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Addressing the Elephant in the Room: Are Universities Committed to the Third Stream Agenda

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Abstract

The third stream agenda is a critical strategy in the pursuit of enriched learning, enhancing student employability and much needed revenues. Voices of support of the third stream agenda resonate across political parties, the business community and universities. Academic journals have also reflected a scenario in which the academic community of practice have transformed its rational into 'can do' mission statements and strategic policies with a clear focus to source, convert and embed third stream activities. In return, universities seek quarries such as more marketable programmes of studies, committed and commercially aware academics, improved business interchange and in light of the economic recession and subsequent austere measures, the replenishment of new revenue streams.

In 2014, an empirical research study involved 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews with university executives and academics across five UK University Business Schools. The key thrust of the research was to answer the question 'are universities committed to the third steam agenda'. The research findings acknowledge current literature concerning university 'mission statements' and 'strategic policy' commitments to third stream activities. However, the research contribution openly challenges existing literature in stating that both Russell Group and P92 universities are failing to exhibit tangible evidence that they are actively achieving such commitments.

Key Words

Academic Identity, Executive Commitment, External Engagement, Third Stream.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is still feeling the effects of the economic crisis of 2008. The newly elected conservative party's Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, carefully crafted a narrative in which he stated that 'the UK economy was back in calmer waters but serious risks remain' (Guardian, 2015). However, the Bank of England Governor, Mark Carney was also quoted as stating 'persistent headwinds continue to hold back the British economy in the wake of the financial crisis (Economist, 2015). The corollary of economic events has resulted in additional forecasted fiscal cuts aimed at the public sector. Higher Education will not be exempt and will witness a further attrition of traditional funding streams. It is, therefore, vitally important that universities ensure that third stream initiatives are prioritized along side first stream teaching and second stream research (Jansen et al., 2015). Further more, universities need to be seen delivering tangible and measurable returns in terms of growing student applications, positive student learning experience and increased commercial (Secundo & Gianluca, 2014).

The research paper addresses two fundamental objectives namely: to appraise third stream literature thereby validating the research theme and secondly, to record anecdotal commentary from a cross section of 28 university executives and academics, to calibrate both the importance and effectiveness that is attributed to the third stream agenda.

II. THE THIRD STREAM AGENDA

Third stream activities pursue 'knowledge transfer' through university relationship building with the wider social and economic arena. Universities have and are commercializing its teaching, research and innovation within various forms such as entrepreneurial incubators, patenting, licensing and consultancy services (Markuerkiaga et al., 2014). In return, it is expected that universities will strengthen their reputation, enrich the student learning experience, foster greater opportunities for student employability and secure much needed revenues (Penaluna et al., 2014).

Given its strategic contribution, universities have badged third stream under various titles for instance; outreach, reach out, enterprise, third leg and third mission (Lawton-Smith, 2015). This has inevitably hindered an agreed singular definition and clouded the clarity of third stream activities (Secundo & Elia, 2014). The most referenced definition of third stream was published in the 2002 Science Policy Research Unit Report, to the Russell Group of universities by Mollas-Gallart et al. (2002). In which third stream activities are 'concerned with the generation, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments' (Molas-Gallart et al., 2002).

The USA was attributed as the first country to pioneer university and commercial relationship building and to foster this initiative the Federal Government passed the 1980 Bay-Dole Act. The Act enabled the dissemination of applied research into the commercial sector and was labeled by the Economist 'as the most inspired piece of legislation of the past century (2002). European

countries initially did not follow suite in passing similar legislation and was brandished as the 'European Paradox' by Kogan et al. (2006).

The UK universities acknowledge the importance of third stream activities and have navigated their strategic compass in search of new revenue streams and horizons that offer a richer learning journey and employability for its current and future student body (Cable & Willetts, 2011). Both the Government and the commercial sector have recognized Higher Education's commitment to the third stream agenda and their endeavours to seamlessly integrate teach, research and third stream activities (Lawton-Smith & Walters, 2014).

Current literature has also documented the courtship between universities and third stream (Laudau et al., 2014). Al-Dajani et al. (2014) have stated that the third stream agenda has become a university strategic priority. Killen, (2013); Murdock et al. (2013); Massey, (2010) state that universities are striving to strategically integrate third stream activities alongside teaching and research priorities. A series of Governmental reports have also paid tribute to universities efforts to secure and adopt third stream initiatives namely the 'Higher Education Funding For 2011 – 12 and beyond, 2010; Innovation & Research Strategy for Growth, 2011; and the Wilson Report, 2012). More recently both the 'Witty review of Universities and Growth', (2013) and the 'Adonis Review' (2014) firmly believe that universities are best positioned to lead the economic recovery and that universities need to play an active role as board members on the regional Local Enterprise Partnerships. The importance of such a university presence was stressed in the 'Smart Specialisation' at a regional level (EU, 2013).

Both Chancellors and Vice Chancellors recognise that universities are a commercial enterprise and refer to their institutions as 'businesses' (Reino&Jaakson, 2014). They equally acknowledge that to exploit sustain economic growth requires suitable funding of the third stream agenda (Parker, 2013). Hence, universities are revising their strategic intent (Murdock et al., 2013) with a clear mandate to transform from an 'ivory tower' mentality to an entrepreneurial university that is response to the needs of its students and the commercial sector (Landau et al., 2014). In order to achieve this transformational change, Vice Chancellors and their university executives are auditing and developing their strategies to embrace and elevate third stream activities alongside teaching and research as a seamless strategic intent to become an integrated entrepreneurial univeristy (Etzkowitz, 2014).

To augment and meet the needs of government and the commercial sector a growing number of universities have set up incubators, enterprise zones, science parks, technology transfer offices (TTOs), employability programmes and strategic alliances (Markuerkiaga et al., 2014). To facilitate the process, external and business development teams and departments have been commissioned (Cable & Willetts, 2011). Universities have also established internal entrepreneurial champions to act as catalysts for third stream change. Such roles have been awarded ring fenced funding, dedicated administrative teams and 'fit for purpose' quality procedures to drive through third stream changes (Ferguson, 2014; Perkmann et al., 2013; &Goodwill, 2012).Perkmann et al. (2013) advocates of the third stream agenda state that

academic third stream correlates with academic success and that such activities lead to the 'Matthew effect' in Universities, thus, creating a scenario in which academic success is reinforced through an honorable cycle of achievements and returns on those achievements (Merton 1973).

Business schools are not traditionally linked with third stream activities (Etzkowitz, 2003). However, over the past 10 years business schools have continued to redraft their policy statements and strategies and in doing so are deliberately communicating a marketing message that they wish to source and secure third stream initiatives (Philpott et al., 2011). Such developments have been driven by governmental pressures in the form of funding cuts, new competitors entering the market both at home and abroad and more recently those measures introduced by the UK foreign secretary Teresa May, (2015), in the form of stricter student visa restrictions. Universities, particularly Russell Group have sort to differentiate themselves in gaining recognition from accredited bodies, such as AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS. In doing so have developed a competitive advantage in attracting students and external interest in the form of funding, research and potential third stream enquiries. This trend has resulted in some P92 universities following a similar accreditation path (Penaluna et al., 2014).

The pace of change and governmental scrutiny has been perceived by many academics as 'institutional intrusion' (Hughes et al., 2011). Many feel that their professional identity is being eroded and third stream speak is a distraction from their academic calling, namely to teach and research (Lea & Stierer, 2011). Rumbings within academic communities suggest that the academic profession is being diluted due to third stream rhetoric and becoming in many cases as 'just another job' (Hakala, 2009). Spicker (2011) states that a growing number of academics feel that third stream initiatives is time consuming and does not offer traditional rewards provided in the pursuit of teaching and research excellence. Thus, there is a view that third stream orientation is a clear threat to their professional status within their own academic community of practice and the wider community (Philpott et al., 2011).

III. METHODOLOGY

The selection of interview respondents for the research exercise was driven by 'purpose sampling' (Mason, 2002). The target sample aimed to recruit 30, across five universities and to ensure a balance between duration of service and seniority; therefore, participants ranging from lecturer to Deputy Vice Chancellor were selected, as described by Kim et al. (2011). The process yielded confirmation of the target sample, however, three senior executives withdrew just prior to the scheduled interview. The interviews were all carried out on campus at the interviewees' university. Whilst no consent forms were completed, all participants confirmed via email that they had received a copy of the interview questions, agreed that the interviews would take place with a ten day lead time and that they were happy for the interviews to be recorded and transcribed for the research investigation. The interviewee characteristics of all 27 participants are detailed in table 1 which indicates Russell Group or P92 University, position, and length of employment.

TABLE I: INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS

University	Position	Length of Employment
Russell Group	Director of School	4 Years
Russell Group	Head of School	28 Years
Russell Group	Associate Dean	18 Years
Russell Group	Research Fellow	19 Months
Russell Group	Senior Lecturer	12 Years
Russell Group	Senior Lecturer	25 Years
Russell Group	Senior Lecturer	23 Years
Russell Group	Senior Lecturer	20 Years
Russell Group	Lecturer	4 Years
Russell Group	Lecturer	2 Years
Russell Group	Lecturer	2 Years
P92	Pro-Vice Chancellor	20 Years
P92	Dean	4 Years
P92	Assistant Director	25 Years
P92	Associate Dean	23 Years
P92	Associate Dean	15 Years
P92	Associate Dean	5 Years
P92	Associate Dean	5 Years
P92	Principal Lecturer	20 Years
P92	Reader	19 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	22 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	20 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	6 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	5 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	4 Years
P92	Senior Lecturer	2 Years
P92	Lecturer	1 Year

IV. ACADEMIC INTERVIEW RESULTS

The first stage of the research process involved the interviewing of 24 academics from the five universities (referred to as Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon) which elicited five key proceeding challenges in the pursuit of effectively embedding third stream strategies in higher education. The themed strategic questions were then constructed having analysed and reflected on the data extracted via the 10 semi-structured interview questions (see appendix I & II). The relationship between the semi-structure interviews and themed strategic interviews, are detailed in figure 1.

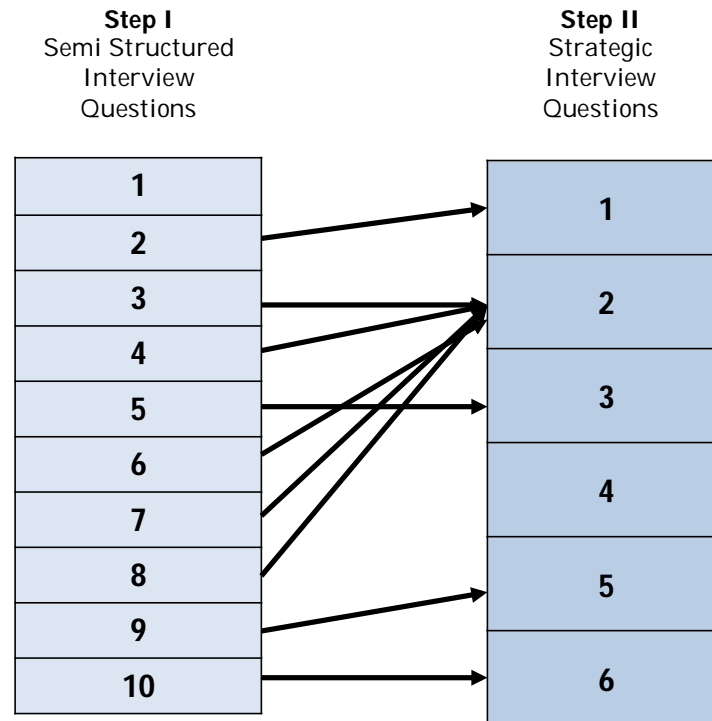


FIGURE I: LINK BETWEEN SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (STEP I) & STRATEGIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (STEP II)

A. Failure to Communicate Third Stream Strategy

All academics from both Russell Group and P92s Universities were united in making two fundamental criticisms about university executives, stating firstly, that university executives had struggled to commission an effective third stream strategy and secondly failed to effectively monitor its dissemination and response amongst academics.

The research results were quite transparent in the fact that academics were either of the view that they were unaware of a third stream strategy or that such a strategy was perceived as 'university rhetoric', 'lacking in clarity', 'tangible evidence' and 'accountability'. The general consensus was a perception that the third stream strategy failed to motivate academics, as it was neither encouraged nor evidenced in being linked to career progression or key performance indicators. For example,

Russell Group, Lecturer, 23 years service:

"Nothing. Never heard of it, if I am honest. I'm not sure it has a role within our Faculty. It may be something that you do over and above your normal day activities".

P92 Senior Lecturer 19 years service:

"I would say another sort of revenue, but not core to our activities. In theory it sounds good, never heard of it happening".

Senior executives did provide a more positive response. For example,

P92 Pro-Vice Chancellor 20 years service:

“I see third stream as being about knowledge exchange and I think that is an important term”.

Russell Group Director 4 years service:

“The key to it is getting academics doing it in a meaningful way and to see that process through”

B. Third Stream Activities Lacking in Status

Russell Group respondent comments presented a message contrary to university policy and mission statements, in that it was perceived by academics that research was clearly their number one priority, second was teaching and third stream was evidently last. For example,

Russell Group, Head of School, 28 years service:

“For me third stream is down stream, it’s a bundle of activities that are left”.

Russell Group, Lecturer, 23 years service:

“Well I perceive a difference between the official line and what I think is really going on”.

In Russell Group Universities, there was a consistent view that third stream activities were to be avoided, as it would hinder academic research and ultimately job security. Academics emphasised the fact that despite the university’s rhetoric on integrating third stream equally alongside research and teaching, there was a firm belief that it was not core to their role and in specific cases, academics felt that senior management were hostile to those expressing an interest in third stream activities. For example,

Russell Group, Senior Lecturer, 12 years service:

“Our university is very much traditional. It has an age, tradition, aspirations and reputation of being research intensive and so it clearly priorities research”.

Russell Group, Lecturer, 2 years service:

“I don’t think it’s that much encouraged, I don’t think it’s that much of a priority”.

Academics openly stated that there was no evidence of funding to embed third stream activities and those who did try to establish third stream initiatives were faced with internal bureaucracy barriers such as delayed decision making and a clear message that academics should focus on producing journal publications.

Those themes and comments extracted from P92 academics transcripts presented similar comments to those expressed in Russell Group transcripts, in which, academics were of the firm opinion that there was no equality in the integration of first stream teaching, second stream

research and third stream activities. Academics within P92 universities firmly believed that their executives prioritised teaching first, research second and third stream as a 'bolt on activity'. This, too, contradicted their university strategic message that states all three streams were of equal priority. For example,

P92, Lecturer 6 years service:

"Well I perceive a difference between the official line and what is really going on. They say teaching, research and consultancy is all equal priority but it is really teaching, teaching and teaching".

Academics from within P92 Universities consistently indicated that third stream activities were not viewed as fundamental to their 'day job'. Many were unaware of its presence and those who did were of the firm opinion that it did not 'fit' and actually hindered or restricted their teaching duties. There was a view that third stream activities were ill resourced and to participate or express an interest would involve staff having to volunteer with no allowance and no tangible recognition in the form of career progression or financial reward. For Example,

Russell Group, Head of School, 28 years service:

"For me it's a real mop up default, its not particularly core to what we do. If your research doesn't hit at least three star we will sack you".

C. Barriers to Academic Involvement in Third Stream Activities

Russell Group academics firmly believed that there was no evidence of operational encouragement to participate in third stream. The central focus of their role was to produce a minimum of three star publications. There was the view that historically staff could 'tinker' with third stream activities as a 'side issue' or 'hobby' to their full time role, firstly, as a researcher and secondly, as a teacher. However, the data results indicate there is clearly a 'research driven agenda' and any involvement in third stream is perceived a descent by senior management. Russell Group academics supported their views as they stated that management failed to provide information, instruction, training and supervision and also failed to link it to career progression or financial rewards. For example,

Russell Group, Lecturer, 2 years service:

"There is no clear incentive for academics to go down this route".

Russell Group, Lecturer, 2 years service:

"I would say it might take our eye off the ball".

Unlike those comments and themes raised by Russell Group academics, P92 academics did feel that their institutions wanted them to participate in third stream activities. However, the institutional rhetoric as it was perceived failed to provide 'ease of access'. Many felt that the current infrastructure struggled to elevate the importance of third stream and there was a clear 'pecking order' in which teaching was their key priority, second was research and third stream

although occasionally mentioned and was looked upon as something 'peripheral' to their role. For example,

P92, Senior Lecturer, 5 years service:

"I haven't got a clue, does that answer your question".

P92, Associate Dean, 5 years service:

"We don't have a co-ordinated approach".

Academics stated that there was little evidence of tangible encouragement in the form of well thought out staff training and development programmes. In addition, staff struggled to be motivated to participate, as there was no evidence of linking third stream activities to career enhancement or reward packages such as incremental awards or research accounts. For example,

Russell Group, Senior Lecturer, 20 years service:

"Yeah, I think in theory it sounds really good, but I have never heard of it happening here though, there is no route to enhance your career, there is no clear progression of employment and there is no reward".

P92, Associate Dean, 5 years service:

"I don't think it does. I don't think it encourages it at all. I think its great rhetoric but does not follow through with it, promises of promotion or financial reward".

D. Failure to Integrate Third Stream Alongside First and Second Stream Activities

Russell Group academics considered their current infrastructure as weak and questioned the effectiveness of their university's central and faculty administrative support, to both promote and embed third stream within their research and teaching priorities. Russell Group academics related an ineffective 'drip feeding' of third stream communications with a poor third stream infrastructure. In addition, Russell Group academics felt that there was little co-operation or encouragement from management. For example,

Russell Group, Lecturer 23 years service:

"My perception is that in terms of prestige they would rank consultancy last".

There was a consistent view that academics were genuinely unaware of third stream activities or felt that the opportunities were 'ring fenced' to a select few. In addition, further criticism was targeted at a culture in which the ease of access to third stream involvement was vague and difficult to grasp. Such a system, unlike with research and teaching, was also void of performance management. Russell Group academics certainly perceived a climate in which if you participated in third stream or expressed interest, then you run the risk of tarnishing your reputation as a 'true academic'. For example,

Russell Group, Lecturer, 20 years service:

"I'm not too sure of the benefits, I'm not sure if there are any benefits to individuals".

P92 academics supported the comments echoed by Russell Group academics. They held a view that the current infrastructure was lacking in its effectiveness to integrate third stream along side their teaching and research outputs. There was also a view that the third stream infrastructure, if it did exist, was in desperate need of streamlining and integration. In addition, academics openly questioned the role and effectiveness of their university central and faculty business support services who appeared to struggle in raising their profile, service and support services amongst academics.

P92 academics certainly felt that third stream was a 'closed shop' or 'jobs for the boys' in which third stream enquiries were kept confidential and resourced by a chosen few. This perception clearly added to the frustrations to those staff that expressed an interest to get involved in third stream activities and further criticism of the university business support services. Therefore, the data presented a consistent view that despite the rhetoric there was no transparent link between teaching, research and how third stream seamlessly fits into day-to-day activities. Third stream was considered the broken link. For Example,

Russell Group, Senior Lecturer, 25 years service:

"We are not bothered about it. It's not a big thing and there isn't much going on. There may be people doing it unofficially. There is certainly a need to stream line and establish an effective structure".

P92, Senior Lecturer, 20 years service:

"There is no linkage, I would say it takes your eye off the ball in terms of research and teaching. You need to focus on teaching and if there is any time left research".

E. Inability to Effectively Schedule Third Stream Activities Along Side Other Academic Responsibilities

Russell Group academics were in agreement that despite the university rhetoric the operational work-loading model was unrealistic. In terms of motivating academics to participate and to fulfill the client's expectations, they felt that there was no pressure on management to change the model as their priority was directed firstly, at research output and secondly, at teaching commitments. Both of these were closely monitored via performance management models. The results indicated this was not the case with third stream activities. For example,

Russell Group, Head of School, 28 years service:

"It doesn't, I would say there isn't any emphasis on that".

Russell Group academics felt that they did not have the backing of key decision makers, namely senior management and therefore did not have the time invest in third stream initiatives. Third stream was simply not factored into to the scheduling of academic workloads.

P92 academic results data, very much reflected the views of Russell Group academics. They felt that management failed to recognise that if staff are to be encouraged to participate in third stream activities, it must be build into their work-loads. Thus, third stream was regarded external to their work load and was to be treated as work over contact hours without recognition and reward. There was the perception that management would only allocate an allowance once the employer or organisation had commitment and failed to recognise that initial marketing, negotiation and fee structures were often the most time consuming activity. For example,

Russell Group, Senior Lecturer, 12 years service:

“Management need to recognise the support in terms of time that is required if it is to work for all”.

P92, Principal Lecturer, 23 years service:

“Give staff the space, positively encourage them. I think what I would like is for the university to get their act together, much more openness, transparency about work loading and opportunities”.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews indicate that third stream is the poor relation to teaching and research. In addition, whilst the literature suggests that academics are resistant to the encroachment of third stream activities, the data indicates that academics feel that universities are failing to strategically promote and embed third stream activities.

Contrary to university policy and mission statements supporting third stream strategic initiatives, academics perceived a climate of strategic rhetoric in which third stream was viewed as an under resourced, bolt on activity. Russell Group academics were of the firm belief that research was their university's priority. Whilst P92 academics felt that teaching was their university's priority. Many academics were critical about their university third stream infrastructure and questioned the effectiveness of their faculty or school support structures. Many felt that third stream activities were exclusive and opportunities were ring fenced.

The vast majority of academics are unaware of their university third stream strategy. Hence, they struggled to raise interest in third stream activities as it was considered peripheral to their role. In addition, there is little evidence of third stream encouragement, realistic work loading models to accommodate third stream activities, a viable and accessible staff development programme nor was it linked to career progression or a reward structure. A significant number of academics felt that to pursue third stream activities would hinder research and teaching commitments and ultimately their job security.

Literature highlights the fact that many academics are struggling to come to terms with their academic identity given the broadening or perceived loosening of their profession role to historically teach and conduct research. However, the data extracted from both the semi-structured interviews indicates that academics would be willing to participate in third stream activities. However, without a clear strategy, senior management commitment, and a career enhancement opportunities then they will mirror the current perception of university executives that third stream is not of equal status to teaching and research.

VI. EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

The executive interview transcripts were thematically analyzed and refined with the results from the interviews. The initial themes used were:

- **Coherent Third Stream Strategy:** Contradicting current literature, the data findings indicated that third stream strategy was failing to be effectively embedding. Academics were in the main unaware of third stream initiatives and how to play an active role.
- **Third Stream Infrastructure:** The data responses also challenged current literature as academics were critical about the university and faculty / school third stream infrastructures. Academics were of the opinion that they were disjointed and failed to provide a clear and viable pathway to participate in third stream activities.
- **Internal Third Stream Communications:** The data responses implied that there was a lack of understanding concerning third stream and current third stream opportunities. It was considered that third stream was the poor relation to teaching and research.
- **Management Commitment to Third Stream:** Feedback from the semi-structured interviews challenged current literature. The data suggested that there was a clear lack of commitment from management to provide the mechanisms to embed third stream activities alongside teaching and research.
- **Reward and Recognition:** Data from both the semi-structured interviews indicated that despite university third stream policies, academics struggled to identify a clear link between third stream and reward / recognition.
- **Third Stream Resourcing and Development:** Despite university strategic commitment to the third stream agenda, the data responses indicated that third stream failed to receive the same resourcing as with teaching and research. Data indicated that the academic work loading failed to accommodate third stream initiatives and there was no evidence of third stream staff training / development programme.

A. Analysing the Executive Interviews

116 meaningful fragments / statements were identified in the transcripts, aiming to clarify the key themes contributing to third stream understanding at the strategic level. The 116 fragments were initially thematically refined to 86 distinct statements. These were then reviewed to identify duplications and similarities, reducing the number of separate issues to 59. Unique statements were reviewed and either integrated with existing themes or removed. For example, those

fragments referring to specific projects or one-off instances or experiences with limited generalizability were removed. This resulted in 24 issues, see table II:

TABLE II: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIC THEMES

Strategic Themes and Issues for Third Stream		
"A label"	"Third stream is embedded"	"Central business support"
"Income for business"	"Outward facing"	"Intrinsically linked"
"Interesting definition"	"Adapting and developing"	"Sits along with teaching and research"
"I would not call it that"	"Funded support"	"Not about encouraging"
"Resonates all aspects"	"Corporate objective"	"Employ appropriate people"
"Community of third stream"	"Mutually beneficial"	"Past selling"
"Third stream is interwoven"	"Difficulty in scheduling"	"Need practitioners"
"Reputation"	"Practitioner skills"	"Balancing work load"

The 24 issues identified in Table II were clustered into 5 core themes:

- Different terminology used in the citing and implementation of third stream activities
- Communication of strategic view of third Stream
- Concerns for university reputation
- Infrastructure and embedding third stream
- Viable Work Loading

However, having reflected on one of the themes namely 'different terminology used in citing and implementation of third stream activities' it was decided that it should be excluded, as it was deemed that this could be legitimately integrated into the theme of 'communication of strategic view of third stream'. Thus, the final list of themes was reduced to four. The four themes are further discusses in the following sections.

B. Executive Theme 1: Communication of Strategic View Of Third Stream

The thematic analysis reveals a total of 31 out of the 116 fragments were related to the strategic view, its understanding and communication of third stream activities. This was a key element to investigate given the critical feedback received from the semi-structured interviews. It was, therefore, important to identify if the university executive corroborated academic responses. The majority of executives openly stated that they viewed the term 'third stream' as being 'dated' and felt that the activity was more appropriately called 'engagement'. They looked upon third stream being more associated with engagement rather than income / revenue. This added to the

confusion of the term 'third stream', as university policy and marketing material actually referenced the term 'third stream activities'.

The majority of executives did believe that their university had effectively developed and disseminated a strategic policy on third stream activities. For example,

Pro-Vice Chancellor:

"Our university is committed to the third stream agenda, we have always been and should always be engines for third stream"

However, one executive interviewed suggested otherwise and stated that whilst the university has both a teaching and research strategy it had in fact failed to establish and communicate a third stream strategy and this he felt contributed to the confusion and lack of academic commitment. For example,

Pro-Vice Chancellor:

"Funny I would not call it third stream anymore. I think third stream if you want to call it that is even more important now. I would think of it much more like a helix actually interwoven; teaching is informed; research is informed; third stream also informs this".

Assistant Director Innovation & Employer Engagement:

"Well that's an interesting description to say its third stream. I think third stream strategy is very much around employability. One thing I find puzzling about third stream is that we don't have a third stream strategy unlike with teaching and research."

C. Executive Theme 2: Concerns for University Reputation

15 of the 116 fragments were related to concerns for university reputation. The executives stated that they needed to be mindful of the potential ramification, if academics failed to meet the commercial expectation when conducting third stream activities and the potential lasting damage to their reputation. For example,

Dean:

"Got to accept it, academics are not always the best people to go outside".

Questions were raised about the commercial competence of existing academics and how best to utilise such a resource with minimal risk to their university reputation. Unlike with teaching and research, many executives were of the opinion that academics may not have the necessary skills or commercial acumen to both source and convert third stream activities. For example,

Associate Dean:

"We need to make sure that we have the right staff, with the right skills and attitude".

In consequence, there were statements that third stream activities would not be pursued if there was doubt in the academic skills / competence. The view was that there needed to be a clear link between academic skills base offering and the clients needs. To do otherwise may compromise the client's expectations and future relations with their institution. For example,

Dean:

"It is critical that we manage client expectations, failure to do so could tarnish our reputation, so we need to employ academics with practitioner skills".

D. Executive Theme 3: Infrastructure and Embedding Third Stream

Feedback extracted from the semi-structured interviews indicated that academics were critical about the current infrastructure and strategic initiatives to embed third stream activities. The thematic analysis identified 38 out of the 116 fragments were related to the importance of infrastructure and embedding third stream. The executives were united in their perception, which believed that there was indeed an established infrastructure which provided the flexibility for staff to actively participate in third stream activities. For example,

Pro-Vice Chancellor:

"We have gone past having to sell the idea to academics, the infrastructure is well established".

Executives were united in their belief that academic participants could benefit from both financial rewards and career enhancement opportunities. As such, the majority of executives stated that they believed that they had 'won the commitment of academics'. Some went so far as to state academics would do it through 'good will'. For example,

Dean:

"Its not about encouraging academics, they will do it through good will".

However, some executives did acknowledge the fact that there were 'tensions' in the sense that whilst executives did encourage third stream activity many were sensitive to the fact that many academics lacked the necessary commercial skills. For example,

Dean:

"I think universities are to an extent struggling with, is that they are very good at embedding teaching but less good at third stream. The clue is there isn't it in the name; the third thing are after the other things".

One Assistant Director felt that the academic calendar that indicated staff availability was out of sync with external commercial operations. For example,

Assistant Director:

“There is no provision made in their workloads for third stream and this is compounded with long holiday periods. If we cannot guarantee the availability of academics we cannot accept it. I would say this is the biggest challenge and frustration”.

In addition, there was the perception that whilst academics were recruited for the teaching and research expertise, their competence to participate in third stream was not as rigorous. Thus, universities often struggled to commit to third stream initiatives due to a perceived limited academic skills base and if academic involvement rolled over into institutional quiet periods, i.e. summer vacations as many academics were unavailable.

The executives felt that the internal system lacked accountability and attractiveness. As some academics felt that to participate in third stream activities was not central to their role and could therefore disband their participation, citing that it conflicted with their main role, i.e. teaching and research without the fear of recrimination. Thus, there was a view to avoid third stream activities if there was a risk to their institutional reputation. For example,

Pro-Vice-Chancellor:

“An academic said to me ‘well isn’t this just another burden on my time, work for which I will get no recognition?’ and I think I am right in saying that I was the first academic in a senior management academic Associate dean with responsibility for this, so how can you argue that there are no career development”.

Dean:

“For me almost the least important of them is financial transactions. I would not say it is about encouraging academics; its about finding ways to balance work loads. I think we have gone passed having to sell the idea to academics...we are passed all of that probably by some distance”.

Executives were of the firm belief that their current infrastructures were ‘fit for purpose’ and substantial resources had been dedicated in establishing both central and faculty support systems. It was deemed that adequate investment in the infrastructure had been made and staff had firmly embedded third stream along side teaching and research activities.

There was also a consistent view that it was paramount to fulfill client's expectations as with teaching and research. Hence, reference was directed at valuable role of institutional and faculty business development teams, in ensuring that external enquiries were not just project managed to avoid negative feedback from existing and prospective clients but to actively provide ‘gateways’ or ‘opportunities’ into teaching and research activities. For example,

Dean:

“I suppose there is something about the kind of high level commitment and infrastructure the university attaches to the importance of third stream. Third stream and research are actually two sides of the same thing and that all wraps into the student experience”.

Associate Dean:

“Probably got to accept that academics are not always the best people to be going out in search of additional funds. So I think universities need to use their savvy about how they use their academic talent. I think in terms, so that’s one think

about making sure we have the infrastructure and capacity. The other thing is making sure we have the staff with the right skills to be able to engage”.

E. Executive Theme 4: Work Loading

The semi-structured interviews indicated that work loading was a key barrier in preventing academics in becoming involved participants in third stream activities. This contradicts the policy and mission statement commitments made by universities. Hence, it would be interesting to assess senior management views on the issue of third stream work loading.

The thematic analysis identified 32 out of the 116 fragments were related to the importance of work loading. A clear division was identified within the executive interviews around the issue of work loading. This division lay between the views of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor / Deans and the views of Associate Deans. There was a view amongst senior executives who perceived that the challenges of third stream integration had been both embedded and resolved within a viable ‘tried and tested’ academic work-loading model and that academics would receive just recognition for their third stream endeavors. For example,

Pro-Vice Chancellor:

“Third stream is embedded all the way down to work loading”.

However, this was not fully supported by Associate Deans who expressed challenges that they faced in trying to integrate third stream initiatives within the academic timetable and work-loading model. For example,

Associate Dean:

“The biggest frustration is the work loading model, the challenge is time and availability”.

They held the view that if third stream was to be integrated along side teaching and research then a more effective work-loading model needed to be devised. There was a clear view that third stream was not given equal priority to teaching and research, hence, they often faced an impossible task of ‘fitting in’ third stream activities to work loading models that had already been agreed prior to the start of the academic years. This, in turn, raised additional concerns in that several executives felt that their service offering to clients was disadvantaged as there was an expectation that universities were open for business like the private sector throughout the year including non-teaching and marking periods. For example,

Associate Dean:

“Recognition and time allowances, makes sure that third stream is able to happen. Our development of academic skills and operating in a professional way also embed it within our institution. If we want to grow and succeed, then we have got to make the work loading situation work”.

Associate Dean:

“First and foremost if you ask academics the difficulty for me is work loading in terms of teaching. Ask the sort of the run of the mill academic one thing I suspect they will turn around and say is that they are work loaded for teaching. So balancing work loading is the challenge”.

VII. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM STRATEGIC INTERVIEWS

There were four key findings from the strategic interviews. Firstly, senior executives were of the consensus that their university had embedded their third stream strategy. However, it was interesting to discover that despite the fact that the term third stream was repeatedly cited in university marketing and policy statements, the majority of executives openly stated that they viewed the term ‘third stream’ as being dated and felt more comfortable with the term ‘external engagement’. However, on close inspection, it was noted that their interpretations were not consistent and mirrored the responses provided by academics. There was a clear and often conflicting interpretation of the term ‘third stream’ and as cited by one of the senior executives “it contributed to the confusion and lack of academic commitment”.

Secondly, concerns for university revealed interesting feedback. Whilst academics felt that to pursue third stream activities would negatively affect their academic reputation, the opposite was reflected in the executive feedback. Executives were specifically concerned with the commercial skill base of academics and were equally anxious at the prospect of academics failing to meet client expectations and the potential lasting damage to their reputation. There was evidence to suggest that senior executives avoided third stream enquiries to guard against commercial criticisms.

Thirdly, in direct contrast to the feedback received from the semi structured interviews. Senior executives collectively believed that their university infrastructure was ‘fit for purpose’ and substantial resources had been dedicated. In addition, executives felt that there were financial rewards and career enhancement opportunities. However, one senior executive felt that the academic calendar that indicated staff availability was out of sync with external commercial operations and this often hindered third stream activities and commercial networking opportunities.

Fourthly, there was a clear division identified within the executive interviews around the issue of work loading. Executive supports of work loading were of the opinion that third stream had been resolved with a viable ‘tried and tested’ work loading model which accommodated academic recognition. However, Associate Deans expressed frustration in trying to integrate third stream initiatives within academic work loading. They held the view that third stream was not given equal priority to teaching and research; hence they often faced an impossible task of ‘fitting in’ third stream activities.

VIII. INTEGRATING THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The results identify that there are opposing perceptions held by university executives and academics (see table III).

TABLE III: INTEGRATION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Integrating Empirical Findings	
Executive Management Third Stream Findings	Academic Third Stream Findings
<p>Third Stream Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Developed & disseminated + Linked with promotion and reward - Did not like the term third stream, preferred external engagement - No unified definition of third stream 	<p>Third Stream Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little understanding of third stream - Limited evidence of third stream strategy and dissemination - Not linked to promotion and reward - Failed to motivate involvement
<p>Third Stream Reputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questioned academic practitioner skills - Lack of monitoring and accountability - Fear of failing to meet client needs - Poor service may tarnish reputation - Avoid problematic third stream activities 	<p>Third Stream Reputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lacking in status - Poor relations to teaching and research - Hinders career and tenure - Not fundamental to job - No allowance / funding / resources
<p>Third Stream Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Fit for purpose + Provides third stream access + Linked to career and reward structure - Academic lack commercial skills - Inflexible academic calendar 	<p>Third Stream Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak infrastructure - Poor administrative support - Failure to integrate third stream - Ineffective communications - No encouragement provided - No training /development programmes - No evidence of personal benefits - Failure to provide ease of access - Exclusive / ring fenced access to third stream
<p>Third Stream Work Loading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior Executives split perceptions - Associate Deans stated work loading did not accommodate third stream activities + Deans and Pro-Vice Chancellor stated work loading was tried and tested 	<p>Third Stream Work Loading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unrealistic work loading model - Third stream not factored into work loading - Management priority was teaching and research
<p>KEY: + Positive Feedback - Negative Feedback</p>	

On further reflection and integration of the empirical findings as detailed in table III, empirical findings, five key areas emerged. 'Third stream strategy', and 'work loading' would remain unchanged. However, 'third stream reputation' should be separated into two areas to emphasise the differing perceptions held by senior executives and academics, namely: 'importance attributed to third stream' and 'academic commitment'. 'Third stream infrastructure' could be more appropriately called 'integration of third stream'.

A. Third Stream Strategy

Concerning the third stream strategy, the results were most enlightening, in that they portrayed a situation contrary to current literature in that, whilst universities communicated a strategic view of third stream activities, such a message was fractured and resulted in a polarisation of views between university executives and academics. Academics were of the view that if a third stream strategy did exist it was not being cascaded amongst academics. Executives clearly opposed such a view believing that their third stream strategies were in fact fit for purpose.

B. Importance Attributed to Third Stream

In reference to the importance attributed to third stream, the results did indicate a consensus of perceptions between Russell Group, P92 Universities including commentary from the university executive, who agreed that third stream needed to be resourced and attractive to academics, if it is to work. However, there was a divergence in that executives perceived that third stream activities were of equal importance to teaching and research. In addition, executives also raised concerns about the ability of academics in meeting the expectations of potential clients and the potential ramification if they were not fulfilled. It was interesting to note that whilst there is much commonality between Russell Group and P92 academics concerning the barriers to third stream activities and suggested recommendations. In contrast to current literature, it is equally evident that the Russell Group academics see second stream research excellence as their priority whilst P92 academics see first stream teaching as a priority. Neither viewed third stream as priority.

C. Integration of Third Stream Activities

The results concerning the integration of third stream activities along side teaching and research were united amongst academics. Both Russell Group and P92 academics stated that there was no firm evidence to support such a view. In contrast to current literature, academics were of the view that the pressures to teaching and to achieve research outputs were a clear priority and to be involved in third stream activities was looked by management as a distraction. Academics raised concern at the limited third stream communication, lack of training and resources.

Russell Group academics perceived that research was followed by teaching and then third stream; whilst P92 academics viewed teaching and priority, research second and third stream lastly. However, the comments received from executives were clearly opposing as they viewed all were equal and the necessary infrastructures were firmly established.

D. Work Loading

In contrast to current literature, there was solidarity amongst Russell Group and P92 academics in their concerns directed at an ineffective and restrictive work-loading model and did draw some support from a minority of executives. The executive comments were not united as some felt that the university's commitment to third stream was reflected in the work-loading model, whilst other executives echoed the sentiments of academics, as they felt that they were in fact between a 'rock and a hard place' in that there was pressure to embed third stream and that under the current work loading model, teaching and research took priority.

Although there was a differing perception of third stream between academics and executives, there were elements of commonality concerning the importance attributed to resourcing, benefits to academics and effective work loading. The fundamental difference was that academics struggled to identify tangible evidence whilst executives were of the opinion that such areas were both readily identifiable and accessible. Having reflected on the responses, the author feels that the major barrier or hindrance to third stream activities is the failure to implement a viable work-loading model.

E. Academic Commitment

Focusing on the issue of academic commitment, it was evident that academic perceptions concerning the opportunities and rewards when engage in third stream were fundamentally different to that of executives. The views expressed by executives were a 'clear step change' as they believed that the third stream agenda was firmly embedded with a clear remuneration and career progression policy. Such a view clearly contradicted both Russell Group and P92s academic perception of engaging in third stream activities and challenged current literature. Academics collectively could not identify a clear reward or career path associated with third stream activities. On the contrary, there were clear examples of Russell Group lecturers being informed that third stream involvement would actually hinder their career progression. It was interesting to note that whilst there is much commonality between Russell Group and P92 academics concerning the barriers to third stream activities and recommendations. It is equally evident, as noted above, that the Russell Group academics see second stream research excellence as their priority whilst P92 academics see first stream teaching as a priority. Neither view third stream as priority.

IX. CONCLUSION

It is evident in the literature that third stream has gained significant traction in the form of universities revised mission and strategic policy statements. However, referring back to 'addressing the elephant in the room', the research findings challenge current literature that states universities are actively integrating third stream activities along side teaching and research strategies. Table III captures a clear mismatch of third stream perceptions between university executives and academics. What universities pledge in term of third stream

commitment is clearly not transpiring in operational key performance indicators. Until the barriers highlighted in the research are address such as; dissemination of third stream strategies, importance attributed to third stream, integration of third stream activities, work loading and academic commitment. Then third stream activities will continue to be the 'poor relation' to teaching and research.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX I. OUTLINES THE MAIN QUESTIONS OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

	Question	Rationale
1	University, name, position, duration of employment in Higher Education	The demographic questions will identify if perceptions of third stream etc. are located within specific academic positions and/or tenure duration. This question will also be used to identify the differences between Russell Group and Post 92 universities.
2	What do you understand by third stream activities e.g. consultancy, enterprise?	This interview question will aim to identify if third stream activities are understood by academics (Shore & McLauchlan 2012).
3	In order of perceived importance how and why does your university rank in order of importance; Consultancy, Research and Teaching. Why do you think this is the case?	Historically, each university has taken a distinct approach in finding a balance between the 3 different roles and responsibility. This question will assess if there is university integration or a prioritisation between the first, second and third stream strategies (Culkin 2009).
4	How does the University encourage you to support third stream activities, such as induction, training, appraisals, mentoring, work-shadowing, performance management, communications, incentives, recognition, other.	Spinker (2011) and (Harman 2010) emphasised the importance in developing support systems and incentives to promote and nurture a third stream culture. Given the government drive and university commitments to embed third stream, it will be useful to the aims of the research to identify if such support systems exist and function fully.
5	Describe the infrastructure / operational process on how the University co-ordinates third stream consultancy activities and how effective is this.	(Small & Minkes 2010)state that third stream activities work best when academics understand how they work and when there is a viable infrastructure. Fumasoli & Lepori, (2011)were, however, of the opinion that third stream activities rarely adhered to a formal structure. It is, therefore, intended that the interview question will identify if such infrastructures do indeed exist and if they are operational.
6	Describe your community of practices (working environment) general perception and interaction of third stream consultancy activities.	Referring back to the research focus, this question will assess academic working environments and gauge their response to third stream initiatives.
7	Are you or have you participated in	This question aims to ascertain the level of third

	third stream consultancy activities, justify your answer?	stream involvement and the respondents' justifications (Naidoo 2010).
8	What do you perceive as the benefits that can be gained from participating in third stream consultancy activities, with specific reference to: The University, Community of practice, individually, student experience?	Cable & Willetts, (2011) have emphasised the tangible benefits to universities in enriched student experiences and collaborative relationships with industry. The interview question will it is intended clarify the perceptions of academics concerning third stream and its potential benefits.
9	What do you perceive as the limitations / barriers from participating in third stream consultancy activities, with specific reference to: The University, community of practice, individually, student experience?	Many authors highlight limitations / barriers to participate in third stream (e.g. Spinker, 2010; Woollard, 2010; Fini et al., 2010) This question aimed to identify barriers at a number of levels, from student experience to university, aiming to ascertain from academics their perceived blockers or barriers to third stream involvement.
10	What would you recommend to enhance academics becoming involved participants in third stream consultancy activities?	This question aimed to identify any approaches that could improve academic engagement in third stream (Massey 2010).

APPENDIX II. THEMED STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

	Question	Rationale
1	What is your strategic interpretation of 'Third Stream' activities within Higher Education?	This question to senior management aims to investigate consistency in the understanding of third stream. If this is not the case, then the lack of strategic clarification will be cascaded down the hierarchy and hinder implementation and the essential commitment of academics (Nelles & Vorley 2008).
2	Do you think third stream activities are strategically important in Higher Education? Please, justify your answer.	Universities are increasingly focusing on third stream activities due to the growing demands of a global economy, a radical reduction of traditional funding streams, increased competition and students demanding richer learning experiences (Wilson 2012). Successful implementation of third stream relies significantly on leadership and leadership commitment (Drew 2010). Without real commitment from senior management it is unlikely that they gain support from academics (Webber & Jones 2010). Opinions of strategic adoption of the third stream agenda will establish levels of consistency and commitment.
3	How is the University strategically embedding third stream activities?	Literature suggests that Vice Chancellors and their executive recognise the need to change (Shore & McLauchlan, 2012). Morrison, (2003) further states, that having identifying a third stream strategy, the real challenge is one of embedding it within the institutional culture. This question aims to identify how third stream is being embedded at the strategic level.

4	What are the strategic academic challenges in pursuing third stream activities?	The embedding of strategic third stream activities is problematic (Bubela & Caulfield 2010) and there is a consensus view that they need to be both identified and efforts made to resolve them (Brenner et al. 2010). Therefore, a natural progression from question three is to explore what challenges senior management had identified and the strategic steps they are taking to resolving them.
5	Given the challenges, what would you strategically recommend to overcome such challenges?	This question is instrumental to the research aim and objectives, as it provided a forum in which strategic management could reinforce the challenges at they perceive with the integration of third stream initiatives and to offer recommendations to overcome such challenges. There responses can then be bench marked against those recommendations identified by the semi-structured interviews.
6	Is there anything that we haven't covered which you think is important to third stream activity?	Question six was deliberately included to capture the views of senior management, which may not have been recorded within questions one to five.

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Dr. Lynne Hall is a Reader in the Department of Computing, Engineering and technology, University of Sunderland. Her main research interests are innovative non-intrusive user experience evaluation approaches and the design and use of transmedia to engage and disseminate to stakeholders and users. She has extensive EU project experience, having lead the Evaluation and Dissemination work packages of the EU FP7 eCUTE project; and was previously deputy-coordinator and leader of content design in the EU FP6 eCIRCUS; and interaction evaluation in the FP5 VICTEC. She has over 100 papers in peer reviewed computing, psychology and education journals and conferences. She has considerable external engagement experience, having been a Principal Lecturer in External Engagement (2002-10). This included as Project Manager for the Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Enterprise strands of the Software City project; and Project Director of the Digital Media Network. In 2011, she won UoS's Knowledge Transfer award and was third in the regional final.

