched by the then Labour government in 1999 as a five year strategy. The sole purpose of this initiative was to increase the number of international students studying in the UK and the target was set to increase the number of non-EU international students in the UK by 75,000 by the year 2005 (50,000 in HE and 25,000 in FE). After successfully achieving the set target, the second phase of the PMI (known as PMI2) was launched in 2006 (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009). The following four interconnected strands were aimed through the PMI2 (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2009);

1. UK positioning - to position the UK as a leader in international education and to further increase the number of international students;

2. Diversification of markets - i.e. HE in the UK heavily relied on a few markets such as China and India and the strategy was to diversify the international student markets;
3. Increase the quality of student experience; and
4. Develop new strategic partnerships – aims to support HEIs in the UK to engage in collaborative partnerships with overseas institutions.

The current government's policy priorities may not favour similar state-funded initiatives targeting non-EU international students, because students are classified as migrants and the government wants to reduce net migration numbers. Watson (2011, p.16) observes that changes to the sector during the New Labour years were dominated by the increasing numbers of students and then the concerns of HEIs were to find means to accommodate the extra student numbers. In this climate international students (non-EU) were seen as a valuable income source (Coate, 2009, p.273).

But the current HE environment and the government's policy priorities have changed significantly. The international financial crisis of 2008 has challenged the UK government's ability to sustain the levels of public expenditure. In terms of HE, the UK government needed to either increase the fees and/or public investment (Allen, 2012). Moreover, the post Browne report era has offered additional challenges to UK HEIs. The reduction in block grant funding has been replaced by the graduate contribution system (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003) and home students are expected to contribute more towards their educational consumption. The government intends to shift the balance of power into the hands of students; the aim is to enhance student choice to

improve quality of services provided by the UK HEIs (Brown, 2012; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011; Jongbloed, 2003). So, the onus is on HEIs to be more responsive to students' needs and students have become the new investors of HEIs (Allen, 2012). These changes will expose HEIs either to the opportunities or threats (Allen, 2012).

So, should the cash strapped and burdened HEIs be solely focusing on the UK (home) markets? Or should they, as in the past, continue to target international students (non-EU) and markets to generate additional income?

As Harris (2011, p.22) observes, HEIs are 'expected to run themselves as businesses to manage the prevailing economic climate'. De Vita and Case (2003, p.385) argue that in the climate of increasing budgetary strains most UK HEIs have begun to rely on international students to source additional revenue. Income from international activities (i.e. international students enrolled on courses and other international HE collaborations) provides an attractive option for many UK HEIs (Foskett, 2011, p.34). But as mentioned above, the current government's policies on international students (non-EU) do not attract them to the same extent (for more on this see chapter 3, section 3.1.1 for discussion on the UK immigration issues relating to non-EU students). De Wit (2011, p.71) argues that the current 'debates on the positive and negative dimensions of the multicultural society, immigration and the economic and financial crisis have a direct link to international students'. He warns that the UK government's recent policy initiatives, unlike in the past, will reduce international activities and non-EU student numbers. From him and

others it is clear that there are obvious signs of discontent in the sector towards such policy initiatives (see chapters 5, 6 and 7). However the government's policy initiatives, in particular those that are relevant to international student immigration, may re-shape the international activities of HEIs rather than reduce them.

Altbach and Knight (2007) observe that the international activities of universities (HEIs) have expanded in volume and complexity during the last 20 years or so. As Harris (2011, p.25) observes, neoliberal policies have encouraged collaborations between the private and public sector and HE has become a significant export industry. International activities such as collaborative HE provision (home and abroad), branch campuses, international exchange programmes, international student recruitment events/or exhibitions, and others have been introduced as part of internationalisation. However the factors influencing internationalisation (at national level and/or institutional level) are constantly evolving, thus the term internationalisation is used and understood in different ways and in different contexts (Knight, 2004). Knight defines the term internationalisation as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2003, p.2). But this process of integration is highly influenced by the national level issues such as policy, funding, programmes, and regulatory frameworks (Knight, 2004). These influences will alter and/or offer new institutional approaches to internationalisation. For example, recent policy changes (i.e. changes in the funding of HEIs especially after the Browne report 2010, and

changes that followed the student (non-EU) immigration consultative phase in 2010) may drive institutions to concentrate on new income-generating approaches to internationalisation. Harris (2007, p.120) refers to 'economic internationalisation' to identify international activities that focus on 'increasing the number of international students enrolled on courses'. Harris (ibid.) argues that this view of internationalisation has acquired economic meaning within contemporary HEIs.

But, some earlier studies have questioned whether finance is really the motive for internationalisation. Knight (2005) has surveyed nearly 3000 HEIs around the world and questioned their motives for internationalisation; as per this study results, the financial motives for internationalisation achieved the lowest ranking (only 4% overall ranking) comparatively. However, the UK HE landscape has changed since then. The economic crisis and the Browne review coupled with the current government's stringent immigration policies have not only put a strain on HEIs' finances but also have constrained their ability to access alternative income sources (e.g. recruitment of non-EU students).

In the meanwhile, worldwide demand for HE and the growth of private providers (for-profit and/or not-for-profit) have given an unprecedented market opportunity for HEIs. Given this development, HEIs in the UK are keen to work with private HE partners to accomplish some of their internationalisation aims more efficiently; and thus the collaborative UK HE provision (at home or abroad) between HEIs and private for-profit HE providers have witnessed a

growth in recent times. Hence, arguably the current internationalisation activities of HEIs, unlike before, have enhanced the role of private HE providers. Hodson and Thomas (2001) argue that it is the need for funds that has driven UK HEIs into a willingness to collaborate with private providers. HEIs in the UK have been making efforts to export their academic programmes through various collaborative arrangements, e.g. franchising of HE provision (De Vita and Case, 2003). However, by doing so, HEIs have created a significant space and/or role for multiple retailers (my term) in the education system. I use the term retailers to denote various intermediaries and/or private HE organisations that contribute to an international students' educational choice. So, I argue that the involvement of similar retailers (often private) within the collaborative HE provision has offered a new rationale for the purpose of internationalisation. The focus has now expanded beyond the defined role of 'integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2003, p.2). Instead, it brings to the fore an economic rationale that aims to achieve financial objectives that may be no more than short-term. Furthermore, this enhanced involvement of retailers in collaborative HE provision has created several tensions in the UK HE sector. For example, Altbach and Knight (2007) argue that in the private for-profit sector internationalisation projects are driven by financial motives. My personal view is that the increased participation of private for-profit providers in mainstream UK HE provision may well have an adverse impact on the international reputation of UK HE.

2.3 Students' Perception of Value

This section moves onto new territory as far as this chapter is concerned; it draws on both the education and marketing literature to analyse the current focus on student choice in the UK HE sector. An analysis of the government's white paper entitled *Students at the heart of the system* indicates the extent of interest in student choice in the government's policy making (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). The document has 73 pages (excluding all annexes), but the themes 'student choice' and 'choice' are mentioned approximately 40 times.

Brown (2012, p.8) is dubious about whether the coalition government's HE reforms really focus on the 'empowerment of students through the enhancement of student choice'. The switch in funding from general taxpayer to students has transferred the financial power to the hands of students. Allen (2012, p.49) agrees that this empowerment will create more assertive students in HE, who will seek value-for-money in their educational choice. As a result, HEIs will be compelled to focus their attention on students' needs and on the student experience. Although HE includes different stakeholders, students are obviously key. The proposed changes mark a significant beginning in the UK HE landscape. The enhancement of student choice, for example will have significant consequences not only on home students but also on international students and on their perceptions concerning the UK HE sector.

According to Cardoso et al. (2011), similar student focused changes are driven by a broader political logic that has been trying to define HE as a service in an educational market. Students are seen as customers with the ability to choose. Conceptions of the student as a customer assume that students will demand high quality HE provision and will exert pressures on HEIs to offer courses that are closely related to the skills required for the workplace (Naidoo et al. 2011). Naidoo et al (2011) argue that such consumerist approach in HE will foster a fundamental change in the way HE is provided. That is, the emphasis on student choice will intensify competition (between HEIs) and will 'result in a responsive, inclusive, and better quality teaching' (Naidoo et al. 2011, p.1145). There are many other dissenting voices that question the reality of student choice in HE. Their concerns primarily focus on the unique nature of education; for example, Agasisti and Catalano (2006) see education as something that needs to be experienced, in which quality can only be assessed long afterwards. Making a wise choice prior to consuming a particular service (education) is far from easy. In the meanwhile, others view education as a service from which some can be excluded (Rowley, 1997). Rowley (1997, p.10) further states that 'higher education is unique as a service experience in that most customers must meet stringent academic and sometimes personal criteria before being permitted to enter on the experience, through the process commonly known as admission'. This notion of exclusive access is relevant to all students in HE, for example, Rowley (ibid.) states that all students in HE are admitted exclusively and 'judged continuously on their suitability as continuing customers', which is unusual in other service provision. However, this notion

is applied more vigorously in the context of non-EU international students, where students are not only required to meet particular academic criteria of HEIs but also are expected to meet stringent immigration rules that often filter students. In this context, a realistic and impartial applicability of student choice is questionable or practically impossible for some sections of the student population.

Nevertheless, HE can also be treated like any other service. Education has several service characteristics: they are primarily intangible, perishable, heterogeneous, and the lecturer's teaching efforts are simultaneously produced and consumed with both lecturer and student being part of the teaching and learning experience (Mazzarol, 1998; Shank et al. 1995). Intangibility refers to the major difficulty in defining the nature of service provided and the perishability of services means that they cannot be stored (Mazzarol, 1998). For example, intangibility and perishability of services (or education) would offer challenges to institutions to manage demand that may result in over crowded or under utilised classrooms. The heterogeneity of services offer challenges in terms of quality of services provided. For example, the heterogeneity of services (or education) would challenge institutions to offer standardised student experience throughout the course.

Some studies show that increasingly students too see themselves as customers. An Australian study (White, 2007) identified positioning by students of themselves as customers. This is a noticeable change from the position of learners. Such a paradigm shift in students' perception will redefine

the existing relationship between students, teaching staff and HEIs. Thus, Naidoo et al. (2011, p.1156) conclude that 'contemporary relations between faculty, students, and universities cannot be structured with the same rudimentary tools that were used in elite systems of higher education when students were perceived as academic disciples with homogenous needs and wants'. So, does the present HE situation warrant a new approach to understand the heterogeneous needs of students?

As outlined elsewhere, the UK government's policy making on student choice is further intensifying the presence of market forces in HE. As a result, HEIs will have to embrace customer-centric business models, often borrowed from the commercial sector in order to effectively compete in the market (Ledden et al. 2011, p. 1234). For example, Fanghanel (2012a, p.56) notes that 'conceptions of the student as a consumer have fostered a focus on performance and satisfaction'. In the UK, a significant number of studies are available on student satisfaction and/or quality to describe student evaluations of educational services (see also chapter 7).

In this study, I argue that the current market-oriented HE landscape (often driven by policy making) will inevitably force HEIs to utilise marketing concepts and business models that are central in the traditional consumer markets (Ledden et al. 2011). I share the same view as Ledden et al. (2011, p.1235) and others who acknowledge the inherent deficiencies in the student as consumer perspective. However, current HE circumstances require HEIs to understand students' expectations much more closely; unlike before, the

current students' needs are heterogeneous. Students will expect institutions to understand their expectations better than before. Moreover, teaching and learning is a form of engagement and it involves teaching staff, students and other stakeholders. Understanding expectations is essential.

Given this background, students' perceptions of value and the process by which students evaluate (or perceive) value from their study experiences are attracting much attention in the context of education (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999; Ledden et al. 2011; Lai et al. 2011). For example, LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) conducted a study in a business school using a focus group interview and 402 questionnaires. They used a theory developed by Sheth et al. (1991) that groups values into five major categories (see table 2A). The focus of their study was to identify the 'cues that signalled value to students' (LeBlanc and Nguyen 1999, p.189). Their study results showed:

- A significant relationship between students' overall evaluation of value and perceptions of price;
- A significant existence of functional value (see table 2A for description), in the form of the benefits associated with the possession of a degree in business.

Thus, understanding how students evaluate and perceive value during their period of study will offer insights into student's choice related judgments. Given the government's focus on enhancing student choice, the application of similar value concepts in education can be seen appropriate. As outlined in chapter one, a considerable number of non-EU international students study

for their degree courses at various private for-profit HE colleges in the UK and abroad. This study aims to understand these students' choice related judgements for studying in such private colleges (also see chapter 7 and chapter 8: section 8.4). This study explores students' perception of value(s) (in the context of private provision) from the perspectives of non-EU international students and will examine how various values (Sheth et al. 1991) affect non-EU international students' satisfaction in their educational experience with various private providers.

2.4 Defining Students' Perception of Value

Woodall (2003, p.1) notes that the term value is 'replete with semantic variety' and the researchers have often given the concept different names. He observes that 'the literature on value per se is as broad as it is extensive, and is represented as much in the fields of economics and philosophy as it is in the domain of business' (p.3). LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) note that searching for a precise and permanent definition of value is a difficult task; LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) explain value as an outcome of a student's experience. I use the term students' perception of *value* as what students perceive that they get by using education (Ledden et al. 2011). Here the meaning of value is closely linked to students' perceptions and their experiences.

Zeithaml (1988) in her exploratory study attempted to conceptualise customers' perception of value. During this study, Zeithaml noticed that participants used the term value in different ways, but put these varying

responses together into four groups to form a definition of value. These four groups of responses were; (1) value is a low price; (2) value is whatever consumer wants in price; (3) value is the quality consumer gets for the price paid and (4) value is what consumer gets for what he/she gives (Zeithaml 1988, p.14). Based on these responses she defined value as 'consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given' (Zeithaml 1988, p.14). Her definition offers a give and get perspective on the concept of value. Zeithamal's definition has considerable currency in a commercial context (Ledden et al. 2011), but in terms of education (given the nature of educational experience – see section 2.5), it is difficult to measure what is given and taken; thus Ziethamal's definition offers limited applicability.

As discussed above (in section 2.5), the HE sector has witnessed many emerging drivers at the institutional, national and global levels which had major influences on UK HE. Often these drivers are interrelated – that is, one driver leads to the emergence of another. For example, the changes to the funding of HEIs (from taxpayer to students), changing expectations of students (as customers), increased climate of competition between HEIs and the changing policy aspirations of the state are all interrelated and having a major impact in the sector. Further, the prevailing political and market-driven landscape leads to the phenomenon of marketisation (Ledden et al. 2011), which increasingly frame HE in the context of market(s). In this situation HEIs are expected to find solutions to the problems in the market through market forces (Hemsley-Brown, 2011). For example, Maringe (2006, p.476) studied

student choice and identified that students, in particular, choose certain courses because it offered them 'anticipated benefits' which are directly linked to their potential career paths. Maringe (2006) argues that given the changes in the funding status of students, HEIs will have to re-examine their strategies to incorporate students' expectations about their courses, fees and employment opportunities. This will require better understanding on the part of HEIs to examine how students, as fee-paying customers, evaluate their education and perceive value they get from their education. Further, HEIs will not only have to compete with private HE providers (for-profit and not-for-profit) but also have to compete with HEIs in different leagues (i.e. Russell group vs. post-1992). Maringe (2006, p.476) points out that HEIs may need to re-position themselves in the market as 'recruiting institutions' to 'selecting institutions'.

I use three previous studies (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999; Ledden et al. 2011; Lai et al. 2011) to understand the application of value in the context of education. All these studies have used the theory developed by Sheth et al. (1991) who categorised value into five major consumption values /or categories. The following table 2A provides a summary of Sheth's work as interpreted in the context of education by LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999, Ledden et al. 2011 and Lai et al. 2011.

Table 2A: Values

Category	Interpretation
Functional value	<p>'A functional value concerns the perceived utility - normally economic benefits' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273)</p> <p>'Functional value is related to economic utility, the benefits associated with possessing the product/service' (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999, p.188)</p> <p>In the context of education, 'functional value accounts for the perceived benefits of the chosen course of study in terms of accelerating or enhancing students' employment or career advancement objectives' (Ledden et al. 2011, p.1239)</p> <p>Functional value in HE include 'benefits students perceive such as guaranteed future employment, a good salary, and promotions' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273)</p>
Social value	<p>'Social value concerns the utility derived from the customers' association with certain social groups' (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999, p.189)</p> <p>'Social value concerns the perceived utility derived from one's association with a specific social group' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273) . For example it may include friends in classes and social activities at the university/or college.</p>
Emotional value	<p>'Emotional value is the ability of a service to arouse feelings or affective states' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273).</p> <p>Examples include whether students are glad to choose courses in their specialisation and whether they find courses interesting (Lai et al. 2011).</p>

Epistemic value	<p>Epistemic value includes the ability of a service to satisfy one's desire for knowledge. Examples include student judgments on the quality of education they receive and course contents.</p> <p>'Epistemic value refers to benefits derived through a product's ability to arouse curiosity, provide novelty or satisfy a desire for knowledge' (Ledden et al. 2011, p.1239). This has particular reference in the context of education.</p>
Conditional value	<p>'Conditional value refers to consumer choice and judgment' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273). For Lai et al. (2011) examples of conditional value include: the size of the department and the number of students in a class are situational variables that can influence the value of the educational experience.</p> <p>Examples of conditional value in education also include the size of a business school and the parents' views with regard to its programs are situational variables which have the potential to influence the value of the educational experience (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999).</p>

Chapter 8 (section 8.4) provides discussion and analysis for data that were gathered from my respondents (non-EU international students). Section 8.4, deliberates on the significant presence of functional value aspects emerging from my data.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the changing landscape of UK HE and examined some of the discourses that are closely associated with the nature and role of the state in HE and its marketisation. This chapter outlined the effects of state financial disengagement and positioned collaborative HE between HEIs and

private for-profit providers as a result of the emerging marketised version of education. This chapter also examined the changing rationales driving internationalisation and identified a growing space for private providers within the UK HE sector. Finally this study explored students' perception of value(s) from the perspectives of non-EU international students (in private HE) and examined how various values (Sheth et al. 1991) affect their educational experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review II: Private Higher Education

3.0 Introduction

The private HE (for-profit and not-for-profit) sector has seen a phenomenal growth worldwide in the recent past. It was estimated that the private HE market reached US\$ 400 billion during the year 2006 (Bjarnason et al. 2009) and the market has grown further since then. A recent study commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013b) specifically looks into the post-2010 shape of private HE provision in the UK. This study has identified around 674 private providers. As per this study, most providers identified are relatively small in scale; 217 of the 674 had fewer than 100 students and five providers had over 5000 students (Department for Business, Innovations and Skills, 2013).

Levy (2010) writing about the global growth of private HE, points out that in the past many countries did not allow private HE, but now only a handful has none (p.122). In the UK, the debate concerning the role of private HE providers is recent. In the past, the UK HE sector has been dominated by the publicly-funded HEIs; hence debates concerning private HE have had no or limited interest at the academic and policy levels (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). The focus of this study is to examine the perceptions of stakeholders within the growing collaborative HE provision between the private for-profit HE providers and HEFCE funded UK HEIs. Given the private nature of

collaborative HE provision, this chapter will endeavour to describe and examine the current status of private providers in UK HE. The term privatisation can be used to describe a 'process that occurs in many modes but in one form or another involves the transfer of public money or assets from the public domain to the private sector' (Fitz and Beers, 2002, p. 139). The term private HE is a term used to describe the existence of non-state sector institutions in the realm of HE (Gupta, 2008). This chapter focuses mainly on the private HE (for-profit), but there will instances where the two terms are taken into discussion in a broader sense and used interchangeably. It is also important to stress here that there is a significant shortage of evidence based arguments on the role of private HE, especially in the context of UK HE, thus this chapter will refer to studies that originate from HE systems elsewhere.

3.1 Private HE: The Global Outlook

In general, student numbers in private HE providers are on the increase and it is a global phenomenon. Table 3A shows the latest data available in terms of student numbers in private HE globally. One of the major difficulties in assessing the growth of private HE is the lack of accurate data available at national level. In this context, table 3A below provides an indication on the scale of global private HE provision. But one must be cautioned on taking the data at its face value to establish any assumptions; simply because the PROPHE (Program for Research on Private Higher Education) aims to identify and count private HE by nations' own legal designations; but such

calculations do not guarantee the degree of privateness and publicness of institutions (Levy, 2012).

Table 3A: Global picture - Private HE student numbers

Region	Numbers of students in private HEIs	Numbers of private HEIs
Africa	0.7m	434
Asia	18m	18,206
Latin America	7.6m	7,090
Europe	3.7m	2,136
USA	4.7m	2,667
World	35m	30,555

Source: Program for Research On Private Higher Education (PROPHE) (November, 2010); Middlehurst and Fielden (2011)

Note: The above data were used by Middlehurst and Fielden (2011) based on the PROBHE (2010) research and contain elements of data gathered in different years (2001-2009) and are shown here to provide an approximate indication of private HE provision.

Nevertheless, the above data can be useful in understanding the current patterns of private HE provision. Table 3A shows that the scale of private provision is highest in Asia and Latin America - for two different reasons. In Asia, many governments are under pressure to expand HE enrolments to improve global competitiveness of their respective HE systems (Mok, 2009). To achieve this states are turning to the market and to the private sector (Mok, 2009, p.36). But in most of Latin America, on the other hand, traditionally private HE has grown out of the efforts of the Catholic Church, a significant force in society (Bernasconi, 2010; Neave, 2007). For example, the Catholic University in Chile emerged in 1888 as a response to the state's overall control in education (Bernasconi, 2010). In countries like Chile, the

rapid expansion of private HE was made possible by the high demand and a favourable regulatory environment (Bernasconi, 2006). For example, in the early 1980s, the military government (1973-1990) turned its attention to HE and created new private universities; the University of Chile and the State Technical University were also transformed into fourteen small, independent public institutes and universities (Bernasconi, 2010).

In western Europe publicly funded HE institutions have had the dominant role (Levy, 2012). According to Levy the 'statist tradition' (p.183) - a tradition that expects 'welfare goods would be publicly funded and provided' is limiting the prospects of private HE in Europe. But, in contrast, eastern and central Europe have seen an exponential growth of private HE providers (Giesecke, 2006). This prompts Neave (2007) to offer an interesting perspective which finds dissimilarities in the trends of privatisation in western and eastern Europe. Neave (2007, p.37) identifies a paradox in the process of privatisation in eastern and central Europe as compared to western Europe - in eastern and central Europe the collapse of moral, political and financial aspects of the state administration (moral - refers, in particular, to the fall of Soviet Union and the changing values and assumptions about a particular structure) encouraged privatisation of HE. In western Europe according to Neave, privatisation required the intervention of the state. The intervention of the state in the process of privatisation (although discussed in the context of wider Europe) is apparent in the UK and has its own implications. The following section will examine the latter.

3.1.1 Private HE in the UK

In the UK, the government's policy making provides a significant role for private HE providers. As noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the speech made by the minister responsible for universities in 2010 indicates a similar policy trajectory - enabling private institutions to play a major role (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010). In the UK, the state's intervention in the privatisation process is evident from its declared intention to open the HE market to various alternative providers (private for-profit and/or not-for-profit). By doing so, the government aims to intensify the current levels of competition in the HE sector and offer students with a wide range of choices (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). Brown (2012) however questions the government's focus on student choice and points out that in reality there is little choice. Expansion of private HE may not necessarily yield a wide range of student choice either. According to Oketch (2003, p.36) private providers offer courses that are 'specific and narrow'. For example, if private providers are considered to be driven by market demands then these institutions may choose to offer courses that provide high private benefits (Wilkinson and Yussof, 2005, p.362).

Privatisation in HE can also be interpreted in terms of the reduction in public expenditure (see also section 2.1; Neave, 2007) - this is evident in the UK HE, where the funding from the state has been substantially reduced and as a result HEIs are being compelled to seek alternative funding sources. In this context, the collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers may offer alternative income opportunities to HEIs (Hodson and

Thomas, 2001). However, such collaborative HE partnerships (involving private for-profit HE providers) may enhance the volume of private provision in UK HE. In this context the state's intervention in the process of privatisation of HE (through its funding cuts) can be apparent in the UK.

A notable study of private not-for-profit and for-profit HE provision was carried out in March 2010 by Universities UK (which represents all universities in the country) and this publication forms the basis for understanding the scale of private HE provision in the UK. Further the same report has offered a classification of private providers by their functions and thus provides an initial step towards understanding private HE providers in the UK. The existing classifications are mostly linked to private HE in the United States (US) (i.e. Levy, 2009); thus Universities UK's classification is timely and appropriate in the context of UK private HE. To provide clarity and continuity, the four major functions used in Universities UK's report are:

1. Delivery of academic content;
2. Academic support for international students in the UK;
3. Partnerships in providing content;
4. Other types of relationship.

The above categorisation based on the functions of private HE providers is unique in UK HE, because this shows the collaborative nature of private provision in the UK. For example, delivering academic content may involve

private providers offering degree courses in collaboration with HEIs in the UK, since not all private providers have degree awarding powers.

Building on this report, HESA (2011) provides provisional but more accurate statistics on the size of student numbers in private not-for-profit and for-profit HE providers in the UK. It is incomplete because the numbers were provided by the private providers who participated in the survey and not all institutions responded. It reveals a number of key trends pertaining to private HE provision in the UK. For example around 35% of students in private HE have come from non-EU destinations and this participation increases to 40% if all non-UK students are counted together (non-EU and EU) (HESA, 2011). This is significant if compared against the non-EU students in HEFCE funded HEIs which amounts only to 12.1% (HESA, 2013a). Given these statistics, it is clear that private HE in the UK has a major international market, and any policy changes undertaken on the immigration front will have a major impact on it.

Before 1982, the Department of Education and Science (DES) was tasked to inspect and accredit independent colleges of HE, but in 1982 DES stopped its inspection and accreditation of colleges. This marked the beginning of uncontrolled growth for private HE provision in the UK (BAC, 2010). Since then the growth of independent institutions (some policy documents use the term independent sector to denote all sorts of private providers) that caters mainly to international students' needs has seen a staggering growth. Some statistics indicate that in the year 1993 there were around 3000 such college-type institutions operating in the UK (BAC, 2010). However 2003 saw a

significant intervention from the state; the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced a voluntary register of education and training providers. This register was used to assess the bona fide status of the institutions when entry clearance was sought by non-EU international students. But in reality, the DfES initiative did not yield the expected results and it had serious flaws in its mechanisms in registering prospective HE providers. By this time there was a growing concern amongst the policy makers regarding the quality of educational provision at these private providers which was beginning to have an impact on the overall image of the UK education overseas.

More stringent proposals were outlined and implemented by the UK Border Agency. The following key points (which are relevant to this study) summarise the events that had occurred during the 2005 - 2009 period:

1. The introduction of the sponsors' register - all HE institutions were required to register with the UK Border Agency, and only those registered institutions were allowed to recruit international students (non-EU);
2. To be included in the sponsors' register, the HE institutions had to be accredited by a recognised accreditation body (for example, the British Accreditation Council (BAC) or the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA));
3. The year 2009 saw the introduction of the Tier 4 Points based immigration system - the students or applicants were given points based on the predetermined variables (i.e. points were given on the basis of sponsor institution's bona fide status, students' financial

abilities and for the English language requirements) and the students were expected to achieve a minimum threshold.

By 2010 the implementation process had begun to inflict a change on the UK HE landscape. Further in relation to this study of private collaborative HE, it has begun to provide new key rationale and shape. The following key points summarise the events that have unfolded after 2010. It is also important at this juncture to realise that the impacts are continuing and some of the changes are being implemented at the time of writing:

1. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has been drafted in by the government to conduct institutional reviews on private HE providers - Review for Educational Oversight (REO) is the term used by QAA. The QAA (as a government's agency) has taken the place of other independent organisations such as the British Accreditation Council;
2. Non-EU students studying with private HE providers have lost their right to work (i.e. part-time work);
3. Limitations were placed on the number of confirmation of acceptances that can be issued by HE institutions;
4. Restrictions were placed on the number of years a student could stay in the UK under the Tier 4 system;
5. Highly trusted sponsorship status was given to institutions that fulfil the sponsor's duties to the satisfaction of the UK Border Agency. The UK Border Agency was given ultimate control to sanction or in some cases revoke sponsorship licences of those institutions that failed to perform their sponsor's responsibilities. Thus the recruitment of students (non-

EU) has become highly dependent on institutions' ability to deliver their sponsors' responsibilities.

The ramifications of these changes are widespread and not confined to private HE providers. Firstly, there is a deliberate steering on the part of the government to elevate the status of private HE provision by bringing in the QAA. Some may view this steer as a heavy handed government's regulative measure; as Tooley (2002, p.54) had earlier observed the 'British government seems to want to regulate private education as heavily as other European countries'. Government's policy making shows that it expects the refined and re-structured private HE to play a major role in the UK HE sector. The following excerpt from the government's White Paper 'Students at the heart of the system' support such assertion (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011);

We want a diverse, competitive system that can offer different types of higher education so that students can choose freely between a wide range of providers (p.47)

Brown (2012) states that the coalition government's central policy aspiration appears to focus on the need to empower students through the enhancement of student choice. In fact, according to him it does nothing of the kind. In the UK the amount of student loan outlay flowing to various private providers has risen to £100 million during the year 2011/2012 (Morgan, 2012) which shows the government's commitment to students in private HE. The government is working to increase competition in the HE sector. This at one level can be

seen as the government's steering of HEIs towards making them competitive in the market. The government's proposals further suggest that first time undergraduate students in private HE providers will be eligible to access student loans amounting to £6,000 beginning from 2013/2014 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). In the past, private HE providers have relied heavily on international student fee income, and this new loan arrangement would entice these providers to focus on the national market(s).

Secondly, the reforms that have taken place in the private HE sector in the last 20 years or so have re-defined the relationship between the state and private HE in the UK. If the departure from accreditation of DES in 1982 is seen as a distancing of the state from the affairs of private HE (served mainly the needs of international students) then the reforms in the recent past can be seen as the re-kindling of the state's relationship with the private HE sector. Private HE providers in the UK have long been able to position themselves outside the public policy framework and enjoyed autonomy in all aspects (except that they were not allowed to offer their own degrees without gaining Degree Awarding Power (DAP). Tapper and Salter (1995, p.74) state that HEIs in the UK were considered autonomous but the reality is that they only enjoyed conditional autonomy. Tapper and Salter continue to state that 'the autonomy was exercised within the externally imposed boundaries' (ibid.). That is, autonomy was exercised only on conditions that reflect national policies; and thus Tapper and Salter argue that the state has reclaimed the control of those boundaries to create a HE system which is more diverse in character. This they suggest offers conditional autonomy to universities in the

UK. The same scenario is being constructed in the context of private HE providers.

Private HE providers were once situated outside the boundaries of government control and in recent times they have been gradually dragged into the 'externally set boundaries'. The QAA and funding organisations now have considerable influence on the operation of private HE providers in the UK. The providers increasingly operate within state-set boundaries. This provides greater challenges to these providers as they cannot simply be viewed as pure private entities anymore and have thus lost some their competitive edge.

3.2 Private HE: Motives and Debates

Debates on private HE in the UK typically include more rhetoric and ideological arguments than evidence-based arguments (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). There has always been a strong presence of publicly-funded HE systems in the UK and in western Europe (Levy, 2012) and this long accepted 'statist tradition' (p.183) has influenced the composition of HE in the UK. In fact, there is a strong resistance to the idea of private involvement in the production of public good. It is commonly understood that HE produces public goods such as knowledge, collective literacy and common culture (Marginson, 2007, p.318). Opponents (for example, Tilak, 2009) of private HE provision question their ability and willingness to meet these societal needs. However, a historical perspective look at policy shows a decline in the statist tradition (antistatism); it promotes the choice of individuals and attempts to

deregulate the HE sector (Pritchard, 1994; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). This is providing a new role and opportunity for the private sector in UK HE.

According to Levy (2009), the private HE sector is heterogeneous and this makes matters even complicated. Levy provides a typology of private HE which has been framed around three broader themes; they are elite, religious and demand-absorbing. The demand for HE is continuing to grow rapidly and the ability of the welfare state to support and meet this ever increasing demand has been questioned. This provides opportunities for demand-absorbing type of institutions (mostly for-profit) to get involved in the provision of HE, thus making them the largest in this categorisation (Levy, 2009; Bjarnason et al. 2009). King (2003) also notes that the fastest growing type of private HE provision is for-profit in nature and he suggests that this form of providers (although comparatively small in size) can be seen operating in eastern and central Europe, and in countries such as Malaysia. In general, private HE providers are driven by market/s and are aware of market demands. They move quickly to meet those demands better than the public institutions (Bjarnason et al. 2009). For example, the growth of private for-profit providers in the UK can be traced back to the early 1980s (certainly not a recent development), this was when UK HEIs had begun to charge a higher tuition fee for international students. Having realised the substantial demand in the international market(s) for less expensive UK education, the private for-profit HE providers have begun to offer HE courses to international students, often under-cutting the HEIs. Ironically, this exponential growth of demand-

absorbing private for-profit HE providers in the UK and worldwide have also raised concerns as to the quality of HE provision.

Further, private for-profit providers have also attracted criticism, for example from King (2003). According to him, private for-profit HE regards education as a commodity through which profits can be made by its investors (King, 2003, p.4). The critics of private for-profit HE provide an argument that highlight the tensions between profit-making and education. Some evidence can be found to substantiate this claim, for example in the context of Sri Lanka, Peiris and Ratnasekera (2007) suggest that there are around 50 private companies engaged in the business of education and the complaints received suggest that some of these institutions lack physical infrastructure facilities and provide poor student experience. As a result many students at these institutions have failed to pass their examinations and could not continue their studies (Peiris and Ratnasekera, 2007).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are many reasons explaining the growth of private providers (for-profit and not-for-profit). The emergence of private for-profit providers is a result of changing government policies and ever rising demand for HE (Shah and Sid Nair, 2012; Collinge, 2004). As this study involves private HE in Sri Lanka one or two other examples from outside Europe are useful. Oketch (2003) examining the trends in Kenyan private HE suggests the following five general reasons for the growth of private universities: (a) growing demand for HE in Kenya; (b) global trends – influenced by donor institutions such as the World Bank (WB);

(c) increase and success in secondary school participation; (d) failure or diminishing confidence in public HE institutions and (e) reduced government involvement. The growth of Kenyan private universities also indicates the apparent external influences, for example the World Bank has placed restrictions on increasing public HE enrolments (Varghese, 2002). Focussing on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, Varghese (2002, p.41) gives the following reasons for the development of the private HE sector;

1. Transition from state planning to planning based on market forces;
2. Public sector is unable to cope with the growing demand for HE;
3. The reduced capacity of the state to fund public sector institutions – due partly to changing political views and
4. Deregulation policies and advancements in technologies that have transformed HE into a globalised transnational operation.

Altbach (2005, p.3) suggests that pressures placed upon governments and HE systems could play a key role in opening a space for private HE providers worldwide. This suggests that the growth and the motives of private HE (for-profit and not-for-profit) cannot be generalised rather it must be viewed and interpreted in specific contexts. For example, the early growth of private HE in the UK (although unobserved) can be characterised as non-elite, demand-absorbing in type and motivated by an unmet international demand for education. This was driven mostly by external factors (i.e. international demand or lack of HE supply in other countries) whereas the recent form of

private provision in the UK seem to be driven by internal drivers which include the shift in government's policy aspirations.

James (1993) studied the growth of private HE provision in 50 countries (12 developed and 38 developing countries) and attempted to find answers to the question why some societies have made dissimilar choices regarding public HE provision and/or private HE provision? His findings suggest that the growth of private HE provision can be explained by a 'phenomenon of excess demand' and a 'phenomenon of differentiated demand' (Tilak, 2009, p.49), i.e. related to the inability of state funded HE to cope with demand, and to diversity of demand.

The phenomenon of excess demand can pave the way for a demand-absorbing private for-profit sector to venture into higher education. Interestingly, the phenomenon of excess 'global' demand can lead to a proliferation of demand-absorbing private for-profit HE providers in the educational systems that has been traditionally catering to the overseas student demands (for example UK).

3.3 Chapter Summary

The focus of this study is to examine the perceptions of stakeholders within the growing collaborative HE provision between private for-profit HE providers and HEIs (HEFCE funded). This chapter provides an overview of the main stakes in private HE (for-profit or not-for-profit) in the UK. The UK HE system

has been highly dependent on public funding and any debate concerning private HE providers leads to controversy. However, there seems to be an interest, at least in policy discourse, to open UK HE up to more private providers. This chapter also looked at the rationale behind such policy statements. The development of private HE in the UK managed to operate partly outside the public policy framework for a long time. Private HE (for-profit and not-for-profit) providers are diverse and their motives complex. Private HE provision is difficult to generalise about and is better understood in context.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This study examines the perceptions of stakeholders in collaborative partnerships involving private for-profit HE providers and HEFCE funded UK universities (labelled in this thesis as HEIs). There is a shortage of empirical investigations on the nature of UK private for-profit providers and their continued and rather unobserved existence. Their existence is unobserved in the sense that some of these private for-profit providers have been in operation for many years and until recently they have not received much attention from the wider higher education stakeholders (i.e. HEIs and policy organisations). This thesis is therefore a timely investigation examining the nature of private for-profit providers from its stakeholders' perspectives. This exploratory study uses a qualitative research framework with semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

This chapter outlines the research methodology and is in four parts. The first part explains the researcher's stance and the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach. Part two discusses the specific research strategies and data collection methods utilised. Part three examines the application of these methods in this study and presents the techniques used for data analysis.

Part four explores the ethical considerations that have been taken into account in this study.

4.1 The Researcher's stance

There are several decisions that need to be taken and made explicit in research design; especially the decision regarding the researcher's choice of research paradigm. The researcher's set of beliefs on the nature of the world and how it should be understood will guide the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.31) and its methodologies.

My philosophical approach can be broadly labelled as interpretivism - a tradition that rejects objectivity in human sciences and instead searches for meanings (Cousin, 2009; Schwandt, 2003). According to (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.31) all research is interpretive, however unlike naturalists, interpretivists believe in meanings and see the world as interpreted and experienced by people. An interpretive view could 'generate understandings and insights in contexts that are held to be inherently too unstable for reliable predictions to be made' (Cousin, 2009, p.9). In order to understand a particular social reality the researcher has to understand the meanings that constitute that particular reality (Schwandt, 2003). The social reality (or process) I want to understand is the collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. Collaborative arrangements in HE do not occur in isolation; such arrangements are a manifestation of various internal and external drivers (for example, HE policies, funding constraints and

demand for HE) that are having an impact on HEIs, private for-profit providers and students.

A HEI may decide to offer its qualifications in collaboration with a private for-profit college, but another HEI may not see any rationale in such HE provision, hence for example my research question a:

What is the rationale for collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the UK and overseas from the perspectives of both HEIs and private for-profit providers?

A non-EU student may opt to study in a university (HEI) in the UK or he/she may decide to enrol in a private for-profit college to study the same course, hence for example my research question b:

To what extent is this private higher education provision attractive to students from non-EU destinations?

Answers to the above questions may not be observed or explained objectively. My position is that to find meaningful answers to the aforementioned questions, the researcher needs to engage with the actors to find meanings. In this case, as the researcher, I decided to engage with the stakeholders of collaborative HE to explore their lived experiences, through which I was able to comprehend and interpret the rationales driving their actions and/or choices. This requires a form of 'interpretation' (understanding

is interpretation) to understand what the actors are doing (Schwandt, 2003, p.296). This understanding or interpretation can only be determined by engaging with actors.

4.1.1 Experiential knowledge

Section 4.1.2 below presents an overview of my rationale for adopting a qualitative framework for this particular study. In an exploratory study such as this, my own experiential knowledge about the topic cannot be ignored. Here I carry out an exploratory study (as compared to explanatory and descriptive), which provides flexibility to test one's ideas and explore their implications and meanings (Stebbins, 2001).

Maxwell (2005, p.38) states that 'separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from major source of insights'. In a study where there is limited literature, the researcher's previous experience, background and identity present valuable sources of input. Yet, in general there are limited arguments on how to incorporate these experiences most effectively in a research design (Maxwell, 2005).

I have been employed in Sri Lanka by a UK institution (a recipient of significant public funding) that promoted UK HE to international students. I have also been a non-EU international student since 2005 in two HEFCE funded HEIs. This offers me a unique vantage position to recognise the concerns of participants in my study. Furthermore, my contact with several

private for-profit colleges as a part-time lecturer provides valuable insights into their world and modus operandi. This experience has influenced my selection of topic for study, the formulation of my research questions and the decisions regarding the review of literature. For example, the motivation for the topic originated from the discord that I have begun to feel between my perception on UK HE (as a non-EU international student) and what I have witnessed during my employment. This, of course, has driven me to focus on specific literature that explored similar tensions in the context of HE.

Also, for example, there are arguments in the media about the diverse reasons why non-EU students seek to gain a UK qualification. Some of these views are ill-informed and driven by specific agendas. For example, Migration Watch UK (2013) identifies international students as a significant element in the calculation of net migration. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I am sympathetic towards the sacrifices an average non-EU student is expected to contribute during his/her studies, sacrifices the UK public would be unlikely to be aware of. The students' experiences include decision making, choice, application, being a student and eventual return home. The word sacrifice is used in a broader sense; it encapsulates in general a non-EU student's willingness to forgo significant proportion of his/her investments and comfort (not necessarily monetary) for the sake of enhanced opportunities and prospects. This view has motivated me to incorporate student views and perspectives in this study (research questions b and c).

However Maxwell (2005) also warns against researchers uncritically forcing their values and assumptions on to the research. This study encompasses perspectives from various stakeholders (management and staff from HEIs and private for-profit HE providers, policy makers and students) who have wide ranging interests on the collaborative HE provision in the UK. As I discuss in section 4.4.1, my study is likely to be enriched by seeking multiple perspectives and using a range of methods (interviews and focus groups). Moreover, this section is an attempt to explain my position in the context of this study.

4.1.2 Qualitative versus Quantitative Research

The type of data collected (qualitative or quantitative) is based on the aim(s) of the research and the questions it attempts to answer. In this section I want to discuss why qualitative methods provide the most appropriate approach to my research questions.

Qualitative research necessitates getting closer to the participants in understanding their perspectives and meanings they attach to the reality (Bryman, 2012; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). The answers to the research questions can only be found amongst the stakeholders of collaborative UK higher education provision. Identifying, understanding and interpreting their ideas, opinions and perceptions form an integral part of this study. Thus qualitative research is appropriate whilst quantitative research, where the researcher remains distant as an outsider in collecting 'hard' and 'reliable' data would not yield appropriate findings or results (Bryman, 2012).

4.1.3 Research Design

This particular study is exploratory in nature, but there are many other aims in different research designs. An exploratory study is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light' (Robson, 2002, p.59). The aim of exploratory research is to collect as much information as possible about a particular research problem. There are various ways of conducting exploratory research; Tull and Hawkins (1993) and Saunders et al (2007) identify (a) search of the literature (b) interviewing experts in the subject (c) conducting focus group interviews. Exploratory research is often seen as a first stage for a more systematic research inquiry. However by its nature i.e. flexibility, an exploratory study provides a good basis to conduct a study in an area that has previously been under-researched (Stebbins, 2001).

In deciding which type of research design to adopt for this particular study, the nature of the topic, its objectives and the proposed research questions were considered carefully. After carefully considering the evolving nature of the topic and the limited literature within this particular area, it was concluded that an exploratory research design would be the most suitable.

4.2 Research Method

This section forms the second part of this chapter where I outline the research strategy and its scope and limitations along with the data collection methods utilised.

At the initial stages of this investigation the case study strategy had been considered as the most appropriate strategy for a number of reasons. A case study is an 'empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context' (Yin, 1994, p.13). It enables a researcher to study a social group, community, system, organisation, event, or even a person within their own context to make assessments and comparisons (Walliman, 2006, p.45). The collaborative setting that I have undertaken to study has the following two key entities; (a) the HEI that awards the degree and (b) the private for-profit organisation that operates as a provider. These two entities taken together can form the basis for a case which can be studied in-depth to address the research questions. Further cross case analysis would enable the researcher to collect context specific data which can be compared across and between entities to further broaden the understanding.

4.2.1 Setbacks

As discussed in the previous chapters (chapters 2 and 3), the UK HE sector has been attracting much attention. The coalition government's recent policy

initiative in respect of private HE provision has generated animated debate within the sector (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011; 2013b). The ambiguities and tensions caused by this state of affairs have its own implications for this study.

Contacts were made, but to my surprise the search for institutional information and access to respondents was a challenging experience both professionally and personally. Section 4.2.2 below outlines some of the difficulties that have been encountered during this struggle for access.

4.2.2 Pilot study: Database and fact finding meetings

In August 2010, I compiled an excel database to assist in systematically contacting relevant institutions in the Greater London. The datasheet had 100 records and included the following: names of collaborating HEIs, names of their partners, location, courses offered, modes of collaborative arrangements and contact details. The QAA's overseas collaborative audit reports along with the British Accreditation Council's (BAC) online information were the main sources for this database. However this was not a comprehensive database because; (a) QAA had not yet conducted audits on all collaborative provision; (b) it was not easy to access information from HEIs; (c) private for-profit providers did not openly advertise their association with the particular HEI (possibly because it gives away crucial information for possible competitors) and (d) there were no requirements at that time by any regulatory or

monitoring organisations to publish such details to wider public or even to the prospective students.

In September 2010 formal requests were sent out to chosen institutions in the Greater London area as part of the first phase of field work. The emails were customised for each institution, and conveyed my desire to get appointments with key individuals to initiate a discussion to focus on the research area. Around twenty one (21) emails were sent followed up by telephone contacts between September 2010 and December 2010. The twenty-one were selected on the basis of convenience. However only two college directors agreed to meet me to discuss the topic further.

4.2.2 (a) Meeting 1: Managing Director - College C in London

On 6th October 2010 I met the managing director of a relatively large private for-profit college that operated from central London, one that offered courses ranging from diploma levels to postgraduate (PG) levels. It had collaborative arrangements with two large universities in the UK to offer their MBA and BA programmes in business, computing and travel and tourism. During the meeting the managing director:

1. Outlined his frustrations on the prevailing tensions between private for-profit institutions, HEI's and the policy makers of the UK HE industry;
2. Stated that because of this neither he nor his institution were prepared to participate in any formal research process; and

3. Categorically rejected the request I made to conduct interviews with students.

This meeting lasted around 25 minutes and although disappointing it offered insights into the current situation, insights that would later be utilised in the interview schedule which will be described in the data collection methods section. This particular college has since gone into liquidation. This illustrates how precarious the UK private HE sector can be.

4.2.2 (b) Meeting 2: Principal - College G in London

On 21st October 2010 I met the principal of a large college that operates from London, one offering courses ranging from diploma to postgraduate (PG) levels and on to doctoral research degrees. It has collaborative arrangements with several large universities in the UK to offer their PhD, MBA and BA programmes in business, computing and travel and tourism. This meeting in contrast to the previous meeting illustrated the complex nature of the topic that I have undertaken to study. Apart from meeting me after a wait of two hours the participant offered little assistance. It was becoming obvious that directors of private colleges are wary of providing information to outsiders.

Given this context I began to examine alternative strategies and methods to address my research questions. However it is also important to point out a significant event that had begun to unfold during this time (late 2010) within

UK HE settings, which may have deterred some participants or institutions from actively participating in this study.

The consultative process on the student immigration system was introduced in December 2010; it proposed radical changes within the HE industry, most specifically within the private for-profit sector. The key aims of the proposal were; (a) to considerably reduce the number of non-EU students coming into the country; and (b) to ensure high standards of quality HE provision within the private for-profit sector institutions the QAA had been given responsibility for monitoring. These reforms resulted in major structural changes within the private for-profit sector and private providers had to respond to these proposals. However a significant number of institutions decided to cease their operations completely in the UK.

Given the nature of these unsettling events some private as well as public (HEI) institutions stated that they could not find the time for my particular study. The Principal of a college owned by a large US conglomerate wrote:

I am however very very busy at present and really need to spend my time supporting my staff so I am afraid I won't be able to help on this occasion

But when queried about an opportunity to meet an appropriate staff member, the Principal responded:

Sorry [xxxx - researcher's name deleted] but the staff here are all extremely busy and already doing much overtime to deal with the constant changes in legislation we currently face

In fact, the difficulties in gaining access to private as well as public (HEI) institutions were not an isolated episode. A contemporary research report on private providers by Universities UK (Universities UK, 2010) highlights the difficulties Universities UK's highly resourced and well connected researchers had encountered in accessing information about private providers. The report states:

The issue of confidentiality has permeated our interviews and discussions with both sides of the public-private divide; both sides have expressed concerns about divulging details of some sensitive developments or collaborations and market initiatives. Several universities cited confidentiality as their reason for declining to complete our survey (Universities UK, 2010, p.10).

With reference to the speech made by Professor Altbach during the European Association for International Education's 2011 conference, the Times Higher Education article entitled 'You can't have it, it's private' (Grove, 2011) shares the same observations. This article highlights the culture of mistrust and secrecy within the private higher education sector, which has hindered research into private higher education.

Overall it was evident that institutions (both private and public) were under severe pressure; because of constantly changing conditions and tough regulations. The QAA's educational oversight of private for-profit providers necessitates resources that strain an already overstretched private provision. Thus any research activity that may possibly divulge competitive information or unveil institutional arrangements is seen as a hazard.

It was becoming clear that I had to take a step back to revisit my research questions and seek alternative means to find answers. I realised that the best alternative way to explore collaborative HE provision was to speak to key stakeholders. I also knew (from my experience in the sector) that there would be individuals within institutions (HEIs and private providers) who would be willing to share their perspectives. Section 4.2.3 below explains and justifies my choice of qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews.

4.2.3 Data Collection Methods: Qualitative interviews and Focus groups

As compared to other methods, interviews are relatively economical in terms of time and resources (Silverman, 2006, p.113) and can be used as part of larger research design, or as the sole method of study. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p.349) qualitative interviews provide a rare opportunity to understand people's experiences, opinions and values through 'multi-sensory channels' - the rapport, the willingness or otherwise to respond to a particular question, and the body language. This study used a semi-structured interview

schedule to maintain some control over the themes and types of questions asked. Semi-structured interviews enable a researcher to have both the structure and the freedom over his/her content and sequence of the questions. In general, the interviewer will have a list of themes and questions that need to be explored in an interview (Saunders et al. 2007; see 4.3.1 (b) for the interview topics) and will enjoy freedom over the flow of these questions. At the same time, it is also an opportunity for the respondents to discuss issues that they feel appropriate and relevant to this study. Given the sensitive nature of the subject, as discussed in section 4.2, it was felt that any form of non-personal methods (for example, questionnaire) would only provide a space for 'politically correct' answers. I often had detailed email correspondence with participants (detailing the purpose of the research) before the actual interview. But, as a researcher, I also realised that 'what stories interviewees share with us, and how they tell their stories may be shaped not just by the rapport established, but also by social similarities and distances between us and those we interview' (Miller and Glassner, 2011, p.136). I strongly believed that face-to-face encounters (interviews) are the best way to gather information on certain subjects.

The themes and questions may vary from interview to interview. In a semi-structured interview a researcher needs a good understanding of the topic under discussion to monitor the discussion and keep it to appropriate themes. This is another important reason for using the semi-structured interview, as the present study participants (stakeholders) have various interests, not

necessarily aligned, and it is important that the researcher is able to adapt his questions with reference to those.

Focus group studies are also used in educational research (Cohen et al. 2007). They are most appropriate for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns (Kitzinger et al. 1999). In general, focus groups provide informational data that is not sensitive in nature (Warren et al. 2010) and enables data to be collected more quicker than for other methods from a large sample of the population. Focus groups are essentially a type of group interview, which focuses in detail on a particular theme or topic with an element of interaction (Walliman, 2006, p.98). As in the case of any other method, focus group studies too have their own drawbacks. The number of people involved in a focus group tends to be small therefore it may gather less information than a wider survey. As a group exercise a focus group may show differences in member participation; a participant with a strong personality may dominate the conversation which will lead to non-participation from weaker group members (Cohen et al. 2007). In this study, to promote equal participation of group members, encouraging suggestions and comments have been offered to participants who showed signs of reduced participation. For example, open-ended questions were posed to individuals based on other participants' responses, i.e. what are your views on what 'A' says?

There are no golden rules on the number of participants in a particular focus group but the market research literature recommends that the ideal number of focus group participants is between eight and twelve (Kitzinger et al. 1999).

However, Gullifer et al. (2010) exploring university students' perceptions of plagiarism in an Australian university conducted their research solely based on seven focus groups, which had participant numbers ranging from three to nine. A focus group can involve as few as three or as many as six participants, with the norm being between four and eight (Gullifer et al. 2010). This study is based on 3 focus groups consisting of in total 14 student participants (see tables 4A). In addition to the three focus group studies with students (undergraduates and postgraduates) I conducted five in-depth interviews with graduates (former students) of private institutions.

4.3 The Study Design

In this part of the chapter I outline the selected methods and approach to data analysis. The fourth part of the chapter will include discussions on the ethical considerations taken into account in this study.

As established above, this study was exploratory in nature; the focus is to 'seek a deeper understanding' of UK collaborative higher education provision. This study primarily used semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups to collect data. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. According to Walliman (2006, p.79) purposive sampling is 'where the researcher selects what he/she thinks is a typical sample based on specialist knowledge or selection criteria' (see table 4E and section 4.3.1). The data collection has centred around three broadly categorised stakeholder groups within collaborative higher education. These three distinctive groups are:

- (a) Student (private for-profit college) participants including five former students who have all graduated;
- (b) Management, staff and policy-maker participants in the UK;
- (c) Management, staff and policy-maker participants in Sri Lanka.

4.3.1 Students

A significant number of international students (mostly non-EU students) are studying for HE courses in the UK and overseas. As key stakeholders within the growing collaborative HE provision private college students' perspectives need to be understood to gain further insights. From my own experience as a lecturer in private colleges of HE, it is clear that these private college students (mostly international students) are bound by the terms and conditions of their student visa status. Moreover under Tier-4 regulations, these students are sponsored by their respective colleges or institutions. In this context, it was felt that focus group studies would better serve the purpose in eliciting views, experiences and opinions as students would feel more comfortable in groups and would be encouraged by peer participation.

Two essential criteria were used to purposively recruit students for the focus groups; (a) they were from private colleges studying for HE courses (b) they were from non-EU destinations. The schedule followed a semi-structured, open - ended format. In total three focus group studies were completed; and each group was asked the following questions;

(1) How did you reach the decision to study in the UK?

(This question focuses on students' decision making process to see how they eventually decided to pursue their studies in the UK)

(2) How did you choose your course and the college?

(This focuses on students' decision making process relating to their choice of institution and course(s), and it aims to identify those factors that influence students to choose private providers)

(3) What were your expectations?

(4) What are your experiences?

4.3.1 (a) Student Participants (including five graduates)

The participants were recruited from two private for-profit colleges in London and from a college situated in the South East of England (for convenience identified as 'outside London'). All three colleges had a student population estimated around 350 to 450. I was working in two colleges at the time. After informing the programme leaders, I verbally invited students who met the criteria to participate in the study. Although I had never belonged to management or full time faculty of these respective colleges and had not taught these particular students, I felt that I was still seen by them as one of the academic staff, perhaps not surprising because I was one of the academic staff. Therefore I took particular care and effort during the focus groups to make it clear that this study was conducted as part of my own PhD programme. In total 14 students voluntarily participated in the focus groups (6 females and 8 males).

Table 4A: Focus group participants

Focus group	Participants	Discipline	Demographics
Group 1 (FG1)	4 students	Business	1 Female 3 Male
Group 2 (FG2)	5 students	Business	3 Female 2 Male
Group 3 (FG3)	5 students	Business / H	2 Female and 3 Male

Although initially many students had expressed interest, in practice most did not turn up on the day. The sessions began with a brief introduction and the participants were informed that the sessions would be recorded. Written participant consent was obtained from all.

Table 4B: Participants - by subject, level of study, nationality, gender and interview location

Participant ID	Subject	Study level	Domicile - region	Gender	Interview location
Participant SE	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	Outside London
Participant T	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant SB	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant Y	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant MU	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant SA	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant ME	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant R	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant M	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant RI	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant S	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant A	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant MA	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant L	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London

In addition to the above focus groups, five graduates (former students) of the private colleges were also recruited purposively and interviewed individually (see table 4C). These interviews were semi-structured and lasted on average 25 to 35 minutes. I felt that the current students might not be 'free' to openly

discuss their views while they were still studying in a private institution (or they may be more critical). But, graduates unlike the current students, would have left the institutions and could offer different perspectives retrospectively. Further, such additional perspectives would enrich the study.

Again two essential criteria were used to purposively recruit students for interviews; (a) they were from private colleges with a degree (undergraduate or postgraduate) awarded by a HEI in the UK (b) they were from non-EU countries.

Table 4C: Student (graduates) interview - participants

Participant ID	Course completed	Awarding HEI	Private for-profit college by Location	Domicile - region	Employment status
Participant SI1	MBA	University W	London	Non-EU	Education
Participant SI2	MBA	University S	London	Non-EU	Unemployed
Participant SI3	MBA	University W	Outside London	Non-EU	Health Care
Participant SI4	BA	University B	London	Non-EU	Hospitality
Participant SI5	MA	University MJ	Outside London	Non-EU	Marketing

The following issues were discussed with each participant:

(1) How did they reach the decision to study in the UK?

(This question focuses on students' decision making process to see how they eventually decided to pursue their studies in the UK)

(2) How did they choose their course and the institution?

(This focuses on students' decision making process relating to their choice of institution and course(s), and it aims to identify those factors that influence students to choose private providers)

(3) Now that they have graduated, how do they feel about their experiences as students?

(4) How useful do they perceive their qualifications to be?

(This aims to understand graduates' assessment of their UK qualifications)

4.3.1 (b) Management, staff and policy-maker participants in the UK

Undoubtedly this study requires perspectives from other key stakeholders (management and staff from HEIs and private for-profit HE providers and policy makers) who have direct experience within collaborative higher education provision in the UK and overseas. As mentioned earlier, it is evident from the QAA's overseas collaborative audit reports that many such collaborative arrangements exist not only in the UK but also in overseas locations (QAA, 2006; QAA, 2009; QAA, 2010; QAA, 2011). Although UK participants (especially those from HEIs) were interviewed about overseas collaborative HE provision, I thought that it would be appropriate to incorporate views from the overseas stakeholders too. Therefore, as explained in section 4.3.1 (c) efforts have been made to incorporate views from overseas stakeholders too, Sri Lanka being the chosen country.

The selection of key stakeholders for interviews is based on criteria as presented in the table 4E. In total 13 interviews were conducted in the UK

using a semi-structured interview schedule. These interviews lasted on average 35 to 40 minutes. During these interviews the following topics were discussed:

1.0 Situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stakeholders assessment of the current HE industry * Challenges faced by HEIs or private for-profit providers
2.0 Collaborative HE: HEI vs. private for-profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What are the key motivating factors? * What are the benefits to the institutions that they represent? * What are the risks posed by such provision? * What are the strengths and weaknesses of private for-profit providers? * Why is such provision attractive to students?
3.0 Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How do they see the future based on their experience? * How is this likely to impact on UK HE?

However access to these respondents (stakeholders) was very difficult as they have busy schedules and often their schedules are managed by gatekeepers. Furthermore the topic under investigation is very contemporary and to a certain extent touches upon information that is sensitive and competitive. However I secured 13 participants (UK) to voluntarily take part in the study. They came from varied backgrounds and institutions (see table 4D for profiles of interviewees).

Table 4D: Other stakeholders – UK participants

Participant Type ID	Profile	Institution type	Interview date
Participant (P)	R1 Director – Private College (T)	private for-profit	12th Jan 2011
Participant (U)	R2 Senior Lecturer with collaborative link responsibility - University (B)	HEI	13th Jan 2011
Participant (U,O & P)	R3 Quality assurance consultant Associate Director - Private College (Q)	private for-profit, Quality assurance and HEI	4th Feb 2011
Participant (O, P)	R4 CEO, HE monitoring and quality assurance	private HE policy/ monitoring	11th Feb 2011
Participant (O)	R5 HE policy	HE policy institution	17th Feb 2011
Participant (P)	R6 Senior manager Courses co-ordinator - Private College (T)	private for-profit	19th May 2011
Participant (U)	R7 Head of School - Management and Law University (B)	HEI	1st June 2011
Participant (U)	R8 Head - Collaborative Unit - University (G)	HEI	15th June 2011
Participant (U)	R9 HEI overseas, former pro VC HEI in Malaysia	HEI (Asia)	27th July 2011
Participant (U)	R10 Director – International	HEI	19th Oct 2011
Participant (U, P)	R11 Consultant HE (UK & US)	HEI and private for-profit	3rd Nov 2011
Participant (U)	R12 Senior Lecturer with collaborative link responsibility - University (W)	HEI	9th Nov 2011
Participant (U)	R13 Principal Lecturer / Director of widening participation - University (W)	HEI	9th Nov 2011

* U – University, P – Private for-profit, O – organisations (Policy, Quality and Regulatory)

Table 4E: Other stakeholder selection criteria

Sector	Criteria
Private:	Institution:
	(a) provides HE course;
	(b) has some form of 'link' with the UK university;
	Position / role:
	(a) Director / Principal;
	(b) Academic Director;
	(c) Head of Department;
	(d) Management team member with external relations responsibility;
Public:	Position / role:
	(a) Head / senior academic position with collaborative provision contacts;
	(b) Academic staff with collaborative provision management responsibility;
	(c) Head of International Office;
Quality assurance / Policy:	Position / role:
	(a) Head of the unit / body;
	(b) Quality assurance Auditor / inspector;
	(c) Advisor / Consultant;
	(d) Policy researchers;

4.3.1 (c) Management, staff and policy-maker participants in Sri Lanka

In 2002, I was working for a British international agency in Sri Lanka and was tasked to identify and follow-up on a small number of Sri Lankan private for-profit HE institutions that had collaborative links with UK HEIs. But as evidenced by the QAA's overseas collaborative audit reports in recent years collaborative provision between the UK HEIs and overseas private for-profit providers tuned into a major pursuit undertaken by many HE institutions (QAA, 2006; QAA, 2009; QAA, 2010; QAA, 2011). During the interviews in the UK, HEI participants discussed at length their experience of working with

private for-profit partner colleges overseas. It was time to get the overseas perspective.

The same criteria used to select participants for UK key stakeholder interviews (see table 4E) were used in the overseas interviews to purposefully select participants; this was to sustain a balanced respondent composition across the study. Overseas interviews formed the last phase of the research and I used a similar interview schedule to that used in the UK interviews with minor adjustments reflecting participants' contexts.

1.0 Situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stakeholders assessment on the current HE provision in SL * Challenges faced by HEIs in SL
2.0 Collaborative HE: HEI vs. private for-profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What are the key motivating factors? * What are the benefits to the institutions that they represent? * What are the risks posed by such provisions? * Why is such provision attractive to students?
3.0 Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How do they see the future based on their experience? * How this will have an impact on the UK and SL HE?

Unlike UK interviews, which were face-to-face, the overseas interviews were conducted via telephone to minimise expense. This served the purposes of the participants also as most wanted to speak from their homes rather than from their place of work.

Table 4F: Other stakeholders – SL participants

Participant Type ID	Profile	Institution type	Interview date
Participant (SL1)	SL1 International Collaborations: Consultant University B	HEI	27th Jan 2012
Participant (SL2)	SL2 Senior Management position UGC	HEI and Policy	29th Jan 2012
Participant (SL3)	SL3 Research Fellow	HE Policy	13th Feb 2012
Participant (SL4)	SL4 Lecturer / Recruitment consultant	Private HE	16 th April 2012
Participant (SL5)	SL5 Lecturer / Co-founder	Private HE	1 st May 2012
Participant (SL6)	SL6 Education Manager	UK HE Promotions	11 th May 2012

4.3.2 Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) data analysis consists of three procedures: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction refers to ‘the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up transcriptions’ whereas data display is ‘an organised assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking’ (ibid.).

Interviews and focus group sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in preparation for the thematic analysis of the content. All recordings were played at least once to make sense of the data. This is normally done before the next interview to expand on the key discussions. Once the recordings were transcribed, the texts were read along with the recordings to make sure the transcription was accurate. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define thematic analysis as a 'method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.82).

They suggest an effective six phase procedure for thematic analysis, which has been pursued in this study with minor amendments. Robinson et al. (2011, p.244) used the same thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and identify the method as a 'non-branded generic approach to qualitative data analysis' – suitable for different epistemological positions and for qualitative researchers with different levels of experience. The next section describes the six phase procedure (amended) used for the data analysis of this study.

Firstly transcribed text documents were read twice to clearly observe major points. Secondly based on the readings, codes were developed and mapped against the relevant data set with the aid of Nvivo. Nvivo is an organisational tool which allows the researcher to: index segments or parts of the text to

particular themes, carry out complex search and retrieval operations faster (Cassell et al. 2005). Thirdly codes were collated into major themes. Fourthly all themes were reviewed not only against themes and the data set but also themes were reviewed against three major category of study participants i.e. students, HEI participants and private for-profit HE participants. Fifthly themes were defined and appropriate titles or names were given and finally the findings were written down (chapters 5, 6 and 7).

4.4 Ethical Issues and Considerations

In the context of research, ethics refers to the 'appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it' (Saunders et al. 2007, p.178). Cousin (2009, p.17) states that an 'ethical orientation supports the thoughtful conduct of the research process and the eventual credibility of the report'. Ethics covers two aspects: (a) research should adhere to the general guidelines stipulated by relevant ethics committees and (b) some ethical considerations are study-specific (for example, sensitive nature of the topic and the kind of relationship between the researcher and the participants) which need to be addressed by the individual researcher as and when they arise. In this section I outline the central ethical requisites which are followed in this study.

Central to most ethical guidelines is the idea of 'informed consent' (Silverman, 2006, p.323) and it covers other major ethical issues. According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011, p.5) 'researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand

the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported’.

The study participants were briefed on the aims and purposes. For example, key stakeholder interview appointments were fixed after several email communications between the researcher and the participants, which enabled participants to gain sound prior understanding on the aspects of the study and the nature of the commitment expected of them. Also the briefing took place at least a week before the actual interview so that participants could take time to make their own informed decisions. Participants were recruited voluntarily and given explicit verbal and written instructions on their rights, and specifically their right to withdraw. Two types of forms were designed and used to obtain written informed consent from the participants (see Appendix 1). One was designed for student participants and the second form was designed for the use of ‘key’ stakeholder interviews. However both the consent forms highlighted the following points;

1. an outline of the purpose of the research
2. an assurance of anonymity and privacy
3. an indication of their right to withdraw and
4. a request for permission to audio-record conversations.

4.4.1 The Researcher's Positionality and Trustworthiness

Cousin (2009) writes of questions of validity being replaced by questions of trustworthiness in qualitative research. In a qualitative study, the question of validity does not carry the same meanings as it does in quantitative study, instead terms such as trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility are utilised (Creswell, 2003, p.196). It is difficult for a researcher to accurately establish the validity of data, especially in the context of a qualitative study such as this where the researcher is focussed on questioning, understanding and interpreting meanings. Further, the researcher's positionality may also influence the conduct and ethical reporting of the research (see for example, Cousin, 2009). Section 4.1.1 is a concise attempt to acknowledge my position in this study. In doing so I acknowledge the influences that I may bring to this study. Consequently I need to examine how these influences will be mitigated in providing a trustworthy report. My response is that the judgements made within this study are based on the evidence (even if it is contrary to my values or assumptions). This evidence rests with the participants of this study and it originates from the participants. Further, as proposed by Creswell (2003), I have used two strategies that warrant credibility and accuracy to my findings. Firstly, I have used direct quotations to convey my findings - examples, Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Secondly, examples that do not offer to support my arguments are presented as well as ones that do. Moreover data, people, contexts and methods can be triangulated (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013) and as Shenton (2004) points out, triangulation may enhance credibility. My study has used triangulation of data sources and methods. Here triangulation of data sources refers to the use of a wide range of participants and

triangulation of methods refers to the use of different data collection methods (Shenton, 2004; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). I interviewed a wide range of informants representing several organisations (participants from HEIs, private for-profit HE providers, HE policy organisations and students) and used two data collection methods (i.e. individual interviews and focus groups) with distinct characteristics and strengths (Shenton, 2004).

4.4.2 Ethics and Limitations

At times certain processes can become a deterrent to the ability of a researcher to access research participants in other cultures. This may, as a consequence, limit the scope and delay the pace of an investigation. For example, I was able to secure just six interviews with Sri Lankan respondents, although I had been in contact (through email) with another five or six high profile stakeholders representing various key private, public and policy sector organisations in Sri Lanka. All stated willingness to participate in the telephone interview and gave times that would suit them for the interviews. But once the consent forms were sent to them (at least a day before the interview), the respondents changed their position. In retrospect, I believe that the process of seeking written consent has to be rethought and consideration given to more oral cultures - where importance is given to personal and social relations rather than where relations are more impersonal (Erinosho, 2008). In a country like Sri Lanka there is a wariness about signing forms. Emphasis is on social relationships and any formal approach will require time and convincing and most importantly requires networking. There is little familiarity with certain Western ethical approval procedures.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the methodology used in this empirical study. Data was collected from the stakeholders of collaborative HE provision in the UK and in Sri Lanka. My approach can be broadly described as interpretivist as I believe that an understanding of a particular social reality (e.g., collaborative HE provision) requires understanding meanings that constitute that reality. The data collection involved semi-structured interviews and focus group studies to explore different perspectives of stakeholders of collaborative HE.

CHAPTER FIVE

Perspectives of management, staff and policy makers - I

5.0 Introduction

The focus of this study is to examine the perceptions of stakeholders within the growing collaborative HE provision between both HEIs (HEFCE funded) and private for-profit HE providers. Chapters five and six will outline the findings from 19 interviews conducted with key stakeholders of collaborative HE provision in the UK and Sri Lanka. The findings are presented in this chapter with the view to answering two research questions, in particular, questions a (what is the rationale for collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the UK and overseas from the perspectives of both HEIs and private for-profit providers?) and d (what are the strategic implications of such collaborations for UK higher education?).

Respondents are identified by the prefix 'R' for respondent and a number (for example, R1, R2, R3). The respondents from Sri Lanka are identified by the prefix 'SL' and a number (for example, SL1, SL2, SL3). Tables 4D and 4F (in chapter 4) list the details of the interview respondents.

5.1 Higher Education Landscape: The Current Situation

Higher education in the UK is experiencing a period of significant change. This is being driven by a number of factors (Chapter 2: section 2.1) and these changes have far reaching implications for both HEIs and private for-profit HE providers; consequently these changes will also have far reaching ramifications on the collaborative HE provision. This study focuses on the factors that the key stakeholders perceive as having an impact on collaborative HE provision. Hence, it is imperative to establish stakeholders' perceptions of the current situation in the UK HE sector, which underpins their understandings of the factors that they perceive as having an impact on collaborative HE. During the interviews the stakeholders were initially asked to assess the prevailing situation in the HE sector to indicate their own concerns and viewpoints. These stakeholders represent HEIs, private for-providers and policy organisations. Moreover, all participants (stakeholders) were selected purposively hence their voices offer valuable perspectives on collaborative HE provision. The themes that have emerged from their (stakeholders) responses are outlined and discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1 Change

The last decades of the 20th century saw the massification of HE and the demand for HE has since been growing significantly in the UK. Meanwhile, governments across the world are increasingly confronted with the task of

funding public education. Thus, the discourse on the efficient management of public sector institutions has become a recurring theme. This has taken over priority, especially during the recent international economic crisis. In this context, governments across the world have begun to reappraise their role (Henkel, 2007) and the state has disengaged itself from its funding responsibilities (Neave, 1990). As a result, there has been a shift in the nature and sources of funding for HEIs and this is transforming the landscape of HE. The present study situates itself with this broader context and identifies the changing UK HE landscape as a corollary of the transforming role of the state (Neave, 2004), which has been discussed in detail in chapter 2.

The findings show that the stakeholders from both the public (HEIs) and private for-profit divide agree on the enormous changes taking place in the HE sector. Furthermore my respondents agreed on the challenges and the uncertainties that these changes present to the HE sector irrespective of institutional dissimilarities. The following comment captures the prevailing views within the HEIs;

It's changing, dramatically changing yes; I have no idea what next 5 years are going to hold. I don't think anyone knows what it's going to be like in 5 years time its very difficult (R13).

The respondents have continued to discuss and deliberate on the uncertainties and burdens that are discernible as a result of these continuing changes. But the key factors driving these change conditions (especially in

relation to collaborative HE provision) are related to funding and policy arrangements in UK HE, as discussed below.

5.1.2 Government Policies and Funding

Society at large benefits from education, it creates a productive workforce, offers social mobility and contributes to economic and social development (Agasisti and Catalano, 2006). This is why state intervention (the state as a regulator) has been the norm in HE (Agasisti and Catalano, 2006). Thus successive UK governments have been exerting their influence on the HE sector through various funding and regulatory mechanisms and the respondents were well aware of those political drivers:

I think there is still an influence by the state but as in many sectors and industries the state provides drivers. HE in the past has been more closely controlled through HE funding council, quality assurance agency and so in that respect there have been quite strong political drivers controlling the environment (R7).

However, the constant restructuring of the UK HE sector, by no means a recent phenomenon, has in general focused on preparing HE institutions that will be less dependent on state funding sources (Henkel, 2007). Williams (2012, p.51) notes that the 'Robbins report in 1963 itself sowed the first seeds of what was in subsequent generations to become a jungle of financial regulation'. For example, the Robbins report in 1963 proposed then that the level of fees should be increased to cover at least 20% of the expenditure of institutions.

From the perspective of UK HEIs, funding from the state has been substantially reduced. Figures for 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 have been provided in chapter 2, while HEFCE funding will be reduced to £1 billion by 2014-15 (Universities UK, 2012b). This forces institutions to seek income from elsewhere. The following response confirms the above point:

The amount of funding the university is getting per student at UG level are continuously decreasing and there is a continuing requirement to diversify income streams and find other sources of revenue (R2).

Respondent 3 discussing the current HE funding situation and its uncertainties had the following observations:

Withdrawal of government support from C and D classed activities predominantly the humanities and social sciences whereby funding for subjects such as history, geography and arts will be substantially reduced (R3)

Greenaway and Haynes (2003) argued that the additional income opportunities for HEIs should be drawn from non-governmental sources to bridge any funding gap. The respondents in this study indicated similar concerns and expectations. In this context, the economic necessities of HEIs have begun to re-shape the HE landscape, where academics have to strive for both academic/research excellence and income generation. As respondents suggest in chapter 6 (section 6.1.6), more part-time academic staff members are being employed in place of full-time academics.

Secondly, the reduction in block grant funding is being replaced by a graduate contribution system (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003; Universities UK, 2012b).

For example, university fees have been increased to a maximum of £ 9,000 in England and these fees had been around £ 3,000 a year. This switch in funding has transferred the financial power to the students. The coalition government's HE reforms have been intentional. They appear to force institutions to be more responsive to students, thus creating institutions that are capable of earning their own income from their students.

Obviously university finances are at the forefront of the public attention with the wide spread concern about the increase in tuition fees (R3).

However, this student-centric focus of institutions will create additional pressures on HEIs and the present study respondents identify and foresee such scenarios. For example, the focus on consumer needs in education may take the attention away from teaching and the focus will be on simply transferring skills as if they were 'possessions that can be bought' (Molesworth et al. 2009, p.280). This is creating further pressures on HEIs and staff.

I think the national students' survey [NSS] has become much more important because its findings are published and so there is much more pressure to be more responsive to students, and to provide I suppose more personal relationships more personal input. So you know I think there are no doubt pressures from all sides, Pressure from government to show return to tax payers, pressures from students, and pressures from funding councils, quality assurance agencies or whatever and so on (R2).

The above response captures the current predicament of HEIs that on the one hand compels HEIs to earn their own income and manage their resources

efficiently, and on the other hand fee paying students will be more assertive and demand value-for-money (Allen, 2012). Furthermore, the success of HEIs is now measured by the numbers of students it attracts, by the number of graduates in employment, and by research and consultancy revenue (Molesworth et al. 2009; Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). These new developments require additional resources (investments) and place additional burdens on HEIs to seek further income from non-governmental sources (as suggested by Greenaway and Haynes, 2003). In the meantime, HEIs will also have to respond to the increasing regulatory procedures that are put in place to protect students' interest. This has implications for academic staff. As Allen (2012, p.49) suggests 'academic and professional staff will need to attune themselves culturally to meeting the needs of students even if inconvenient to them'.

Thirdly the state also has begun to concentrate its efforts on private HE provision and providers. This has two facets; firstly the state intends to regulate the growth of private HE providers (i.e. the state as a regulator; Agasisti and Catalano, 2006) and secondly the government wants the 'restructured' private HE sector to play a major role in the UK HE environment. Respondent 11 outlines the government's policy initiatives:

The government is attempting to encourage more private universities to provide higher and further education but at the same time it's creating challenges for such universities and colleges in the point of view of regulations, having to do with work study arrangements for students who are not in public universities (R11).

The coalition government aims to open-up the HE market to diversified providers (i.e. private HE providers). By bringing in deregulation policies and other privatisation schemes (for example, access to public funding and taught degree awarding powers), the government intends to liberalise the HE market to strengthen student choice and improve quality (Jongbloed, 2003). However, the reforms that are based on market control and co-ordination attract enhanced regulatory requirements (Henkel, 2007): increased monitoring for example. Respondents 6 and 1 suggest that the gradual invasion of these regulatory requirements within the private HE provision has not been received with enthusiasm (see section 5.1.4).

New quality regulation uses a 'standardised' quality assurance apparatus across all types of HE institutions (irrespective of their public and private nature). By bringing in the QAA as a preferred agency for ensuring quality within the private HE provision (R11), the government has not only sidelined other independent agencies such as the BAC (the British Accreditation Council, see also chapter 3) but also, to an extent, has strengthened the status of private providers in the HE landscape. As my respondents suggested, this has initiated a debate on the 'blurring of boundaries' between both the public and private divide in the UK HE sector:

Thing about QAA of course it's a government agency that means the government is coming into play. That means private colleges are not ultimately as private as they once were (R8).

This is a significant statement in the context of this present study. The private HE providers are seen as 'private' in a sense that they had limited or zero access to the public funding. But increasingly the evidence suggests that the private HE providers too have had access to the public-backed funding sources (Wilkinson and Yussof, 2005). For example, in the UK student loans for private HE providers have risen to £100 million during the year 2011/2012 (Morgan, 2012). So to what extent is the private HE provision in the UK really 'private'? The discourses on the public-private divide often focused on the origins of funding sources to argue a case for and against the blurring of boundaries between the public and private divide. But as my respondents suggest, the blurring of boundaries between the public and private HE providers is also increasingly apparent with the extension of public regulatory requirements and its agencies into the private HE sector. Thus now the boundaries are blurred and distinctions are hard to identify:

The regulatory scene is very complex due partly to the blowing [away] of boundaries in the public and private sectors and obviously the [...] particular inspector's approach towards it (R5).

The government controls market entry by controlling the power of institutions to award degrees (Department for Business, Innovations and Skills, 2011). But as my respondents acknowledge, the current government proposals aim to reduce the main barriers to market entry and make it easier for new providers to achieve taught degree awarding powers (TDAP). In the meantime, the government has also begun to exert its control over the private sector and it is re-shaping the nature and composition of these providers. My

respondents (R1, R6 and R8) fear that these regulatory propositions are discriminatory towards the private HE sector and providers. Respondents 1 and 6 are private college senior managers and respondent 8 is the head of the collaborative unit of a HEI. Clearly all three have a vested interest in the survival and expansion of private HE.

As mentioned earlier, my respondents point out certain uncertainties that are discernible within the HE sector, more significantly their responses highlight underlying tensions that are emerging in the sector. The effects of state financial disengagement have resulted in a shift in the nature and sources of funding for HEIs and this is transforming the outlook of HEIs. In the meantime the state has begun to both control and liberalise the growth of private providers.

The following sub-themes have emerged in relation to institutional perceptions and responses.

5.1.3 Opportunities for Innovation - The Changing model

Stakeholders' views differ when it comes to the institutional responses to the changes:

I think it is a dynamic, fast changing environment that poses challenges. But as with any challenges it provides opportunities and opportunities for innovation and changing models (R7).

According to respondent 7 these changes will force all institutions to re-think their offerings and will encourage institutions to see themselves as not mere providers of courses but as providers of multiple services. This multiple offerings may include providing consultancy services to businesses, providing life long learning opportunities, providing corporate trainings and building collaborative HE provision. This will impart a shift in the current model of offering predominantly loan scheme based HE courses.

Universities in a way stop thinking about themselves as being providers of courses but actually we are providers of multiple services and products (R7)

Respondent 7 argues that this expectation of HEIs as providers of multiple services and products will eventually alter the current HE models. The above responses reiterate and support the point I made in chapter 2 (section 2.1). That is, the consequences of the deliberate distancing of the state and its privatisation efforts are restyling the governance of HEIs. As a result, HEIs are increasingly changing into business enterprises (Bleiklie, 2004) involved in the business of knowledge (Scott, 2007, p.60). Indeed, this is not all new to HEIs; a significant number of HEIs have already been offering multiple services and products. But, my point is that the levels of such offerings are limited. Hence, the main focus is still placed on the loan scheme based undergraduate degree courses (see chapter 2: section 2.1 for income of HEIs). But, given the scale and complexities of the recent changes i.e. fee arrangements, increased private provision and new international student controls, HEIs will have limited options to resist a drastic change. In the views of respondents 7 and 8 the future demand for certain types of courses and the types of experiences will

also see a significant change. For example, market-based HE may encourage the provision of more vocational degrees and HEIs will have to adapt to students' extrinsic motivations, i.e. gaining a qualification to get a job (Molesworth and Scullion, 2005). As Williams (2012, p.54) observed, HEIs will continue to be treated (by the government) 'as suppliers of a heterogeneous mix of services and goods with the state and other purchasers purchasing on a selective basis'. Thus HEIs will need to be flexible with their offerings and this will eventually change the current models of HE provision.

In contrast, this re-thinking of activities may also encourage narrow specialist subject courses rather than wider ranges of courses. For example, another HEI respondent observed that HEIs may choose to focus on more viable subject areas with funding opportunities. When discussing the changes in the HE sector respondent 13 stated:

It is going to be more in focus on specific [.....] subjects, i.e. the engineering type STEM subjects for the UK market so I do think that we will change as an institution in terms of what we offer. We will be offering more of those technological subjects I believe. We will offer other things but it will be much reduced. So real environment in which re-focus of our curriculum will take place and we are going to bring more of the STEM based subjects into what we do (R13)

The above response (R13) can be directly linked to the observation made by respondent (R3: see section 5.1.2), where he discusses the removal of government support (funding) from certain subjects which in effect driving the

need for change which I discuss above. However this is the continuation of a trend that goes back to the 1980s (also see Williams, 2012).

5.1.4 Frustration of the Private Sector

On the other hand the current situation has also been seen as frustrating and presenting limited opportunities for the private HE providers. As respondent 6 points out:

By and large it's the changes that have come around very frustrating, huge and it's having enormous impact on all private institutions (R6).

The frustration of this private sector manager is obvious he sees that the current situation is not favourable towards the private for-profit HE providers. This in essence is seen as a barrier to non-discriminatory competition within the HE sector and moreover it paves the way for limited student choices. Commenting on the challenges faced especially by the private HE sector another respondent from the HEI sector states:

Well currently it's rather challenging, currently it is more challenging for the private sector than it is for the public sector [.....] Because of course we can carry on in the public sector [...] recruiting international students in our own right and that's occurring and there is a unit that looks after that (R8).

This view is further endorsed by others (R1 and R4) who express similar concerns for the private sector. For example, commenting on the

unfavourable situation facing the private HE sector, the head of HE policy organisation in the UK states that:

We have UKBA and its current proposals and the consultation that has just finished which could potentially disproportionately affect the private HE sector (R4).

Respondent 6 predicts:

Personally I foresee within a short while say within the next 12 months almost 80% of these institutions would have been gone. Because when you look at the details of these changes, it brings criteria which most private institutions cannot meet (R6).

Figures on closures have been provided in chapter 3, and the closure of one of the colleges approached in the pilot study has been mentioned in chapter 4. Indeed, the respondents are relating their comments to the restrictions proposed by the UKBA (now the Home Office) and the government on the private HE sector and their ability to recruit international students from non-EU origins. These changes have created a disadvantaged platform for the private HE sector providers to operate and compete alongside the rather advantaged HEIs. The following comment illustrates the above view;

Yes margins have been squeezed because the balance of power is more with the universities (R6)

Respondent 6 further comments that these changes that have been proposed and being implemented by the government not only alters the balance of

power, but also restricts students choice which is in total contradiction to what has been aimed in Lord Browne's report. Respondent 6 argues that the private sector provides an alternative entry route into HE for many students who have failed to meet the basic entry requirements of HEIs, and therefore restricting institutions from recruiting students actively restricts students choice.

They (private institutions) take these students may be with O / levels, give them diploma, make them academically able and so they could be able to fit in the university (R6)

The second account is based on the inconsistencies of government policies and the frequency of these changes. There are several inconsistent messages that are conveyed by the different sections of the government's HE policy. The following comment illustrates one such inconsistency:

We've got the university minister who seems very aware of private HE and we've been involved in a number of meetings with him talking about particularly degree awarding powers and also the funding of students which may eventually lead through to private institutions receiving students with students loans [.....] So that's very much a positive from a private HE perspective on the other hand we have UKBA and its current proposals and the consultation that has just finished which could potentially disproportionately affect the private HE sector (R4)

This control by the state, and the frequency with which changes are brought in, negatively affects the whole sector. The director of a private college comments on the frequency of changes and states:

Very uncertain, because of the ever changing legislation and rules, so sometimes they are even changing overnight or every fortnight. So once we make a plan we cannot go beyond that certain period and it is really difficult to adjust again (R1)

As a result the private for-profit HE sector too is forced to 're-shape' in the context of UK HE, which, I will discuss more in the later sections. It is apparent that the above responses highlight the widespread frustration and uncertainties within the private HE sector in the UK. This sector and its providers were once positioned outside the boundaries of government control and arguably were kept outside the mainstream HE provision. But, these recent changes correspond with the coalition government's aim to open the HE market to new HE providers, i.e. private providers (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). But at the same time the government reforms also focus on making private providers comply with externally set boundaries and controls. In this context, the QAA and HEFCE organisations have already begun to exert their influences in the operation and management of private HE providers in the UK. And I will later argue that this two way movement (which I will call the convergence of educational organisations) is blurring the boundaries between public and private HE provision in the UK. While the divide between private and state is being blurred the divide between elite HEIs and the rest appears to be widening. However this thesis is concerned with private for-profit providers rather than with elite and non-elite HEIs.

5.1.5 Competition for the International Market

The debate on the nature of competition in the HE sector and more importantly between institutions has been a much discussed topic in recent times. At one level, HEIs have been forced to seek alternative income options to replace diminishing public funding; and as a consequence now display an 'entrepreneurial' outlook in their overall activities (Rutherford, 2005). On another level, global demand for HE has intensified the competition between diversified HE institutions and systems. In the context of UK HE, the following response captures the stakeholder's view especially on the emerging gap between available funding and the need for supplementary income:

The amount of funding the university is getting per student at UG level are continuously decreasing and there is a continuing requirement to diversify income streams and find other sources of revenue (R2).

The focus on international markets has been widely seen as an activity focussed heavily on income generation. The positive relationship between the international activities and its ability to offer potential income 'streams' has never been ignored in the context of UK HE. The UK HE sector is the second largest exporter of international education globally (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). Its export earnings of higher education including tuition fees and other spending by non-UK students (i.e. off campus expenditure and transnational education), have been estimated to reach £16.9 billion by 2025 (Universities UK, 2012a). But the changes in the international student front especially in relation to non-EU students (the largest segment of the international student

market, which this study focuses on) have altered the nature of competition amongst HEIs. As respondent 10 states;

The current situation in the HE sector here is effectively intensified competition around international generally. Because of things like the UKBA changes universities are finding it harder to recruit students here to study in the UK (R10)

Such increases in the regulatory requirements have restricted access to revenue sources from international markets (that is, recruitment of international students) and created an intense competitive environment for HEIs. This will alter the focus of HEIs and private for-providers operating in the UK and may result in the movement of such provision to overseas markets.

5.2 The Growth of Private for-Profit HE

In general the numbers of students studying in private HE institutions are on the increase and it is a global phenomenon. In the meantime, the growth of private HE in the UK has been subtle and significant. But it is necessary to understand the stakeholders' perceptions to empirically examine the nature of such growth in UK private HE and more specifically the growth of private for-profit HE. The following key themes have emerged from this discussion during the interviews:

- Uncontrolled growth (of private providers);
- Controlled growth (of private providers).

5.2.1 Uncontrolled Growth

The growth of private for-profit HE providers has surprised many in the HE sector in UK. Until recently many HE stakeholders did not fully anticipate the exponential growth of the private for-profit HE providers. Organisations such as BAC and QAA that are primarily established to assure quality of HE institutions were not fully aware of the potential of the private sector. A respondent from one such organisation recalls:

Yes if new set-ups focus on UK market there would be no regulatory need for them to approach particular body to gain accreditation or to gain recognition. We did find when the tier- 4 was set up we saw the number of applicants come to us grow quite considerably, naturally, and it was very interesting to see the number of very well established organisations that have been existing for years, normally in a partnership with UK university who haven't approached any organisations for accreditation, they haven't needed it (R4).

Respondent 3 sees that the exclusion of private HE sector from the public policy discussions as the key factor that has contributed to the covert but organic growth of the sector. Furthermore these private for-profit HE providers (this has changed in recent times) had no regulatory need to approach an authority or institution in the UK for approval or recognition. Respondent 3 points out that:

Private providers have sprung up and expanded in an unsystematic way because by definition they are outside of the public policy on education (R3)

These private for-profit HE providers in the UK were established primarily by

individual entrepreneurs who saw business opportunities. The absence of robust regulatory requirements enabled them to operate and grow in an unsystematic way (R3). As per the available statistics and other authoritative reports (Universities UK, March 2010; Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011) these private for-profit HE providers were initially established to accommodate international HE demand. Therefore it attracted less public interest up until recently when immigration and student visa system abuses in general started to generate serious public discussion (Introduction of Tier 4 in 2009 and the consultative process on student immigration in 2010). But during this time, the global shift towards the commodification of education has transformed the status of HE and led education to be traded in the market similar to any other services. This has attracted private entrepreneurs who again have fuelled the growth of private for-profit providers in the global context.

The commodification of education has led to this enormous emergence of private providers globally (R8).

It is argued (R8) that during this time HEIs (UK) have managed to take cover behind the traditional values to sustain their position amidst competition from the growing private HE providers. But it was also during this time that some HEIs began to explore and establish collaborative HE provision with private providers (see R4 above). As I outlined in section 2.2, at least in the context of international education, HEIs have significantly contributed towards the multiplication of such private providers in the UK HE provision.

5.2.2 Controlled Growth

The growth of private for-profit providers began to influence policy discussions; therefore according to respondents, the growth of private providers in the UK in recent times began to take on a structured outlook. With this new approach came the new regulatory prerequisites that are being implemented in order to assist, monitor and control private providers (R11, R5 and R4). The respondents extensively highlight the interests shown by the state and its agencies in the prospective role of private providers.

The government's justifications in favour for private HE provision focus on widening access to education and creating competition and innovation within the sector (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011; Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). As evident from the respondents (R4 and R11), the present UK government's policies on the one hand wishes to realise these aims by opening-up the HE market to diversified private HE providers. Thus the UK HE market has, in recent times, witnessed deregulation policies and other privatisation schemes. For example, BPP College, a private for-profit HE institution in the UK, has recently been given university college status. But on the other hand, as findings suggest, the same government's policies seek to curtail any uncontrolled growth of such private providers. As Tooley (2002, p.54) argued, the 'British government seems to want to regulate private education as heavily as other European countries'. Hence the government's

policy strands represent a dual trajectory in the context of private HE providers. In this context the government is seen as a regulator (Agasisti and Catalano, 2006) and a deregulator. These policy developments have managed to inflict a change in the shape of the private providers in the UK. Based on the responses, the following key sub-themes have been identified as describing the current growth trends.

5.2.3 Regulating the Private Provision

Due to UKBA (Home Office) regulation and QAA educational oversight review the number of private for-profit HE providers reduced from 3000 in 1993 to 674 in 2013 (BAC, 2010; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b). As respondent 11 points out:

The number of private education institutions [.....] has been radically reduced by the combined effects of moving towards tighter student visa controls; there are discriminatory decisions such as the lack of work study arrangements for private sector students compared to public sector students. Further the need to improve quality infrastructure and to have appropriate oversights, for example oversight by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (R11).

These checks are intended to create genuine, quality and sustainable private HE providers that will co-exist and compete with HEIs. These efforts are ongoing and will continue to have significant impact on the future composition of the private for-profit sector.

Over the past few years, I would say the private sector in education have grown enormously. But recently because of certain concerns and funding issues I think the government is trying to squeeze most private institutions [...] (R6).

The opponents of the private for-profit sector have long complained about the lack of quality assurance requisites (R5). These days, however, these regulatory requirements are in effect reducing and curtailing the future growth of private for-profit sector.

Government is encouraging more private educational provision in the UK HE landscape; its actual policies have been mitigating against this and two days ago for example UK Border Agency announced that there were some 244 private sector institutions which has been closed by UKBA action in the course of the last 3 months and further 17 institutions were been intensively reviewed it is therefore likely that when dust settle there will only be a small number of private sector colleges which will remain in place having fulfilled all requisites for continuance (R11).

This view is also echoed by Respondent 5:

Oh yes certainly, part of the ongoing Tier-4 discussion concerning students visa system I don't know how familiar you are with, but for example English language requirements proposed to be tighten for international students, obviously this may greatly affect private provision (R5).

In the context of UK private HE and its growth, the government had serious concerns regarding some dubious private HE colleges operating in the UK which were abusing the student immigration system (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). Hence the tightening of the regulatory regime and the introduction of new restrictions on international students (non-EU), especially those studying in the private sector has been justified by the policy makers. This is shaping the growth of private HE provision in the UK.

5.2.4 International to National Markets

Private for-profit providers are encouraged by government policy aimed towards increasing the role of private sector in the UK HE; hence slowly moving away from the international markets and into national student markets.

[.....] eventually leads through to private institutions' receiving students with student loans, so which does possibly mean that the private education in HE will open up much more for the UK student market than it has previously. So that's very much a positive from a private HE perspective (R4).

Moreover the private for-profit providers equipped with the new status quo (provided to them by the QAA inspections as in the case with other HEIs) now see themselves surviving by catering to EU and national student populations in the UK. As respondent 3 remarks the changes in UK tuition fees will prompt private providers to directly compete for the national student market.

It may well be the case with the changes in university finances and tuition fees that they will be targeting more markets to a greater extent possibly undercutting university fees (R3).

From my experience the national student market for private colleges is to a significant extent made up of returnees to education who lack the qualifications to be admitted to a university.

If liberalising the UK HE market is seen as a move towards increasing

competition to enhance quality and student choice, then the governments' initiatives are heading in that direction. The private HE providers, with their newly acquired status will compete with HEIs in the markets that have been previously under the purview of HEIs. At the time of writing, the private for-profit HE providers with the help of public-backed funding (i.e. student loans) are beginning to attract and recruit UK as well as other EU students. If these shifts in focus are to succeed they would provide a strong argument for further government interventions (direct or via the agencies of public purpose) in the HE market. One existing intervention is making public-backed funding available to private HE providers.

5.2.5 Expand to Survive

In the context of UK private HE, the largest category of private providers are small in size (The growth of private and for-profit HE in the UK, Universities UK, 2010). But my respondents believed that this trend would inevitably alter following the recently introduced changes (i.e. QAA educational review and the consultative process on student immigration in 2010). Further the respondents envisage that these changes will present huge challenges to the private HE sector and suggest that their sustainability depends on their ability to adapt and expand. According to one university department head:

The challenge for the private colleges to think about whether they need to reform and regroup a bit because there are lots of little organisations may be

they need to think about consortium approach. So it's a challenge to them (R7).

When faced with challenges private providers might eventually expand their presence and this will lead them not only to navigate through challenging times but also to achieve their own degree awarding powers (TDAP). This view is expressed by respondent 4:

I think also we are likely to see a few more institutions, private institutions getting their own degree awarding powers [.....] certainly we are aware of small number of our institutions who have submitted applications are going through that process. We see the high end of ours will move down that road (R4).

The responses from participants 4 and 7 forecast the future of private for-profit HE providers in the UK. According to my respondents, the growth of private for-profit HE providers may take a different shape. The surviving private institutions may look to expand their operations to sustain themselves in the UK private HE landscape. They are surviving institutions in the sense, as seen in section 5.2.3, that these institutions have managed to survive the recent regulatory 'storm'. The responses seem to agree that the 'private universities are in a much better position to react quickly to changes in the market (Quddus and Rashid, 2000, p. 492).

5.3 Characteristics and Contradictions of UK Private for-Profit HE

This section will discuss and analyse themes identified by the stakeholders as unique characteristics of the UK's private for-profit HE providers. Some of the themes offer contradictory readings and present conflicting stakeholder perceptions on the private for-profit HE providers.

5.3.1 Market Orientation, Entrepreneurial & Commercial Awareness

The theme 'market orientation, entrepreneurial and commercial awareness' (MECA) incorporates, a number of different elements that form together to describe the positives of private for-profit HE providers. Firstly the market orientation reflects the level of commitment to the market(s) and marketing related activities. Private for-profit providers are credited for their orientation towards market and marketing; for example, Dima (1998) commenting on the growth of private HE in Romania credits the market oriented approach of private providers for identifying and offering a wide range of subjects that were required to satisfy the needs of a transition economy. A university department head (Respondent 7) commenting on the UK private for-profit HE and their market orientation had this to say:

They recognise the importance of the marketing activity and their role about marketing. That's crucial and they are actually more successful considering

that they don't have league tables, they actually offer other university degrees and I think from that point of view actually they are hugely successful (R7).

It is also indicated that the private for-profit providers' marketing efforts are driven by better in-country networks (R12) (in the context of international markets and students) which helps gain trust especially with international students (i.e. non-EU students). They spend a significant share of their budget on market-related activities and the following respondent's view again coincides with the view of respondent 12:

They (private for-profit) must be doing something right. For me they place emphasis on the marketing and because they are smaller they can emphasise student care (R7).

Clearly some of my HEI respondents are appreciative of the achievements of their partner private HE providers.

The views of respondents 8 and 13 again reflect the views expressed by respondents 7 and 12:

What I am thinking of they are extremely market savvy. They have much more well structured administrative and protocol devices (R8).

Secondly the private for-profit HE providers are entrepreneurial and exhibit commercial awareness in a sense that they bring about changes as and when the market requires such adjustments. According to respondent 12, private for-profit providers maintain stronger relationships with students as compared to HEIs; this strong relationships and understandings allow them to offer

personal support, in most cases, better than the HEIs. Respondent 12 suggests that this enables private for-profit HE providers to act more quickly when responding to change conditions. He further sees that this advantage is brought about by the operational size (small) of the private for-profit providers. My focus group participants (students) responded favourably to the flexibility offered by private HE providers as compared to HEIs (see also chapter 7).

Some of my respondents (for example R7) state that the QAA's expectations often slow down decision making in HEIs (at least in the context of collaborative HE). In this context, private providers may also lose some of their nimbleness with the introduction of QAA's educational oversight review. Private for-profit HE providers display high levels of commercial awareness; they have fewer overheads and they do not maintain expensive estates (R8). According to respondent 8, they use efficient administrative procedures and believe in being small to adopt, change and survive the ever changing market conditions. The market savvy and commercially aware private for-profit HE providers offer courses and opportunities for students based on the market needs (R1 and R6). As per the quote below, the private for-profit HE providers not only aim to offer courses that are needed in the market place but also offer courses that are identified as those that have the future market potential.

Most of the universities are focused on what we call traditional courses. [.....] because of competition, they (private HE institutions) look for areas which are more attractive and which are potentially attractive and they could invest on those courses and develop areas and then it becomes a huge market (R6).

Thirdly respondent 8 brings to the fore a critical point on the market(s) and the market needs which explain the market orientation. It is the respondent's view that the market demands a change in HE offerings and that change will require institutions to adapt fast.

The market need itself is having an impact of how all of us are starting to operate because [.....] certain elements of market needs are simply about get me an award as quickly as possible. You know I will do a degree but I am going to spend a year doing it. I don't mind if I have to pay £ 12,000 for it but I am going to do it in one year. Of course the private providers can establish systems to allow that to happen whereas the public sector which is overseen by QAA, funding councils in a way demands that we operate to a slower schedule (R8).

The above statement expressed by a stakeholder representing a HEI captures the slowness of HEIs in responding to market needs. But, increasingly some HEIs too are becoming more market oriented (Molesworth et al. 2009). According to Jongbloed (2007), HEIs have become more free to set their own strategic directions. They compete for students and income. They are increasingly managed from a commercial perspective. That is, funding bodies and senior management utilise strategies (i.e. targets and outputs) that force HEIs to increasingly adopt market forces and draw on marketing theory. According to my respondents the growth in collaborative HE provision encourages HEIs to respond to private provision more and adopt similar market oriented approaches.

5.3.2 Flexibility

The theme flexibility of private for-profit HE providers has been repeatedly mentioned within the stakeholders' responses. Respondent 10 referred to as the 'nimbleness' of private institutions.

Private HE offers nimbleness and a flexibility that is difficult to find in public education (R10).

Based on the respondents' comments the theme flexibility refers to the flexible disposition that can be witnessed within the private for-profit HE providers, in terms of their operations, the relationship with students and markets, courses offered and finally the organisational structures. The stakeholders have observed that the private for-profit providers' flexibility is based on their receptiveness and/or readiness for change and at ease in which they could action that change:

They [private HE institutions] are much quicker in changing things. For us [HEIs] it's very difficult to change anything so if there is anything even changing one module to another or one class to another its very difficult in institution like this because its all centralised where as they can actually change very quickly. They can go from a part time to a full time course, full time to part time. Evening to day time within 24 hours for us that would be almost 8 months (R12).

Similarly respondent 7 argues that the complex systems, procedures and the structures that are present in the HEIs cause them to be slow. For example, in

the context of collaborative HE provision, respondent 7 outlines the following:

We have to go through really strict process of approval, accreditation, due diligence, partnership agreement. We have nearly half a dozen agreements and I have to go through about 3 departments to get them sign off before the PVC responsible for it will sign off all the contracts. They want to see that financial agreements been agreed, that the outlined proposal been agreed, that the validation is been completed the finances are been signed off, so all of those things even for a short course (R7).

Respondent 7 states that the QAA's expectations have also played a role (at least in the context of collaborative arrangements) in slowing down the HEIs:

QAA requirements make us very slow to respond. We have to have huge amounts of paper work, we have to have huge amounts of processes [.....] most of the time you have already negotiated the deal but the contract is slow to follow up because you have to persuade you have to go through each of the stages. So life isn't like that when you are negotiating partnership you are already negotiated the deal including the financial split the responsibilities and then you are catching your plane; in the university in terms of getting initial approval you have already agreed something verbally and hope that it actually, you won't get turned down. So as a manager you haven't got the freedom of the private institution where in smaller firm you are the decision maker. You take the responsibility and you make the decision and you sign the deal (R7).

This can be linked to an observation by respondent 10:

If for example you want to change the curriculum in the public sector the quality assurance enhancement or mechanism and the expectation of the faculty concerning their role, the process the traditional process for curriculum development, change or review all combine to create a very extended period; so that it might take a public university a year to adjust relatively small element to the curriculum. Where in the private institution a proposal can be made this week and it can begin to be implemented next week or as of least next month (R10).

Commenting on the flexible nature of the relationships that the private for-profit providers have with their students, respondent 12 had this to say:

They (private for-profit HE institutions) know the students, they know their personal mobile phone numbers they know where they work, they can contact much quicker where as we (HEIs) don't have that privilege (R12)

A response from the private for-profit manager puts forward a case for the flexible organisational structure that exists with their institutions. The respondent states:

The other issue flexibility, we provide that. The bureaucracy is not here. We could be able to address individual student affairs by the way we see them, the way we assess them and that helps them in their educational career (R6)

The above statement not only shows the existence of less formal structures within the private for-profit providers but also establishes a link to the theme market orientation.

5.3.3 Alternative and Affordable Option

Respondents 12 and 9 also indicate that private for-profit HE providers incur less overhead costs by organising their operations efficiently and are thus able to offer degrees at cheaper rates than HEIs.

Rather than paying £ 9,000 a student can actually do it for £ 2,000 [2011 figure] elsewhere, there is no way HE will be able to resist that force its going to be much of a strong force (R12).

The logic of this is clear. This way they compete successfully with HEIs and attract and offer options for students who otherwise could not afford to attend HEIs. The type of private for-profit HE providers found in the UK, especially those that are examined in this present study differ from other private HE providers that can be found elsewhere, for example in the United States (Zumeta and LaSota, 2010). Often these private US HE providers charge a much higher tuition fee and offer access to the financial and/or scholarly elite, for example Harvard University (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). However in the UK, the growing number of small private for-profit HE providers usually undercut HEIs' tuition fees to attract students who otherwise cannot afford to attend HEIs (R5 and R12). Further the responses also highlight that some of these private for-profit HE providers offer preparatory courses to students to enable flexible entry into HEIs. Thus offer an alternative route into HE for those who do not fulfil traditional entry requirements (R5 and R9). This alternative option expands competition for HE in the market place.

Respondent 9 observes that private for-profit HE providers present an alternative option in HE and hence compete with HEIs; as a result the HEIs will be forced to improve their offerings.

Its a good competition so you could see their (private) graduates are coming out better than our (HEIs) graduates so what is wrong with us we better improve ourselves to maintain our high status [.....] (R9).

5.3.4 The Business Approach

As discussed in section 5.2.1, in general, private for-profit HE providers in the UK are primarily established by entrepreneurs who see investment opportunities in the HE sector. Therefore the private for-profit providers are directly or indirectly influenced and managed by their owners who can be over conscious of the returns on their investments. This can be counter productive in the context of HE. A senior manager representing a private for-profit HE provider had this to say;

Normal day to day affairs could be run by academics who understands education but when it comes to pumping investments, you begin to discuss with businessmen and all what they are looking for is money. These could have potential blow to the standards of education (R6).

The above response (R6), ironically emanating from a private for-profit provider himself, highlights some of the conflicting interests of private for-profit

providers in the business of education. The opponents of private for-profit HE have often discussed such conflicts of interests; for example, private for-profit HE providers have been accused of prioritising business objectives at the expense of educational objectives (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). The stakeholders' perceptions on the characteristics of the UK private for-profit HE providers exhibit similar conflicts of interests. As seen in section 5.3.1, the market orientation calls for a greater understanding on the market needs. Thus, market savvy private for-profit HE providers offer courses that are based on market needs (R1 and R6).

Most of the universities are focused on what we call traditional courses. [.....] because of competition, they (private HE institutions) look for areas which are more attractive and which are potentially attractive and they could invest on those courses and develop areas and then it becomes a huge market (R6)

Further the private for-profit providers do focus on students as customers (Morey, 2004), and offer services (or courses) that are affordable and less bureaucratic to navigate, i.e. offer flexibility (R10 and R12). Some stakeholders' view this market approach favourably, yet there are others who have criticised such business approach in education (R6 and R13). Gibbs (2001) suggested that the adoption of market model and its accompanying discourse of marketing would force education into a commodity that could be sold and bought. Gibbs (ibid.) went on to say that this would turn a student into an accredited person who would pursue his or her economic desires. But,

it is an arduous task to resist the influence of such market forces in HE, especially given the recent policy trajectories that seem to encourage them. As Molesworth et al. (2009) argue, this requires a smarter approach and the onus is on the academics to resist and critique the application of such commercial interests in education. In the context of collaborative HE this requires collaboration from academics in both HEI and private for-profit sector.

Since the funding primarily comes from private sources the private for-profit HE providers may well offer limited facilities to students.

The facilities quite often tend to be less good than one would want in terms of such things as social space, extra curricular activities, size of classrooms which are all regulated by the BAC (R3)

Respondent 3 argues that although the facilities at the private for-profit providers can be adequate by the expectations of the BAC inspections, they may not be ideal. But he also observes that this is not only relevant to private for-profit institutions in the UK but also to some HEIs. Private for-profit HE providers rely heavily on student fees (R1; R6; Bernasconi, 2006); therefore their investments and returns are closely tied to student numbers at these institutions. These institutions are owned by businessmen who invest their own capital; when faced with deficiencies in financial gains they may opt to re-direct their investments away from education.

Because in the past 1 to 2 years and for next year the enrolments have gone down; Most of these institutions are not run by professional management so

they live by tuition fees to run their day to day affairs. So if they cannot recruit it means that the pot is getting dry and if the pot is getting dry it means, well I think I need to look for alternative businesses (R6)

One other point that may also be included under this theme is linked to the entry qualifications of students at these private for-profit providers. It is suspected that they (private providers) find themselves under pressure to recruit more students without due regard to their potential to succeed (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). Data concerning student completions is not readily disclosed by private colleges because of its sensitivity. Respondent 9 states that private for-profit providers may not be too stringent on student entry criteria as they seek to enrol as many as possible. But the introduction of QAA oversight reviews of private HE providers have placed more vigour and accountability on the recruitment and monitoring of students in private HE.

Another key issue that we put a question mark to these private universities is the entry qualification. People tend to think that ok if you have money you go to private university and if you do not have good grade you go to private university because the public universities have higher entry requirements so those who cannot get to public universities which are highly subsidized they go to private university they pay on their own and there the entry requirements may be of less stringent because they want your money (R9)

Further a respondent from HEI claims that the private for-profit providers do not have sufficient understanding of educational processes and systems. Instead they want immediate action on matters which can often take time in an educational environment:

The weakness is their understanding the difficulties of education systems and the educational sector. Particularly in audit processes, validation processes and approvals, I am doing quality monitoring and they don't understand that at all and they get very frustrated with it. Yes they are sometimes very laborious, very time consuming processes but they are there for a reason (R13)

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the findings from 13 interviews conducted with key stakeholders of collaborative HE provision in the UK (management, staff and policy-maker participants). It confirmed the changing nature of the relationship between the state and HEIs as far as my respondents are concerned. The chapter identified certain uncertainties and tensions emerging from the state disengagement and the increasing influences of privatisation and market theory in HE. The findings from my respondents indicate:

- a. Government intervention in the private (for-profit/not-for-profit) HE sector is discernible. My respondents clearly indicate that private HE provision in the UK is being reshaped. Government has begun to both control and liberalise the growth of private providers. However, this creates certain difficulties and tensions in the sector and my respondents (from both HEIs and private providers) express their frustration. Certainly they have a vested interest in the survival and growth of private HE.

- b. The effects of state financial disengagement have resulted in a shift in the nature and sources of funding for HEIs and this is transforming their outlook. Thus the contradictory modes of governance, which feature a 'combination of control and disengagement' (Fanghanel, 2012a, p.16) is increasingly blurring the boundary between what is described as public and private.

- c. The regulatory scene is complex and provides additional uncertainties for HEIs and private HE providers. My respondents express discomfort with the government's regulations concerning non-EU international students. According to my respondents from HEIs, this is restricting their ability to earn needed income. But according to my private HE respondents, it is challenging their survival in the sector.

CHAPTER SIX

Perspectives of management, staff and policy makers - II

6.0 Introduction

The first part of this chapter will build on the findings from chapter five but the key focus will be on the rationale for collaborative HE. That is, the findings will concentrate on the stakeholders' perspectives on what drives collaborative arrangements in HE. The second part will focus on the findings emerging from the interviews held with the stakeholders of collaborative HE in Sri Lanka. I use these interviews to present the perspectives of UK's overseas collaborative HE provision.

Tables 4D and 4F (in chapter 4) list the details of the interview respondents, who represent various institutions and hold diverse interests.

6.1 Collaborative HE: Drivers and Blockers

Collaborative arrangements in HE involve crossing of organisational boundaries. In the context of international collaborations it may also involve crossing both national and organisational boundaries (Beerkens, 2002). The reasons for establishing collaborations in HE are wide-ranging and institutions (both HEIs and private for-providers) are motivated by a combination of

internal and external factors (Eddy, 2010). The literature on collaborative HE identifies generic reasons for the establishment of collaborative arrangements in HE irrespective of any institutional differences. For example, Beerkens (2002) observed that the developments in the policy domain and the resulting resource constraints and/or dependencies of HEIs were the key reasons for any inter-organisational arrangements. McBurnie and Ziguras (2001), discussing transnational education (TNE) suggest that market expansion and the aspiration to raise institutional profile are the specific reasons for overseas HE collaborations. They cite UNESCO's (2001) definition of TNE as an arrangement in which the 'learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based' (McBurnie and Ziguras, 2001, p.86).

I, in particular, focus on a collaborative HE arrangement that includes HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. The respondents were purposively selected for this study and hence have direct experience working within such HE arrangements. The findings in this section will therefore identify those factors that act as 'drivers' and 'blockers' of the collaborative HE provision.

The figure below records those factors under my headings: 'drivers' and 'blockers';

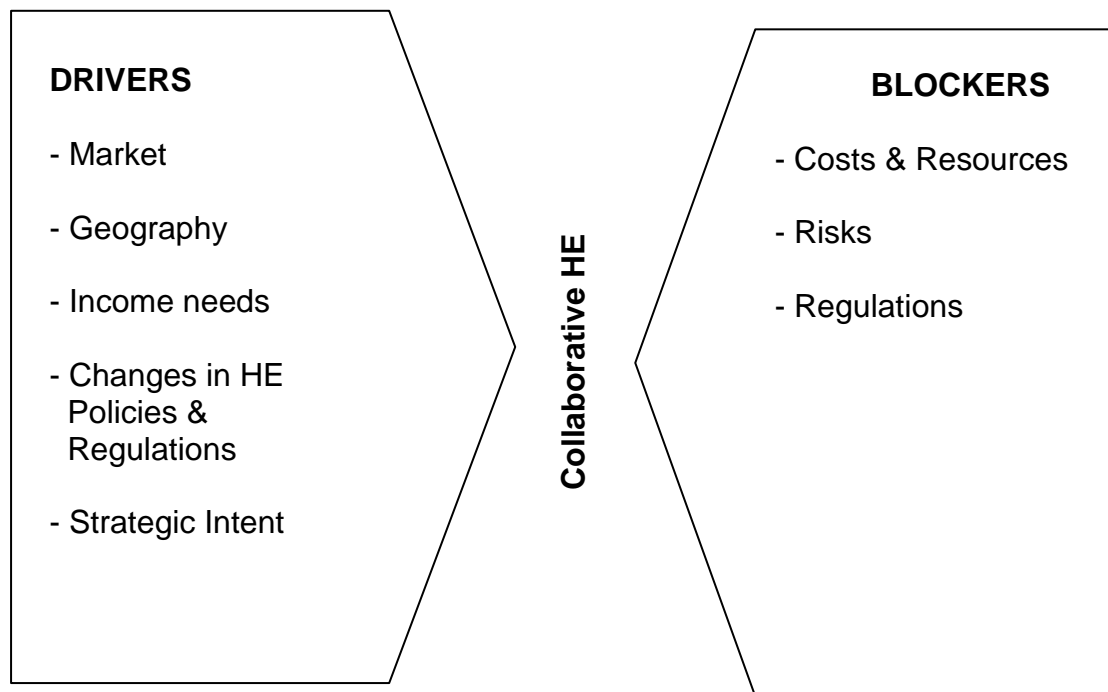


Figure 6A: Collaborative HE: Drivers and Blockers

At the risk of oversimplifying I have dichotomised themes into drivers and blockers. Collaborative arrangements in HE are influenced by a combination of complex factors that are both exclusive and/or mutual. For example, some of the state HE policies and regulations can be exclusive to HEIs or private for-profit providers and these can either serve as drivers in the context of HEIs or blockers in the context of private for-profit providers. Similarly, the government regulations can also be applied across the sector and hence can operate either as a driver or blocker for both the HEIs and private providers. So, by using dichotomies (i.e. drivers and blockers) one can comprehend this complex and interactive situation in its rudimentary forms. This will help frame the rationale for collaborative HE in the context of HEIs and private for-profit

providers, which can then be used to recognise various contradictions, tensions and relationships emerging from the stakeholders' perspectives.

6.1.1 Market

In the context of HEIs, the market provides a key rationale for establishing collaborative HE provision. The market is seen as a key driver in a sense that it paves the way for other drivers to come into play. The respondents highlight the effects of marketisation of education and the resulting influence and application of marketing discourse in education (Gibbs, 2001; Hemsley-Brown, 2011). Their responses highlight the willingness of HEIs to commodify their educational offering (Molesworth et al. 2009), thus positioning collaborative HE as part of their business enterprising approach (Bleiklie, 2004).

For example, respondent 7 commenting on the motives for collaborative HE provision argues that:

The drive is market driven. So it's an opportunity for generating income and is part of a diversification strategy (R7)

Firstly, as respondent 8 asserts, HEIs are restricted in terms of student numbers and this restriction limits the amount of income they (HEIs) could potentially generate.

Public sector is also facing the restriction on student numbers, so we can only make certain amount of money. We can't make any more money by simply doing what we are expected to do (R8)

Thus, the market conditions drive HEIs to seek alternative income streams; and one such option is to expand their HE provision (or market) through collaborative HE. The following response supports the above thinking:

It gave them (HEIs) extra income stream and they managed to get around the limitation and cap on student numbers, which have been posed quite rigorously (R3)

In terms of access, collaborative HE provision support HEIs to access the wider market (i.e. international). As respondent 4 observes:

The universities can tap into other markets that they wouldn't normally have access (R4)

Secondly, respondent 7 indicates that the market not only drives institutions to expand their HE provision but also drives institutions to extend the life of current HE offerings. According to the response (R7), the market and its demands offer opportunities for HEIs to extend the 'product life cycle' of their existing courses by expanding into different markets, for example overseas markets.

I think what you can certainly get is product life cycle extension going overseas which is a classic kind of marketing concept and its just an opportunity of actually extending income on the back of an existing course (R7).

If explained further, respondent R7 referring to non-UK domicile student statistics presents a case in relation to the courses that are less attractive in

the UK market but are attractive in other markets (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2012a). The respondent asserts that these opportunities available in other markets (for example, overseas) may drive institutions to build collaborative HE arrangements to extend the life of some existing courses. But in the context of private for-profit providers, firstly the push towards collaborative HE is driven by the market needs (market demands) and these private providers are in fact responding to those needs. According to respondent 1, the types of courses sought, especially by international students, often experience changes and these changes are often influenced by the external market factors such as government regulations (R1). Therefore adjusting to market requirements means at times seeking out collaborative partnerships.

So every now and then we get agents [...] they ask this is the market sir can you not just change your course according to the market? Students are looking for, ok they are 10th level passed students but they want to come for Level-6 and they want to come for minimum 3 years, do you have any programmes? (R1)

Thus, the market and its demands have become a major driving factor that motivates collaborative HE partnerships. In summary, the responses from participants representing HEIs and private for-profit providers illustrate that their market based expectations (on collaborative HE) are alike and thus make them resemble each other irrespective of their institutional differences. That is, private for-profit providers are focused on satisfying the market needs (for profit) and HEIs are focused on overcoming market deficiencies (lack of income) by capitalising on the market opportunities (demand for HE)

(Hemsley-Brown, 2011). Gibbs (2001) suggests that HEIs have a moral responsibility to sometimes resist market forces. But as my respondents suggest, at least in the context of collaborative HE, the market has become the organiser of HE provision. Such collaborations with private for-profit providers are, in reality, making education as part of the 'private investor's good' (Gibbs, 2001, p.93). Ironically, as responses suggest (see section 6.1.3), HEIs also attempt to stand outside the market (or resist the market) to serve public interests. As I suggest (in chapter 2, section 2.1) this contradictory role of HEIs is locating them as hybrid organisations in nature with a conflicting stance. In the long run, HEIs will find it difficult to sustain this balance and further closing of the public purse will force institutions to lean more towards demand and supply. This could lead to more conflicts and uncertainties within institutions and the sector, which could eventually damage trust in the UK HE system.

6.1.2 Geography

The UK stakeholders' responses also highlight the link between the geographic location of an institution and the nature of opportunities available. Their responses suggest that geographically isolated HEIs are driven into seeking collaborations with private for-profit providers which are situated in a geographically advantaged and/or more attractive location. The following response provides an indication of institutions that are geographically disadvantaged:

So the universities north of England will collaborate with private London providers because it's difficult sometimes more difficult to advertise universities that aren't necessarily high in the league tables in northern parts or parts outside of London. So they will see that as geographic advantage and an opportunity to recruit international students and diversify in that way (R7).

In the context of student demands originating from a particular geographic location which is not readily accessible to HEIs (national or overseas), institutions may opt to collaborate with private for-profit HE providers that are in close proximity of such student markets.

I can see small steps being taken in the UK market and it being increasingly viable offer to look to a private institution within the UK to get university degree particularly if students are increasingly going to stay at home and so geography is going play an important role in selecting where you are going to get your degree (R12)

6.1.3 Income Needs

Income needs as one of the drivers receive contradictory responses. The stakeholders (R3, R7, R8, R10 and R13) recognise that collaborative HE provision can bring about financial benefits (income) to financially strained HEIs. For example, many HEIs recruit international students to earn profits, but some studies have questioned the financial motives of internationalisation (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Knight's study (2005) involving 3000 universities revealed that financial motives for internationalisation achieved the lowest

ranking (only 4% overall ranking). Similarly, my respondents showed reluctance to link collaborative HE to profits (especially those from HEIs). But, the respondents (HEI) seem to understand that they are increasingly expected to conduct their practice within a highly marketised HE landscape (see section 6.1.1).

Certainly the respondents have acknowledged that there is an obvious economic rationale that underpins their collaborative HE agenda.

I think, yes you know working with partners obviously have economic benefits (R10)

But respondents suggest that their actual profits are not as high as one would imagine. The following observations highlight one such ambiguity:

Financially I don't think certainly for the business school it's not something that will make huge amounts of money. May bring some sort of revenue but I don't want you to suspect it makes a loads of money financially I am not 100% sure at this point (R12).

There is a perception that you can actually make lots of money out of this (R12).

However the responses also suggest that the HEIs benefit from the 'economies of scale' by setting up collaborative HE arrangements to offer existing courses.

If you take something like business and computing, if you are running that course in the UK and then you are running the same course in another

market even though you are selling it much cheaper you still got economies of scale because you are not developing a new product so you are just penetrating into the market with the same product (R7).

The above argument is presented on the simple economic premise that the existing courses involve lower costs and when these courses are offered in collaborations they begin to yield margins even though they are cheaper. The pilot study discussions with the director of a large private for-profit HE institution (Chapter 4: section 4.2.2 (a)) and the response from R1 indicate that the collaborative HE provision offer limited income to private for-profit providers. The HEIs are criticised for charging a higher franchise or validation fees that reduces the private providers' profit margins.

Some colleges are charging like £ 3,500 - £4,000 for UG degree per year and out of that they are paying around £2,500-£2,700 to the universities, so how much are they making? (R1).

In fact, private for-profit providers claim that they make substantial profits by running other professional qualifications (non-degree), which do not incur any heavy franchise or validation fees.

To give you a very honest answer we get more margins running professional courses than university programmes because once you get university franchise you have to pay franchise fees. For professional programmes we are just paying registration and exam fee that's it, the rest whatever amount you want to charge or whatever is reasonable you go with that (R1).

So, on the one hand HEI respondents claim that there is an economic

rationale that underpins their motives for collaborative HE agenda, but on the other hand they are reluctant to establish clear economic rationale. The final argument on the income needs and collaborative HE shifts the emphasis from 'income generation' to 'income replacement'. The response highlights that HEIs are forced to seek income replacement activities to compensate for the reduction in funding, as a result, collaborative HE provision is considered as an income replacement activity.

[...] a lot of these things that we are doing now are not necessarily income generators they are income replacements. Because if we don't replace our income that we are losing through HEFCE we will have to cut size (R13)

This theme provides contradictions. Even the private for-profit providers do not see collaborative HE as a major income generator. However, respondents from private for-profit providers do not indicate any reluctance to see collaborative HE with an economic motive. Instead, they seem to focus on the costs of such collaborative arrangements.

6.1.4 Changes in HE Policies & Regulations

Respondents have repeatedly identified four major policy strands that they see as the underlying reasons which explain collaborative partnerships between private for-profit providers and HEIs. Although these four key developments are palpable in the sector, their impact on collaborative HE

provision is not necessarily obvious. The first reason in the context of HEIs relates to diminishing funding from the state (R2 and R3). The second stems from the limit on student numbers that has a direct impact on the potential income of HEIs (R3 and R7). The third arises from the increase in tuition fees; which my HEI respondents expected to reduce the number of applications made to HEIs, thus opening opportunities for private for-profit providers to offer cheaper courses (R3 and R12). The fourth and final reason related to the changing immigration regulations affecting international (non-EU) students. The first three reasons drive HEIs to seek additional income opportunities, which have been identified and discussed in the previous section. It will be useful at this juncture to include a view (from the perspectives of HEIs) that captures the current thinking in relation to these three reasons outlined above.

Because they don't particularly have here for example, we don't have the STEM subjects, science, technology, maths etc where there will still be government funding. We don't have a medical school etc so we've got a kind of purely vocational courses where our students will have to be totally self funding. Who knows how many of those (courses) will continue to get applications at the current level we don't know. So if you don't get enough of those where else is your money going to come from. Its got to come from may be part time, international, collaborative, weekends I don't know (R2).

The first three reasons, as discussed by my respondents, also focus on the changing relationship between the state and HEIs. The financial disengagement of the state forces HEIs to earn their income. The state policies focus on creating a leaner public sector and this is promoted through the funding cuts, privatisation and the introduction of market mechanisms

(Henkel, 2007; Tapper, 2007; King, 2004). As a result of this changing marketised HE landscape, collaborative HE is seen as an alternative solution to the problems (De Vita and Case, 2003; Hodson and Thomas, 2001).

The fourth reason is specific to the changes in regulations (mainly immigration related) affecting international students (non-EU). These changes have shifted the demand for the types of courses from professional to degree level (level 6) and above (R1). In this context, according to the responses, the private HE providers are motivated to engage in collaborative HE as they perceive that their survival and existence depends on their ability to offer courses at level 6 or above. They could be able to offer those courses in collaboration with HEIs.

They (private for-profit HE) scramble for survival because that's the only brighter route they can follow now if they want to continue in business say within the next couple of years (R6).

The same respondent (R6) describes these changes as a regulatory 'storm' and expects the private HE institutions to navigate through this storm.

Well we (private for-profit HE) don't mind the rise in cost of franchising, we don't mind, what we just want is to wait for another storm to finish (R6).

Thus, the changes in the HE policies and regulations act as a rationale driving collaborative HE provision in UK HE. Yet, responses also indicate a link between the changing regulations and the shifting nature of the collaborative HE landscape. The responses show that HEIs are keen on avoiding any

uncertainties that come along with new regulations, thus opt for overseas collaborative HE partnerships at the expense of UK based collaborative HE. That is, HEIs seem to prefer a collaborative provision with the private for-profit partner in an overseas location as opposed to a collaborative provision in the UK, as any partnership involving international students in the UK will be under the preview of regulatory (immigration) influences. The private HE respondent describing this situation states that:

When we approach, they (universities) say if you want to run in sub-continent we are happy to give you but not in-country (UK) (R1).

A similar view is expressed by the HEIs support the above observation. As respondent 10 states:

Because of these big policy changes, universities are now more interested in delivering in-country programmes [overseas] (R10).

Again the following comment from a HEI respondent captures the rationale for seeking overseas collaborative provision as opposed to UK based provisions:

the overseas collaboration for me is something that I buy actually we are extending our market and we are penetrating different markets or we are extending the product life cycle of existing product (courses) so my preference is obviously to make sure I am not cannibalising my own market here (R7).

Although the above view is not influenced by the regulatory frameworks that are in place in the UK, yet it provides an insight into the future of collaborative HE provision in the UK. Respondents indicate that future collaborative

provision is more likely to be based overseas than in the UK.

6.1.5 Strategic Intent

I use the term 'strategic intent' to describe the notion that 'forces organisations to be imaginative and inventive in seeking new ways to create capability and to achieve its goals' (Davies and Ellison, 1999, p.49). The data indicates the existence of deliberate strategic intentions within institutions (mainly HEIs) that favour collaborative HE. The following respondent captures the significant position given to collaborative HE arrangements within a HEI's strategic plan:

It is very much part of our strategic plan and it is a high priority for us [.....] from our point of view you know it is a very important dimension to our strategy (R10).

HEIs intend to accomplish two purposes by undertaking collaborative HE provision: 1) HEIs intend on increasing the international reputation of their institutions and 2) they intend to establish long term relationships with the markets through private for-profit HE partners (R12).

At an institutional level it is one of the things that the universities want to be seen to be doing that they got international students, they got international collaborations [.....] It serves the purpose for students coming here to be able to say we got international we are familiar with the elements of international students etc and so on. It also helps to market the university that we are international university rather than just dealing with our local xxxxxxxxx [deleted] catchment (R12)

Respondent 12 identifies the reasons for the intentions:

It will increase our reputation, provide quality provision and have a long term relationship (R12).

On the other hand, according to the respondents, the private for-profit providers have been adopting both the short and long term strategies in relation to their collaborative HE provision. In the short term they are intent on strategies that help secure their survival amidst the ever changing regulatory 'storms' (R6) and in the long term they have been focusing on strategies that will help them build credibility (R3 and R12). Finally the strategic intent on building long term relationships with private for-profit providers (R12) has given form to a new collaborative HE model. HEIs use their partnerships with private for-profit providers to set up 'feeder stations' or 'feeder colleges' that will continue to help supply students and market courses on behalf of these HEIs.

Universities agree (to the collaborative HE) because they don't have their resources, i.e. students, because it is hard to recruit students directly, these private institutions are like feeding bodies (R6).

When HEIs respondents were asked a direct question in relation to the view which sees the private for-profit providers as 'feeder colleges', a respondent was quick in his following response:

Yes, very much so (R13)

Thus my respondents (from HEIs) envisage a role that they expect private for-profit providers to play in collaborative HE partnerships (i.e. supply students). But, as a result, HEIs seem to offer an elevated role and space for various private for-profit providers in HE.

In terms of 'blockers' to collaborative HE provision, the themes have emerged from the responses, and they are developed in the next section.

6.1.6 Costs and Resources

Costs and resources refer to an institution's financial and other resource commitments towards collaborative HE provision. The responses indicate that collaborative HE provision involves costs and requires resources (R2, R7, R8 and R12); this could deter institutions (HEIs and private for-profit providers) from establishing such collaborative HE arrangements.

It's costing us more to run it overseas because: the development upfront then managing it and paying people, administrators and academic staff to manage that relationship, so if one module runs in Malaysia, Cyprus, Singapore, Vietnam we give hours for every relationship they have. [.....] Our staff are not teaching over there but they get hours to manage their relationship with their counterparts overseas (R12).

The above observation indicates that a key resource allocation of a collaborative HE includes the allocation of staff hours. Private for-profit

providers also perceive that the costs incurred and the resources utilised may not necessarily yield expected returns on investment. Private provider respondents (pilot study: college 'C') also indicates that the contractual obligations undertaken as part of the collaborative agreements may force institutions to operate at break-even or loss. For example, it was revealed that minimum student numbers are agreed by the private providers in the contracts and a failure to secure this minimum number will force private providers to pay the franchise fee from their own profit margins (pilot study: college 'C'). Costs and other resource requirements that are often associated with collaborative HE can present additional pressures on the already overstretched academic staff within the HEIs. The following respondent captures one such situation:

In terms of collaborative provision you are really looking for resources in terms of making somebody a link tutor [...] in that sense there is always a complaint that you have 15 hours of teaching sometimes you have 20 hours of teaching and its a additional burden on them in that case you need to give them a perk or so (R7).

Building on the above observation a link tutor attached to a HEI in the UK had this to say about her experience of dealing with a particular collaborative HE provision:

To be honest, I am on the operational side now I deal with it on a day to day basis. It's a hell of a lot of work for a very minimal return (R2).

These additional pressures coupled with other academic staff related tensions could create a state of uneasiness within HEIs. The following response highlights the other tensions that prevail amongst academic staff concerning collaborative partnerships, especially in the context of international collaborative partnerships:

This is one of the other tensions of course one of the uncomfortable aspects in developing collaborative provision for probably all public sector institutions is that there is ethos surrounding public education which resists the market and which resists the collapse of the established academic profile. So some academic colleagues find it very difficult to understand that the year does not start in September and does not end in June. They find it very difficult to work through the idea that students may be recruited 4 times a year or students may complete their course in one year rather than 10 years so you get those challenges at times from the academic community (R8).

Respondent 8 outlined the tensions between academic staff and international collaborative partners:

One of the big issues for the academic community and for this institution in that respect is that English medium because obviously you are delivering courses in English all over the world, English is their required medium and is stated as such and students sign up to that but results can be variable. So of course that impacts upon how the academic staff respond if they are ever asked to do marking (R8).

Moreover the collaborative duties of academic staff have also been having a negative impact on home department, students and colleagues.

Our home markets have been hit, students have made comments of the fact that XXX (name deleted) is again in XXXXXX (country name deleted), he's not covering the class and somebody else have to cover, there are some disruptions sometimes (R13).

Respondent 13 states:

What we are doing we are using some of the VL's [visiting lecturers] for overseas work as well to reduce the impact on our home markets (R13).

The above response suggests that the increasing academic workload and the disruptions these have caused in the home markets will compel HEIs to employ more visiting lecturers (part time staff members) to perform certain tasks that have previously been undertaken by the full time lecturers.

6.1.7 Risks

The responses outline some of the inherent risks that are part of collaborative HE provision. But the responses from this theme are highly reflective of HEIs' points of view. Respondents (R1, R3, R7, R10 and R13) overwhelmingly indicated 'quality risks' as their key concern. It is understandable as the ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities rest with the degree awarding institution (QAA, 2012a).

My concerns would probably be around, I guess, the quality side [.....] because you can't physically be there 24/7 to see if it works. You got to put some trust in the partner that what they are actually doing will be just as good as what we do here (R10).

Respondent 13 states:

Quality is generally the main risk [...] because they (private HE institutions) are very commercially orientated. Quality is not the highest thing on the agenda. [...] Certain things have happened in the past that we have to call people and say you cannot do that, yes the money is one thing but it is not the way to make quick gains it's about long term standards of those programmes (R13).

Data also suggest that concerns regarding quality are discouraging further establishment of collaborative HE provision. HEIs are concerned by repercussions that may arise from unsatisfactory QAA audit outcomes.

My impression is that most recently they (HEIs) been less keen to take on private providers partly because of QAA did audits of collaborative provision which showed up some of the deficiencies and also because [...] it is very difficult to manage quality and standards. It's difficult to get a grip on what's going on in these colleges. So I think there has been inclination to draw back a bit from establishing these links (R3)

However respondent 7 provides other examples of the collaborative risks that can be perceived as further deterrents to collaborative partnerships:

The risks are around quality assurance [...] have you got the right partners? Have you got the right strategic partners? the quality risks, reputational risk, transaction risk all of those aspects (R7).

The above identification of the three broader concerns on the collaborative risks is supported by other responses which establish relationships between the transaction risks and the reputational risks.

They (HEIs) want to see three year accounts for example because one of the greatest concerns of universities is what happens if the college goes under financial difficulty what do you do to the student on the course if the college collapses which would apart from of course being bad experience on students which should be the first concern its very damaging to the reputation of these universities (R3).

According to respondent 3, any risks originating from, for example, the financial health of private for-profit providers may cause reputational damage. Thus, a collaborative risk can cause multiple effects on collaborative HE partnerships and more importantly on its partners. HEIs are more vulnerable to these risks because they are the degree awarding institutions, therefore they choose their collaborative partners and partnerships cautiously.

6.1.8 Regulations

The findings in the previous sections (5.1.2(a) and 5.1.3(b)) have outlined some of the HE policy and regulatory changes and their impact on the private for-profit HE providers and on HEIs. In relation to this section there is one specific regulatory impact that can be separated and presented as a deterrent

to collaboration. The current government's policy drive on immigration is motivated by a 'desire to reduce immigration levels overall' (R3); but indirectly this has limited the growth of private for-profit HE. As respondent 11 stated this policy drive classifies 'international students as migrants' and restricts the work rights of those students who are studying at private HE providers. This may restrict the number of students coming into the UK for HE. It may also curtail the number of students studying at private institutions.

I do think the private colleges focussing on international recruitment are going to be facing a very difficult period with this government in place and I think their survival is at risk (R7).

Given these circumstances HEIs that favour collaborative HE provision are forced to re-assess the situation.

Because of these big policy changes, universities are now more interested in delivering in-country (overseas) programmes. [...] certain universities perhaps might not have been considering that sort of thing (R10).

HEI respondents openly discussed their concerns regarding collaborative HE. It was clear from them that HE policy developments and the resultant regulations are changing the shape of collaborative provision. As stated earlier, this new shape will favour overseas (in-country) provisions as opposed to UK based provision (R8). Thus the changes in HE policies and regulations are on the one hand driving collaborative HE but on the other hand deterring from a particular form of collaborative HE provision.

Respondent 8 commenting on his position as a head of collaborative unit states:

If they [private HE institutions] have an off-shore delivery point then we would be interested in pursuing the conversation, because if the students are not coming here then there is no use whatsoever [no use in having a partnership here in the UK] and the number of partners, some of our established partners and some of our proposed partners are saying that well that's the route that we will go down, we will establish campuses off-shore and we will want to deliver your awards there (R8).

6.2 Overseas Collaborative HE Perspectives: Sri Lanka

HEIs in the UK (with degree awarding powers) do not only collaborate with private for-profit HE providers in the UK, they also collaborate with various international private for-profit HE partners. This is often included under the topic of cross border HE (CBHE), also known as transnational education (TNE). However the CBHE has different taxonomies and often takes different shapes (Kinser, 2010). It is important to stress here that this study neither intends to examine the developments in CBHE nor aims to scrutinise the market entry strategies of HEIs, for example franchising. Hence, this exploratory study confines itself to a number of Sri Lankan stakeholders' perspectives of growing collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit HE providers.

During the interviews conducted in the UK, the stakeholders of collaborative HE discussed and shared their perspectives regarding overseas collaborative HE provision. They also talked about overseas-based collaboration. But this study would be somewhat narrow without the perspectives of stakeholders located overseas. HEIs and private for-profit providers may collaborate to provide degree courses to non-EU students in the UK. Stakeholders' perspectives on such provision are diverse as evident from chapter 5 and section 6.1. But the same perspectives cannot be implied readily in the context of UK HEIs collaborating with overseas private for-profit HE providers. Therefore this research set out to incorporate the views of overseas collaborative HE. Sri Lanka was chosen as the most 'fitting' destination (see chapter 1). As per Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014, p.17), such comparative (international study) perspectives will: (a) help examine the alternatives (for example, overseas collaborative HE provision) and (b) help examine the consequences of certain courses of action, by looking at experiences elsewhere.

The findings in this section will be discussed under two broad sections and they are; (a) supply-side and (b) demand-side. The supply-side section will include themes emerging from the responses that are associated with UK HEIs and their motives for collaborations with private for-profit HE partners in Sri Lanka. The demand-side section will include themes that are to do with host country (Sri Lanka) issues and the rationale for such private HE provision or institutions.

6.3 UK HEIs: Supply-side Perspectives

Firstly, I wish to summarise two key lines of arguments that sum up the basics of overseas collaborative HE provision. They are:

1. Increasingly, universities (HEIs) in the UK are competing with each other against a background of reducing public funding support (Tapper, 2007; King, 2004). As Greenaway and Haynes (2003) argue that the additional income opportunities for HEIs should be drawn from non-governmental sources to bridge any funding gap (see also section 5.1.5). Universities in the UK 'have sought to expand their financial base by using international students as a source of revenue (De Vita and Case, 2003, p.385).
2. Universities realise that their awards have commercial value and this has led to the exporting of academic programmes through various forms of collaborative arrangements which aim to bring in more financial benefits (De Vita and Case, 2003; Hodson and Thomas, 2001).

So, to what extent do participants' responses echo these two realisations? The number of international students (non-EU) studying in the UK has risen since 2000. In the 2002/03 period non-EU students made up 8% of the total student population but by 2010/11 this had gone up to around 12%. Further it

is widely acknowledged that international students bring huge benefits to the UK economy; the HE as an export industry contributed around £7.9 billion annually to the economy in 2009 and has the potential to contribute almost £17 billion by 2025 (Universities UK, 2012b).

Given this background, what are the stakeholders' perceptions of the motives of overseas collaborative HE provision?

6.3.1 Student Mobility and Non-EU Markets

As has been stated, respondents indicated that the UK market for international students has become competitive (see section 5.1.5) and the external market forces and the stringent regulatory conditions (i.e. immigration policies) have put a strain on student mobility. Moreover studying in the UK has become an expensive decision for many Sri Lankan students, (SL1 and SL6)

[.....] the British pound is going up I think now it's like Rs. 207 or more students will not be able to afford to go to UK for UK qualification [.....] (SL6).

If studying in the UK is considered expensive by international students then universities will need to focus beyond their 'first wave' (students coming here to study) in international education as described by Mazzarol et al. (2003).

Directly commenting on the expenses of studying in the UK, participant 1 (a Sri Lankan UK-based university consultant) observes that:

You can find most of the universities who had 10-15 students for their masters programmes [in the UK] are now down to 1 or 2 and even those students are perhaps local students. When I say local students I meant those who are living here already [...] if you see the costing here they are so difficult now, £ 9000 for the course £ 5000 for living with all the restrictions of work, and you are looking at about £ 20,000 minimum for somebody to come to UK to study for a year which is not a kind of income that every family can afford to keep aside for a child (SL1).

In the context of UK postgraduate courses, statistics show the importance of international students in sustaining such courses in many HEIs. This has been widely discussed in many postgraduate network forums in the UK such as that of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and its HE policy network seminars (SRHE, 2013). According to HESA, non-UK domicile students accounted for over a third of all postgraduate students at the UK HEIs in 2011/12. During the same year non-UK students on full time postgraduate courses numbered at 176,640 (HESA, 2013a). As already pointed out, HEIs have realised that the traditional international student recruitment strategy alone is not tenable in the long run. Any reductions in student numbers will inevitably have an adverse impact on their income. Thus an alternative approach to attain those student numbers had to be put in place.

It gave them (HEIs) extra income stream and they managed to get around the limitation and cap on student numbers, which have been posed quite rigorously (R3).

Some respondents argue that if restrictions are placed on student mobility then universities should go to where students are and in such scenarios collaborative HE provisions may be sought. Thus, Mazzarol et al. (2003) argue a case for HEIs to move forward into the export channel: the provider goes to the market instead of the market coming to the provider. Respondents indicate that collaborative HE provision in markets such as Sri Lanka is undertaken by UK HEIs to increase their profile on the local market with a view to target students in the country itself (SL6).

If we want to maintain the international links I think it's better thing that we go to the market because if the student can't approach us then we should be approaching them (SL1).

Some respondents pointed out that by no means all international students, especially those in developing countries, can afford to come to the UK and that collaborative HE can reach market segments which otherwise would not have the opportunity to access UK qualifications.

Most significantly such expansion of markets into overseas territories cannot simply be seen on the grounds of economic rationale i.e. income. It carries with it significant benefits that education provides to society.

[Collaborative HE] can reach markets that we have no access to and of course those markets are often in areas where the currency of education is of a much higher standing than it is in the UK [.....] To know the courses are been delivered in Sri Lanka, in Zimbabwe and in Vietnam means that we are reaching people for whom the currency of education is entirely different. You know when we hear stories of students who will transform their families, lives because they are studying our awards [...] (R8).

Amongst many other overriding economic arguments that support market and economic rationale for collaborative HE provision the response from HEI respondent 8 points to the often concealed positive benefits that can be brought about by overseas collaborative HE provision. The data also suggests that collaborative HE that is being driven by an economic rationale could also, if balanced appropriately, produce benefits to the learners and the communities.

As I say you know this institution has particular foundational principles that it says it wants to meet [.....] and this is one way which it meets them. So it is very difficult when the economic arguments arises and somebody is saying for example we will expect this one to make £120,000 instead of making a £100,000 and you say well actually the impact is greater than the any amount of money you can count on. That economic argument pales [.....] (R8).

The above response touches upon the obvious tensions that are apparent within HEIs. On the one hand, HEIs are seen as business enterprises (Bleiklie, 2004). The distancing of the state from its financial commitments and the increasing preference for privatisation have compelled HEIs to adopt market-oriented private undertakings. But on the other hand institutions and academics are also guided by their own values and principles concerning the role of education. Molesworth et al. (2009, p.286) points out that academics should reflect on education as 'personal transformation and therefore resist the pressures from both managers and students'.

6.3.2 Supply-side: UK HE Policies

Sections 6.1.4 and 6.1.8 have covered discussions of recent policy changes and their impact on collaborative HE provision. Their impact, as evident from the data is two-fold. On the one hand HE policies have encouraged institutions (HEIs) to seek alternative income sources and thus have generated interest in collaborative HE provision. On the other hand, recent government policy initiatives have begun to shape the nature of collaborative HE (with private HE providers).

But in the context of overseas collaborative provision, the most significant impact originates from immigration policies and the resulting fall in international student numbers in the UK (SL1). The effect is being felt and the consequences are only just beginning to emerge. Recent data indicated that in the year to December 2012, there were 209,804 visas issued for the purpose of study (excluding student visitors), a fall of 20% compared to the previous 12 months (Casciani, 2013). For those UK HEIs that heavily rely on the income from international student (non-EU) recruitment, this is a certain set-back. For example, London Metropolitan University (LMU), based on a recent report, is said to have lost income worth up to £20 million due to the UKBA revoking its licence to sponsor non-EU students (Barrett, 2013). LMU not only lost income from its international recruitment but also much of its income from UK recruitment was lost due to the bad publicity.

For example, a UK-based Sri Lankan education consultant commenting on

the immigration issues stated that:

Specifically on UKBA issues, people are fed up; students are fed up of the visa criteria. The visas are being rejected for no reasons and when they come here the way they have been treated [.....] the UK is becoming a very unattractive destination (SL1).

Commenting on the current Sri Lankan market, the Sri Lankan-based manager of a UK institution that promotes UK HE to international students implies that:

For the time being we don't actually have the actual fact or figures for 2011/2012 yet but if we look at 2009/2010 our numbers have not gone down that much, I mean we still have closer to 4,000 students who actually came to UK in 2009/2010 to study for UK qualification in the UK (SL6)

But with regard to the issues that we have had with the some of the further education and HE colleges closing down in the UK and also the costs and the visa issues, the market has gone down in SL (SL6).

My respondent suggests that the demand for in-country collaborative provision has seen an increase:

We think the market is growing in SL for TNE [.....] in the student segments that actually do the Sri Lankan curriculum in SL. I mean those are the students who are actually switching into UK qualification in order to get better employment opportunities (SL6).

6.4.1 Demand-side: Unmet Demand for HE and Students' Needs

In Sri Lanka gaining accurate data on the whole HE provision (public and private) is difficult, but the data available on public HE can be considered reliable. As stated earlier, Sri Lanka has only 17 state-funded 'public' universities for a population of 19.5 million. Due to the limited number of places in state funded universities, only 17% of those who qualify for university education gain admission. As a result, each year more than 100,000 qualified students are forced out of the state HE system (Jayawardena, 2012). The majority of students who do not secure a place in a public university choose to study in private HE institutions. But the data on private HE institutions is not readily available. Peiris and Ratnasekera stated that there were around 50 companies engaged in the business of education in Sri Lanka (Peiris and Ratnasekera, 2007). These private HE institutions (or companies) either offer professional and/or vocational qualifications or offer degrees in collaboration with overseas HE institutions. Given this background, the findings support the arguments that see the growth of private institutions as a phenomenon of excess demand (James 1993; Tilak, 2009). The phenomenon of excess demand occurs when the private HE sector enters a market to accommodate the growing demand for HE that has not been met by the state funded HE system.

Firstly, the under supply of HE opportunities and the increasing demands for HE provides a strong rationale for UK HEIs to collaborate with private HE

institutions in Sri Lanka. Thus it leads to a higher involvement of the private sector in the provision of HE in Sri Lanka.

Right, it's actually the supply can't meet the demand at the moment that is the biggest problem (SL3)

Yeah, the thing is in SL only about 11% of students who get through A levels can enter public universities so the rest of them, if their families can afford they prefer to go abroad to study but lot of them can't do that then they opt out [and go to] these other odd tertiary education facilities that are available (SL3) .

Although the above responses convey a rationale for the existence of overseas collaborative HE in Sri Lanka, the respondent describes those qualifications as 'odd' (SL3). This reflects the widespread scepticism that surrounds private HE provision in Sri Lanka. Peiris and Ratnasekera (2007, p.2) state that 'parents and students have been taken for a ride by the business companies that claim for foreign accreditation and international recognition, charging large sums of money without providing quality education'. With the absence of strong quality assurance apparatus in Sri Lanka (recently the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council of University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka has taken steps to monitor and quality assure such private provision), the private HE provision of all sorts have grown including those that have genuine collaborative links with the UK HEIs. But as Dissanayake (2005) states that the increasing demand for HE in Sri Lanka has been exploited by some foreign universities and private HE providers.

This takes us into the discussions and findings outlined in the section 6.1.7, where the UK HEIs have expressed significant concerns regarding the collaborative HE provision with private HE partners:

Quality is generally the main risk [...] because they (private HE institutions) are very commercially orientated. Quality is not the highest thing on the agenda. [...] Certain things have happened in the past that we have to call people and say you cannot do that [...] (R13).

The Sri Lankan experience shows that the market can present opportunities for collaborative HE. Certainly the data on the under supply of university places in Sri Lanka is a great market opportunity. But the responses and the realities also show that these opportunities come with built-in risks for the UK HEIs that collaborate with private partners in markets such as Sri Lanka. Here the term built-in risk is used to indicate markets, such as Sri Lanka, where there are limited robust regulatory regimes or legal apparatus to monitor and audit private HE institutions. Universities in the UK are aware of risks and responsibilities associated with the collaborative HE provision.

To this point, I have been focussing my discussion on the demand and under supply of places in the state universities in Sri Lanka.

Areas in which they offer degree courses are narrow [...] most of the extension recently has been in arts stream but the demand is also for more higher that is more technical kind of subjects [...] (SL3)

For example, a student in Sri Lanka cannot study a subject such as aeronautical engineering in state universities simply because they do not offer a course in such a subject areas. But the collaborative HE provision that

Kingston University has in Sri Lanka with the private for-profit partner could provide students with choice and opportunity. This is significant; as critiques of private provision (Wilkinson and Yussof, 2005; McCowan, 2004; Walford 1988) often argued that private providers mainly concentrate on subjects that require less infrastructure facilities and thus concentrate on classroom based subject areas but the example, at least in the context of Sri Lanka, suggest this is not always the case.

6.4.2 Demand-side: Inefficiencies in the State Sector

In the context of Sri Lanka, the sector does not have the capacity to satisfy the growing demand for HE. And also the state HE provision, in many ways, does not fit students' needs (SL2, SL3 & SL4). Hence, in the context of Sri Lanka, the growth of private provision can be seen not only as a 'phenomenon of excess demand' (section 6.4.1) but also as a 'phenomenon of differentiated demand' (James, 1993; Tilak, 2009).

Four key sub-thematic points have been identified from the data to confirm the above assertions and these points will be discussed in detail below.

1. The state managed HE sector does not offer quality (SL2, SL3 & SL4)
2. The state sector education is outdated (SL3)
3. The state university graduates lack skills (SL3)
4. The state sector is under political influence and thus prone to political disturbances (SL4).

Firstly, the growth of private providers in Sri Lanka is seen as a result of the diminishing public confidence in the state managed universities.

Most of the locals believe the quality of HE institutions managed by the state [has] badly gone down (SL4).

Some comments and discussions on the quality of education at the public universities were very critical in nature, for example the following by a research fellow at a HE policy institute in Sri Lanka:

They (the state universities) are not very dynamic they don't respond quick enough to changes so that's one reason why they get outdated and the degrees are not marketable so that's another reason for bringing in the private sector so that there is more dynamism and energy to create competition (SL3)

The respondents have identified many deficiencies in state funded universities in Sri Lanka. There is a high level of unemployment amongst their graduates. The respondents also suggest that most private sector business organisations prefer to recruit local graduates from the non-state sector HE institutions (often with overseas qualifications). The respondents attribute this trend to the perception that the state university graduates lack the essential skills that are seen as important in the current job market.

There is high unemployment among some of the people who come out of university, local universities. They are definitely without more marketable skills like IT and English they can't get good jobs (SL3).

Yeah I think the private sector is very much keen to hire these students from non state or private HE institute compared to other sector except for few universities and now the majority of these arts and social science students have the problem of getting the employment because of the lack of English and IT knowledge [...] (SL2).

In the private sector (corporate sector) they will be happy to employ a candidate from UK university. The problem they see with the local graduates is their attitudes and their ability to speak English language. For a long time in the private sector they have this idea that the local graduates lack social skills (SL5)

As I pointed out in chapter 3, the growth and the nature of private providers is best understood in specific contexts. The data in this section supports my point. The UK HE sector is dominated by public-funded HEIs and they are considered to be better than private institutions. For example respondent 7 commenting on private HE in the UK stated:

The perception in the UK around private education [...], certainly by the sector itself and may be by the general public is seen as something perhaps a second best (R7)

In Sri Lanka, however the perception is that private providers and their graduates are better. The respondents also believe that the state universities are under close political influence; this often leads to disturbances i.e. strikes and other politics-related actions. Therefore many students from rich and urban backgrounds opt to study in the private HE institutions that have overseas collaborative arrangements.

With the opening of overseas universities most of the rich people could afford to send their children to these institutions but rural communities [are] still depending on the [.....] State owned universities (S4).

The public education system is entirely free in Sri Lanka and private HE provision requires high tuition fees. Thus the private HE sector limits itself to certain segments of the market. It creates a divide between the students who can afford and those who cannot. This is again a significant outcome. The early growth of private HE in the UK can be characterised as non-elite, demand-absorbing in type and motivated by an unmet international demand for education (also see chapter 3). For example, international students looking for affordable UK qualifications decided to study in these private for-profit HE institutions (see chapter 7: section 7.2). But in the context of Sri Lanka, the growth of private for-profit HE can be characterised as demand-absorbing and exclusive in type. That is, it only caters to the needs of certain segments. Thus it questions the ability of private for-profit HE sector to expand access to education.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter again touches upon the findings from 13 interviews conducted with key stakeholders of collaborative HE provision in the UK; and for the first time on the findings from 6 interviews in Sri Lanka. This chapter has identified several factors that act as drivers and blockers for the establishment of collaborative HE partnerships. The findings suggest that the market and its demands have become a major force that motivates collaborative HE partnerships. Working with private partners in the UK and overseas is seen with an economic motive and thus collaborative HE partnerships are seen as

an income replacement activity. The findings have broadened understanding of collaborative HE and have helped recognise various contradictions and tensions emerging from the stakeholders' perspectives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Perspectives of Students

7.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the students' perception of private for-profit HE provision. The data were collected in three focus group studies conducted with non-EU international students (see table 7A). In addition, this chapter also uses data from five interviews conducted with former students (graduates from private HE, see table 7C). These data, in particular, are presented in this chapter with the view to answering research questions b (to what extent is this private higher education provision attractive to students from non-EU destinations?) and c (what are the students' perceptions of the value they receive from such private provision?).

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on the themes emerging from three focus group studies and the second part on students' expectations and experiences. The participants were guaranteed anonymity. Hence the focus group study participants are identified by maximum of two letters from their names (the participants have mentioned their names in the beginning of the focus group studies, which enabled me to assign responses to the individual participant during the transcription of the audio recordings). In the case of the five student interviews, the participants are identified by the prefix 'SI' and a number (for example, SI1, SI2, and SI3). The tables 7A, 7B and 7C list the details of the participants.

Table 7A: Focus group participants

Focus group	Participants	Discipline	Demographics
Group 1 (FG1)	4 students	Business	1 Female 3 Male
Group 2 (FG2)	5 students	Business	3 Female 2 Male
Group 3 (FG3)	5 students	Business / H	2 Female and 3 Male

Table 7B: Participants - by subject, level of study, nationality, gender and interview location

Participant ID	Subject	Study level	Domicile - region	Gender	Interview location
Participant SE	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	Outside London
Participant T	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant SB	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant Y	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	Outside London
Participant MU	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant SA	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant ME	Business	UG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant R	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant M	Business	UG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant RI	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant S	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant A	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Female	London
Participant MA	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London
Participant L	Business & Hospitality	PG	Non-EU	Male	London

Table 7C: Student (graduates from private HE) interview – participants

Participant ID	Course completed	Awarding HEI	Private for-profit college by Location	Domicile - region	Employment status
Participant S11	MBA	University W	London	Non-EU	Education
Participant S12	MBA	University S	London	Non-EU	Unemployed
Participant S13	MBA	University W	Outside London	Non-EU	Health Care
Participant S14	BA	University B	London	Non-EU	Hospitality
Participant S15	MA	University MJ	Outside London	Non-EU	Marketing

7.1 Selecting UK for HE: International Students' Perspectives

The focus of this chapter is to establish students' perceptions of private for-profit HE provision in the UK. But it is imperative to first identify the factors that motivate these international students (non-EU) to study in the UK. This will provide a more balanced approach to situate and discuss these students' perspectives on private for-profit HE and on collaborative HE. The following themes have emerged from this line of enquiry and suggest a number of motivators.

7.1. (a) The Need for Recognised Qualifications

Previous surveys conducted amongst international students in UK HEIs conclude that international students chose to study in the UK for its recognised qualifications worldwide (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Carter, 2007). Similarly, the focus group discussions with the international students at the private for-profit providers confirm that non-EU international students are very keen on attaining a recognised qualification. They believe qualifications gained overseas may give them the level of acceptance they need in their home countries. The following statement reflects one such perception:

Coming to UK is a dream for everyone back in my country. Having a qualification, if you get a graduation certificate from university or college in UK, they praise you a lot (back home) and you get jobs easily [.....] moreover it is accepted everywhere (FG2; Participant M).

The above attitude has been repeatedly observed across the focus group discussions. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) have examined the international students' need for overseas study opportunities and their findings suggest that international students prefer overseas study options as they perceive overseas courses as better than the local courses. Similarly, there also exists a preference, as evident from these discussions (FG2 and FG3), which seems to favour overseas qualifications over local courses. In summary, the student responses confirmed that they favour overseas qualifications and in particular, international students at the private for-profit providers felt that a UK qualification was particularly attractive.

7.1 (b) Home Country Issues

Under-supply of university places and the subsequent unmet demand for HE in developing countries leave many students with no choice but to study abroad (Gribble, 2008). However a theme that has emerged from the discussions focuses on the difficulties these students encounter in their home countries in relation to HE. These difficulties centre on the political instabilities and the consequent disruptions to students' education. For example, a participant commenting on the HE conditions in his country states:

Even in a good university in XXXX (country deleted) politics play a major role. In a good university in XXXX (country deleted) out of 365 days hardly two months of lectures will be available. Others are spent on strikes etc. (FG1: Participant SB).

The unstable political climate and other related home country issues have pushed these students to seek alternative places to continue their HE (FG1: Participant SE). Further, students discussing the private HE institutions in their home countries, which attract less political disruption, argue that these institutions may be offering UK type qualifications but do not offer the same practical experiences as one would gain by living and studying in the UK (FG1: Participant SB). It is important to point out here that the findings in this section are specific to respondents from particular countries and it would be impossible to generalise from them.

Apart from these difficulties, respondents also suggest that the higher education trends within these non-EU countries have also made an impact on students' decision to study overseas, especially in the UK. During the discussions, students spoke at length about their friends who had already been to the UK for HE purposes (FG2: Participant M; FG1: Participant T). This shows the increasing trends in student mobility from non-EU international destinations to the UK. Hence, Gribble (2008, p.26) argues that the 'families and students in these many developing countries expect that foreign study will confer professional and business advantages'. The decision to study overseas can be a significant and expensive initiative for most of these international students (Mazzarol, 1998; Cubillo et al. 2006). However the shifting socio-economic circumstances in these, mostly developing, non-EU countries have provided opportunity for these students. The upward socio-economic mobility within these sending countries has created a more affluent middle class; this has made overseas studies affordable to a larger student

population than previously. Further discussions also show, given the increasing student mobility trends, that the international student decisions to study in a location are increasingly influenced by friends and existing networks overseas (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

7.1 (c) Exploring International Study Destinations

The recent report published by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), states that 'globalisation is enhancing the number of potential students who 'shop' globally for the best higher education offerings' (Barber et al. 2013, p.10). The focus group discussions also reveal that these international students were looking for other suitable international study destinations before deciding to come to the UK. In other words the UK was not necessarily the first choice for some of the focus group participants (FG1, FG2 and FG3). As an example, the following four statements from the participants describe their intentions:

Example 1:

When I completed my higher secondary level back home I applied twice for US I got rejected unfortunately. Then I was on process for the 3rd time (FG2: Participant R).

Example 2:

I completed my bachelors' degree [in home country] and I wanted to do something. I wanted to go to US. But I didn't have 16 years of education as

my degree was only for 3 years duration. That's why I had the option of coming to UK (FG3: Participant MA).

Example 3:

I was thinking of going to Australia, that very moment they stopped visa processing to Australia (FG3: Participant S).

Example 4:

Actually I finished my BA degree in 2008 in XXXX (home country) I applied for a university in the USA but did not get the visa because of my 3 year degree (FG1: Participant Y).

The above statements illustrate several key points in terms of international students' decisions pertaining to UK HE. Firstly, in general, these four examples show that international students at private for-profit providers 'shop around' before deciding on a study destination. This shows that the private for-profit international students in my study have no commitment to a particular study destination; and they seem to choose destinations that fit their purposes. Secondly, in particular, the examples 1, 3 and 4 indicate the stringent immigration procedures followed by the competitors of UK's international HE. Thirdly, example 2 highlights the different entry requirements of other competing countries as compared to UK institutions, for example in the USA. Finally, the responses are in line with a previous study finding (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003) that places USA as the first place of preferred study destination.

7.1 (d) Lack of Information

The focus group discussions also examined the level of prior information that these students had on the UK HE environment and systems. For example, students had little information on the types of institutions and the course offered in the UK.

I wanted to do business management but I did not know about the courses, about diploma, bachelors or anything like that [...] (FG2: Participant R).

This lack of prior information has given rise to the role played by the student recruitment agencies or consultancies and these private businesses are specialised in recruiting students (especially international students) on behalf of their clients (HE institutions) for a commission. This chapter will further explore the role of agents in the later sections. As one participant acknowledges;

Yeah there are consultancies in our home countries and they will suggest us like this course will be good [...] (FG1: Participant SE).

These students with little information on overseas study opportunities had to rely on these agents to guide them throughout the process. This includes selecting the courses and institutions; thus their decision to study may well not be determined 'independently' and it may well be influenced by a for-profit organisation that has its own priorities i.e. commission. It may give rise to a situation, whereby these consultancies will be inclined to promote their clients

(which could either be HEIs or private for-profit HE providers) who offer attractive commission rates. Therefore students may not be selecting the appropriate course or institution that suits their actual needs, at least at the initial stages, as they do not have access to all necessary information. For example, the focus group discussions have revealed that some of these students, after arriving in the UK, have either changed institutions or courses that they initially offered a place or they intend to change the course or institution after an academic year (FG1: Participant T; FG3: Participant L). If these students' choices are dependent on the interests of the intermediaries (agents), then one could well argue that this may lead to inappropriate HE choices. This may lead to lack of motivation amongst students which may cause non-completion of the courses. Research conducted amongst UK university students suggests that a poor choice of courses or institutions may become a cause for non-completion of degree courses (Christie et al. 2004).

The focus group discussions have also revealed that these students did not recognise the differences between public and private HE providers in the UK (FG2: Participant R). This is a significant outcome as far as this study is concerned. The growth of the private sector has witnessed many emerging debates and tensions on the public and private HE divide; and these debates often included arguments for and against the private HE provision and providers (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). Nevertheless, international students, at least in the context of this study, have shown less concern with regard to the public and private divide, in particular at the early stages of their HE choice. Indeed one reason could be that these students may well not have

had the necessary information to consider any differences between these types of HE institutions. Given these circumstances it is not surprising that lack of information available on private HE providers contributed to poor choice by some of my respondents.

7.1 (e) Tier - 4: An Attraction

All three focus group studies have included extensive discussions on the tier - 4 points based immigration system that was introduced in the UK in 2009. The majority of the participants have, during their discussions, made explicit links between the tier-4 system and their decision to study in the UK. The relationship between international student decisions and the prevailing host country immigration systems are closely connected. The immigration systems in the host countries can be used as a catalyst by the policy makers to fine-tune international student numbers. Previous studies also show that international students give precedence to countries that have easier immigration procedures in place (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003).

The Tier-4 system has encouraged many of the private for-profit HE students to choose UK for their HE purposes and there is evidence of this outside of my sample (i.e. international student numbers in private HE). The following three examples show the extent to which my respondents were attracted by the more flexible and less cumbersome immigration procedures that were put in place in 2009:

Example 1:

In June 2009 I suppose, they had this points based system that was quite easy everyone was like going to UK [.....] So I thought why don't I give it a try? (FG2: Participant M).

Example 2:

I completed my higher secondary level back home I applied twice for US I got rejected unfortunately. Then I was on process for the 3rd time then suddenly I heard about the tier 4 rules it was easier than the previous system (FG2: Participant R).

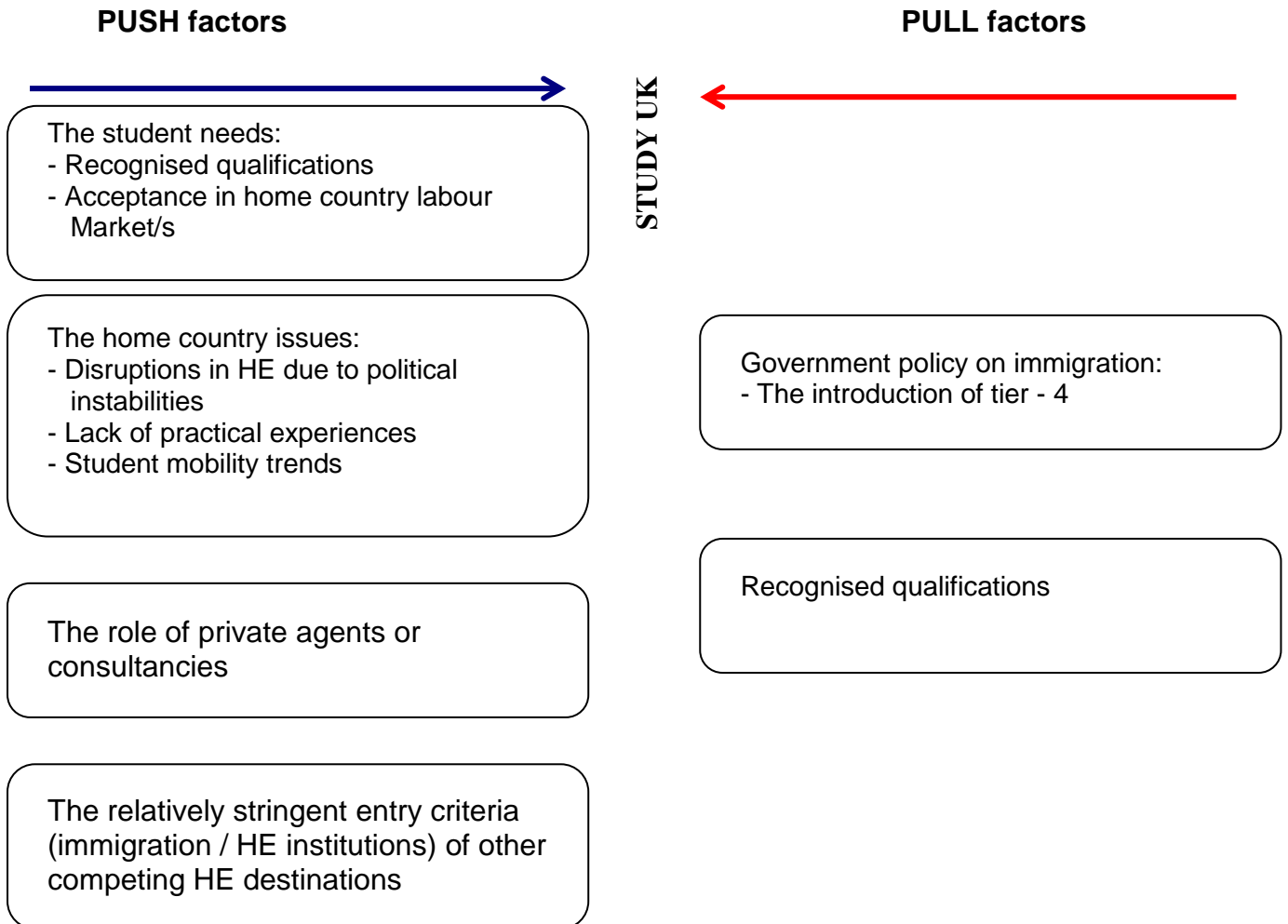
Example 3:

I want to go back to the end of 2009 when I decided to come to UK for my further study. Actually I have not planned to come here to study in the UK and when tier 4 was introduced it made things very easy [.....] (FG1: Participant SB).

The above examples 1, 2 and 3 indicated that the policy changes especially in relation to the student immigration has become a major pull factor for these private HE international students. The second example, in particular, is specific and demonstrates that in the context of international students the ease of immigration procedures can be a significant motivator in deciding a choice of host country. Based on the discussions, the factors that motivate the private for-profit international students (non-EU) to study in the UK are organised into the following push and pull factors (figure 7A).

Figure 7A: International (non-EU) students in private for-profit HE:

Push - Pull factors for Selecting UK



Source: The Author (FG1, FG2 and FG3)

7.2 UK Private for-Profit HE Providers: What's the Attraction?

A holistic understanding on collaborative HE provision, involving the HEIs and the private for-profit providers, will not be complete without some understanding of the private for-profit HE providers' responses from students. A practical way to capture this is via the students' perceptions of these private HE providers. This section will first explain international students' rationale for selecting private for-profit HE providers. The following themes have emerged from focus groups discussions.

7.2 (a) Tuition Fees

In the context of international students, the costs involved in overseas HE makes it an expensive decision and the tuition fee is a significant deciding factor (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). International students are sensitive to price fluctuations (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003) and the focus group studies confirm this. A significant increase in the amount of tuition fees could negatively impact international students' choice. The focus group studies and discussions have shown that international (non-EU) students at these private HE institutions are certainly conscious of the tuition fees involved in UK HE and their decisions pertaining to the selection of institutions are very much influenced by financial limitations.

I choose this college actually not the university because I could afford only the college. The University fee is relatively high [...] (FG2: Participant M).

This view establishes, in no uncertain terms, the relationship between tuition fees and the selection of institutions. The selection is dependent upon the fee they charge and private for-profit HE students are price sensitive. Two other respondents (FG2: Participant R and FG1: Participant SE) held the same view:

Going to university or highly trusted college too expensive for me. I cannot afford. I can only afford £2,500 (FG2: Participant R).

A participant commenting on private HE tuition fees argues that;

As you know prices of the colleges like compared to universities are cheaper. That was the main reason [...] (FG1: Participant SE).

Therefore, from the students' perspective, private for-profit HE providers are an affordable option as compared to HEIs. Their (students') choice is driven by the amount of fees the private providers charge for similar courses offered in the HEIs and thus fees become a key driver in attracting these fees-responsive international students.

7.2 (b) Private HE: Enroute to HEIs

The discussions also reveal that the students eventually wish to study in a university or have already secured an offer. A focus group participant (FG2: Participant MU) describes how she has already secured a place in a top business school to do a MBA, but as she comes from a science background

she wanted to complete a business course in a private for-profit institution to refine her knowledge.

So I got an offer for MBA in the University of XXXXXXX, because I have first degree in Physics I was like kind of afraid [.....] so I was like ok let me just take one year course to get an idea (FG2: Participant MU).

Some participants also explained how they intend to 'top-up' at the university (final year), instead of completing the whole course in the private for-profit HE College.

Let's see if I get a chance I will do a top-up in a university [...] (FG1: Participant SB).

The above respondent views illustrate two key points. They look at the private HE providers as an initial step (foundation) towards further study options in the UK (FG2: Participant MU). They make use of the private for-profit HE providers to get themselves familiarised with the HE environment in the UK (FG1: Participant T). As discussed previously (7.1.d) these students may not necessarily get access to the information they need to make an informed decision prior to leaving their home countries and this gives them an opportunity to gauge the HE sector. Students also see private for-profit providers as a means by which they could reduce the total amount spent for HE in the UK (FG1: Participant SA; FG1: Participant SE). For example, students could reduce the year 1 and year 2 fees by studying for a degree programme in private for-profit HE institutions and they then will be able to transfer their credits to the final year in a HEI. This would significantly reduce

their spending. The spending will approximately be reduced by 30% - if one assumes a business undergraduate (UG) degree is £ 9,000 per year in a HEI and £ 5,000 per year in a private for-profit HE provider. But for some students the private for-profit HE providers offer alternative routes into HE. They see that the private providers offer a diverse set of qualifications, i.e. diplomas, higher diplomas and they see this will ease their entry into traditional HE (FG2: Participant R). Flexibility of opportunity is discussed later in this chapter (see also chapter 6).

7.2 (c) The Influences of International Recruitment Agents

Private educational consultancies or student recruitment agencies have been working with educational institutions (both HEIs and private for-profit providers) to help recruit international students. These agencies are considered as important influencers of international students' HE decisions for a number of reasons and some of the previous studies have shown that HEIs are highly dependent on these agents to recruit international students (Yen et al. 2012). For example, in the context of students from Thailand and their international HE choices, Pimpa (2003) indicates that these agents offer face-to-face advice and suggestions concerning the type of courses and institutions. Previous studies on international students' HE choices have also identified a number of factors (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Maringe and Carter, 2007) that influence institutional selection, but these studies, to an extent, have overlooked the pivotal role played by these private agencies. One reason could be that these studies have either been based on students

in the process of going overseas (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002) or they were conducted with students at the HEIs (Maringe and Carter, 2007). My focus group respondents (FG3: Participant L; FG1: Participant SE) revealed the significant amount of influence agencies exert on students' HE choices. Thus the focus group data suggest that students as well as HE institutions are dependent on the services of these agents. My focus group responses are backed up by Yen et al. (2012). These agencies wield their influences in two areas of students' HE choices; 1) selection of institutions and 2) selection of courses. As discussed in section 7.1 (d), these international students (my respondents) had little information on the courses and on types of institutions in the UK. The students had done little prior research on the qualifications, courses and the institutions in the UK (FG3: Participants L and S; FG1: Participant R). Thus students relied heavily on these agencies.

Example 1:

There are many consultancies operating in our countries, so we came to know about those details such as courses, colleges and universities [...] (FG3: Participant L).

Example 2:

Yeah there are consultancies in our home countries and they will suggest us [...] like this course will be good (FG1: Participant SE).

These examples show the extent to which agencies influence students' decisions to study in the UK. Based on example 1, these agencies operate as a source of information for international students and in example 2, they

become part of the decision making process. But unlike previous studies, this particular study looks at private HE students in the UK. It has shown the profound impact that these agencies have on students' decisions.

7.3 Expectations and Experiences: Private HE Students

An understanding on private for-profit HE students' expectations and experiences is an important part of this chapter. Section 7.2 looked at the reasons why these international students were attracted by private HE provision and/or HE institutions in the UK. This section will look at the students' expectations and their actual experiences of the UK private for-profit HE providers. There have been many studies conducted in the UK that, in general, examined students' perceptions of quality (Hill et al. 2003; Telford and Masson, 2005; Voss and Gruber, 2006; Angell et al. 2008), student satisfaction (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Thomas and Galambos, 2004; Douglas et al. 2006) and HE decision making (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Carter, 2007). But all of these previous studies were conducted in the context of HEIs and the significance of this present study is that it looks into the students' expectations and their experiences in the context of small but growing private for-profit HE providers in the UK.

The UK Coalition Government's HE reforms purport to focus on the empowerment of students through the enhancement of student choice (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). Hence if one were to apply the similar focus in the context of private HE in the UK, one must first

understand the expectations and experiences of private HE students (see section 2.3). This understanding will not only assist in constructing clear insights into the modus operandi of private HE providers but also will help answer questions concerning future students' choices and the ability of private HE providers to attract, compete (with HEIs) and retain these students efficiently.

In terms of the expectations, the focus group discussions have revealed a broader theme that shows the 'high expectations' of these international students, which will be discussed in detail in the section below. The findings will then move on to the students' responses about their actual experiences of studying in UK private for-profit HE providers. In addition to the focus group study student responses, this section will include responses from the five interviews conducted with former students of private for-profit HE providers.

7.3.1 High Expectations of Students

Section 7.1 looked at the reasons why non-EU international students in this study have opted to study in the UK. International students in private for-profit HE colleges/institutions feel that the UK offers worldwide recognised qualifications. This is similar to the findings of Binsardi and Ekwulugo, (2003). Hence, irrespective of the types of institutions they chose to study (private or HEIs), the students have high expectations of the institutions that offer a route to UK qualifications (FG1: Participant Y; FG2: Participant ME; FG3: Participant L; FG3: Participant S).

You know to be honest I really had high expectations when it comes to the education here (UK) (FG2: Participant ME).

Another participant states:

Actually when I came here I thought that we will get sophisticated buildings, all kind of different teaching styles and interaction between students and teachers; actually I was thinking of a particular theoretical and practical knowledge [.....] (FG1: Participant Y).

Similarly a former student summarised her expectations and states:

As someone who has visited UK on numerous occasions and attended English language courses at the private institution, prior to coming here as international student of HE, I was expecting high level of teaching, with good resources, facilities, and international atmosphere. I was expecting high level of interaction amongst students, and challenging studying environment (Participant SI5).

Moreover in terms of expectations with regard to the UK institutions (in this case private for-profit HE providers), these international students have made comparisons with their home country HE institutions, mostly well established public colleges. The institutional comparison benchmark was set at the students' home country HE colleges.

Let me say I thought all colleges are same. We had same type of colleges affiliated with T University in [at home]. We thought it will be same. But when I came here it was a surprise. I found all colleges here are something like tuition centres that we had back home (FG3: Participant L).

As we have seen in the previous sections, students expected a British qualification that offered worldwide recognition. In the context of the focus groups, international students' educational expectations were to receive a quality business education (respondents were purposively chosen from business cohorts). This links with the study conducted by Hill et al (2003), which aimed to answer the question 'what does quality education mean?' The results were captured in the following four key themes: (a) quality of the lecturer; (b) students' engagement with learning; (c) social/emotional support systems and (d) resources of library and Information Technology (IT). Similar student expectations are evident in this present study too, but in contrast the expectations of my study respondents are focused more on the outcome of their education (FG3: Participant L; FG1: Participant Y). For my respondents quality education meant (FG3: Participant M and L):

- courses that are accredited and/or offered in partnership with HEIs;
- courses that prepare students to cope with challenges, for example:

[.....] education that makes us (students) cope with any problem... enable us to be competitive in the market place (FG3: Participant L).

According to Narasimhan (1997), students in general are concerned about the practical applicability to the external world of knowledge learnt in class. One of my respondents pointed out that:

I heard that in overseas studies there are more practical things better than our home country. I expected different type of educational systems [.....]; back home we had to study different subjects give exams and pass, even the subjects which we are not interested [...] (FG1: Participant SE).

As such the expectations are tied to employability and these students expect their courses to be practical and offered in partnership with HEIs (FG3: Participant L; Participant SI and S3). This is similar to the expectations of students, not necessarily international, at the UK HEIs. Rolfe (2002, p.174) found out that the lecturers at the four UK HEIs in her study felt that students expected a more vocational education to gain skills that gave them enhanced job prospects. My student respondents also indicated that any qualifications offered in partnership with HEIs will provide a favourable outcome since not many private HE providers have their own degree awarding powers. One of my respondents (Participant SI1) pointed out that he chose to study in a particular private for-profit HE institution because of its collaborative partner (HEI) and its international reputation. In addition, these students have also been expecting to have access to the: (a) first class facilities; (b) British teaching faculty and (c) the best learning resources at these private HE providers. The students appreciate lecturers who knew the subject and were interesting to listen to (Hill et al. 2003, p.16). My respondents (non-EU international students) were expecting a teaching style that is different from

what they were used to in their home countries (FG1: Participant Y). Thus they preferred British teaching staff to give them that opportunity to experience different teaching and learning styles.

But in contrast, some students also stated that they have had minimal expectations when it comes to these private for-profit providers because of the affordable (cheaper) tuition fee. For such students, private for-profit HE providers offer a cheaper route towards a HEI's qualification and therefore they expect less as compared to other students (FG3: Participant MA). For these particular students the quality education means the quality of the certification that they will gain on completion of their courses. But importantly unlike other students, these students who had minimal expectations had better prior information regarding UK HE systems (FG3: Participant MA). To put it simply, for these students where you study is irrelevant; the focus is on the type of qualification (the certificate) and the costs involved in gaining that qualification. Thus, it shows the changing focus of students (i.e. as customers) and their 'perception of HE as a hurdle to jump on their way to a career (Molesworth et al. 2009, p.281). In this context, the highly market-oriented private providers will strive to meet the needs of students and by doing so they will create a situation where education and skills will be exchanged as if they were possessions that could be bought at the expense of 'challenge, risk and potential transformation' (Molesworth et al. 2009, p.285). However, such analysis cannot only be confined to private providers; similar debates are increasingly observable within HEIs too, especially given the recent policy changes. But, as evident from the responses in chapter 5 and 6, there seems

to be a flow of tensions and debates that oppose such market based narratives.

7.3.2 Inconsistencies: Teaching and Learning Experience

The student responses show 'inconsistencies' in the teaching and learning experiences across private for-profit HE provision. Previous studies conducted with students in HEIs identified that students placed greater emphasis on the teaching and learning aspects when considering their HE experiences (Douglas et al. 2006; Hill et al. 2003).

The responses from my former student participants in general highlight positive teaching and learning experiences, while the focus group study responses were more critical in nature (see 7.3.3). What is most interesting is that former student participants who had completed two different courses in the same private HE institution had encountered dissimilar teaching and learning experiences. First let me draw the attention to the students' experiences concerning the teaching and learning aspects of their education. Example 1 below indicates a positive student's experience relating to the teaching ability and subject expertise of staff, and echoes Douglas et al. (2006). The student experiences of the classroom environment and the diversity of ideas from peer groups are also important aspects of positive assessments of education, and link with Narasimhan (1997) and Hill et al. (2003).

Example 1:

The college which I was associated with had different lecturers, all of them came from different countries, and they fly-in from France, Canada etc., because it was based on modular system, once the module is started they finish it within 2 to 3 weeks. So it was wonderful and the lecturers and professors all have doctorates so quality was incomparable. It was obviously very good (S11).

Example 2:

I much appreciate my MBA class which is highly motivated, my classmates are excellent, and I am learning quite a lot from them from their cultures, from their experiences. It's awesome. Credit goes to XXXX (*college name deleted*) [.....] (S14).

The two student examples above reveal a positive experience in respect of teaching and learning opportunities in the private for-profit HE institutions. One of these former students commented on his overall educational experience at the private for-profit HE institution as follows:

Yes, by the end of the course as I have received the degree, I can say that I have learnt a lot from the class room experience and from lecturers. We have been inspired a lot by being a MBA student. What is happening all around the world? We are up to date. Our professors and the college have given us opportunities to meet alumni share knowledge and experiences [.....] (S11).

However the following respondent's observations highlight discernible 'inconsistencies' in students' teaching and learning experiences not only

between various private for-profit HE providers but also within the same HE institution.

I did my HND in a private college XXX (name deleted), I had excellent lecturers, and teaching was fabulous. I was led down by XXXX (2nd college name deleted) [.....] after all it was just an experience; I could only get to know about the poor quality in education by studying there. Thank God I am so happy about XXXX (3rd college name deleted) (SI4).

This is one example of how a student's experience can vary between different private HE providers, although the student has not explicitly commented on her reasons for 'switching' institutions.

During the first year [.....] in Business, I was studying with a group of 8 students on average, hence the classroom and learning experience was very interesting, as interaction with lecturers was very direct, the discussions and studying was very productive, engaging, even challenging. During the second year, the class was consisting of around 35 students and the delivery of lectures was different in a way that it was much general, covering broader aspects of the subjects not leaving much room for detailed discussions [...] (SI5)

In the above comment, the particular student discusses the change in class size and the subsequent less favourable teaching and learning experiences (also see White (2007) in section 7.3.3). As we will see in section 7.3.3, there are underlying tensions to private for-profit HE providers' pursuit of corporate objectives through the provision of education. This is often used by the critics of private for-profit HE to undermine their role in HE. The present study found that the prevailing tensions between the business objectives and the provision

of education could significantly erode students' teaching and learning experiences (SI5).

The students speaking on the topic of lecturers have commented on the 'mixed' nature of teachers at these private for-profit HE providers. As we will see in section 7.3.3, the current students at these private for-profit HE providers were not pleased with the type of lecturers available to them. Former student responses (graduates of private HE) seem to favour staff with industry experience:

Yeah I find very mixed teachers from different environments. One was totally an academic [.....] He used to teach in two or three universities and I found one teacher and she has very good experience in industry (SI2).

But both the groups (current students and the graduates) seem to agree on having lecturers with industry experience. This may be relevant to the nature of subjects that these students chose to study – in this instance business related subjects.

7.3.3 Commodification of Education

Private for-profit HE providers are criticised for rewarding their shareholders through the business of education (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). Private businesses invest in education to gain a return and thus, they will seek measures that minimise costs and maximise their returns. But studies show that students' interests could be jeopardised if commercial considerations

originate from HEIs and/or private providers (Walker, 1999, p.239). Walker's study identified several factors that worked as 'anti-educational', for example course times that benefited the agent more than the student. The focus group student discussions on student experiences at these private for-profit providers do support such strong observations. In contrast to the students' expectations, these students have felt that education has been replaced by the business priorities of the private for-profit providers.

I find that in the colleges especially the private colleges, they are doing a business rather than providing a quality education. I don't blame that all the colleges do the same things but most of the colleges [.....] They are just focusing on a business model not on teaching [...] (FG1: Participant SA).

My student respondents felt that the private for-profit HE providers and their owners are careful about what they spend on the students' learning facilities and tutors; thus offer a negative impact on the students learning experience. For example, my respondents felt that the private for-profit providers have modest library facilities and teaching resources. The following part of the conversation taken from the focus group studies captures their grievances. These concerns amongst students will create a negative attitude towards the private for-profit providers and may create tensions within the classroom environment which will have an impact upon the whole learning experience of students as opposed to their expectations.

(FG1: Participant T);

Yeah we are struggling here, actually one of my friend studying in a university so when he has to do his work (assignments) they provide sources so that they can easily get access to information. So for them it's easy to get more resources

We have to go especially to a library but they can do it in their homes. They get access to websites (online learning sources) [...]

(FG1: Participant S).

It's just we have to struggle more to get resources, more than the university students

The students also felt that their private for-profit HE providers employ tutors who lack experience and specialisation in the relevant subjects they deliver as compared to tutors in their home country institutions. The students also argued that they could learn the theory by studying in their home HE institutions. Their expectation was to gain valuable practical skills and knowledge especially in business subjects, but this was not provided by the private providers (FG3: Participant L). This is significant in the context of this study, as private for-profit providers are open to criticism for offering teaching that is not directly linked to research. However these focus group responses are in contrast to some of the graduate student responses (SI1; SI4 and SI3), which outlined some positive experiences (7.3.2).

The student responses also suggest that the private for-profit HE providers were charging an increased additional fee for any internship arrangements. The students argue that this was not disclosed during their recruitment.

If I had to apply for the placement for 14 months I have to pay £2000 extra and they are going to keep me in the placement. When I came here we never talked about this placement. So every college has got its own way to run its courses, which is not good (FG3: Participant L).

Moreover former student participants discussed their concerns relating to the class size in their private for-profit HE institutions (SI1 and SI3).

I didn't bother on the number of students we had and the crowd in the classroom but I used to sit in the front and listen to lecturers or professors' teaching and came out soon [left after the lectures] (SI3).

A study conducted with Australian university students suggested that the students viewed a large classroom as an 'impersonal efficiency driven' teaching and learning activity (White, 2007, p. 597) which would create a negative learning experience. The above response from participant SI3 corresponds to such views. If private HE providers organise the class to ensure organisational efficiency and thus economise, it distances students from the teaching and learning process. However some respondents referred favourably to the large but manageable class sizes and argued that it provided them with valuable learning opportunities.

Yeah the classroom experience has been terrific. I mean we witnessed that in our classroom there were students from more than 40 countries. So that was quite diversified; different cultures, different nationalities and different expectations, we learnt a lot about the differences the cultures and societies which are there in the world [.....] (S11).

Most private for-profit HE providers rely heavily on tuition fee income (Bernasconi, 2006). This is certainly the case for most UK private for-profit HE providers too. In this context one could argue that the student numbers remain a significant concern for private HE providers. In contrast to the response from the participant S11 above, another respondent points out that the private for-profit HE providers, in their pursuit of student numbers, could specialise in recruiting students from one particular nationality (country) which may affect or narrow down other students' learning opportunities within the classroom environment.

[.....] most of the students were of one particular foreign nationality, most of the time, speaking their own language, which created very specific atmosphere amongst students, as I felt that students of different nationalities did not really have the chance to interact with others as much (S15).

This along with other issues discussed in this section raises questions about the recruitment strategies of these private for-profit providers. Further questions can be raised on the extent to which the students were provided with accurate information prior to arriving. As I have found out that these students had little prior information on UK HE systems and this can have a negative impact not only on the private for-profit providers but also on the

whole UK HE brand. It is important in this juncture to reiterate two key developments that are currently being operationalised. Firstly, the QAA has been tasked by the government to oversee the private educational provision in the UK. The QAA as a government's agency has taken the place of other independent organisations such as the BAC. As part of this educational review, as of December 2012, the QAA has published 140 reports (QAA, 2012b). These reports include details of the private providers reviewed and indicate their overall performance. This was not previously available in the public domain and more importantly to students. Secondly, to improve the quality of student decision making the Government has called for enhanced information requirements from HEIs to be made available at the course level and this requirement will be called Key Information Set (KIS). It will be interesting to see how this particular information requirement will affect the private HE sector, if implemented.

The current student responses, on a more positive note, acknowledge the flexibility offered by the private for-profit HE providers as compared to HEIs.

They (private HE institutions) are more flexible than universities (FG1: Participant M).

This flexibility is partly due to the small size of these colleges. Class time tables can be adjusted as per student requirements and teaching hours compressed into 1 or 2 days of the week (FG3: Participants M and R). However as indicated in chapter 5 (section 5.3.2), the flexibility of private HE providers was seen positively by my respondents (management, staff and

policy makers). Although student respondents preferred the flexibility offered by small private providers they were critical of the business approach adopted by these private colleges (see section 7.3.3).

7.3.4 Changing Student Attitudes and Priorities

The negative experiences along with the changes in the regulatory environment (specifically related to immigration and non-EU international students), in general, have had an impact on these students' attitudes and priorities. Some respondents have noted that their initial intentions regarding HE in the UK were replaced by economic motives as they see: (a) no long term prospects in the UK, and (b) the private HE providers are not quite as they should be in providing HE.

FG3: Participant RI:

After coming here we understood that studies mean nothing. So next aim is to earn money

Everyday the laws (student immigration) are changing

As discussed in section 7.1 (e), the introduction of the Tier-4 points based immigration system (PBS) had a positive impact on students' decisions to study in the UK. However the Coalition Government's posture on student immigration has radically changed. As already mentioned international students (non-EU) are now included in the UK's net migration count and the Government's policy drive towards reducing net migration has begun to have

a big impact on these students' status in the UK. At the time of my focus group studies, that is during the student immigration consultative phase, my respondents were just beginning to realise the consequences of the proposed changes and their responses reflected their disappointment. Some students (respondents) have begun to question their decision to study in the UK and were beginning to look at other alternative ambitions in the UK or elsewhere.

So the best option we have is to do whatever we can in the short time, have good results and progress report and go back to our country and it's up to you after that [...] try US may be? (FG3: Participant L).

In contrast some students, while accepting the impact that these changes have on their educational experience, look to HEIs to satisfy their educational needs.

FG3: Participant M:

Well the quality of education I expected was very high. This institution I don't think it or any private institutions will provide that kind of expected education. Let's see if I get a chance I will do a top-up in a university and get better education

In the context of UK, the Home Office has expressed concerns on some of the private HE providers exploiting the student route for immigration purposes (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2012). As a result a number of policy initiatives are undertaken by the current Coalition Government to streamline private HE and

international student migration systems. This has taken its toll on students' attitudes and perceptions.

I found that studying in the private institution in the UK at the moment, has its ups and downs; that people should be very careful when they choose what they want to study, why and where they want to study. If they are keen to learn and get a degree, it is achievable in the UK private institution, however, given the environment and atmosphere may not be according to their expectations, in my opinion, mainly due to their domestic experiences and international expectations (SI5).

The above comment from a former student respondent depicts current international students' sentiments on the private for-profit HE provision in the UK. This is shaping the students' (most specifically international students) expectations and their experiences in the context of UK private HE provision. Importantly in time to come, as seen from student responses (FG3: Participants L and RI; SI5), it will shape students attitudes towards UK HE which will have an impact on the whole sector including HEIs.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on students' perspectives on private for-profit HE in the UK. This chapter identified several push-pull factors that are attracting non-EU international students to study in the UK. According to my findings, non-EU international students choose to study in private HE because:

- (a) It offers courses at lower fees than HEIs
- (b) Students see it as a route to HEIs

(c) Students are influenced by private recruitment agencies that represent the interests of private providers.

My findings also reveal the prevailing high expectations, tensions and varying study experiences of these students in private for-profit HE. My participants pointed out that they did not recognise any significant differences between public and private HE providers in the UK, in particular at the early stages of their HE choice. This draws attention to the blurring of the boundary between what is described as a public or private provider. This chapter also identified the importance of employment and other functional value aspects of education to my respondents (non-EU international students). They seek to gain an overseas qualification that prepares them for employment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Collaborative Higher Education: Discussion of Stakeholders' Perspectives

8.0 Introduction

This exploratory study aims to understand the stakeholders' perspectives on collaborative HE arrangements between HEIs and private for-profit colleges in the provision of UK degree courses in business and management.

This study has accumulated data from 24 interviews and 3 focus groups. Chapters five and six have outlined the findings from the interviews conducted with key stakeholders of collaborative HE provision in the UK and Sri Lanka. Tables 4D and 4F list the details of the interview respondents. Chapter seven outlined the students' perspectives on private for-profit HE provision. The findings were based on data analysis from 3 focus group studies conducted with non-EU international student participants (see table 7A and 7B). In addition, chapter seven also outlined the findings from five interviews conducted with former students (graduates) of private providers (see table 7C).

This chapter provides an interpretation of the diverse data that were gathered in the course of this study (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). In addition, this chapter also discusses the apparent tensions that are increasingly discernible within UK collaborative HE provision. This chapter applies literature that had been

previously explored (Chapters 2 and 3) to link up with the themes emerging from the data.

8.1 HEIs' Perspectives

HEFCE funded HEIs with degree awarding powers are engaged in establishing collaborative arrangements with private for-profit HE providers both in the UK and overseas. A significant number of non-EU students who graduate from UK HEIs study at these private for-profit HE colleges in various parts of the UK and/or in their home countries. The term collaborative HE refers to an array of different arrangements between HEIs and other (i.e. private for-profit) providers. As mentioned earlier, I use the term collaborative provision to denote 'arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations² other than the degree-awarding body' (QAA, 2012a).

The first objective of this study is to understand the rationale driving the collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. This understanding of collaborative HE should be located in the stakeholder perspectives, as HE includes a diverse set of stakeholders with dissimilar interests (Trim, 2003). Universities (HEIs) are transforming into more complex organisations (for example, business enterprises (Bleiklie, 2004); and/or social enterprises (Jongbloed, 2007) and as a result new classes of university (HEI) stakeholders have emerged with diverse set of stakeholder influences and demands (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010). Indeed, the present study

² In this study, organisations refer to private for-profit HE providers

findings have, by design, extracted perspectives of stakeholders representing HEIs, private for-profit HE providers and non-EU international students. As evident from chapters 5, 6 and 7, the present study findings show a diverse set of viewpoints, interests and conflicts (emerging from both institutional and individual view points). Hence this section shall first look at the rationale from the HEIs' perspectives.

In general, collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit HE providers can be viewed in the context of inter-organisational arrangements. That is, it involves crossing of organisational boundaries (Beerkens, 2002); for example, HEFCE funded HEIs may need to go beyond their rigid organisational structures in order to provide HE in collaboration with private HE providers. As public institutions, HEFCE funded HEIs have strong internal structure of governance (Bleiklie, 2004) and responsibilities (both external and internal) as compared with private for-profit providers, hence the rigidity. Private for-profit HE providers in the UK can be small and medium sized and have unique characteristics and contradictions as compared to HEIs (see section 5.3 and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b). Moreover, if collaborative HE is discussed in the context of international provision, then it may also involve crossing of both the national and organisational boundaries simultaneously (Beerkens, 2002). Previous studies on the international and inter-organisational arrangements in HE mainly focus on the typologies of such arrangements or collaborations (Neave, 1992; Beerkens, 2002). Little has been written on the rationale behind such inter-organisational collaborations in HE. For Eddy (2010, p.18), the reasons for

establishing collaborations in HE are varied, with 'motivations being driven intrinsically or extrinsically or sometimes simultaneously'. Eddy (2010, p.22) goes on to explain that the 'intrinsic motivation emerges from a sense of self-driven reasons for engaging in an activity' and the 'extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, may derive from external sources such as money, coercion, mandates, or exertion of power'. So, what do the respondents see as the reasons driving collaborative HE?

It is important to point out here again that the focus of this study is to understand the stakeholders' perspectives on collaborative HE provision between both the HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. But the narrative focuses, in particular, on non-EU international students. Chapter 6 offers essential inputs to the below section. Section 6.1, in particular, organised the findings into drivers and blockers of collaborative HE. Further, section 6.2 outlined the findings in the context of overseas collaborative HE provision.

International student recruitment, especially from non-EU destinations, continues to play a pivotal role in finding needed income for UK HEIs. HEIs in the UK see international students as a source of revenue (De Vita and Case, 2003; Russell, 2005). The contribution of international students to the UK economy has been significant and the published data supports such claims (see section 6.3). But the demand for international education, although on the increase, provides major challenges and drivers for HEIs. There is a huge competition amongst UK institutions (R10) for a fair share of the international education market and there is a surge in international competition from other

exporting countries, i.e. USA and Australia. Education is one of the 12 service sectors in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the importing and exporting of education and training programmes is a commercially viable trade area (Knight, 2004). Further the international education market has seen new exporting nations and the governments in those nations have expressed interests in establishing regional educational hubs, i.e. China, Malaysia and Singapore (Altbach and Knight, 2007). In the context of the UK, student mobility (international) has seen major influences. Some are positives (PMIs and the introduction of Tier-4 in 2009) and recently some have had negative impacts (the consultative phase in 2010 and the subsequent major overhaul of the Tier-4 system, see chapter 3, section 3.1.1). The present study (see section 7.2) and other previous study (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Carter, 2007) results show that the study-UK option has become an expensive and cumbersome decision for most of these non-EU international students. In this context, HEIs in the UK had to do something different to expand and remain competitive in the international education market/s. It paved the way for identifying new market/s, segment/s and opportunities (R7). International students, for example, those who cannot afford to study in the UK universities, have now been given the opportunity to study in various private colleges in the UK (and/or in their home countries); these institutions offer courses at a competitive price. In this context, the international education market has seen, as described by Mazzarol et al. (2003), three waves of internationalisation. The first wave involved students travelling to host nations for studies, the second wave involved institutions

moving into international markets, and the third involved the creation of branch campuses (Mazzarol et al. 2003).

8.1.1 The Context for Collaborative HE: HEIs' Perspectives

In the context of UK HEIs, this study's findings have borne on the enormous changes taking place in the HE sector. These changes, as per the findings, cause many uncertainties, challenges and burdens (R13). These uncertainties prompt a diverse set of interpretations and responses from HEIs. For some participants these uncertainties represent opportunities for innovation. But for some it offers limited opportunities to replace lost income and intensifies competition in the sector (see sections 5.1.3, 5.1.4 and 5.1.5). As participants (R2, R7 and R8) argue, the prevailing situation in the UK HE sector calls for an institutional departure; a departure from the conventional approach to a new innovative approach that expects HEIs to be competitive and be able to find additional revenue opportunities. This new expectation can be related to what Rutherford (2005, p.300) describes as a 'corporate model of university'. Rutherford's description focuses on the political and economic forces that, according to him, are transforming HE into an academic market (ibid.). In the context of this study, stakeholders' perceptions identify the gradual but deliberate distancing of the state and its privatisation efforts (R2, R3 and R11). The respondents' perceptions on the recent changes bear resemblance with Jongbloed's assertion on the emerging hybrid nature of HEIs (Jongbloed, 2007). That is, as discussed in chapter 2, HEIs are expected to play a complex role – a role that positions HEIs as performers of public tasks (i.e. teaching, research and helping society) with private undertakings (i.e. meeting

the needs of students and employers) to use Jongbloed's terminology. Such expectations (emanating from the state and its policies), on the one hand encourage HEIs to resemble private providers, but on the other hand problematise the private nature of HEIs. As seen from the responses, this is creating additional burdens and tensions within the sector and institutions.

To discuss further, one key uncertainty appears from the dwindling public funding available to HEIs (R2 and R3).

The amount of funding the university is getting per student at UG level are continuously decreasing and there is a continuing requirement to diversify income streams and find other sources of revenue (R2).

The funding from the state has been substantially reduced and this compels institutions to address their income needs (R2). As discussed in section 5.1.2, successive UK governments have focussed attention on preparing HE institutions for less dependence on the state and its funding sources (Henkel, 2007). This transformation or re-positioning of the state and its view on public institutions, i.e. HEIs, characterises the contemporary context in which UK HEIs are expected to operate and exist. HEIs are expected to earn their own income.

I drew on neoliberalism to explain this context; the term neoliberalism here is used to refer to the mode of 'regulation or form of governmentality' (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p.314) that believes in less government subsidies and places its faith in the market/s. This neoliberal rationale translates into the

marketisation agenda within HEIs (Fanghanel, 2012b). The present study's discussion backs up the emphasis on marketisation. Against a backdrop of reducing public funding support, Greenaway and Haynes (2003) argue that additional income opportunities for HEIs should be drawn from non-governmental sources to bridge any funding gap. The responses show similar thinking and justify the need to diversify income opportunities (see comments R2 & R3). Thus, marketisation activities are pursued by institutions to generate much needed income (Wangenge-Ouma, 2007). In the context of this study, collaborative HE provision between both the HEIs and private for-profit HE providers is viewed as one such activity. Collaborative HE can be positioned as part of this wider marketisation agenda, which aims to find income from non-governmental sources, i.e. international students and private partners.

In this context, many HEIs have recognised that their course portfolio and awards have economic value and thus have begun to realise these values by marketing their courses through collaborative provision (Hodson and Thomas, 2001; De Vita and Case, 2003). As mentioned earlier, there has been a general pattern of state withdrawal since the 1980s. This must be distinguished from the changes that followed the financial crisis of 2008. As Williams (2012, p. 54) points out, 'the 2011 reductions in public expenditure represented a fundamental shift in higher education policy'. That is, 'higher education is now explicitly recognised as an activity that primarily benefits private individuals' (Williams 2012, p.54).

In the context of UK HEIs, Hemsley-Brown (2011) argues that the government cuts have forced institutions (HEIs) to look for alternative sources of income including income from collaborations and international activities. The findings also suggest that these challenges (or uncertainties) provide new opportunities for innovation and modes of HE provision (i.e. collaborative HE) driven by markets and market-like behaviours (R7 and R8). The following responses justify such market-like behaviours:

We can't make any more money by simply doing what we are expected to do (R8).

Universities in a way stop thinking about themselves as being providers of courses but actually we are providers of multiple services and products (R7).

The findings from the stakeholders (HEIs) are showing that collaborative HE provision (in the UK and/or overseas) offers HEIs the opportunity to expand their HE provision (i.e. enter new markets or segments) with limited resource commitments (R4 and R6). HEIs collaborate with private providers in distant markets to offer courses or they attract international students from those markets to study in the private for-profit HE providers here in the UK. This may provide opportunities for HEIs to extend the life of a course that is less attractive in the UK market and earn income (R7 and also see section 6.1.1). This is not a new phenomenon; HEIs in the recent past have begun to engage in similar activities. However, given the current paradoxical HE policy landscape and the changing expectations of stakeholders, this movement could deepen over time. I identify the current policy landscape as contradictory; that is, on the one hand, the state has begun to distance itself

from its funding commitments but on the other hand the evaluative state (Neave, 1988, 1998, 2004) has begun to introduce new structures of governance and accountability (Jongbloed, 2007). For example, the success of an institution (HEI) is now measured by the level of income it generates, numbers of students it attracts, by the number of graduates in employment, its position in league tables and by the amount of research and consultancy revenue it generates (Molesworth et al. 2009; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). In this context, HEIs begin to deepen their reliance on markets and market-oriented responses (Brenner et al. 2010). In addition, in the context of collaborative HE, the involvement of private providers would further deepen economic motives in education (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

The findings suggest that collaborative HE is driven by markets to generate income (R7) and this, as Hemsley-Brown (2011, p.118) suggests, can be seen as a part of the 'marketisation in education which refers to the adoption of free market practices in running universities'. Importantly, these discourses and the reliance on the markets give way to an economic market narrative in the context of collaborative HE and it eventually provides, as per this study findings, an argument for an economic rationale behind the establishment of collaborative HE provision between both the HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. For example, the study participants have acknowledged that there is an obvious economic rationale that underpins their collaborative HE agenda.

I think, yes you know working with partners obviously have economic benefits (R10)

Meanwhile, as discussed before, the political drivers (R7) that are at play force HEIs to pursue an economic rationale as the governments' economic policies do not include the expansion of government expenditure to meet the growing demand for HE (Davies et al. 2006; Hardiman, 2010). If collaborative HE is essentially seen as an inter-organisational arrangement (between a HEI and a private for-profit HE provider), then as Beerkens (2002) suggests, the developments in policy domain in the UK too can offer a rationale for inter-organisational linkages. His argument is that in Europe, many HEIs have relied on the governments' support and their funding sources. The reduction in public financial support meant that these institutions had to rely on other avenues/or sources for their financial resources. In this context, the stakeholders' responses indicate that the recent government policy reforms, as Eddy (2010, p.22) suggests, offer extrinsic motivations for collaborations in HE. That is, HEIs and private for-profit providers are driven by external causes, such as the reduction in funding and the changes in policies, to engage in public-private partnerships. Further, the current form of public sector management is re-shaping the governance of HEIs, and the principles of managerialism encourage HEIs to engage in public-private partnerships in HE (Deem and Brehony, 2005).

Additionally, the UK coalition government's HE reforms appear to focus on the empowerment of students through the enhancement of student choice (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). This can be seen in six main policy themes (as outlined in page 218). These proposals illustrate that the government intends to make adjustments that favour competition on

the supply-side (involving HEIs plus other HE institutions). On the demand-side, the government says that it seeks to enhance and liberate student choice. For example, in the supply-side the government intends: (a) to remove control on the recruitment of highly qualified students (ABB or above at A-Level and removal of student number control in 2015); (b) to expand the information that the institutions are required to provide to their prospective students; and (c) to open the HE market for various alternative providers. Similarly on the demand-side, the government expects: (a) students to contribute substantially towards their educational consumption; (b) to put in place a new regulatory system that will aim to protect standards and quality; and (c) 'to publish online summary reports of student surveys of lecture courses, aiding choice and stimulating competition between the best academics' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, p.6). Overall these reforms will compel HEIs to change and institutions will be forced to seek solutions to the problems they encounter (i.e. need for more resources, by which is meant income plus the need to control costs). Hemsley-Brown (2011) suggests that the government's answer seems to further push HEIs into the market to find solutions to the problems they encounter in the market. The collaborative experience and the discussions with the respondents reinforce this proposition.

My data also suggests that the recent reforms have intensified competition for income amongst UK HEIs (R10). A participant asserts that HEIs are restricted in terms of student numbers and this restriction limits the amount of income they (HEIs) could potentially generate. This response is based on the

assumption that not all HEIs will be able to attract students with high grades (AAB plus / now ABB plus) and thus HEIs will have to expand the market/s they serve.

Public sector is also facing the restriction on student numbers, so we can only make certain amount of money. We can't make any more money by simply doing what we are expected to do (R8).

Thus these conditions drive universities to seek alternative income streams; and one such option is to expand their HE provision through collaborative HE. Further in terms of access to the markets, the collaborative HE provision presents HEIs with the opportunities to access new and wider HE student market/s.

It gave them (HEIs) extra income stream and they managed to get around the limitation and cap on student numbers, which have been posed quite rigorously (R3).

The universities can tap into other markets that they wouldn't normally have access (R4)

This is important in the context of HEIs' international activities; the number of international students (non-EU) studying in UK HEIs has risen. As stated earlier, in the 2002/03 period, non-EU students made up 8% of the total student population but by 2010/11 this had gone up to around 12%. Further it is widely acknowledged that international students benefit the UK economy.

To reiterate, HE as an export industry contributed around £7.9 billion annually to the economy in 2009 and has the potential to contribute almost £17 billion by 2025 (Universities UK, 2012b).

The increase in competition between UK HEIs meant new ways of looking at the markets and opportunities. In this context not only international students but also programmes have begun to move to distant markets (as identified by Mazzarol et al. 2003). But this required a collaborative approach, an approach that looked to reduce resource commitments. Further, not all non-EU students can afford to pay higher tuition fees charged by HEIs and the private for-profit HE providers offer an alternative option to these students (see section 7.2). Moreover statistics also show that international students favour particular regions in the UK, for example around 24% of students chose to study in London and 26% in the East of England during the year 2011/12 (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2012b). This meant that HEIs in areas in the UK seen as less attractive had to get access to these markets and collaborative HE could give these HEIs the opportunity (for example, in 2009/2010 the University of Sunderland had such arrangements in the Greater London area). The responses suggest that collaborative HE provision with private for-profit HE providers offers geographic reach (R7).

So the universities north of England will collaborate with private London provider because it's difficult sometimes more difficult to advertise universities that aren't necessarily high in the league tables in northern parts or parts outside of London. So they will see that as geographic advantage and an opportunity to recruit international students and diversify in that way (R7).

The adoption of market and market-like behaviours in HE often accompany the discourses on marketing (Gibbs, 2001). The study results show similar observations. The collaborative provision is essentially seen as part of the diversification strategy.

The drive is market driven. So it's an opportunity for generating income and is part of a diversification strategy (R7).

The respondents also argue a case for economies of scale, whereby courses that are already offered in the UK can be packaged to be offered in collaboration, which is likely to incur less costs (i.e. development and administration costs) to HEIs. Thus, opportunities available in other markets (for example, overseas) can be exploited. For example in international markets such as Sri Lanka, where there is a phenomenon of excess demand (section 6.4.1), the collaborative HE arrangements can effectively be used by HEIs in the UK to earn much needed income.

8.2 Rationales: HEIs' Conflicting Perspectives

In the previous section the discussion centred on the economic rationale behind the establishment of collaborative HE provision. The respondents have suggested that the dwindling financial support from the state drives institutions (HEIs) to seek alternative income sources (R2); this relates to Hemsley-Brown (2011), who states that the government cuts have forced institutions (HEIs) to look for alternative sources of income including income from collaborations

and international activities. Additionally, the changes in the public policy domain involving UK HEIs also demand changes and, in return, offer a rationale for collaborative HE driven by economic reasoning. As Beerkens (2002) suggests this offers a rationale for international and inter-organisational arrangements in HE. This also can be applied in the context of UK collaborative HE provision. Further analysis of the data demonstrates that collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers is driven or motivated by external pressures, in particular, by institutional income needs and the exertion of influences from public policy aspirations (Eddy, 2010).

Indeed the stakeholders' perspectives, in general (R3, R7, R8, R10 and R13), agree that the collaborative HE provision can bring about economic benefits to financially stressed HEIs.

I think, yes you know working with partners obviously have economic benefits (R10)

But, the findings also contain contradictory perspectives on the above assertions (see section 6.1.3, R2, R12 and R1). For example, some of the study participants representing HEIs are reluctant to offer direct economic justifications, as will be discussed below. Their responses highlight some of the conflicting interests that exist within HEIs, and between HEIs and private for-profit providers. Such contradictory views render discourses that question the viability of an economic rationale behind the establishment of collaborative HE partnerships.

This is significant as far as this study is concerned. In section 6.1.3, I have identified and briefly explained such contradictory positioning of academic professionals, especially those representing HEIs. The marketised HE environment offers many challenges to academics. Often academics find themselves in a complex situation where they either need to act independently or satisfy the stakeholders' needs and/or expectations i.e. students needs, the state and management's expectations (Molesworth et al. 2009). Fanghanel (2012a, p.115) states that academics' responses towards the policies framing their practice often included a mix of 'adoption and resistance'. Similarly, on the one hand this study results demonstrate the adoption of an economic rationale to justify the establishment of collaborative HE. But, on the other hand, respondents appear to display resistance towards the marketised HE environment. These ambiguous and contradictory perspectives may interfere with the effective functioning of collaborative HE provision with private partners, who may have a primarily economic rationale (section 5.3.4). A comprehensive analysis of the findings in sections 6.1.3, 6.1.4, 6.1.5 and 6.1.6 allows the following point of views and discussions.

Firstly, some of the respondents (R12) with collaborative HE management experience reject the widespread belief that collaborative HE provision could provide huge economic dividends to HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. Further, some respondents were quick to downplay the financial significance of collaborative HE (R12). According to these participants, running and managing a collaborative HE partnership requires resource commitments and involves costs. According to these respondents, if these inputs are compared

against the return, the economic argument loses its vigour (R2 and R12). So, if the economic rationale is made redundant, then what are the other factors that encourage collaborative provision?

The answer is not straightforward. The respondents offer a much more complicated scenario; a closer look at the responses point to deep-rooted beliefs that oppose markets and economic justifications in the provision of education. Participants representing HEIs neither positively recognised nor rejected economic justifications for the establishment of collaborative HE. The results, as discussed above, show ambiguities on the part of HEI respondents, who had reservations about their role in the new marketised world of HEIs. The responses also described the difficulties that academic professionals encounter adjusting to market conditions and expectations (R8). For example, the responses included difficulties encountered by academic staff concerning four intakes of students a year. One respondent talked about her difficulty in giving feedback to students whom she has not met in person, in this instance students in Sri Lanka.

At the same time, some respondents see themselves as participants of this marketisation order by circumstance rather than by force (R2 and R8). To discuss further, current HE circumstances warrant universities (HEIs) seeing some economic benefits through education, as White (2007, p.594) argues 'attracting funding and efficiency have become key university performance indicators'. In other words, the difficult financial conditions and the ever changing landscape of the UK HE sector have placed considerable pressures

on HEIs (R2). Given these conditions, HEIs' response was to seek solutions through market/s and market-like behaviours. Although not convinced, academics have found themselves playing a role that was contradictory to their moral beliefs concerning teaching and researching (Gibbs, 2001, p.89). They find themselves navigating through territories that are dominated by market-like behaviours. The following reflection from a respondent points to this:

I am an academic....5 years ago I never used such words (the respondent was talking about markets and costing), 5 years ago I was writing books about Art and now I have to use this sort of language (R8).

So the sector is responding in a way that says this is about survival, we either do this or we don't survive [.....] (R8)

Although the sector is responding to economic market expectations, one cannot reject the existence of tensions between the academic roles, their institutions' core principles and the economic expectations of a collaborative HE arrangement (R8). Gibbs (2001, p.89) suggests that education must be contextualised outside the economic market model. Similarly, the responses reflect resistance to the economic market rationale in education. The respondents argue against placing greater emphasis on the economic rationale; instead they offer alternative justifications that underpin some of their beliefs concerning the role of collaborative HE. As per these respondents, collaborative HE offers opportunities for widening access to

education and presents avenues for cross cultural learning opportunities (R8, R7 and R10). Collaborative HE could also help students in overseas markets to access high quality British education (R8).

There is a learning exchange that goes on from both parties so it's an opportunity to learn about the partner's environment, about students from a different country environment (R7).

For example, some HEI respondents talked about how they intend to offer opportunities for UK students to spend some time in an overseas collaborative campus.

I mean one of those things that I'm hoping, we sort of piloted but I do think we can extend it and that is around getting our students here to fully work with students studying on the same modules at an overseas partnerships (R10).

Of course, overseas collaborative HE can do all of this and can offer several benefits to the learners and to the society at large (see section 6.3.1). But the key question is, to what extent the institutions (HEIs) will be willing to compromise on the potential revenue to achieve these above pursuits? The same respondents who wished to see these non-economic benefits through collaborative HE talk about the stringent pre- collaborative audit procedures. As per the responses, any pre-collaborative HE negotiations involve stringent audit procedures, which include costing and revenue projections (R8). HEIs with their limited public funding will be reluctant to invest heavily in overseas ventures and as public sector organisations, HEIs are accountable for the

funds they receive from the state and very much sensitive to using these funds in overseas markets. As respondent (R8) argues any overseas ventures must at least break-even, if they are to be sustained. The attempts of respondents to offer alternative causes for collaborative HE tend to contradict each other. At the risk of oversimplifying I identify these alternative rationales as a process by which academics attempt to find academic solace in their practice.

But, given a situation where there are two opposing views on the economic rationale behind the establishment of collaborative HE, the findings provide a debate that views collaborative HE as an income replacement activity as opposed to an income generation activity (R13). This view is in line with the current ambiguities (i.e. academic discomforts towards marketised HE) that prevail in the HE sector. Further this view places the onus on the state and its diminishing financial commitments and depicts the UK HEIs' market based activities as reactive rather than proactive. That is, universities in the UK are forced to replace income they lost through the state funding arrangements in order to continue offering the same level of services to their key UK stakeholders. As discussed in chapter 2, the expectations on HEIs to perform public and as well as private tasks have tied them up in a network of stakeholders (Jongbloed, 2007). As a result HEIs have become accountable to various stakeholder demands and are obliged (or forced) to satisfy those demands. If HEIs are to see collaborative HE provision as an income replacement activity (R13), it might give rise to a dual or two tier system in HE. In such a system, collaborative HE provision with private partners (in the

UK and overseas) will increasingly be seen to have economic intent and will be able to support other core HE expectations such as the needs of home students. As indicated in section 8.1.1, the success of an institution (HEI) is measured by the level of income, numbers of students and graduates at employment and its position in the league table (Molesworth et al. 2009; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). So, further financial difficulties might compel HEIs to focus more on income replacement activities to meet the needs of other stakeholder demands and expectations. In other words, HEI will be forced to commodify a part of their HE provision (for example, international) to meet the needs of other stakeholders (i.e. home students). In the long run this process would transform HE into something that can be bought or sold for profit (Giroux, 2005).

8.3 Rationales: Private Providers' Perspectives

The previous sections looked at the rationale for collaborative HE, primarily in the context of HEIs but, could the same rationale be readily applied in the context of private for-profit HE providers?

The findings show contradictory views. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 have offered insights into the growth and characteristics of the type of private for-profit HE providers that this study investigates. The findings show that the growth of private for-profit HE providers in the UK has come as a surprise to the governments' policy apparatus and only recently the government has begun to catch up with their policy making concerned with such private institutions

(R3). As participants suggest (R4), the government's policy making concerning the private providers shows a positive outlook but it has not been interpreted positively by the private for-profit stakeholders (R6). Government steering concerning private provision is twofold. On the one hand it wants the private providers to play a major role in UK HE (R4), but on the other hand it feels that the private sector needs to be regulated and brought on par with other types of HE institutions (the state as a regulator – Agasisti and Catalano, 2006). This steering (governance) of the private HE sector is in line with the government's policy aims (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011).

Firstly, the government wishes to enhance student choice and thus hopes to ease the barriers for various HE providers to enter the HE market (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). Secondly, the government intends to speed-up the system for new providers to achieve taught degree awarding powers (TDAP). By doing so, the government hopes to widen access to HE and increase competition amongst the current HE providers - which will directly have an impact on UK HEIs. But, a recent study has shown that only a minority of private providers aim to apply for TDAP (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b).

Yet, the government intends to regulate and control the private sector which, in the past stood outside the public policy framework and has mainly focused on different target audience i.e. international students. As I explain in chapter 3, the growth of private providers is complex and difficult to generalise from.

Moreover, the range of private providers is heterogeneous (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011) and thus bracketing such institutions into one sector may appear too simplistic.

As respondents suggest, the government has begun to exert its control over the private sector and it is re-shaping the nature and composition of these providers (see section 5.2). The relationship between the state and private HE providers in the UK has begun to take a new outlook. The autonomy enjoyed by the private HE sector and providers in the UK has been compromised and the state has begun to impose its boundaries within the private sector as it did with public universities (Tapper and Salter, 1995). By doing so the government has deliberately transformed the private sector and providers to resemble HEIs. However, as per this present study finding, these changes did not go down well with the stakeholders of the private for-profit providers and, as responses suggest, they see these regulations as discriminatory and they seek temporary solutions to navigate through such a regulatory 'storm' (R6; see 5.1.4 and 5.2).

A 2013 study of UK private HE provision showed that 68% (86 of the 126 surveyed institutions) of private providers are either likely or very likely to maintain partnerships with HEIs (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b). Private for-profit providers are likely to maintain partnerships with HEIs to gain status and credibility. This is not to claim that the private for-profit providers are not seeking to earn profits through the business of education, but it is to point out that the findings suggest that private HE

providers do not see any significant improvement in their monetary gains through collaborative HE (R1). In the past, private for-profit HE providers in the UK were mainly catering to international students who were looking for affordable study options in the UK (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). But immigration regulations have a significant impact on the recruitment of international students. As discussed in chapter 3, government agencies such as the UKBA³ have expressed concerns about private providers in the UK using the student route to exploit immigration rules. As a result the year 2010 has seen a major overhaul of the immigration system, part of it targeted private for-profit providers and the status they must achieve to recruit international students (Tier 4 - highly trusted sponsor status). As a consequence the majority of the small scale private providers either ceased their operation or changed focus. Equally, the international student market demand has also begun to see a shift. International students (and their overseas recruitment agents) have begun to demand Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) level 6 or above courses (for example, degree level courses) which give students (non-EU) an opportunity to study for three years continuously in the UK with some work rights (with work rights for their dependents - as per the new Tier-4 rules). As seen in chapter 5, the market-oriented private HE providers had to respond (R1). Given this scenario, the private providers had to reluctantly seek collaborative arrangements with HEIs (R1 and R6). Thus, in the case of private for-profit providers the rationale for

³ On 1 April 2013 the UK Border Agency was split into two separate units within the Home Office. In this study I will continue to identify the organisation as UKBA as this would be consistent with my respondents.

collaboration focuses on the institutional survival rather than the external funding pressures (R1 and R6).

8.4 Collaborative HE: Students' Perception of Value

Findings on the students' expectations and experiences (section 7.3) have shown that private HE students (non-EU) have had high expectations about UK HE provision. Their (the students) expectations of HE in the UK cannot be considered dissimilar to previous study responses conducted in the context of HEIs (Hill et al 2003; Narasimhan, 1997; Rolfe 2002 and Douglas et al. 2006). On the other hand, my respondents' experiences also demonstrate inconsistencies and three key themes have been identified and discussed. They are;

1. Inconsistencies in the teaching and learning experience;
2. Commodification of education; and
3. Changing student attitudes and priorities

Chapter 7 has, in detail, outlined students' perspectives on the private for-profit HE provision. The aim was to explore their perceptions, expectations and experiences which have never been unlocked significantly in any previous studies. Chapter 7 and its interpretations have contributed significantly to the body of knowledge pertaining to private for-profit HE in the UK (see section 9.4). As I described in chapter 4, as a researcher my own

enthusiasm for the subject originated from the discord that I have felt between my perception of UK HE (as a non-EU student) and what I have witnessed during my part-time employment with several private HE providers. As such, the findings in chapter 7 are valuable and could form the basis for further research and could possibly be of use to HEIs, private providers and relevant policy organisations.

However, given the importance of recent policy priorities concerning student choice (see section 2.3), in this section I intend to focus on students' perceptions of value and the process by which students attribute value from their study experiences (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999; Ledden et al. 2011; Lai et al. 2011). Understanding how students perceive value during their period of study will offer understanding into student's choice related judgments. As elaborated in chapter 2, I use the term students' perception of value to describe what students perceive that they get by using the service (i.e. education as a service) (Ledden et al. 2011). Here the meaning of value is closely linked to students' perceptions and their experiences (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999). Hence, chapter 7 will feed into my interpretation and analysis in this section.

But, I first summarise below some key arguments that touch on value in the context of education. They are as follows:

1. Education can be classified as a service and it comprises all elements that can normally be associated with any other service provision (Mazzarol, 1998; Lai et al. 2011).
2. In a highly market-driven HE landscape, understanding how students evaluate their educational experience and perceive its value will keep institutions close to students and realities. This can offer opportunities for HE institutions to engage with students in enhancing learning and teaching activities.
3. Several studies in the past have used and examined perceptions of value in the context of education (Le Blanc and Nguyen, 1999; Lai et al. 2011). I agree with Lai et al. (2011, p.280) and others who suggest that the process of education and students' perceptions of value on education can be examined using the consumption values proposed by Sheth et al. (1991). Here the process of education is considered as an act of consumption (Lai et al. 2011).

Sheth et al. (1991) classified values into five major consumption values and they are; (a) functional value; (b) social value; (c) emotional value; (d) epistemic value and (e) conditional value (see table 2A). If Sheth's consumption values are interpreted in the context of this present study it will yield answers to questions such as; (a) why students (non-EU) choose private HE provision? and (b) why students (non-EU) choose private providers over the others i.e. HEIs?

Functional values in education represent 'benefits students perceive from education such as guaranteed future employment, a good salary, and promotions' (Lai et al. 2011, p. 273; LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1999). As compared to other values, the focus group discussions with non-EU international students significantly support the presence of functional values in education. It has significant influence on students' choice of destination (UK), course and institution. The present study results show that students' (non-EU) expectations are firmly attached to employability (FG3: Participant L; FG1: Participant Y). Such results support previous study findings (for example, Rolfe, 2002; Narasimhan, 1997). The findings of my study are that non-EU international students in private for-profit colleges emphasise qualifications that are likely to bring them employment.

According to these non- EU international students, qualifications obtained in the UK can offer better job opportunities in their home countries or globally (FG2; Participant M). They expect their chosen course to prepare them for the world of work with more focus on practical skills (FG3: Participant L; Participant S1 and S3). As described in section 7.3.1, it shows the changing focus of students where the impetus is on the outcome of education (i.e. career or employment). In this context, education is increasingly seen as a *laissez-passer* to students' employment and the decision to study in the UK has been made on this premise. The results support claims made by Naidoo et al. (2011).

Further, my study participants' responses also indicate the application of rational economic choice in education. Non-EU international students make a rational economic choice by selecting private HE providers for their HE purposes. To explain further, my study shows that the tuition fee is a major factor in the selection of institutions. Students, being price sensitive, choose private HE providers in the UK (and overseas) because of their lower tuition fees (FG2: Participant M). Students display the character of a rational economic individual (Lai et al. 2011). This focus on functional value aspects of education depicts students making rational economic choice(s) to maximise their economic benefits through the process of education. In this context, as Harvey and others argue, students resemble the neoliberal version of the self interested economic maximisers (Saunders, 2010; Lynch, 2006; Harvey, 2005).

Understanding the implications of these forms of students' perceptions is critical to all types of HE institutions. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999, p.194) argue a case for institutions to facilitate such students' needs. They argue that institutions should inform students of the opportunities that exist with regard to employment, and the possibilities of career advancement. Naidoo et al (2011, p.1145), on the other hand argue that this consumerist approach in HE will 'result in a responsive, inclusive, and better quality teaching'. In a climate of increased competition for income and student numbers, it is my opinion that HEIs and other providers will be forced to satisfy these perceptions of value that students place in HE.

In the context of collaborative HE (between HEIs and private for-profit providers) this would translate into an exchange process where students (non-EU international) would enrol in a course (for a cheaper price) to get skills required for employment. This in the long run can be detrimental. HEIs and private for-profit providers will mutually create a situation where education and skills will be traded internationally as if they were possessions that can be bought at the expense of learning and teaching (Molesworth et al. 2009). If considered in the context of international students and collaborative HE, this can be detrimental to the 'Study UK' global brand. I see a need for institutions (both HEIs and private HE providers) and their academic professionals working together (Molesworth et al. 2009, p.286). Molesworth et al (ibid.) urge individuals who work within these institutions to 'engage in the intellectual challenge of reflecting on the role of tutors, students and managers within changing HE'. Collaborative HE arrangements with HEIs and private providers offer an ideal space for this to occur. Given the blurring nature of boundaries between the public and private divide there is scope for further collaboration and exchange of practices.

8.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided discussion and analysis of data gathered in the course of this study. This chapter has highlighted different uncertainties, conflicts and tensions that are discernible amongst the stakeholders of collaborative HE (HEIs and private for-profit providers). My findings show the existence of economic motives driving the establishment of collaborative HE

partnerships. But this is presenting academic staff (HEIs) with certain difficulties and they appear to resist certain aspects of marketised HE.

My findings also clearly indicate a shift in the relationship between the state and private HE providers in the UK. The autonomy enjoyed by the private HE sector in the UK has been undermined with the state beginning to impose its boundaries within the private sector. This chapter also outlines certain dangers resulting from the growth of collaborative HE supported by the urge to replace lost income. I argue, in the longer run, that this will intensify, and that this might result in highly commercialised HE provision.

CHAPTER NINE

Concluding the Study

9.0 Introduction

The main focus of this study was to examine the perceptions of stakeholders within the growing collaborative HE provision between HEFCE funded HEIs and private for-profit HE providers. This study was framed by the research questions, and this chapter addresses them.

- a. What is the rationale for collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the UK and overseas from the perspectives of both HEIs and private for-profit providers?
- b. To what extent is this private higher education provision attractive to students from non-EU destinations?
- c. What are the students' perceptions of the value they receive from such private provision?
- d. What are the strategic implications of such collaborations for UK higher education?

9.1 Résumé of the Thesis

Chapter 2 commenced with the recognition of the significant role HE plays in the economy. However, the prime focus of chapter 2 centred on the changing mode(s) of university governance in the UK. Managerialism in public sector management concerns managing and management in attaining economic goals (Deem et al. 2007; Deem and Brehony, 2005). Chapter 2 also touched on the effects of state financial disengagement and the accompanying influences of privatisation and market theory in HE. I claimed that HEIs are increasingly caught-up in a complex, often contradictory, set of ideals that present additional expectations, burdens and tensions. Given this background, I framed collaborative HE as a by product of the emerging marketised version of education that has its origins in neoliberal-managerialist tendencies. Chapter 2 pointed out that the shifting rationales driving internationalisation of HE have provided a space for private providers (not for-profit and/or for-profit) within the UK HE sector. HEIs' willingness to collaborate with private providers for income (Hodson and Thomas, 2001) has enhanced the involvement of private providers within the UK HE sector and thus has offered them a higher standing.

Chapter 3 focused mainly on private HE (not for-profit and/or for-profit) and privatisation of HEIs. The type of collaborative HE that this study investigates involves HEIs and their privatisation process and it also involves the participation of private providers in HE provision. Chapter 3 explored the

shape of private HE in the UK and underlined the heterogeneous nature of private providers (for-profit and/or not-for-profit). Chapters 2 and 3 identified increasing similarities between HEIs and private providers. Privatisation efforts and the increasing emphasis on market(s) are pressurising HEIs to become more like private HE providers. Like Jongbloed (2007), I see an increasing hybridisation of HEIs where they are made to pursue dual objectives (see section 2.1). The QAA's educational oversight reviews of private providers and the government's proposals to ease some of the barriers to market entry and degree awarding powers have been re-shaping the private HE sector (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b).

Chapter 4 on methodology described my philosophical approach which can be broadly understood as interpretivist (Cousin, 2009; Schwandt, 2003). I wanted to understand the stakeholders' perspectives on collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private providers and felt that the best way to understand these perspectives was to speak to those stakeholders who have been part of this collaborative process. Chapter 4 has also highlighted a culture of mistrust and a lack of transparency within the private HE sector, which in turn has had an impact on this study and its methods. In my role as researcher, I have encountered setbacks during this research process and have outlined these in chapter 4. Chapter 4, like other previous studies (for example, Universities UK's study on the growth of private and for-profit higher education providers in the UK private provision, 2010), identifies several

difficulties in researching private HE and calls for transparency and trust within the sector.

The findings from chapter 5 (Management, staff and policy makers in the UK) confirm the changing nature of the relationship between the state and HEIs. The findings indicate the gradual 'divestiture' of certain functions of the state (Neave, 1990, p.106) and underline the need for HEIs to find income from non-governmental sources. But importantly, the findings have also confirmed the blurring boundary between what is described as a public or private provider. The rationales driving internationalisation have been outlined by Knight (2004), but little has been said in the context of collaborative HE. The rationales driving collaborations in HE are wide-ranging and institutions are driven by a combination of factors (Eddy, 2010). The significant contribution of chapter 6 (which covered management, staff and policy makers in Sri Lanka) was to identify several drivers and blockers for the establishment of collaborative HE. The findings broaden our understanding of collaborative HE and help recognise various contradictions and tensions emerging from the stakeholders' perspectives.

Chapter 7 focused on students' perspectives on private for-profit HE in the UK. Unlike previous studies touched upon in chapter 7 (for example, Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Mazzarol and Soutar 2002; Maringe and Carter, 2007), the findings revealed perspectives of students in private for-profit HE and identified several push-pull factors that are attracting non-EU international students to choose the UK for their studies. It also identified the prevailing

high expectations, tensions and inconsistent study experiences of these students in private HE. More importantly, the findings have revealed that non-EU students did not recognise any significant differences between public and private HE providers in the UK, in particular, at the early stages of their HE choice. This again draws attention to the blurring boundary between what is described as a public or private provider. Chapter 7 examines the changing expectations of students that are increasingly tied to employability (Rolfe, 2002; Molesworth et al. 2009; White, 2007). In this context, students' discourse on their high expectations and their actual experiences (unsatisfactory or inconsistent) are contradictory. My student respondents indicated that they were seeking to gain a qualification that prepares them for employment. This is really what is behind their investment of money and time – but of course less money if they attend private colleges.

Chapter eight provided discussion and analysis for the diverse set of data that were gathered in the course of this study (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). My findings identified the existence of economic motives driving the establishment of collaborative HE partnerships. However according to some respondents, this is offering certain difficulties to academic professionals representing HEIs. They (academic staff) seem to adopt approaches that often appear to resist certain aspects of marketised education. Also, in chapter 8, I highlight several potential dangers resulting from the growth of collaborative HE underpinned by the urge to replace lost income. I argued that this might result in a system where a part of HE provision will bring in as much income as possible with a view to supporting the survival of other parts of UK HE provision.

9.2 Research Question Conclusions

The findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7 are organised to address the questions that this present study aims to answer. However, a brief summary of findings is outlined against each research question.

9.2.1 Research Question - a

What is the rationale for collaborative HE provision between HEIs and private for-profit providers in the UK and overseas from the perspectives of both HEIs and private for-profit providers?

The rationale behind collaborative HE is interrelated, contradictory and complex (see section 6.1). For example, government policies and regulations can provide a rationale for both HEIs and private for-profit providers to collaborate. They are contradictory in the sense that a particular factor such as immigration policy can be a motivator for private for-profit providers to collaborate. At the same it can motivate HEIs not to collaborate, for example when there are uncertainties about recruitment restrictions for private colleges. These factors are complex. The stakeholders' perspectives vary based on the institutional circumstances. The following broader rationales for collaboration were present amongst my HEI respondents.

First, the paradoxical policy landscape (i.e. both the increased control by the state and the disengagement of the state), and the financial distancing of the state have compelled institutions to source income from non-governmental means. HEIs are increasingly expected to earn income. Working with private partners in the UK and overseas is therefore perceived to have an economic motive and collaborative partnerships are seen as a solution to the difficult financial situation of HEIs. This is re-arranging the priorities of the HEIs' internationalisation agenda. More importantly, the participation of private providers in meeting international market opportunities has created a new economic impetus to raise additional income through education (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

Second, the changing forms of university governance have driven HEIs to be innovative. HEIs have begun to adopt business models and see themselves as providers of multiple services (Chapter 5: section 5.1). Collaborative HE with private partners is framed as one such service provision. My findings suggest that HEIs will intensify their multiple service provision. They indicate that collaborative HE is positioned to extend the life cycle of existing courses and/or to expand the HE market (Chapter 6: section 6.1). The growth in international market opportunities has enabled institutions to expand their HE provision. For example, in the context of Sri Lanka, the growth of private provision is seen as a result of a 'phenomenon of excess and differentiated demands' (James, 1993; Tilak, 2009, p.49).

But for my private providers at any rate the motives for collaboration stem mainly from the policy changes that have begun to influence their operating environment. Highly market responsive private providers are keen to capitalise on the changing market demands. In the recent past (in 2009/2010), the government's immigration policies have undergone significant changes, which I outlined in chapter 3. As a result, non-EU international students' demand for certain courses has declined. Yet, the demand for degree courses has seen a rise (R1). Thus, if private for-profit providers were to survive and retain these students they have to collaborate with HEIs to offer such degree courses in the UK. As pointed out in chapter 6, my respondent 6 (a private college senior manager) stated:

[Private for-profit HE] don't mind the rise in cost of franchising, we don't mind, what we just want is to wait for another storm to finish (R6).

Moreover, the part-time work restrictions on non-EU international students studying in private institutions have also forced private providers to collaborate closely with HEIs. Under collaborative HE arrangements students may be sponsored by HEIs, which guarantees them the right to take employment for a certain number of hours per week.

In this context, private for-profit HE providers are motivated to engage in collaborative HE as they perceive that their survival depends on their ability to offer certain types of courses. But these courses (i.e. degree courses) can only be offered in collaboration with institutions that have degree awarding powers (DAP/TDAP). Therefore the recent re-structuring of private HE (see

section 5.2) plays a key role in attracting private HE providers to work with HEIs. For example, 68% of the private providers who responded to the recent survey conducted by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills suggest that they are likely to maintain collaborations with HEIs (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013b).

9.2.2 Research Question - b

To what extent is this private higher education provision attractive to students from non-EU destinations?

The answer to this question contributes to the originality of this study. In the context of UK HE very little research has been undertaken on private HE and, in particular, non-EU international students in private HE. Private HE has managed to exist and survive for many years in the UK and the public policy focus on such providers has only just begun. There are many other studies conducted on non-EU international students' motives for choosing the UK but none focused on non-EU students in private HE (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Carter, 2007).

There appears to be three key outcomes emerging from the interpretations of my sample students' responses. Non-EU international students have chosen to study in private HE because; (a) it offers courses at lower fees compared to HEIs; (b) students see it as a route to HEIs and (c) there is considerable evidence to suggest that students are influenced by some private recruitment

agencies that represent the interests of private providers. Points 'a' and 'b' are inter-linked; as private HE students show signs of price sensitivity and they are looking for cost effective ways to gain qualifications in the UK. However, the attractiveness of private HE needs to be placed in the broader context. Indeed, students' decisions to study with private providers are related to their decisions pertaining to HE in the UK (see figure 7A). So, section 7.1 and its explanation on the push-pull factors should also be taken into perspective before making judgements on the attractiveness of private HE provision.

9.2.3 Research Question - c

What are the students' perceptions of the value they receive from such private provision?

The answer to this particular research question stems from students' responses in chapter 7. Students' expectations and experiences (section 7.3) have shown that private HE non-EU international students in my sample had high expectations of UK HE provision. Their experiences demonstrate inconsistencies and three key themes were examined: (a) inconsistencies in teaching and learning experience; (b) commodification of education, and (c) student's changing attitudes and priorities.

The results have shown that non-EU students' expectations are strongly linked to employability. This study's results confirm previous studies (Rolfe, 2002; Narasimhan, 1997). As compared to other values (see section table 2A

and section 8.4), the focus group discussions with the non-EU students in my sample support the strong presence of functional values in education. In the context of education, 'functional value accounts for the perceived benefits of the chosen course of study in terms of accelerating or enhancing students' employment or career advancement objectives' (Ledden et al. 2011, p.1239). Non-EU international students perceive that qualifications gained in the UK make them more employable. So, they expect their course to prepare them for employment with more practical skills. It clearly demonstrates the changing focus of students where the impetus is on the outcome of education (i.e. career or employment). As I argued in chapter 8, this makes education a *laissez-passer* to students' employment, and their decision to study in the UK has been made on this basis. It appears that non-EU international students are making a rational economic choice by selecting private HE providers for their HE purposes (see chapter 8).

9.2.4 Research Question - d

What are the strategic implications of such collaborations for UK higher education?

The answer(s) to this question originates from chapters 5, 6 and 7 and are linked to the previous three research questions. They are as follows;

First, in the context of HEIs, collaborative HE involves managing HE provision with others (QAA, 2012a). The UK quality code for HE published by the QAA states that;

The fundamental principle underpinning all arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others is that the degree-awarding body has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, regardless of where these opportunities are delivered and who provides them (QAA, 2012a, p.6).

But as discussed in chapter 3, managing private providers can be a complex endeavour. The reason being, private providers are heterogeneous in nature and the physical distance between the collaborating institutions (HEIs and private providers) can be a barrier to the effective management of such provision. Thus, repeatedly HEI respondents have stressed the risks associated with collaborative HE. For example, my Sri Lankan respondents outlined the scepticism that surrounds private HE in Sri Lanka (see section 6.4.1). But, managing HE offered in collaboration requires additional management functions, responsibilities and oversight. Thus, academics in my study stated that they are made to concentrate on managing and on management related tasks at the expense of teaching (R2). The UK HE sector and my study in particular highlight the shifting nature of collaborative HE. HEIs are keen to avoid any uncertainties that are associated with the recent regulations related to private providers and student immigration. Thus, HEIs are showing a preference for overseas collaborative HE arrangements

at the expense of UK based collaborative HE (R8). Such an increase in the physical distance between partner institutions increases management responsibilities.

Collaborative HE can also be a learning opportunity for participating institutions, especially in the context of private providers. Working in collaboration with HEIs may provide valuable new experience in the delivery of HE. In the context of HEIs, working in collaboration with private partners helps position these providers as collaborators as opposed to competitors. But the government's proposition in favour of private providers calls for a 'competitive system that can offer different types of higher education so that students can choose freely between a wide range of providers' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, p.47). But, in contrast, collaborative HE helps expand the current HE provision. Private college competitors turn into collaborators with public HE, with strategic implications for both.

Collaborative HE poses significant challenges to the future direction of British education. My non-EU international student responses indicate several key push-pull factors that differentiate HE in the UK as compared to other destinations. Non-EU international students in particular attribute importance to practical learning experience and this, as indicated in my findings, pushes students to select the UK for HE. But, in the context of overseas collaborative HE this cannot always be the case. If so, HEIs have some questions to answer in the long run as they actively seek such overseas collaborative HE provision. For example:

- Is there dissimilarity between the educational experience obtained in the UK (on campus) and in an overseas partner institution?
- If so, how does this fit with the expectations of the QAA?
- If not so, what is the advantage of studying in an on-campus delivered course?

These questions are important for non-EU international students who aspire to study in the UK. These questions have important implications for HEIs and policy-makers. As a non-EU student myself, I studied in two HEIs in the UK. I made numerous sacrifices – both financial and personal. This is the case for many other non-EU students studying in the UK. But what are the distinct advantages we (students) have over those students studying in various overseas partner institutions? Are we better or worse off than those studying in various overseas private HE institutions? My evidence shows that HEIs need to re-think these concerns. If not, in the long run, studying in the UK might lose its demand and prestige. Employers overseas might begin to see inconsistencies; this would have an adverse impact on the international perception of UK higher education.

9.3. The Significant Outcomes of the Study

9.3.1 Collaborative HE: The boundary is blurred

This present study has examined the stakeholders' perspectives on collaborative HE provision between private for-profit providers and HEFCE

funded HEIs. But in recent times the boundary between what is described as a public or private provider has become increasingly blurred; for Middlehurst and Fielden (2011), this originates from the sources of funding (for example, public backed funding for private for-profit providers). My study results indeed concur with this point of view. As mentioned earlier, the government has made the QAA the preferred agency for overseeing of private providers. It appears that current policy-making on private providers attempts to exercise some form of control over them. Whilst this is happening on the one side, there appears to be more deliberate adjustments made to the governance of HEIs where specific privatisation efforts have begun to re-shape the nature of HEIs. The deliberate distancing of the state from its financial commitments has forced HEIs to embrace marketisation to compete for income. By doing so, HEIs are re-shaped into complex business enterprises or corporate model universities (Bleiklie, 2004; Rutherford, 2005). HEIs have moved to some extent in the private direction, and private HE providers are increasingly steered by public policy. This blurs the public-private distinction in HE. Moreover, an analysis of the recent government proposals (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) aimed at offering access to degree awarding powers (in particular, TDAP to private providers) will further blur the distinction.

This blurring of boundaries between private providers and HEIs problematises the government's arguments in favour of private providers. For example, if boundaries are blurred and distinctions are hard to comprehend (R5 and R8) then the aim of creating diverse institutions and systems in HE (Department

for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) has lost its way and its intended benefits. However as pointed out earlier, the gap between elite and non-elite HEIs looks set to widen.

9.3.2 Collaborative HE: HEIs and the growth of private providers

This study explores a form of collaborative HE that involves private for-profit HE providers in the provision of education. In the context of HEIs, there are many rationales driving the establishment of similar collaborative HE (see section 6.1). The need for income generation steers HEIs into collaboration with private for-profit providers (Hodson and Thomas, 2001). Indeed, my findings are in agreement with this. They also call into question the role played by HEIs in the growth of the private providers in my study at any rate. My findings indicate that HEIs are keen to work with private HE partners and have been making efforts to export their academic programmes (R7 and R8). This links with De Vita and Case (2003). They argue that HEIs have been making efforts to export their academic programmes through various international collaborative arrangements. Given this background, HEIs have begun to present opportunities for private providers to offer UK degree courses (both in the UK and overseas) and such a growth in collaborative HE will inevitably grant these private providers a prominent space in mainstream HE provision. Further, the findings also suggest that such collaborative arrangements are assisting private providers to navigate the recent regulatory storms and helping them meet the changing student demands (see section 8.3). Thus, I suggest, that the rationale driving collaborative HE is opening a

space for private providers (I used the term retailers in chapter 2) within the UK HE sector, and that this is brought about partly by the needs, motives and circumstances of HEIs.

9.3.3 Collaborative HE: Academic tensions and conflicts

As discussed previously, the establishment of collaborative arrangements between HEIs and private providers is driven by several key motives and circumstances. However, there is a sense of denial and a lack of enthusiasm amongst academic professionals within HEIs to relate collaborative provision to economic motives (see also section 8.3). Some of my respondents indicated that their involvement is due to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves at work: the emphasis on income generation and increasing marketisation. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 3), Altbach and Knight (2007) state that in the private for-profit sector internationalisation projects are driven by financial motives and this would fundamentally contradict with HEIs' purpose of education. There are tensions at the heart of collaborative HE, or at least of the instances of collaborative HE investigated in my study. In particular, my HEI respondents seemed ill at ease with the economic motives that appeared to contradict their traditional academic role.

9.4 Originality and Contribution to the body of knowledge

HEFCE funded HEIs and private for-profit HE providers increasingly collaborate. This thesis examines the perceptions of a number of the

stakeholders involved in this provision. It is a small scale investigation of the nature and role of private for-profit providers in UK HE, a topic which has been under-investigated. Private for-profit providers are small in student numbers but playing an increasing role in UK HE provision. Obviously students are the most important stakeholders in HE. Although many previous studies have examined the perceptions of non-EU students in UK HEIs, this study investigates their perceptions in a private HE environment. Thus it adds empirical evidence where little or none existed before.

My study included an investigation into private for-profit HE in Sri Lanka (my home country) in the context of the UK's overseas collaborative HE provision. Although the number of key stakeholders interviewed was small (six), I found that unmet demand for HE in Sri Lanka (due to public universities having insufficient student places) offers an opportunity for UK HEIs. Although collaborative HE offers Sri Lankan students a UK qualification at much less cost than if they had to come to the UK, or if they came to a private for-profit provider in the UK, it still only caters to the financially better off, given that state HE is free in Sri Lanka.

Overall my study shows that the boundary between what is described as public and private is increasingly blurred in the UK HE sector. It is clear from my respondents that the entry of the QAA within the private sector has contributed to this blurring. Government oversight of the private HE sector is also increasing. However my respondents - in particular respondents from private HE – did not display enthusiasm for this.

I am a non-EU student myself, and a former employee in Sri Lanka of a British international agency with funding from the UK government. As such, a study into the complex environment within which students make decisions relating to obtaining a UK qualification is of particular interest, as are their perceptions of their experiences. In addition, non-EU students are regularly affected by immigration policies, while the state of affairs in UK HE is subject to constant change. The examined research area remains both a current and an important topic for non EU students, private colleges and HEIs. My evidenced based view is that the enthusiasm for collaborative partnerships with private for-profit providers may well have an adverse impact on the international perception of UK higher education.

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Appendix 1A: Consent Form: Stakeholder Interviews

CONSENT FORM

1. Contact information:

John Mariampillai
University of West London (formerly Thames Valley University)
Email: john.mariampillai@gmail.com
XXXXXXXXXX@ex.tvu.ac.uk

Tel: XXXXXXXXXX

2. Title:

“Collaborative provision within UK Higher Education: Perceptions of value amongst stakeholders of private colleges offering university degrees in business and management”

I am requesting your consent to interview you in order to understand your views on UK collaborative HE provision. I would like to record (audio) this informal interview with your permission. You will have an opportunity to comment on my analysis of this interview at a later stage in the process, if you so wish. You also have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

3. Specific information about your participation

1. Your participation is on entirely voluntary basis and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
2. I will maintain confidentiality and anonymity throughout this study. Confidentiality will be maintained by not divulging identifiable information to other parties, except those directly involved in supervising and examining the study. Such parties will not be able to link the data to identifiable participants, as the data will be anonymised by using codes on the interview transcripts.
3. Any quote used in the research will use a pseudonym rather than the participant's name. Arrangement for the documentation and dissemination of findings will guarantee individual anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and anonymised description.
4. Data will be protected by keeping transcripts and recordings (audio) in a secure place. Once the study has been examined, the data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

4. Participant declaration:

I agree to take part in the above research project. I agree to be informally interviewed (interview to be recorded - audio) by John.

I understand that the information will be held, processed and the analysis published as described above.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential and that no information will lead to identifying individuals or institutions involved in this research project.

I understand that I will be given an opportunity to comment on the transcription of the interview and on preliminary findings if I wish to.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can choose to withdraw at any stage

Name: _____ **Email:** _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 1B: Consent Form: Students

Consent Form

Project title

“Collaborative provision within UK Higher Education: Perceptions of value amongst stakeholders of private colleges offering university degrees in business and management”

Outline

This research is focussed on understanding your experience as an international student studying for a higher education course at a private higher education college. Further this discussion will aim to examine your decision in choosing UK for higher studies, reasons for choosing your course and institution.

Please tick the appropriate boxes

I have been briefed on the purpose of the above mentioned project by John

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project

I agree to take part in the above research project. I agree to be informally interviewed (interview to be recorded - audio) by John

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked questions about why I no longer want to take part

I understand my personal details such as name and institution will **not** be revealed to people outside of this project

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs but my name or other identifiable information will not be used

On this basis I am happy to participate in the above mentioned study

Name of Participant

Signature.....

Email (optional).....

Name of Researcher.....

Signature.....

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact:

John Mariampillai
University of West London (formerly Thames Valley University)
Email: john.mariampillai@gmail.com
XXXXXXXX@ex.tvu.ac.uk
Tel: XXXXXXXX

One copy to be kept by the participant, one to be kept by the researcher

Appendix 2: Summary: Collaborative HE: Drivers and Blockers

Drivers	Institutions	
	HEIs	Private for-profit HE institutions
Market	<p>* The current market offers restrictions (R8)</p> <p>“Public sector is also facing the restriction on student numbers, so we can only make certain amount of money. We can’t make any more money by simply doing what we are expected to do” (R8)</p> <p>* To expand market access (R7 & R4)</p> <p>“The universities can tap into other markets that they wouldn’t normally have access” (R4)</p> <p>* Provides opportunities to extend the product life cycle (R7)</p> <p>“I think what you can certainly get is product life cycle extension going overseas which is a classic kind of marketing concept and its just an opportunity of actually extending income on the back of an existing course” (R7)</p>	<p>* To satisfy market demands (R1)</p> <p>“So every now and then we get agents [...] they ask this is the market sir can you not just change your course according to the market? (R1)</p>
Income needs	<p>* To satisfy income needs (R3, R7, R8, R10 and R13)</p> <p>* The perception on the income & collaborative HE (R12)</p> <p>“There is a perception that you can actually make lots of money out of this” (R12).</p> <p>* To replace lost income (R13)</p> <p>“[...] a lot of these things that we are doing now are not necessarily income generators they are income replacements” (R13)</p> <p>* Benefit from economies of scale (R7)</p> <p>“if you take something like business and computing, if you are running that course in the UK and then you are running the same course in another market even though you are selling it much cheaper you still got economies of scale because you are not developing a new product so you are just penetrating into the market with the same product” (R7).</p>	<p>* Reduced profit margins (R1); not a driver;</p> <p>“Some colleges are charging like £ 3,500 - £4,000 for UG degree per year and out of that they are paying around £2,500-£2,700 to the universities, so how much are they making?” (R1)</p>

Geography	<p>* To gain advantage from the geographical situation (R7)</p> <p>“So the universities north of England will collaborate with private London provider because it’s difficult sometimes more difficult to advertise universities that aren’t necessarily high in the league tables in northern parts or parts outside of London” (R7)</p>	
HE policies & regulations	<p>* Reduction in the state funding (R2 and R3)</p> <p>* Changing market demands & limitations (R3, R7 and R12)</p>	<p>* The need to survive the 'storm' (R6)</p> <p>“They (private for-profit HE) scramble for survival because that’s the only brighter route they can follow now if they want to continue in business say within the next couple of years” (R6)</p> <p>“Well we (private for-profit HE) don’t mind the rise in cost of franchising, we don’t mind, what we just want is to wait for another storm to finish” (R6).</p>
Strategic intent	<p>* Highly prioritised strategic activity</p> <p>“It is very much part of our strategic plan and it is a high priority for us [.....] from our point of view you know it is a very important dimension to our strategy” (R10).</p> <p>* Focused on increasing reputation and building long term relationships (R12)</p> <p>* Establishing 'feeder stations' (R13)</p>	

Blockers		
Costs & resources	<p>* Incurs costs and resource allocation (R12 & R7)</p> <p>"it's costing us more to run it overseas because; the development upfront then managing it and paying people, administrators and academic staff to manage that relationship" (R12)</p> <p>* Make way for tensions to develop (R7 & R8)</p> <p>"this is one of the other tensions of course one of the uncomfortable aspects in developing collaborative provision for probably all public sector institutions is that there is ethos surrounding public education which resists the market and which resists the collapse of the established academic profile" (R8)</p>	<p>* Incurs costs and provides less margins (by the terms of the contractual agreements - Pilot study)</p>
Risks	<p>* Quality risks (R10 & R13)</p> <p>* Quality risks, Reputational risks and Transaction risks (R7)</p> <p>"The risks are around quality assurance [...] have you got the right partners? Have you got the right strategic partners? the quality risks, reputational risk, transaction risk all of those aspects" (R7).</p>	
Regulations	<p>* Change in the shape: moving from UK to in-country (R8)</p> <p>"Because of these big policy changes, universities are now more interested in delivering in-country (overseas) programmes. [...] certain universities perhaps might not have been considering that sort of thing" (R10).</p>	<p>* Moving to overseas markets (R8)</p> <p>"some of our established partners and some of our proposed partners are saying that well that's the route that we will go down, we will establish campuses off-shore and we will want to deliver your awards there" (R8).</p>