INTERNATIONALISATION OF POST-1992 UK UNIVERSITIES
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THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY
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With Brexit still uncertain as I write, the place of the UK in the modern international world is unclear. What is sure is that it will change fundamentally over the coming years. How our universities and graduates are ready for this change is of national and personal interest. This book looks at the UK government’s internationalisation strategies from the point of view of post-1992 universities. It investigates why post-1992 universities in the UK internationalised, how they went about it and what were the effects on the universities, their local environment and the major countries they operated in.

This book compares the UK government’s internationalisation strategies with that of the UK university sectors’ major markets, China, Malaysia and the United States, and investigates how post-1992 universities have helped these countries internationalise, receiving little in return but short-term monetary gain.

I have not counted the EU as a major international market in this text. This is partly because of the uncertainty around Brexit, which will potentially allow a book by itself to be written about UK universities’ relationships with the EU and partly because post-1992 universities have always treated the EU as a home market.

Over the period that this book spans, the understanding of the internationalisation of higher education has matured and changed. In 2015, Jane Knight, updating the definition of internationalisation, stated that ‘it is important that a definition does not specify the rationales, benefits, outcomes, actors, activities, or stakeholders of internationalization as these elements vary across nations and from institution to institution’ (Knight 2015).

This book attempts to do just that across a section of the UK higher education sector –namely post-1992 universities. For the purposes of this book,
the term internationalisation is used to describe any activity that is carried out by universities that have an international component.

Internationalisation of Post-1992 Universities is not a purely academic tome but what my publishers classify as a ‘crossover’.

But in developing my arguments I have tried to do so with a proper evidence base and not relied on anecdotal stories. I have also tried to give a true account of how UK universities have operated in different markets over time.

Although it is now common to discuss UK higher education as a single sector, I argue that this is not the case. The history of post-1992 universities, as depicted in Chapters 1 to 3, show that these universities were and are fundamentally different from pre-1992 universities, which had poorer funding, weaker governance and less commercial potential. This has translated into a group of universities more likely to take risks when developing business overseas. That is not to say that all post-1992 universities have taken risks or that no pre-1992 university has.

In the book the mistakes of certain post-1992 universities are mentioned more than others. This should not be taken as evidence that they are particularly aggressive risk-takers. It may be that they were the ones that were naive and were caught out. Likewise, those which are shown to have developed innovative programmes for the good of all students may not be complete paragons of virtue.

I hope you enjoy reading this book and that many of you recognise the story and environment that I describe and have worked in for the majority of my working life.
International education it’s nothing new. For centuries British universities have taught the progeny of despots, sons of rajas, terrorists—who when they won their fight became the fathers of a new nation; they all came to the dreaming spires to study, mingle and be Anglicised.

They returned home replete with swan stuffed with widgeon and happy memories of a Britain still at the top of its game, where the plebs knew their place, punters were people with punts and all was right with the world.

It was all about using university education of foreign nationals to exert soft power. So when they become leaders in their countries, Britain was their first-choice partner to split the proceeds of their invasion of some oil rich neighbour. Or the supplier of choice of those wonderfully clever anti-personnel mines and other weapons of indiscriminate and discriminate mass murder that we make so well.

Of course, when Thatcher changed the rules and universities could charge full fees for international students, there developed a more commercial approach to international recruitment. But it was very much a peripheral activity for universities. With the creation of a whole new group of universities in 1992, the cosy world of international education in the UK changed dramatically.

For the new post-1992 universities, hawking their wares overseas was the only way their vice chancellors could get enough non-exchequer income to make up for years of underinvestment and to fund the expansion in student numbers the government demanded. Post-1992 universities developed differently than their predecessors. With pressure from the previous polytechnic directors the new universities had been set up as a commercial body with expensive CEOs who had a managerial style to suit a dynamic entrepreneurial business rather than an accountable public body.

The directors had made sure that the new boards of governors were toothless and they could do anything they wanted with their shiny new institutions—so
there was little or no oversight of their overseas activities. Salary increases of eye-watering proportions were ratified by remuneration committees that the vice chancellors sat on.

Simultaneously, from the 1990s on, successive governments encouraged the sale of university qualifications overseas, using them as advance economic troops in attempts to attract businesses to the UK. They were one of the first businesses invited by the government to join trade missions in newly opened markets.

Almost every university in the UK ramped up international recruitment activities. But for new universities with little pedigree, to be successful in a world where education was increasingly monetised, so called innovative strategies were needed.

Staff from universities from the Scotland Highlands to the South Coast of England descended on Kuala Lumpur, Tripoli and other capital cities throughout the world, like latter-day missionaries, bringing the natives salvation in the form of Western education.

Universities took their lead on which countries and regimes to do business with from the government of the time, rather than making their own moral judgements. If it’s okay for the British government to do business, there can’t be any moral issues – can there?

So they ignored any negative reports of their new-found partners.

Institutions that denounced any form of discrimination based on racial, religious or sexual orientation found themselves taking money from governments, with quite different morals and ethics. Senior staff in universities watched TV reports about genocide, imprisoning of academics, mass re-education policies or just plain murder in countries where they had just signed partnership agreements as fulsome as a B-list celebrities’ wedding vows.

From the 1990s and into the new century, excess followed excess and the money piled in. Executive lounges in five star hotels were full of surprisingly badly dressed guests, as the international education horde realised that the free drink that one got as part of the luxury executive package did not appear on the hotel bill. So the university would pay and never question it.

Senior academics who would never be able to pay for this luxury took full advantage; meetings had to end by 5 pm to accommodate the free cocktail hour. To be fair, the more conscientious held meetings in the executive lounges during the cocktail hour.

Professors of sustainable energy dusted off their Hawaiian shirts and hit Hard Rock Cafes from Sao Paulo to Saigon, where their true attractiveness was
apparent to young ladies and lady boys who were not as shallow as their Western counterparts.

Old academics fell asleep with their heads in recently emptied minibars. Staff tipexed the ‘a’ out of ‘massage’ on hotel bills and replaced it with an ‘e’ – back home, accounts staff were shocked at how much a message could cost in some countries never mind the ‘extras’.

Heads of business schools who had never had to demonstrate a head for business took to the new concept of universities as cash generators with a vengeance. This was the chance to show that the old adage ‘those that can do, those that can’t teach’ was wrong.

They became institutionalised entrepreneurs – not unlike the bankers and traders who were doing so well for the world economy at the time. They were able to risk other people’s money with no risk to themselves. And in what was considered by marketing men as a soft market, there was every chance that the risk would bring in significant monetary rewards.

Engineers who had spent time in industry before they became academics in the local polytechnics found themselves becoming what they had always despised most – salesmen. They amassed millions of air miles, stayed in particular chains of hotels which had loyalty points and never had to pay for a holiday for their families again.

Doormen in Mandarin Orientals, Shangri Las, Sandals Resorts and Tajs knew them by name, but never got a tip as that wasn’t refundable by the university.

And all the time these business heads were lauded as heroes by the press as, overnight, education became one of Britain’s largest export sectors.

A whole new career path opened up for clever young people who had studied languages at university and then realised that having English as your native language and an intimate knowledge of the modern literature of another language was of no interest to industry. After all, whatever language you studied had millions of native speakers of which a rising number spoke English fluently and many had an actual useful skill – like engineering or computing, rather than just being able to translate someone else’s words.

So, finding no work outside teaching other languages to students who, like themselves, would find no work, they flocked to join the new profession of international recruitment officer. It was these young people who flew like sardines, common class, stayed in cheap hotels and went to danger spots that you would never get a senior member of staff to visit – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Yemen and so on – these were the people that actually recruited hundreds of thousands of overseas students into UK universities.
Agencies opened all over the world to dip their beaks in the fountain of money produced. These middlemen represented large numbers of universities. The funding from international students was so important to new universities that for the majority of staff, who stayed at home manning the fort, it felt as if chasing international income was prioritised over teaching. A new form of institution had developed, one where students were markets and programmes were products.

True to their roots, new universities proved to be incredibly flexible in entry requirements; after all, if they could take UK students into degrees with low grades and alternative qualifications and still pass them, why would they demand more of foreign students?

This meant that they took in more students into advanced years than pre-1992 universities. In some cases British students returning to final year of their degree found that instead of classes of 20 UK students they had a hundred new foreign colleagues none of whom could buy a packet of crisps without using sign language but who were taking modules on banking ethics – an oxymoron comparable to military intelligence.

Business schools grew to accommodate international students rather than because of any local or national need. Questions as to whether universities had a responsibility to their local population and whether UK students would be able to get jobs when competing with overseas students who had two languages and dual qualifications were derided as parochial – out of touch with the modern global world.

International education as a means of bringing income into underfunded universities and into many small cities throughout the UK was without doubt effective. The nature of not only the university but also its surrounding communities was changed for the better with most of the country realising the economic and cultural benefits of this influx of temporary visitors. Media stories of how these temporary immigrants were contributing to cultural and economic growth were a beacon against the anti-immigration rants in some press. Small cities reeling from traditional industry closures found that the new local university was now the biggest employer in town and paid better with better conditions than before. The growth of these universities was only possible with income from international students.

In an era before Trump and Brexit, where internationalisation and globalisation were seen as not only inevitable but also desirable, this trade was a shining example of how everyone could benefit from the effects of an increasingly international world, but only if there was a way of using the new makeup of the university body to the benefit of home students.
Universities with their roots in public service realised that it could not be all about money. The concept of internationalisation at home was developed with mixed results. Internationalisation strategies were developed that tried to recognise and resolve the conflict between funding and education. They relabeled ‘international recruitment’ to ‘internationalisation’ claiming it was less about the pounds and more about the people.

As the 1990s progressed through the noughties and into the teens, the swashbuckling behaviour that was created in the initial Klondike-like rush lessened, as staff and processes matured to take into account the hard lessons the sector learned.

When the government decided that on-campus international students should be at a level described in the International English Language Test as a ‘Modest User who should be able to handle basic communication in their own field’, the recruitment market slowed down, particularly for post-1992 universities.

To counter this downturn, many new universities began to focus on transnational education (TNE). Instead of Mohammed coming to the mountain the mountain would come to Mohammed.

UK university degree programmes were increasingly outsourced to private colleges and universities throughout the world.

The government agencies which were designed to ensure quality in the UK joined in, selling their own programmes or becoming onlookers and recorders rather than regulators.

And all the while the media failed to hold the sector to account. They were too busy publishing league tables, selling glossy adverts, writing university guides, even running recruitment events, to upset the apple cart.

In the last two and a half decades, post-1992 university activities overseas has influenced the commercial behaviour of all UK universities as pre-1992 universities allowed post-1992 universities to take the risks and then emulated those that they had got away with.

The focus of post-1992 universities on international student fees above all developed a market-led culture which many would say is at odds with a public body – this was easily translated to the fee regime in England when it was introduced.

This book looks at the undoubted success of post-1992 universities’ international strategies and how this has changed them. It examines some of the practices they had to adopt and the consequences of doing so. It also looks at the effect of this on the countries they operate in and how they have been used by other cultures and nations to realise their own interpretation of internationalisation.
THE NEED FOR NEW TYPES OF GRADUATES 1960s

The swinging 60s, the war was long finished, rationing was but a bad memory and there was a renewed optimism and increasing wealth. No longer the black and white of the 1950s, the 1960s were lived in technicolor.

Ordinary men and women were embracing the joys of instant mashed potatoes, coming to terms with eating spaghetti that didn’t come out of a tin – do you use a spoon with your fork or not? They were moving to high-rise tower blocks with bathrooms and indoor toilets – some even had showers over the bath – buying their first car, first TV and first washing machines. Old-fashioned was bad and everything new was good. Polystyrene ceiling tiles, bright orange bри-nylon sheets, psychedelic shirts, drip-dry suits, the pill, the space race, the first heart transplant, the invention of Astro Turf all were greeted with enthusiasm. It was an exciting modern world, one where science and the new were embraced by everyday people. Affordable package holidays to exotic locations, which had previously needed a war for working-class Brits to visit, stretched global horizons. Britain applied to join the forerunner to the European Union (EU) – the European Economic Community (EEC) – twice in the 1960s, but was blocked by the French president Charles De Gaulle, who claimed that Britain harboured a ‘deep-seated hostility towards European construction’ (BBC On This Day, 1967). Post-Brexit he must be as smug in his grave as he was in life. But in the 1960s and 1970s there was a wide-held belief in the benefits of joining the EEC and being part of a new order, The 1960s were when Britain and its people had to assume a new place in a world without the British Empire.

Politicians recognised this was a new era. The heavy manufacturing that Britain had relied on was becoming less viable, the unions claiming that post-war
owners had refused to reinvest, the owners claimed the unions were strangling investment with pre-war work practices.

At the start of the 1960s, the prime minister was Harold Wilson, a shifty political wheeler dealer; he was never entirely trusted, even by his own party. Tony Benn famously said, ‘The tragedy of Harold Wilson was that you could never believe a word he said’ (The Telegraph 2014). In later years, Anthony Howard in a leader in the New Statesman was to say that ‘Mr Wilson has now sunk to a position where his very presence in Labour’s Leadership pollutes the atmosphere of politics’ (Kellner 2010).

But in 1963, Wilson made his ‘White Heat of Technology’ speech at the Labour Party conference. Undoubtedly, it was one of the most famous political speeches of the twentieth century. He concluded that, for Britain to prosper, ‘a new Britain’ would need to be forged in the ‘white heat’ of the ‘scientific revolution’ (Francis 2013). By focusing on science and not ideology, he managed to unite the previously divided party under the banner of a new scientific socialist party. In the same speech, he portrayed Conservatives as old Etonians, out of touch with the modern technological world (Francis 2013).

By the 1960s, it was widely recognised by all parties that the existing university system could not create the volume or indeed the type of graduates that such a scientific revolution required. However, not all felt that it was the place of universities to do so.

In 1959 the novelist and physical chemist C. P. Snow gave a Rede lecture entitled ‘The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution’. He claimed that British social and political elites were dominated by ‘natural Luddites’, whose ignorance of science and engineering made them singularly unfit to govern a world in which technology was becoming ever more important. He argued, almost with disbelief, that not only were they Luddites, but they also reveled in their lack of knowledge of science and engineering as a sign of intelligence and breeding. And, of course, these elites were products of the old universities (Age of the Sage n.d.).

Like a character out of Tom Sharpe’s satire on Oxbridge life ‘Porterhouse Blue’, F. R. Leavis, director of English at Downing College, Cambridge, and a well-known literary critic, made a waspish retaliation to Snow’s criticism in his Richmond lecture, in which he called Snow ‘intellectually as undistinguished as it was possible to be’ and continued in much the same vein, saying that ‘Snow displays an utter lack of intellectual distinction and an embarrassing vulgarity of style’ (Age of the Sage n.d.).

This backfired and the press rounded on Leavis and his views, giving fuel to the debate about the role of traditional universities in a modern world.
What was widely accepted, outside Oxbridge, was that the country needed more people studying a wider range of subjects aligned with industry, seen as equivalent to a university degree. People were looking towards post-war France and Germany, where technocrats were running the country. From across the channel they appeared to be doing a far better job of modernising, creating joined-up road and rail networks and radical town planning. Of course, when the UK took some of their ideas, they found that high-rises built cheaply in bomb sites were not quite as glamorous as they had looked like in the sun of the Mediterranean and ultra-modern Bonn.

There were two opposing views of how the UK could develop a higher education sector that would produce a cadre of technocrats (Pratt 1997). On one side was Lord Lionel Robbins, a grammar-school boy who graduated from the London School of Economics. On the other side Mr, later, Sir Tobias Weaver, an old Cliftonian who had graduated from Cambridge. Robbins at the time was chair of the London School of Economics, he was an economist and an advocate of free-market economics. Weaver was a civil servant who, when he entered the civil service, had asked for a gentleman’s agreement that he would never be moved from the department of education. Both were passionate about the need for participation in higher education to increase for Britain to be able to take advantage of the new post-war world. But whereas Robbins believed in increasing the numbers of universities to meet this market and allowing those universities to work in a free market, Weaver believed in a locally managed higher education system to deal with local industries and local people’s needs.

**THE ROBBINS REPORT**

The Robbins Committee on Higher Education Report in 1963 (Robbins 1963) was instructed by the Conservative government to look at the higher education system in the UK and recommend its long-term development plans and in particular to look at

whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution. (Robbins 1963)

This was the first time there had ever been an attempt by government to review higher education in the UK as a whole rather than individual independent