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AI Acknowledgement

~~I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.~~

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Elicit <https://elicit.com/> on March 29th and April 1st 2025 to assist with finding research papers relevant to the assignment. Elicit is a GenAI tool, rather than a simple search engine, because it produces summaries of the literature and extracts certain data with follow-up prompts. I used the prompt(s):

1. Can you find papers that connect Q Methodology to a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm?
2. What does the literature say about using (generative) AI in the research process?

I acknowledge the use of Notebook LM <https://notebooklm.google/> on February 14th and March 29th 2025 to assist in the process of extracting information from the literature on Q Methodology. I uploaded a number of pdfs to Notebook LM and generated an audio overview, and later asked various questions, given below. After asking each question, I went to the original pdf of the source to check what was said about the topic in question.

Questions posed to Notebook LM:

1. What do the sources say about Q Methodology research being intended to be replicable rather than generalisable?
2. What do the sources say about Q Methodology and a constructivist paradigm?
3. Do the sources say anything about the appropriate number of participants for a Q sort?
4. What do the sources say about checking the results through semi-structure interviews?

Further use of Generative AI for the production of research instruments are detailed within the assignment and its appendices.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

1. RESEARCH CONTEXT

This small-scale research study aims to explore the perceptions of academic staff at a United Kingdom (U.K.) post-92 university concerning the broad essential purpose of higher education (HE) in a global societal context, and of their own identities and place within that purpose.

In seeking to investigate the subjective worldviews and opinions of participants in the study, the following research questions have been posed:

1. How do higher education practitioners at a post-92 U.K. university perceive the role of higher education in a broad global societal context?
2. How do higher education practitioners at a post-92 U.K. university perceive their professional identities?
3. How do higher education practitioners at a post-92 U.K. university perceive the relationship between their understanding of higher education's role in a broad societal context and the formation or enactment of their professional identities?

To further situate this study in its context, my own positionality in a role concerned with the support and professional development of staff is crucial: the study has the broader goal of understanding what support and development opportunities may be of most value to staff and achieve the most engagement.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY

This study is approached from an interpretivist-constructivist stance, seeking to explore the meanings and realities that individuals construct based on their lived experiences (Punch and Oancea 2014; Creswell and Poth 2023). Social constructivism specifically seeks out a ‘complexity of views’ (Creswell and Poth 2023, p.23), acknowledging that meanings and realities are multiple and defy simple categorisation. An overview of the literature has uncovered a plethora of views on the purpose of HE, ranging from the economic and employability purpose (Ashwin 2020; Trinidad *et al.* 2021) to the purpose of empowering individuals to take radical action for sustainable futures (Sterling 2021). Likewise, the understandings of HE practitioners of their roles and identities are varied, ranging from researcher and career academic (Dickinson *et al.* 2020), to ‘para-academic’ (Macfarlane 2011, p.59). Thus, the social constructivist paradigm achieves ‘compatibility and integrity’ (Punch and Oancea 2014, p.18) between the research questions and the methodological approach.

2.2 POSITIONALITY

However, I am approaching this research with caution due to my own positionality. As an HE practitioner with many years of service in multiple roles, I have already categorised myself as a ‘blended professional’ (Obexer 2022 p.468; Beaton and Hope 2022) with a fluid, unstable identity (Dickinson *et al.* 2020, p.291; Obexer 2022; Peri *et al.* 2023). In addition, my current role involves providing support and development training, and I hope to gain insights from the research into the types of provision that might be appropriate to staff. There is the potential with familiarity to miss important insights arising from the research. It is important, therefore, to seek out ways to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Delamont and Atkinson 2021, p.9) in order to minimise the potential for confirmation bias. It is hoped that the research approach and chosen method will fulfil the function of adding objectivity to the research.

2.3 Q METHODOLOGY: THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF SUBJECTIVITY

Therefore, in seeking to remove my own value position from the research process, I have turned to Q Methodology, which involves the sorting and ranking of statements that represent various subjective viewpoints on the topic in question. Q Methodology was originally envisioned by its inventor William Stephenson (1953) as an 'objective (unbiased, empirically verifiable and repeatable) method for the study of subjectivity' (Robbins and Krueger 2000, p.637). There is widespread agreement that Q Methodology brings a scientific element to the study of subjectivity (Brown 1993; Stenner 2009; Watts 2009; Davis 2011; Coogan and Herrington 2011; Bashatah 2016). Watts (2009), for example, argues that Q Methodology can locate 'bodies-of-knowledge' (p.35) and render their structure observable, representing the 'objective part of the subjective world' (p.43).

In discussing this potential for objectivity in the study of subjectivity, Stenner (2022) connects Q Methodology to constructivist thinking: Q Methodology is about understanding how people actively construct their understanding of the world, as opposed to finding pre-existing frameworks – seeing how people create their own understanding. Ramlo and Newman (2011), in a discussion about the connection between Q Methodology and constructivism, argue that in the Q sort process, the act of arranging statements allows each participant (sorter) to construct their own reality. The researcher does not impose predefined operational definitions on the statements in the Q sample; instead, participants interpret these statements based on their own reference frame (Bashatah 2016).

Q Methodology is seen, therefore, as a means to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods (Brown 1993; Coogan and Herrington 2011; Bashatah 2016; Walker *et al.* 2018; Shaw 2023). Shaw (2023) describes Q Methodology as 'qualiquantillogical' (Shaw 2023, p.4): it uniquely blends rich qualitative data with rigorous statistical analysis. Similarly, Walker *et al.* (2018) acknowledge the complex interplay of qualitative and quantitative elements in Q Methodology, which can relate to different epistemological stances, but particularly constructivism, referring to the combination of the 'rigor of statistical analysis with qualitative constructivist meaning making' (p.452).

2.4 Q METHODOLOGY: A WHOLE METHODOLOGY

There appears to be a widespread consensus that Q Methodology is a *whole methodology*, encompassing a far broader framework than a simple method or tool (Davis 2011; Brown 1993; Capdevila and Lazard 2008; Bashatah 2016; Ramlo 2023). It is understood as a comprehensive methodology with its own theoretical underpinnings and a distinct way of investigating human perspectives (Capdevila and Lazard 2008). Much of the literature works on the premise that there is a crucial difference between Q Methodology and more traditional approaches such as surveys and questionnaires (Stephenson 1953; Smith 2001; van Exel and de Graff 2005), and this difference lies in what is referred to as *operant subjectivity*: subjectivity that can be communicated, or expressed operantly.

An abductive approach will be taken to this study, compatible with Q Methodology. With its distinctive core as the scientific study of subjectivity (Bashatah 2016), it is argued that Q Methodology allows a shift in the researcher-researched power dynamic towards a more democratised approach (Robbins and Krueger 2000), bringing forward marginalised voices (Capdevila and Lazard 2008). Connected to this idea of uncovering distinct viewpoints is the abductive approach of forming explanations (Davis 2011). Harris *et al.* (2019) and Stenner and Watts (2012) emphasise the role of Q Methodology in discovery and theory building, Harris *et al.* (2019) pointing out that abductive logic is concerned with explanation, where induction has more descriptive aims. In the context of this study, a number of ideas have emerged from the literature: i) that ‘pracademics’ and ‘career academics’ will have significantly differing worldviews and experiences (Dickinson *et al.* 2020); ii) that identities are fluid and responsive to external forces (Dickinson *et al.* 2020; Obexer 2022); and, iii) that HE practitioners experience tensions in the negotiation of an integrated identity (Yang *et al.* 2021). However, it is expected that this study will generate new understandings and theory representative of the shared viewpoints of the participants.

The remainder of this section will be concerned with an account of how the tools and techniques of Q Methodology will be applied in the context of this study.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

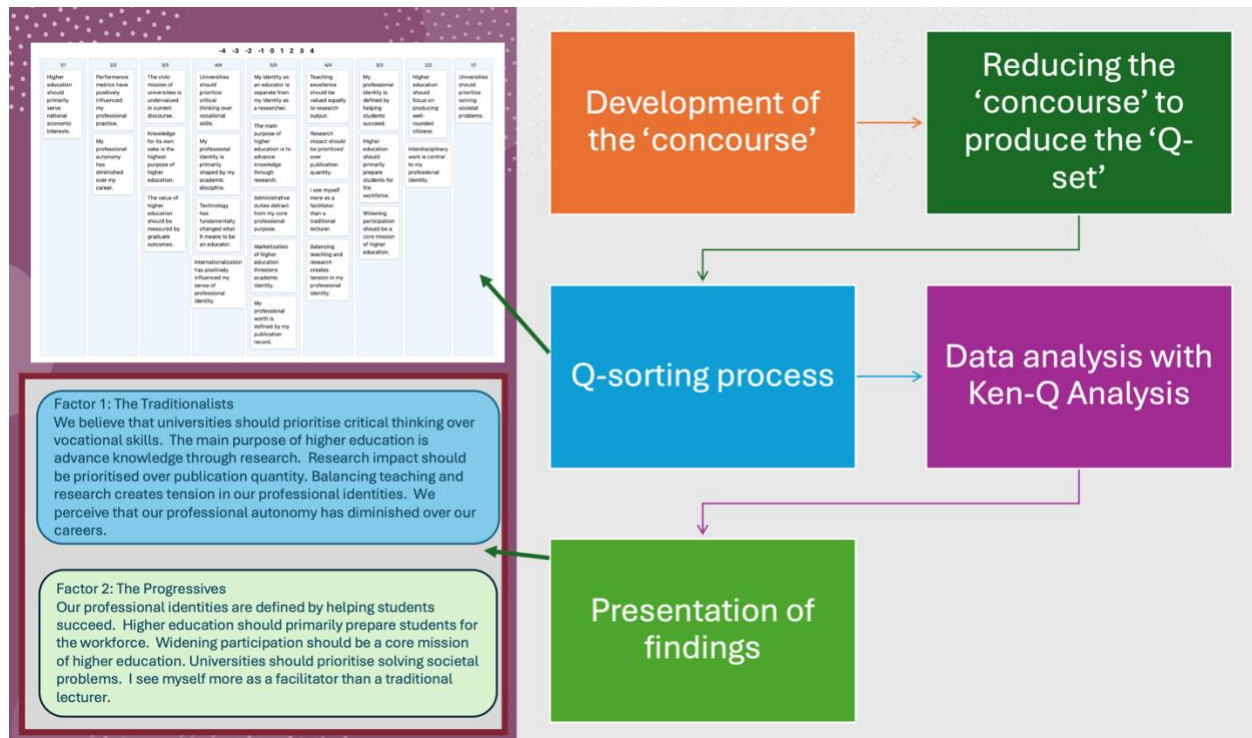


Figure 1: Flowchart to show demonstrate the Q Methodology process

3.1 DEVELOPING THE CONCOURSE: HARNESSING EMERGENT TECHNOLOGY

Van Exel and de Graaf (2005) identify the first step in preparing for a Q Methodological study as defining the 'concourse' (p.4). The concourse is generally a series of statements related to the research questions, representing the possible opinions, thoughts and feelings of the participants. It is intended to be as comprehensive as possible (Capdevila and Lazard 2008), including everything that could be said or thought about the 'domain of subjectivity' (Robbins and Krueger 2000, p.638). From this list of statements, a smaller sample is selected and becomes the Q-set: the set of statements used in the sorting stage of the research. The concourse is developed

through gathering material from a variety of sources, which might include scholarly articles, but can also come from semi-structured interviews, focus groups and popular media (Brown 1993; Coogan and Herrington 2011; Shaw 2023; Espartinez 2024).

Stenner and Watts (2012) are somewhat critical of Stephenson's descriptions of the development of a concourse and subsequent Q-set, characterising them as 'rather vague' (Stenner and Watts 2012, p.57). As an example of this, they cite a 1987 paper in which he describes the extraction of 100 statements from a single article as 'a straightforward matter' (Stephenson 1987, p.531 in Stenner and Watts 2012, p.57). They go on to stress the importance of care in the assembly of Q items, suggesting that this may be the most time-consuming element of the research process. Several authors likewise stress the importance of a comprehensive approach to the development of the concourse, it being an essential step in informing the Q-set statements that will determine the validity and reliability of the research (Harris *et al.* 2019; Shaw 2023; Ramlo 2023).

Ramlo (2023) describes the content of the concourse as potentially infinite, and studies include accounts of concourse development with up to 400 items (Robbins and Krueger 2000). While Capdevila and Lazard (2008), on the other hand, introduce the idea of 'finite diversity' (p.73), this does suggest the importance of establishing a thoroughly comprehensive concourse covering all potential perspectives, including the marginalised. A number of researchers mention using practical approaches to gathering statements, including using inspirational books, articles and interviews (Stenner 2022), popular media, such as newspapers and magazines (van Exel and de Graaf 2005), and requests for comments via email or in focus groups (Coogan and Herrington 2011).

Given the small-scale nature of this research, time constraints, the current emergence and rapid development of new technologies and personal experience experimenting with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), I made the decision to use GenAI to assist in developing statements for the concourse. Concourse statements generated through this process were then carefully selected and edited in order to maintain the important human and reflective element in the creation of the research instruments, while taking out the bulk of the time-consuming

synthesising and summarising otherwise involved in distilling statements representative of viewpoints on the purpose of HE and professional identities from large numbers of sources.

Several recent papers have highlighted the value of using GenAI for research, with a large focus on using various tools in order to facilitate the process of writing literature reviews (Stiglic *et al.* 2023; Kumar and Gunn 2024; Mozelius and Humble 2024; Schryen *et al.* 2024). However, others have argued that there is a legitimate place for the use of GenAI tools in research extending beyond searching and summarising literature, including using GenAI tools for research design, data collection and data analysis (Kingsley 2023; Berg 2023; Salman *et al.* 2025). Berg (2023), for example, argues that approaching a Large Language Model (LLM) with the expectation that ‘a lengthy dialogue’ (p.7) will be necessary in order to collaboratively achieve a usable output, can lead to the exploration of nuanced alternative and revised arguments. Due to the nature of the researcher’s input, interactions, and navigation of the LLM’s responses, a robust output can be achieved that is tailored to the researcher’s aims, ‘while also taking advantage of the LLM’s vast informational resources and analytical capabilities’ (ibid. p.8). An account of the process I followed for developing the initial concourse using Google Gemini ‘Deep Research’ and Google Gemini ‘Pro’ can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 includes the initial prompt and screenshots of the Gemini ‘Deep Research’ process, and Appendices 2 to 5 include the Gemini ‘Deep Research’ and ‘Pro’ outputs.

3.2 DETERMINING THE Q-SORT MODE

Once the concourse has been established, the researcher then needs to reduce the number of statements to a manageable number: the Q-set, which will be used by participants for the Q-sort (van Exel and de Graaf 2005; Stenner and Watts 2012). Van Exel and de Graaf (2005) note that the number of statements used in the Q-set typically ranges from 40-50 statements, but can be anything from 10 to 100.

In deciding on an appropriate number of statements, I first took into consideration the mode of the Q-sort (the process of sorting the statements by participants). In a Q-sort, participants are required to rank the statements in the Q-set on a bell-shaped grid (see Figure 1 for an illustration of this, with fewer items at the extremes and more towards the middle (see Fig 1), which is considered to be easier for participants than a straight sort from most to least agree (Woods 2011). Woods (2011) refers to the process as a ‘forced sort’ (p.324), since the requirement to place a fixed number of statements at each place in the grid necessitates critical reflection. Van Exel and de Graaf (2005) explain that participants often start by sorting into three piles, with statements they agree with, disagree with, and feel more neutral about. The groups of statements are then refined further, as participants place a specific number of statements into each position on the grid following a distribution required by the researcher (Bashatah 2016), forcing participants to weigh their strong agreements and disagreements against their more moderate opinions. This process is significantly different from checking a box to agree or disagree: participants have to make choices about what resonates most strongly with them, revealing the underlying structure of their subjectivity. Thus, participants are not required to speak or to produce language in any way themselves in order to reveal their subjective viewpoints (Lundberg 2020). It is the interaction with the research instrument that empowers the participants to construct meaning (Shaw 2023), with the Q-set can providing support where knowledge is tacit (Wood 2011).

There seems to be broad agreement that Q-sorting should be conducted in a face-to-face setting with the researcher (Watts and Stenner 2012; Walker *et al.* 2018). I therefore made the decision to conduct the Q-sorting process in a face-to-face setting with participants, with a carefully worded condition of instruction (Bashatah 2016).

3.3 DEVELOPING THE Q-SAMPLE/SET

By going through each of the statements generated by Google Gemini, I was able to delete those that were less focused and covered more than one topic area. In addition, where there was a

degree of repetition or overlap, I chose statements that I felt best expressed or encapsulated a subjective viewpoint and deleted the others. Other statements were deleted where it was felt that they were not closely enough related to the themes of the purpose of HE and professional identity. The final list of forty-two statements can be seen in Appendix 6.

3.4 PARTICIPANT SAMPLE SELECTION

Q Methodology differs from traditional surveys in that it is not concerned with obtaining a large random sample to represent populations (Bashatah 2016; Walker *et al.* 2018); the goal is not to generalise the findings, but rather to capture the differing perspectives within a specific group of people who are relevant to the research. Bashatah (2016) stresses that the richness of the findings depends more on the diversity of the viewpoints than on the number of participants. In contrast to quantitative studies, Q Methodology can be employed in small-scale research in order to obtain what Bashatah (2016) terms ‘profound findings’ (p.39). Van Exel and de Graaf (2005) suggest that the number of participants must simply be enough to establish factors for comparing with one another, and that a Q Methodology sample is not random but structured to include respondents theoretically relevant to the study.

Therefore, since the institution where the study will be conducted is relatively small (around 900 staff in academic or support roles), participants will be selected through convenience sampling via a call-out to all staff in relevant roles through an announcement on the staff intranet. There is some risk of a biased sample, but it is hoped to recruit a sample including participants from various roles, including academics, professional services, practitioner turned academic and blended roles. A total of around 40 participants will be selected, as this is the ideal number recommended for a valid Q Methodology study (Bashatah 2016).

1. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Woods (2011, p.325) refers to ‘standard statistical software’ packages that can be used to find patterns or factors in participants’ Q-sorts. The fact that there are almost limitless ways in which statements can be configured on a Q-sort grid is at the heart of Q Methodology, with the aim of understanding subjectivity holistically at the level of the individual (ibid.). The specialist software is used for identifying groups of participants who sort the statements in a similar way, meaning that they have a similar perspective on the topic. Thus, rather than correlating variables across people, Q Methodology correlates people across a set of variables (the statements in the Q set). Each ‘factor’ (Stenner 2022, p.9) represents a distinct pattern of how people think about the topic. ‘Factor loadings’ (van Exel and de Graaf 2005, p.8) tell the researcher how strongly each participant’s sort matches each factor. People with high loadings are the defining variants for each factor (ibid.). I have chosen to use [Ken-Q Analysis](#) for this research (Basanick 2023), because of its ease of use and provision of spreadsheet templates for entering the data following its collection.

Q-sort analysis looks for both distinguishing and consensus statements (Coogan and Herrington 2011; Ramlo 2012). Distinguishing statements help to define what makes each viewpoint unique: statements that people in a specific factor rank very differently to people in other factors. Consensus statements are statements that everyone, no matter which factor they belong to, rank in a similar way. Finding those areas of agreement can be of significant value to the overall aims of the research. Brown (1993) described the creation of a ‘composite Q sort’: a model that represents the overall perspective of each group.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Although the results of a Q Methodological study can be presented numerically and in tabular format (Woods 2011; Lundberg *et al.* 2020; Espartinez 2024), one of the distinguishing aspects of Q Methodology, according to Woods (2011), is the ‘production of a set of verbal accounts that

summarize distinct viewpoints and that are readily accessible to a wide audience' (p.333). Shephard and Furnari (2013) do this masterfully in their study of the views of HE lecturers regarding Education for Sustainability, in which four factors are represented by a kind of position statement written in the first person. The exceptional readability of their results and the potential, therefore, to reach a wide audience (Woods 2011) has led me to the decision to use this approach for the presentation of the findings of this research (see Figure 1 for example paragraph presentation of findings).

2. CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore the perspectives of HE practitioners regarding the purpose of higher education, their professional identities within that field, and the degree to which their views on the purpose of HE impact the development of an integrated identity. In building a bridge between qualitative and quantitative methods (Shephard and Furnari 2013), Q Methodology seeks to measure subjectivity in a systematic way (Brown 1993; Stenner 2022). It is not about finding broad trends, but about mapping out the different ways of thinking that exist within a group. It is thus reliable and valid for a small-scale study such as this, where the results are not intended to be generalisable, but seek to inform approaches to staff development at one higher education institution. Indeed, van Exel and de Graaf (2005) emphasise that the important factor in the reliability of a Q Methodological study is 'replicability' (p.3): can similar studies with different people and slightly different Q sets reveal similar viewpoints? Will the same underlying subjective structures emerge again and again? In that sense Q Methodology represents a powerful way to uncover hidden viewpoints and perspectives that are essential for understanding the human experience at a local level.

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Woods, C. (2012) 'Exploring emotion in the higher education workplace: capturing contrasting perspectives using Q methodology', *Higher Education*, 64, pp.891-909. doi: 10.1007/s10734-012-9535-2

Yang, S., Shu, D., and Yin, H. (2021), "'Teaching my passion, publishing my pain": unpacking academics' professional identity tensions through the lens of emotional resilience', *Higher Education*, 84, pp.235-254. doi: 10.1007/s10734-021-00765-w

APPENDIX 1: USING GENERATIVE AI TO DEVELOP THE CONCOURSE

Due to the rapidly evolving nature of GenAI tools, my approach to their use for designing my Q Methodology concourse was experimental. I chose to use Google Gemini as my main tool, given its ability to connect to Google Search to acquire the necessary resources to perform the task required (Imran and Almusharraf 2024). Gemini Deep Research, launched in December 2024 (Citron 2024), follows a prompt by producing a research plan that the user can either approve or edit (ibid.). Once the plan has been approved, the user is able to watch as Gemini reveals the sources it is accessing as it prepares its research report. My initial prompt to Gemini Deep Research can be seen in Appendix 2, along with screenshots of the research progress and sources accessed, leading to the production of a report. The initial report is included in Appendix 3. The original online version of this report, saved in my Chat history, has links to the sources used as footnotes, so the accuracy of the information can be checked.

Having produced a report with a comprehensive overview of the views of higher education practitioners in academic, administrative and support roles, and of the major debates around the purpose of higher education, I attempted to use Gemini Deep Research to turn the report into a numbered list of statements suitable for use in a Q Methodology concourse. However, this resulted in another report, not dissimilar to the first. I consequently tried another Gemini tool, 2.5 Pro (experimental), introduced in March 2025 (Kavukcuoglu 2025), for the final step in development of the concourse by uploading the two Deep Research reports and asking the AI to use them as the basis for development of numbered lists of statements suitable for use in a Q Methodology concourse. After asking the AI to 'redo' its output twice, I achieved a total of 139 statements that could potentially represent the perspectives of higher education practitioners on the purpose of higher education and of their own professional identities. The statements are included in Appendix 5.

APPENDIX 2: GOOGLE GEMINI INITIAL PROMPT AND ‘DEEP RESEARCH’ PROCESS



Research Websites

Can you generate 400 statements appropriate for a Q Methodology concourse on higher education practitioners' perceptions of the purpose of a U.K. higher education, and on higher education practitioners' perceptions of their own self-identities? The statements should be representative of a broad range of viewpoints.

(1) Search for articles and reports discussing the purpose of higher education in the UK from the perspective of academics, administrators, and support staff.

(2) Find opinion pieces and blog posts written by UK higher education practitioners about their roles and responsibilities within their institutions.

(3) Explore websites of UK higher education institutions, looking for mission statements, strategic plans, and faculty profiles that might reveal insights into perceived purpose and self-identity.

(4) Research government publications and policy documents related to higher education in the UK to understand the broader context shaping practitioners' views.

(5) Look for reports or studies that have surveyed or interviewed UK higher education practitioners about their motivations, values, and understanding of their professional roles.

(6) Search for discussions or debates within the UK higher education sector regarding the changing landscape and its impact on the purpose of universities and the identities of those working within them.

(7) Investigate articles exploring the historical evolution of the purpose of UK higher education and how practitioners' roles have changed over time.

(8) Find commentaries or critiques on the current state of UK higher education from various stakeholders, including practitioners, students, and the wider public.



Analyze Results



Create Report

Researching websites

 blogs.manchester.ac.uk S...

 pearl.plymouth.ac.uk Exp...

 ucu.group.shef.ac.uk Wor...

 towersstreet.com Higher ...

 blogs.lse.ac.uk Let's look ...

 tandfonline.com Full articl...

 advance-he.ac.uk Advanc...

 wonkhe.com Staff are wor...

 qaa.ac.uk Instilling interna...

 ahep.ac.uk Central versus...

 heprofessional.co.uk Top ...

 hepi.ac.uk The relationshi...

 journals.uclpress.co.uk C...

 career-advice.jobs.ac.uk T...

 ray.yorks.ac.uk Motivatio...

 advance-he.ac.uk Leader...

 self-compassion.org Moti...

 info.lse.ac.uk Typical Aca...

 gmc-uk.org National traini...

 radar.brookes.ac.uk Acad...

 reddit.com Interview at U...

 advance-he.ac.uk Equalit...

 frontiersin.org The Import...

 hepi.ac.uk Public Attitude...

 tandfonline.com Full articl...

 careers.ed.ac.uk Prepare ...

 ukcge.ac.uk UK Research ...

 theprofessorisin.com The...

 tandfonline.com Full articl...

 prospects.ac.uk Educatio...

 study-uk.britishcouncil.org

 career-advice.jobs.ac.uk W

 targetjobs.co.uk Higher e...

 heprofessional.co.uk The ...

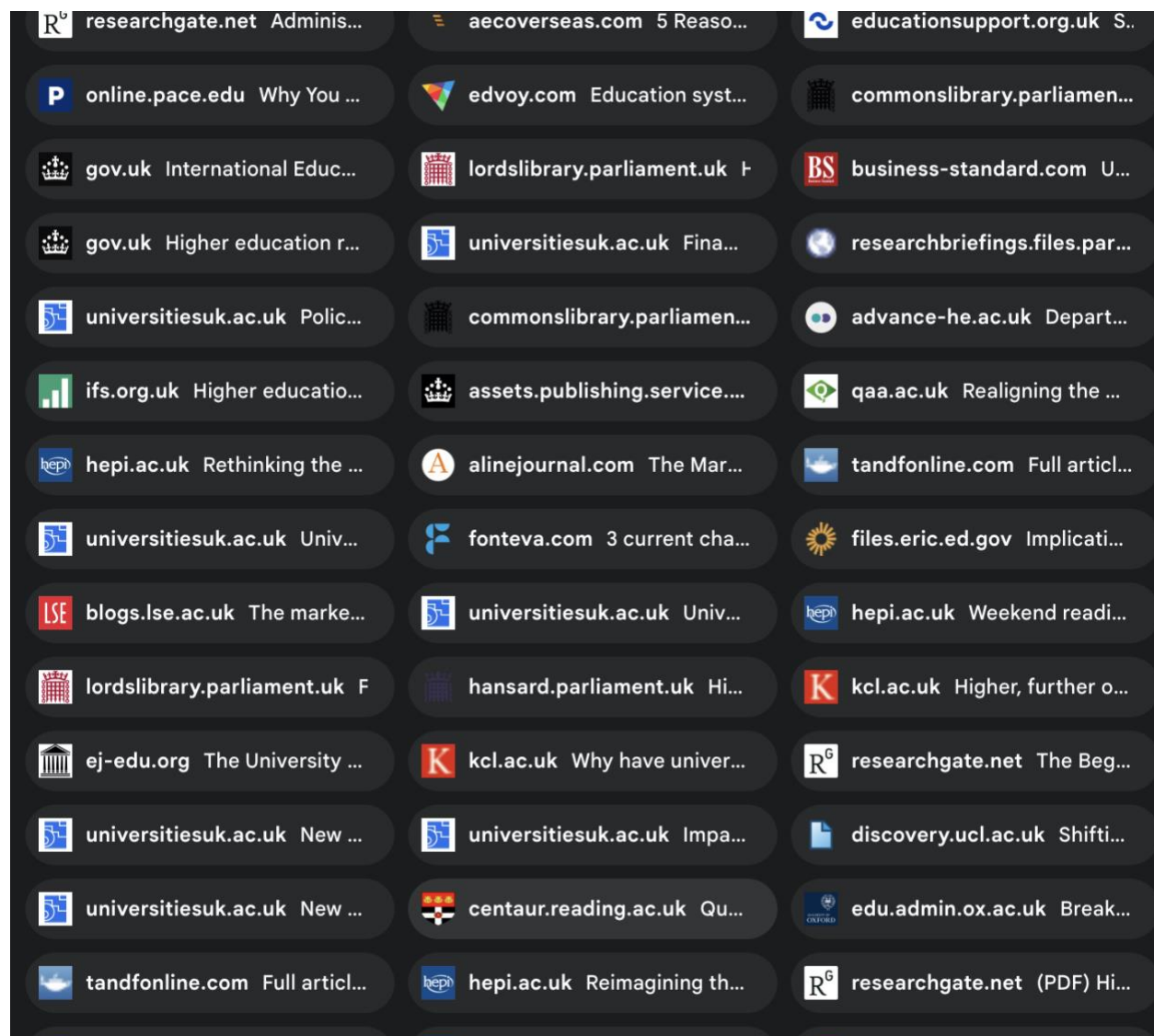
 ivyeducation.co.uk What I...

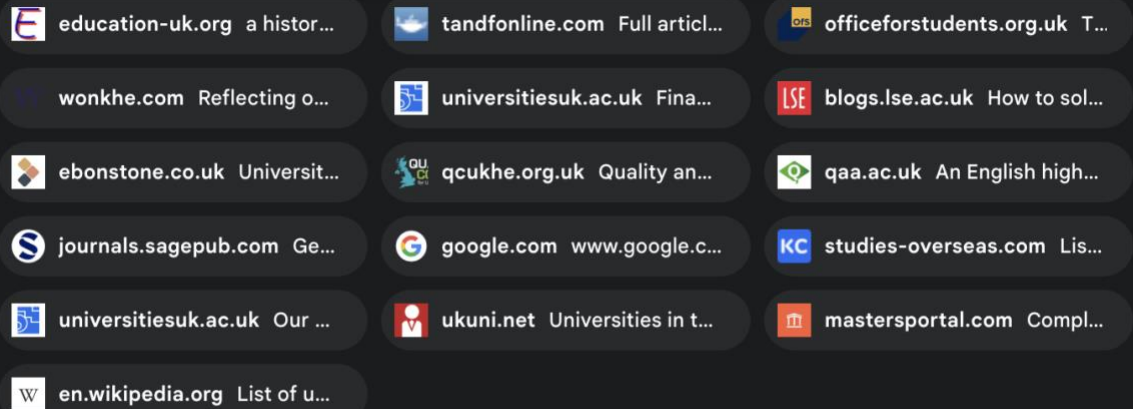
 discovery.ucl.ac.uk Profe...

 oxfordre.com History of E...

 bluesky-education.com W...

 hesa.ac.uk What do highe...





✦ **Key Themes Identified**

I've identified several important areas from the initial search results. These include the academic and research focus of UK universities, their role in career development and economic growth, and the emphasis on personal development and widening access. I also see the importance of government regulation in maintaining standards.

Diverse Practitioner Roles

My research indicates a variety of roles within UK higher education, each with distinct responsibilities. Academics are involved in teaching and research, while administrators manage operations, and support staff provide essential services. Interestingly, the lines between these roles appear to be blurring.

Sector Challenges Highlighted

Several challenges facing UK higher education have emerged, particularly around funding, the impact of marketization, increasing workloads, and maintaining quality. There are also ongoing discussions about government policies and the role of internationalization.

Further Document Exploration

Further Document Exploration

To gain a deeper understanding, I will now browse the websites of key organizations like Universities UK and HEPI, along with specific reports and opinion pieces I've found. This will help me extract more detailed statements for the next stage of my research.

Researching websites

 advance-he.ac.uk Leader...

 targetjobs.co.uk Higher e...

 hepi.ac.uk HEPI - The UK's...

 career-advice.jobs.ac.uk T.

 wonkhe.com Reflecting o...

 blogs.lse.ac.uk The marke...

 universitiesuk.ac.uk Univ...

✦ Emerging Insights on Priorities

I'm noticing a strong emphasis on teaching excellence, research and innovation, and a positive student experience as key priorities for UK higher education. There's also a clear recognition of the sector's significant economic and social contributions.

Understanding Varied Roles

My investigation confirms the diverse nature of roles within UK universities. Academics are seen as researchers, educators, and mentors, while administrators are crucial for institutional efficiency, and support staff play a vital role in the overall functioning. It seems collaboration across these roles is increasingly important.

Next Steps for Deeper Understanding

To build a more comprehensive understanding, I plan to explore the historical evolution of the purpose of UK higher education and the changing roles of practitioners. I will also look into government strategies and delve deeper into the perspectives of support staff using alternative sources.

Researching websites

Researching websites

 thebrandededucation.com T...

 gov.uk Higher education r...

 blogs.ed.ac.uk Staff pers...

 tandfonline.com Full articl...

 lordslibrary.parliament.uk ↑

 commonslibrary.parliamen...

 researchgate.net (PDF) Hi...

 digitalinsights.jisc.ac.uk 2...

 hepi.ac.uk Beyond the Bal...

 assets.publishing.service....

 qaa.ac.uk Life in pandemi...

 researchgate.net Higher e...

 policyconnect.org.uk Hig...

 tandfonline.com Full articl...

 advance-he.ac.uk Equalit...

 researchgate.net (PDF) T...

 ej-edu.org www.ej-edu.org

 gov.uk International Educ...

◆ Support Staff Insights

I've gained new insights into the perspectives of support staff in UK higher education. While a dedicated survey is unavailable, information from university blogs and reports on equality and wellbeing indicates that support staff have diverse roles and experiences that are crucial to the functioning of universities.

Evolution of Purpose

My research into the history of UK higher education reveals a significant transformation in its purpose. Initially focused on elite education and religious training, it has broadened to encompass professional training, wider access, research, and contributing to societal development.

Policy Priorities

Analyzing current UK government policy documents highlights key priorities for higher education, including financial stability, maintaining quality, ensuring access, and emphasizing graduate outcomes and the sector's economic impact.

Practitioners' Perceptions of Purpose and Self-Identity in UK Higher Education

1. Introduction

This report outlines the diverse perceptions held by practitioners within the United Kingdom's higher education sector regarding the fundamental purposes of UK higher education and their own professional self-identities within this dynamic environment. Understanding these perceptions is crucial in the current evolving landscape, characterized by financial pressures, policy reforms, and shifting societal expectations. This analysis draws upon a range of documents, including government publications, sector reports, academic articles, and opinion pieces, to identify key themes and nuances in how academics, administrators, and support staff view their roles and the overarching aims of higher education institutions in the UK.

2. Purpose of UK Higher Education: Practitioners' Perspectives

A dominant perspective on the purpose of UK higher education centres on its contribution to the economy and the development of a skilled workforce.¹ Numerous sources emphasize the role of universities in producing graduates equipped with the necessary skills for successful careers, thereby fuelling economic growth and fostering innovation. Terms such as "career prospects," "employability," and "skills needed for a well-developed career" frequently appear in discussions about the value proposition of a UK education.² The consistently high global rankings of UK universities underscore the perceived quality of this education in preparing individuals for the demands of various industries, including technology, business, arts, engineering, and healthcare.¹ This emphasis on employability, while seen as a key purpose, potentially creates a tension with the broader academic and personal development goals traditionally associated with higher education. Practitioners may hold differing views on whether the primary aim should be vocational training or a more holistic cultivation of intellectual and personal growth. The significant reliance of UK universities on fees from international students introduces another layer of complexity to the perceived purpose.⁹ This financial imperative might lead institutions, and consequently their staff, to prioritize programs that are attractive to the international market, potentially influencing the diversity of academic offerings or the focus on specific domestic needs. Furthermore, government policies that increasingly emphasize "gainful employment" as a key outcome of higher education further solidify the economic purpose in the minds of practitioners, potentially shaping curriculum design and the provision of student support services.¹⁶

Another fundamental purpose attributed to UK higher education is its role as a hub for research and innovation.¹ The UK boasts a strong international reputation for its research output, with universities being at the forefront of groundbreaking discoveries and advancements across a wide range of disciplines. This aligns with the traditional academic purpose of universities as centers for the creation and dissemination of knowledge. The interconnectedness of research and teaching suggests that practitioners may view their purpose as contributing to both the expansion of knowledge and the education of future generations of researchers.¹ The growing emphasis on university start-ups and knowledge exchange indicates an evolving purpose that extends beyond academia to include the translation of research into tangible economic and societal benefits.¹⁹ The increasing importance placed on the impact of research might lead practitioners to perceive their purpose not only in conducting research but also in actively demonstrating its relevance and benefits to the wider world.²¹ However, the ongoing debate surrounding the relationship between teaching and research reveals differing perceptions

among practitioners regarding the priority and the degree to which these two core functions are integrated.¹⁷

Beyond economic and research contributions, the purpose of UK higher education is also seen through the lens of individual development and the cultivation of broad learning.¹ Discussions highlight the development of "fresh ideas," "critical thinking," "problem-solving skills," and "independent thinking" as crucial outcomes of a university education.¹ This perspective emphasizes a more holistic aim, focusing on the intellectual and personal growth of students, extending beyond the acquisition of specific job-related skills. The idea of "learning to see things differently" suggests a transformative role for universities in shaping individuals' perspectives and fostering intellectual curiosity.¹ This broader learning purpose, however, can sometimes be at odds with the increasing emphasis on employability, creating a point of discussion among practitioners who may hold different views on which aspect should take precedence in defining the core purpose of higher education.

Furthermore, the purpose of UK higher education is increasingly linked to social mobility and widening participation.³ There is a recognized role for universities in ensuring "equitable access to higher education for all" and addressing "social inequity" by providing opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to improve their life chances.³ Practitioners directly involved in widening participation initiatives may hold a stronger conviction in this as a central purpose compared to colleagues whose roles are more focused on research or other areas.²⁵

Finally, the global engagement and reputation of UK higher education are significant aspects of its perceived purpose.¹ The UK's "world-famous universities" and its standing as a "world-leading destination for students" underscore the importance of maintaining a strong global presence.¹ International research collaboration and the attraction of talented international students are also seen as key purposes, contributing to the UK's academic standing and global influence. The financial reliance on international students intertwines with this global engagement purpose, potentially creating a complex set of motivations for both institutions and the practitioners working within them. While global engagement offers academic and cultural enrichment, the underlying financial considerations might, at times, influence practitioners' perceptions of the primary drivers behind this particular purpose.

3. Academics' Self-Identities: Practitioners' Perspectives

Academics within UK higher education often identify strongly with their roles as researchers and knowledge creators.²¹ Research is frequently highlighted as a core function, with expectations around securing funding, publishing scholarly work, and making meaningful contributions to their respective fields. This identity is deeply rooted in disciplinary expertise and the pursuit of advancing the frontiers of knowledge. However, the increasing pressure to consistently obtain research grants and publish in high-impact journals can introduce significant stress, potentially impacting academics' self-perception as primarily driven by intellectual curiosity rather than external pressures for career advancement.²² The prevailing "publish or perish" culture can inadvertently shift the focus from the intrinsic rewards of discovery to the more extrinsic demands of career progression.

Furthermore, academics widely identify as teachers and mentors, playing a crucial role in shaping the learning and development of students.²¹ This involves a significant commitment to preparing and delivering lectures, assessing student work, and providing guidance and supervision. Many academics find genuine reward in the interaction with students and the opportunity to impart knowledge and foster intellectual growth. Nevertheless, the persistent

challenge of effectively balancing research responsibilities with teaching demands can lead to internal conflicts in academics' self-identity.²² In many universities, research output is often perceived as carrying greater weight in promotion considerations compared to teaching excellence, potentially leading some academics to feel pressured to prioritize research, even if they are deeply committed to their role as educators.

While their primary identities often revolve around research and teaching, academics also undertake a range of administrative and managerial duties.²¹ These responsibilities can include serving as module convenors, participating in departmental meetings, and providing pastoral support to students. While these tasks are essential for the functioning of academic units, they are not typically the core of an academic's professional identity. The growing administrative burden reported by many academics can detract valuable time from their research and teaching activities, potentially leading to frustration and a feeling that their fundamental academic identity is being eroded by bureaucratic demands.²⁹

Finally, academics in UK higher education increasingly see themselves as navigators of significant change and uncertainty within the sector.²² They face ongoing challenges related to securing research funding, managing increasing student numbers, adapting to the "student as consumer" mentality, dealing with heavy workloads, and embracing the rapid shift towards e-learning. The growing prevalence of precarious employment models, such as fixed-term contracts and teaching-only roles, further contributes to this sense of uncertainty.³⁴ This evolving landscape can significantly impact academics' sense of professional security and their long-term identity within the higher education sector. The rise of precarious employment, in particular, might lead to feelings of anxiety and a reduced sense of investment in the institution, ultimately shaping how these academics perceive their professional identity and future within the field.

4. Administrators' Self-Identities: Practitioners' Perspectives

Administrators in UK higher education perceive their role as fundamentally supporting the academic mission of universities.³⁷ They see themselves as essential in ensuring the smooth operation of institutions by effectively managing a wide array of organizational and financial tasks. Their contributions are viewed as vital to the overall success of higher education institutions, enabling academics to focus on their core responsibilities of teaching and research. This recognition of their importance suggests a growing sense of professional value and identity that extends beyond simply being categorized as "support" staff.³⁹

Administrators also strongly identify with their expertise in managing complex institutional processes.³⁷ Their responsibilities encompass diverse areas such as student admissions, quality assurance mechanisms, data management and analysis, the administration of examinations, financial management, marketing and communications, and human resources functions. This wide range of specialized tasks contributes to administrators' perception of themselves as professionals possessing distinct skills and knowledge crucial for the effective functioning of a university. The increasing professionalization and specialization within administrative roles further bolster this sense of professional identity, offering clearer pathways for career progression and the development of deeper expertise within specific domains.⁴⁰

Furthermore, administrators see themselves as key facilitators of both the student and staff experience within higher education.³⁸ They play a significant role in student recruitment, providing essential support services to students throughout their academic journey, and working to enhance the overall student experience. Administrators also directly support academic staff

by managing various administrative tasks, allowing academics to concentrate on their teaching and research. The growing emphasis on collaboration between academic and professional services staff indicates a positive shift towards a more integrated professional identity within the broader higher education community.⁴⁰ This collaborative environment fosters a shared sense of purpose and contributes to a more unified professional identity across different functional roles within the university.

Finally, administrators identify as crucial navigators of efficiency and change within the higher education sector.⁹ They are responsible for managing institutional budgets, implementing new policies and procedures, and adapting to the ever-evolving challenges and reforms in the higher education landscape, including financial constraints and the increasing demand for standardization across different functions. This requires administrators to be proactive and responsive in ensuring the efficient and effective operation of the university in a constantly changing environment. However, the potential tension between the desire for centralized consistency and the need for localized, flexible support for academic departments can lead to differing perceptions among administrators regarding their autonomy and their ability to directly address the specific needs of academic units.⁴² Administrators in central roles might prioritize university-wide standardization, while those embedded within specific departments may place a higher value on flexibility and the ability to provide tailored support, ultimately shaping their professional identity in distinct ways.

5. Support Staff's Self-Identities: Practitioners' Perspectives

Support staff in UK higher education identify as essential contributors to the fundamental operations of their institutions.⁴¹ Their roles, encompassing a wide array of non-teaching positions, are recognized as vital for maintaining the managerial and regulatory framework that allows teaching staff to concentrate on their core educational responsibilities. This acknowledgment of their crucial function suggests a growing awareness of their importance within the broader higher education context, extending beyond the traditional perception of merely providing assistance.⁴³

Furthermore, support staff see themselves as providers of diverse and highly specialized services.⁴³ Their responsibilities span various critical areas, including administration and management, direct student support services, the management and maintenance of estates and facilities, the provision of library resources, and essential corporate and operational support functions such as human resources, finance and accounting, marketing and communications, and information technology. This diverse range of specialized roles contributes to support staff's perception of themselves as professionals possessing distinct and valuable skills within their respective fields. The increasing complexity and specialization inherent in these support roles likely enhance their sense of professional identity within their specific domains of expertise.⁴⁰

Support staff also recognize their significant role as enablers of student success and wellbeing.⁴¹ Those in student-facing roles, such as attendance officers, progress coaches, careers advisors, and counsellors, play a direct part in fostering a positive and supportive environment for students, addressing their wellbeing needs, and contributing to their overall academic and personal development. This focus on student-centered duties indicates a strong connection to the overarching educational mission of the university, reinforcing support staff's sense of purpose and contribution.

Finally, support staff identify as integral contributors to the overall institutional culture and infrastructure.⁴¹ Roles within estates and facilities management ensure the physical

environment is conducive to learning and working. Professionals in human resources, finance, marketing, and IT contribute to the effective administration, financial stability, public image, and technological backbone of the university. These diverse roles collectively shape the overall functioning and atmosphere of the institution, making support staff feel like essential components of the university's ecosystem. The increasing emphasis on career development opportunities specifically for professional services staff signals a growing recognition of their value and a commitment to their professional growth. This investment in their development can further enhance their sense of belonging, professional identity, and long-term commitment to the higher education sector.

6. Current State and Future of UK Higher Education: Practitioners' Perspectives

Practitioners across UK higher education are acutely aware of the significant financial challenges and sustainability concerns currently facing the sector.⁹ The combination of frozen tuition fees for domestic students, rising operational costs, an increasing reliance on international student enrollment, and, in some cases, reduced government funding has created a precarious financial situation for many institutions. The uncertainty surrounding long-term funding models and the potential for institutional restructuring or even bankruptcies are likely sources of anxiety and instability for practitioners in all roles. Differing opinions may exist among practitioners regarding the most effective strategies to address these financial pressures, with potential debates around the merits of increased government investment, adjustments to tuition fee structures, or the exploration of alternative funding sources.

The increasing marketization of higher education and the heightened competition between universities are also prominent features of the current landscape that shape practitioners' perspectives.²² The rise of the "student as consumer" mentality and the emphasis on institutional rankings can lead to diverse reactions among practitioners. Some might see the market-driven approach as fostering efficiency and responsiveness, while others may critique it for potentially prioritizing financial gains and marketing over core educational values and the overall ethos of higher education.

Maintaining quality and academic standards in the face of these challenges remains a central concern for practitioners.¹ The UK higher education sector has long enjoyed a strong domestic and international reputation for its quality, and practitioners are likely committed to upholding these standards. However, the ongoing debate surrounding the English quality assurance system and its divergence from internationally recognized frameworks may raise concerns among practitioners about the potential impact on the global standing and recognition of UK degrees.

Widespread issues of heavy workloads, stress, and burnout among both academic and professional services staff are significant aspects of the current state of UK higher education that profoundly affect practitioners' experiences.²⁹ The perception of unmanageable workloads can lead to feelings of disillusionment and negatively impact practitioners' sense of professional fulfilment and wellbeing.

Finally, the higher education sector is experiencing a period of significant evolution in the roles and responsibilities of its workforce.²¹ The growth in teaching-focused academic positions, the increasing professionalization of administrative roles, and the blurring of traditional boundaries between academic and non-academic staff are all contributing to a changing professional landscape. Practitioners are actively adapting to these shifts, which, in turn, can influence their professional self-identities and their understanding of their purpose within the evolving higher education environment. The emergence of "third space" professionals who operate at the

intersection of academic and administrative functions may lead to the development of new, hybrid professional identities within the sector.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of various sources reveals a multifaceted understanding of the purpose of UK higher education, encompassing economic contributions, research and innovation, individual development, social mobility, and global engagement. Practitioners' perceptions of their own self-identities are equally diverse, shaped by their specific roles as academics, administrators, or support staff, and influenced by the current challenges and transformations within the sector. The financial pressures, the impact of marketization, the imperative to maintain quality, the pervasive issues of workload and wellbeing, and the evolving nature of roles and responsibilities all contribute to a complex and dynamic environment that shapes how practitioners perceive their purpose and their professional selves within UK higher education. The insights gleaned from this analysis provide a robust foundation for generating a comprehensive set of statements suitable for a Q Methodology concourse, aiming to capture the breadth and depth of these diverse perspectives.

Table 1: Summary of Perceived Purposes of UK Higher Education

Purpose Theme	Illustrative Keywords/Phrases
Economic Contribution & Skills	Career prospects, employability, skills needed for a well-developed career, economic impact, meeting demands of various sectors, gainful employment, vocational training.
Research & Innovation	Research, innovation, knowledge creation, groundbreaking discoveries, advancements, research-informed teaching, university start-ups, knowledge exchange, impact of research, real-world relevance.
Individual Development & Learning	Fresh ideas, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, independent thinking, deep understanding, learning to see things differently, intellectual and personal growth, transformative role.
Social Mobility & Participation	Equitable access, social inequity, widening access, opportunities for diverse backgrounds, improve life chances, social responsibility.
Global Engagement & Reputation	World-famous universities, world-leading destination, international reputation, attract international talent, global research partnerships, international collaboration, global standing, international influence.

Table 2: Key Aspects of Practitioners' Self-Identities

Practitioner Group	Key Aspects of Self-Identity
Academics	Researchers and knowledge creators, teachers and mentors, administrators and managers (to a degree), navigators of change and uncertainty, disciplinary experts.
Administrators	Supporters of the academic mission, managers of institutional processes, facilitators of student and staff experience, navigators of efficiency and change, specialized professionals.
Support Staff	Essential contributors to university operations, providers of diverse and specialized services, enablers of student success and wellbeing, contributors to institutional culture and infrastructure, integral to the university ecosystem.

APPENDIX 4: GOOGLE GEMINI'S SECOND REPORT IN RESPONSE TO THE PROMPT,
'CAN YOU DEVELOP THIS REPORT INTO A NUMBERED LIST OF STATEMENTS THAT
HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS MIGHT MAKE TO EXPRESS WHAT THEY
THINK ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, ABOUT THEIR OWN
PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES AND ABOUT HOW THEIR VIEW OF THE PURPOSE OF
HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMS THEIR SENSE OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY?'

The Purpose and Role of Higher Education in the UK: A Comprehensive Analysis

I. Executive Summary:

The landscape of higher education in the United Kingdom is characterized by an evolving and multifaceted purpose, navigating the complex interplay between economic imperatives and broader academic and societal aspirations. This report synthesizes diverse perspectives from practitioners, academics, students, and the government to provide a comprehensive understanding of this dynamic sector. While the economic contribution of universities, particularly in producing skilled workers and driving innovation, is a dominant theme, significant tensions exist with the pursuit of knowledge, holistic personal development, and the broader social and cultural responsibilities of these institutions. The sector currently faces considerable challenges, including financial constraints, the impact of marketization, and the imperative to adapt to a rapidly changing global environment. Ultimately, a balanced and holistic understanding of the various objectives of UK higher education is essential to ensure its continued success and relevance in the years to come.

II. Introduction: Setting the Context - The Multifaceted Nature of UK Higher Education:

The higher education sector in the UK represents a complex and dynamic ecosystem, holding a position of historical significance and boasting a strong global reputation.¹ This report endeavours to address the fundamental question of the purpose and role of higher education in the UK in the contemporary 21st century. Numerous stakeholders are deeply invested in this sector, each bringing their own set of expectations and priorities. Students seek personal growth, the acquisition of valuable skills, and enhanced career prospects.³ Academics are driven by the pursuit of knowledge through research and are dedicated to the education of future generations.⁵ University administrators are tasked with the complex responsibility of managing institutions effectively and ensuring their financial sustainability.⁷ The government plays a crucial role in setting policy frameworks, allocating funding, and defining strategic priorities for the sector.⁸ Employers look to universities to produce highly skilled and adaptable graduates who can contribute to the workforce and drive economic growth.⁹ Finally, society as a whole holds expectations regarding the broader contributions of universities to social progress, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement.¹⁰ This report will explore these diverse perspectives and the inherent tensions that arise from them, examining the economic contributions, the pursuit of research and innovation, the delicate balance between economic and academic aims, the various viewpoints on the core purpose, the historical evolution of the sector, its wider societal impact, the current challenges it faces, and ultimately, offer a perspective on the future outlook for UK higher education.

III. The Economic Imperative: Driving Growth and Employability:

Universities UK consistently underscores the significant economic impact generated by the higher education sector in the UK, quantifying its contribution in billions of pounds annually and highlighting its crucial role in fostering job creation across various industries.¹⁰ This robust economic activity positions universities as key engines of national prosperity. Governmental policies and strategic documents frequently articulate a vision of higher education as a vital instrument for cultivating a highly skilled workforce, thereby fuelling national economic growth and enhancing the UK's competitive standing in the global landscape.¹⁶ This perspective often prioritizes educational outputs that are directly applicable and relevant to the evolving demands of the labour market. The increasing emphasis placed on the establishment and growth of university start-ups and the active promotion of knowledge exchange initiatives illustrate a deliberate strategic shift towards universities assuming a more direct and tangible role in generating both economic and societal benefits through the translation of research into innovative products, services, and enterprises.¹⁴ Recent analyses reveal a notable surge in the number of start-up companies originating from UK universities, projecting substantial future turnover and the creation of numerous employment opportunities, indicative of a burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem within these institutions.²¹ Reports commissioned by Universities UK from London Economics further underscore the significant return on public investment in higher education, demonstrating the sector's efficiency in delivering both economic advantages and broader societal benefits to the nation.¹⁵ The substantial economic contributions made by international students, not only through tuition fees but also via their spending and broader economic activity during and after their studies, are consistently acknowledged, highlighting the global appeal and considerable financial significance of UK higher education.¹²

A central and frequently stated responsibility of UK universities is the preparation of graduates for successful and fulfilling careers [User Query 2, 4]. This objective reflects a growing expectation from students who invest significant time and resources in their education, as well as from the government and the wider public who view higher education as a pathway to economic opportunity. Consequently, the perceived value of a UK education is increasingly and directly linked to its capacity to improve graduates' career prospects and enhance their overall employability in a competitive job market.²³ In response to this imperative, universities are actively developing and promoting a wide range of employability programs, including internships, work placements, and career guidance services, all designed to equip their graduates with the practical skills and professional attributes necessary to thrive in their chosen fields and to effectively meet the evolving needs of employers.²³ Furthermore, government policies and regulatory frameworks are increasingly emphasizing graduate outcomes, such as rates of employment and levels of earnings, as key performance indicators for evaluating the overall success and societal value of higher education provision.¹⁸

The strong and consistent emphasis on the economic contributions and the paramount importance of graduate employability across a wide array of sources strongly suggests a dominant instrumental view of UK higher education. Its primary worth is increasingly being assessed based on its direct and measurable impact on the national economy and its effectiveness in preparing individuals for the workforce. This trend is likely fuelled by evolving government funding models that often link financial support to demonstrable economic outcomes, the implementation of performance metrics that prioritize graduate employment statistics, and broader societal expectations in an increasingly competitive global economic landscape. However, this economic focus is not without its vulnerabilities. The significant reliance on tuition fees paid by international students to cross-subsidize a substantial portion of both teaching and research activities within UK universities represents a critical financial fragility within the sector's overall economic model.²⁴ Recent and potential future declines in the number of international students enrolling in UK institutions, driven by shifts in government immigration

policies and evolving global economic factors, pose a considerable threat to the financial sustainability of many universities across the UK.²⁴ This over-dependence on international student revenue creates a degree of instability and underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive re-evaluation of existing funding models to ensure the long-term viability and resilience of the sector.

Year	Tuition Fees (Domestic)	Tuition Fees (International)	Funding Body Grants	Research Grants & Contracts	Other Income
2011/12	64%	5%	39%	N/A	N/A
2016/17	31%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2021/22	28%	23%	12%	14%	23%
2022/23	N/A	N/A	12%	14%	24%

Note: Data compiled from.²⁵ Percentages may not always add up to 100% due to rounding and variations in data availability across sources.

This table illustrates the increasing proportion of income derived from tuition fees, particularly from international students, and the corresponding decrease in direct funding from government grants over the past decade, highlighting the growing financial reliance on international student enrolment.

IV. The Pursuit of Knowledge: Research, Innovation, and Academic Advancement:

UK higher education is unequivocally recognized as a vital national and international centre for pioneering research and innovation, serving as a crucial engine for intellectual progress and driving significant advancements across a diverse range of fields.¹ Universities throughout the UK are consistently at the forefront of groundbreaking scientific, technological, and societal discoveries and advancements, making substantial contributions to the ever-expanding global knowledge base.³⁵ A fundamental and enduring academic purpose of these institutions is the creation, rigorous investigation, and widespread dissemination of knowledge across an extensive spectrum of disciplines.²² This traditional and intrinsic role remains a core value underpinning the very existence of universities. Academic practitioners within UK universities widely perceive their professional responsibility as actively contributing to both the continuous expansion of human understanding through original research endeavours and the dedicated education and comprehensive training of future generations of researchers who will carry this vital work forward.⁶ The extensive research and innovative activities undertaken by universities across the UK not only advance the frontiers of knowledge but also generate a substantial and measurable economic return for the nation, demonstrating the practical application and successful commercialization of academically generated insights and discoveries.¹³ Analysis conducted by the Russell Group, representing leading research-intensive universities, highlights the significant impact of public investment in this sector, demonstrating that for every £1 of public funds strategically allocated to research within their member institutions, a considerable multiple is generated for the broader UK economy, underscoring the efficiency and far-reaching impact of research-focused universities.¹³

The process of recruiting academic staff within UK universities, as clearly evidenced by the established interview practices for lecturer positions, places a strong and consistent emphasis on candidates' articulated research vision, their demonstrable ability to attract external research funding through competitive grant applications, and their established track record of publishing original research findings in reputable, peer-reviewed academic journals.⁴⁶ Securing research grants from prestigious funding bodies, such as the UK Research Councils, is widely acknowledged as a highly competitive and demanding process, necessitating that researchers develop not only innovative project proposals but also robust contingency plans and the capacity to explore diverse alternative funding avenues to support their scholarly work.⁴⁶ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) serves as a critical and influential mechanism for rigorously evaluating the quality and broader impact of research conducted within UK universities, playing a significant role in the allocation of research funding and shaping institutional reputation both nationally and internationally.⁴⁶ Universities UK actively engages in efforts to secure the necessary financial resources and supportive policies to enable universities across the nation to conduct cutting-edge research across all academic disciplines, recognizing the fundamental importance of this activity to the sector's overall mission.¹² The long-term sustainability and continued international competitiveness of UK university research are fundamentally contingent upon consistent and stable funding commitments, coupled with strategic support and a clear vision from the government.¹²

The often intermittent and unpredictable nature of government funding for research and development initiatives can create disruptions in ongoing projects, potentially hindering the development of essential research infrastructure and the cultivation of specialized expertise within key areas of inquiry.⁵² UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) plays a central and pivotal role in funding a wide array of specific research projects and comprehensive research programs across the UK through its network of seven subject-based Research Councils, as well as through Innovate UK and Research England, demonstrating the government's commitment to supporting research and innovation.⁸

The strong and consistent emphasis on research and innovation throughout the provided materials firmly establishes UK universities as indispensable drivers of both intellectual progress and tangible economic development. Their multifaceted activities extend far beyond the crucial task of educating students, encompassing the active creation of new knowledge, the rigorous testing of existing theories, and the translation of academic insights into practical applications that benefit society as a whole. This dual mission, seamlessly integrating education with the advancement of knowledge, stands as a defining characteristic and a cornerstone of the UK higher education sector.

However, the persistent challenge of securing adequate and sustainable financial support for these vital research activities, particularly when coupled with the increasing reliance on cross-subsidization from other, often financially volatile, income streams such as international student fees, raises significant concerns about the long-term health, vitality, and sustained global competitiveness of UK university research.²⁴ The reported structural deficit in the funding available for research necessitates a critical and comprehensive re-evaluation of existing investment strategies and funding mechanisms. This re-evaluation is essential to ensure that the UK can maintain its hard-earned position as a world leader in research and continue to generate the groundbreaking discoveries that address global challenges and drive future prosperity.

V. Bridging the Divide: Reconciling Economic Goals with Broader Educational Aims:

The provided research material explicitly acknowledges a discernible tension and potential conflict that exists between the increasing economic focus of higher education in the UK, largely driven by governmental policies and funding priorities that emphasize outputs such as graduate employment and economic impact, and the sector's more traditional and broader academic aims, which encompass the pursuit of knowledge for its intrinsic value, the cultivation of critical thinking skills, and the fostering of intellectual curiosity.³⁶ Commentary within the sector suggests that an overemphasis on purely economic outcomes and the increasing influence of marketization principles may inadvertently jeopardize the fundamental and inherent purposes of universities, potentially leading to a narrowing of the overall educational experience and a devaluation of academic disciplines that are not directly and immediately linked to demonstrable economic gains.⁵³ The growing influence of market-driven approaches can also incentivize higher education institutions to prioritize strategies that are primarily aimed at attracting prospective students and maximizing revenue generation, sometimes at the expense of focusing on the diverse academic needs and the holistic development of their current student body, as well as potentially compromising the core values that have historically defined higher education.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the research highlights a potential divergence and even conflict between the strong economic focus that is increasingly shaping higher education and its broader aims that are related to the personal development, overall well-being, and comprehensive growth of individual students.³ Despite the significant economic pressures facing the sector, personal development planning (PDP) is widely recognized and valued within UK universities as an important and integral process for actively supporting students' academic learning, their future career aspirations, and their broader personal growth through self-reflection and the development of essential life skills. Moreover, many universities across the UK are demonstrating an increasing commitment to providing a holistic approach to student well-being, acknowledging the critical importance of addressing mental health challenges, fostering strong social support networks, and cultivating a positive and inclusive campus environment that supports students' overall development alongside their academic pursuits.⁶¹

Despite the prevailing economic narratives, numerous practitioners and academics firmly maintain the belief that a primary and essential purpose of higher education should be the comprehensive and holistic development of students' intellectual capabilities, nurturing their capacity for critical thought, fostering creativity and innovation, and cultivating a lifelong passion for learning and intellectual exploration, rather than solely concentrating on the acquisition of specific vocational skills that are immediately applicable to the job market.⁶³ UK higher education has long been internationally recognized for its distinctive pedagogical approaches that actively encourage independent learning, cultivate strong research skills, and promote students' ability to critically question assumptions, rigorously analyze information, and engage thoughtfully with diverse perspectives.²³ The development of robust critical thinking skills is consistently emphasized as a fundamental and indispensable component of a UK university education, widely valued by both academic institutions and prospective employers as an essential attribute for graduates entering a complex and rapidly evolving world.⁶⁸

The evident tension between the pressing economic demands and the enduring importance of broader academic and personal development aims underscores a fundamental and ongoing debate about the core values and ultimate purpose of higher education within the UK. The increasing pressure to demonstrably evidence economic impact and high rates of graduate employability carries a significant risk of overshadowing the equally vital roles of fostering intellectual curiosity, cultivating sophisticated critical thinking abilities, nurturing holistic personal

growth, and providing a well-rounded educational experience that contributes to the creation of a more informed, engaged, and responsible citizenry. Successfully navigating the complexities of the current higher education landscape necessitates a careful and thoughtful approach to effectively bridging the divide between the immediate economic demands placed upon the sector and the long-term significance of its broader academic and personal development missions. Achieving a sustainable and ethical balance between these often-competing priorities is absolutely crucial for ensuring the continued value, integrity, and overall success of UK higher education in the years to come.

VI. Conflicting Visions: Exploring Different Perspectives on the Core Purpose:

The research material reveals a clear divergence in opinion among practitioners and stakeholders regarding the primary purpose of higher education in the UK. Some strongly advocate that vocational training should constitute the main objective, emphasizing the need for universities to directly prepare graduates with the specific skills and knowledge required for success in particular jobs and industries.⁶⁶ This perspective aligns closely with the economic imperative discussed earlier, viewing higher education as a direct pipeline to employment. Conversely, other practitioners hold the firm belief that the central purpose of higher education should be the holistic development of students' intellectual capacities, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and a deep and comprehensive understanding of their chosen fields of study, even if the immediate and direct vocational application of this knowledge is not the sole or primary focus.⁶³ This viewpoint emphasizes the intrinsic value of learning and the broader societal benefits of an educated populace. The UK higher education system, in its current form, reflects this fundamental duality by offering a diverse range of specialized, career-focused courses and vocational programs alongside more traditional academic degree programs that prioritize theoretical knowledge, in-depth analysis, and intellectual exploration across a wide array of disciplines.²³ While government policies increasingly emphasize the importance of graduate employability and the alignment of higher education with the needs of the labor market, they also acknowledge the necessity of providing a high-quality academic experience, suggesting a complex and at times seemingly conflicting set of priorities that the sector must navigate.¹⁸

Academics within UK universities hold diverse perspectives on the intricate relationship between teaching and research, with varying opinions on the ideal balance and the most effective ways to integrate these two core functions of their professional roles.³⁶ Historically, governments in the UK, across different political ideologies, have often exhibited a degree of skepticism regarding the inherent value of a strong and direct link between teaching and research activities within universities. Instead, governmental priorities have frequently focused on other objectives, such as the expansion of student enrollment numbers or the establishment of separate accountability mechanisms for the distinct functions of teaching and research.³⁶ The increasing trend towards the structural separation of teaching-focused and research-focused roles within universities is identified as a significant development that carries both potential benefits, such as enabling institutions to accommodate larger numbers of students, and potential drawbacks, particularly in terms of the overall quality of university practices and the formulation of effective government policy for the sector.³⁶ Research into the motivations of academics indicates that they are primarily driven by an intrinsic desire for intellectual expertise and a profound search for meaning in their scholarly pursuits, with material rewards and the pursuit of institutional power playing a comparatively less significant role in their core motivations.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the increasing prevalence and influence of managerialism within higher education institutions are perceived by some academics as contributing to a reduction in their overall levels of professional motivation, potentially impacting their engagement and effectiveness in both teaching and research endeavors.⁷⁵

The fundamental disagreement regarding the primary purpose of higher education, whether it should prioritize vocational training or holistic intellectual growth, highlights the absence of a singular, universally accepted vision for the sector's core mission within the UK. This divergence in perspectives likely stems from the varied values and differing priorities held by a multitude of stakeholders, including students with diverse career aspirations, academics with strong disciplinary loyalties and pedagogical philosophies, and policymakers who are often primarily concerned with national economic competitiveness and broader societal outcomes. The differing perspectives among academics on the relationship between teaching and research, coupled with the government's historical ambivalence towards their close integration, suggest a potential underappreciation of the significant synergistic benefits that can arise when these two core academic activities are effectively linked and mutually reinforcing. The increasing structural separation of teaching and research roles, while potentially addressing immediate institutional pressures, could inadvertently weaken the overall quality of both by limiting opportunities for teaching that is directly informed by cutting-edge research and by potentially hindering the development of essential research skills among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The lack of a clear consensus on the main purpose of UK higher education, combined with these differing views on the value of integrating teaching and research, presents a complex and multifaceted challenge for effective strategic planning and coherent policy development within the sector. Addressing these conflicting visions will necessitate a careful and nuanced consideration of the diverse needs, expectations, and values of all stakeholders involved in and impacted by UK higher education.

VII. A Historical Perspective: The Transformation of UK Higher Education's Role:

Historically, the earliest forms of higher education in the UK, dating back centuries, primarily served a relatively small segment of society, functioning largely as finishing schools for the aristocracy and playing a central role in the training of religious leaders and the dissemination of theological knowledge.³⁷ The 19th century witnessed a significant and transformative shift in the landscape of UK higher education with the emergence and growth of civic universities in major commercial and industrial urban centers. This development was largely driven by the increasing need for a more practical and relevant curriculum that could effectively address the evolving demands of the burgeoning industrial era and the expanding middle class, leading to a greater emphasis on professional and vocational training.³⁸ Over the course of the 19th century, the fundamental purpose of higher education gradually broadened to encompass research as a key and integral element, mirroring concurrent developments and advancements in other leading nations around the world, such as Germany and the United States, which were rapidly establishing themselves as centres of scientific inquiry.³⁹ The 20th and the early decades of the 21st century have been characterized by further significant reconfigurations of the purpose of UK higher education, including a democratic reconfiguration aimed at widening access to a larger and more diverse student population, and an ongoing economic and societal reconfiguration driven by the forces of globalization and the increasing prominence of the knowledge-based economy.⁷⁶ Following the end of World War II in 1945, higher education became more widely accepted as a crucial social instrument and a vital agency for promoting social progress and individual opportunity, with a growing emphasis placed on the principles of equality of opportunity and enhanced social mobility for individuals from all backgrounds.⁴² More recently, the latter decades of the 20th and the early years of the 21st century have seen a noticeable increase in the level of interest from the government in areas such as institutional accountability, the quality of teaching provision, and the development of specific mechanisms to recognize and reward excellence in teaching, alongside the long-standing and continued focus on research outputs and impact.⁷⁷ Finally, the increasing influence of marketization principles

within higher education, particularly since the 1980s, has profoundly shaped both its fundamental purpose and its overall function, introducing concepts of competition among institutions, viewing students increasingly as consumers of educational services, and placing a greater emphasis on the direct economic outcomes and the demonstrable employability of graduates.⁵³

Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the historical evolution of the purposes that have shaped UK higher education is absolutely essential for accurately interpreting its current multifaceted role within society and for appreciating the inherent tensions and complexities that continue to exist within the sector. The fundamental purpose of higher education in the UK has been far from static or monolithic; rather, it has continuously adapted and responded to significant shifts in societal values, evolving political priorities, and changing economic realities over the course of many centuries. Recognizing this dynamic historical trajectory is not merely an academic exercise but is absolutely crucial for informing effective policymaking and developing robust strategic plans for the future of the sector. By understanding how the purpose of universities has shifted from primarily serving a small elite to embracing mass education and increasingly focusing on direct economic contributions, we can gain a much deeper appreciation for the current priorities that drive the sector and the underlying origins of many of the ongoing debates and tensions that characterize higher education in the UK today.

VIII. Beyond the Curriculum: Social, Cultural, and Civic Contributions of Universities:

Beyond their well-established roles in teaching and research, UK universities play a significant and increasingly recognized role in contributing to the social, cultural, and civic life of their local communities and the nation as a whole.¹⁰ These institutions support their communities through a diverse array of initiatives, ranging from extensive volunteer programs that engage students and staff, to providing expert advice and resources to local charities and non-profit organizations, and by offering public access to their valuable facilities, including libraries, sports centres, and museums.¹⁰ Furthermore, universities are increasingly acknowledged as vital drivers of social mobility and agents for widening participation in higher education, actively working to improve access for individuals from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby promoting greater equity and opportunity across society.⁴² The concept of the 'civic university' has gained prominence, emphasizing the crucial role of higher education institutions in actively engaging with and contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of their local and regional communities through the sharing of knowledge, fostering collaborative partnerships, and proactively addressing locally identified needs and challenges. Viewing universities through the lens of social and cultural infrastructure further illuminates their importance as fundamental spaces and providers of services that actively foster community cohesion, strengthen vital social and cultural ties, and contribute significantly to the overall vibrancy and resilience of their surrounding localities.³⁵

UK universities also make substantial and often overlooked contributions to cultural enrichment and the promotion of global citizenship.¹¹ They actively support cultural engagement and the flourishing of creative industries through their investment in arts programs, the maintenance of cultural institutions on their campuses, and the development of collaborative partnerships with a wide range of creative organizations both locally and nationally.¹¹ Moreover, universities play a pivotal role in fostering global citizenship among their students by attracting a diverse body of learners from across the globe, actively promoting international research collaborations that transcend national borders, and offering a growing number of academic programs specifically

focused on global issues, intercultural understanding, and the development of responsible global citizens.²²

Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition within the higher education sector of the fundamental responsibility that universities hold in promoting robust civic and democratic education among their student populations, with the aim of equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become active, informed, and engaged citizens throughout their lives.¹¹⁰ Universities are actively exploring and implementing a variety of innovative practices and initiatives designed to support democratic participation among their students, such as facilitating voter registration drives on campus, hosting local, regional, and national election events and debates, and providing regular opportunities for students to engage directly with political processes and elected officials.¹¹⁰

The role of UK higher education clearly extends beyond its well-documented contributions to the economy and the advancement of academic knowledge. Universities serve as vital anchors within their communities and make significant and increasingly recognized contributions to the broader social, cultural, and civic fabric of society. This multifaceted societal impact is now understood as an integral and essential dimension of their overall purpose and the considerable value they bring to the nation.

IX. Navigating the Current Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities in UK Higher Education:

The UK higher education sector is currently navigating a complex and often turbulent landscape, facing a multitude of interconnected challenges that demand strategic attention and innovative solutions. Foremost among these are the significant and growing financial pressures that are impacting institutions across the nation. These pressures stem from a combination of factors, including a sustained decrease in the real-terms unit of funding provided for domestic students, the prolonged freezing of undergraduate tuition fee caps despite rising inflation, increasing operational costs across various institutional functions, and ongoing constraints on funding available for research activities.⁸ These financial realities have ignited ongoing and often intense debates within the sector and among policymakers regarding the adequacy and long-term sustainability of current funding models, prompting serious discussions about potential alternative funding mechanisms that could provide greater stability and support for universities in the future, such as increasing direct teaching grants, implementing a graduate tax system, or introducing a levy on graduate employers.²⁵

The increasing marketization of higher education, characterized by the application of principles of competition, an emphasis on student choice as consumers, and a strong focus on demonstrable economic outcomes, has significantly reshaped the operational environment for UK universities. This shift has brought about both perceived advantages in terms of institutional efficiency and responsiveness to student demands, as well as notable criticisms regarding potential negative consequences for the overall quality of education, the equitable access to opportunities, and the erosion of traditional academic values.³⁷ The experience of students within UK higher education and their evolving expectations, particularly in the context of the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, represent another significant area of challenge and opportunity. There is a growing emphasis on the need for institutions to provide more flexible learning options, enhance their digital resources and online learning environments, and foster a strong sense of both virtual and physical community among their student populations. Furthermore, cultivating a robust sense of belonging among students is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in promoting academic success, improving student retention rates, and

supporting their overall well-being throughout their university journey. The issue of student mental health and well-being has also risen to become a particularly prominent concern within the higher education sector, requiring universities to invest in and enhance their support services, adopt more proactive and preventative approaches to mental health, and cultivate a more holistic and supportive environment for all students.⁶¹

Academic staff working within UK universities are facing considerable challenges related to increasing workloads, often struggling to effectively balance the frequently competing demands of conducting high-quality research and delivering engaging and effective teaching. Many also experience concerns regarding job security, particularly those employed on fixed-term contracts that are often tied to specific research projects.⁴¹ The professional identity of academic staff is also undergoing a period of significant evolution, influenced by shifting institutional priorities that often place greater emphasis on research outputs and external funding, the increasing prevalence of managerial structures and practices within universities, and the growing diversity of academic roles, including the rise of teaching-focused positions.⁵ Ensuring and continuously enhancing the quality of teaching and learning remains a central and unwavering focus within UK higher education, with established frameworks such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) playing a significant role in assessing institutional performance and driving ongoing improvement. Principles of accountability and transparency in the operations, governance, and outcomes of higher education institutions are also being increasingly emphasized by regulatory bodies, governmental agencies, and the wider public.¹⁵⁷ The regulatory landscape governing higher education in the UK is itself dynamic and subject to change, with influential bodies such as the Office for Students (OfS) in England playing a pivotal role in shaping institutional practices, setting minimum standards, and ensuring compliance across the sector.⁸ Finally, UK universities operate within a highly competitive global market for attracting talented students, securing valuable research funding, and recruiting leading academic staff, facing increasing competition from well-regarded institutions located in other countries around the world.²¹ Recognizing this global context, the development and effective implementation of a comprehensive and forward-looking global strategy for UK universities is widely seen as essential for maintaining their strong international standing, maximizing their global reach and impact, and ensuring their continued success on the world stage.⁵²

The current state of UK higher education is undeniably characterized by a complex and interconnected array of significant challenges, primarily revolving around issues of financial sustainability in a rapidly evolving funding environment, the ongoing and multifaceted impact of marketization principles, and the persistent need to maintain high levels of educational quality and a positive overall student experience within a sector undergoing continuous transformation. Successfully navigating this intricate landscape will necessitate proactive and strategic responses from universities themselves, as well as from policymakers, regulatory bodies, and all other stakeholders who have a vested interest in the future of higher education in the UK.

X. Conclusion: Towards a Holistic Understanding of UK Higher Education's Purpose and Role:

The purpose and role of higher education in the UK are demonstrably multifaceted, extending beyond the crucial economic contributions to encompass the fundamental pursuit of knowledge through rigorous research and impactful innovation, the vital fostering of both academic and personal development in students, and the significant engagement with social, cultural, and civic responsibilities within communities and on a national and global scale. Inherent and ongoing tensions persist regarding the prioritization of these diverse aspects, particularly in navigating the delicate balance between immediate economic imperatives and the more enduring

educational and societal aims of universities. The sector currently faces significant challenges, most notably ensuring long-term financial sustainability amidst evolving funding models and increasing global competition, while simultaneously adapting to the changing needs and expectations of students and maintaining high standards of quality and overall well-being. Successfully navigating this complex landscape requires the adoption of a holistic and integrated approach to both understanding and actively shaping the future trajectory of UK higher education. This approach must carefully consider the diverse needs and varied perspectives of all stakeholders involved – including students, academics, administrators, government agencies, employers, and the broader society – and fully recognize the enduring and multifaceted value that universities provide to both individuals and the collective well-being of the nation. Moving forward, potential areas for future research and focused policy attention could include exploring innovative and sustainable funding models that reduce the sector's reliance on potentially volatile international student markets, fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging across university campuses to enhance the student experience, providing robust support for the evolving roles and overall well-being of both academic and professional staff who are critical to the sector's success, and developing a clear, coherent, and long-term national vision for the overarching purpose and vital role of higher education in the future of the United Kingdom.

APPENDIX 5: GOOGLE GEMINI PRO (EXPERIMENTAL) RESPONSE TO THE PROMPT, 'I'M GOING TO UPLOAD 2 REPORTS ON UK HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ABOUT THEIR OWN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES. I WOULD LIKE YOU TO WORK THROUGH THE REPORTS AND DRAW OUT AS MANY STATEMENTS AS POSSIBLE THAT COULD POTENTIALLY REPRESENT THE THOUGHTS, OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS. PLEASE PRODUCE THESE STATEMENTS IN A NUMBERED LIST. YOU CAN USE PHRASES LIKE, 'I THINK', 'IN MY OPINION' ETC. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THESE STATEMENTS SOUND LIKE SOMETHING A HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONER MIGHT SAY WHEN STATING THEIR SUBJECTIVE VIEWPOINT.' WITH 2 REDOS.

Perspectives on the Purpose of Higher Education:

1. In my view, the main purpose of higher education is to equip graduates with the skills needed for successful careers and contribute to economic growth.
2. I believe our key role is preparing students for the job market, focusing on their employability.
3. I think the quality of UK education is high, preparing individuals well for various industries like technology, business, and healthcare.
4. For me, there's a tension between focusing on vocational training versus the broader goal of intellectual and personal development.
5. In my opinion, the reliance on international student fees sometimes forces us to prioritize programs attractive to that market, possibly shifting focus from domestic needs.
6. I feel that government policies pushing "gainful employment" shape how we design curricula and support students.
7. My perspective is that universities are fundamentally hubs for research and innovation, creating and sharing new knowledge.
8. I see my purpose as contributing both to expanding knowledge through research and educating the next generation of researchers.
9. I believe we need to not only conduct research but also actively show its relevance and benefits to the wider world.
10. In my view, a crucial outcome of university is developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and independent thought.
11. I think higher education should be transformative, helping students learn to see things differently and fostering intellectual curiosity.
12. For me, a central purpose of higher education is promoting social mobility and ensuring equitable access for people from all backgrounds.
13. My perspective is that maintaining our global reputation and attracting international talent is a key purpose of UK higher education.
14. I believe universities have a significant role in contributing to the social, cultural, and civic life of our communities.
15. In my opinion, we have a responsibility to promote civic and democratic education among students.

Perspectives on Professional Identity (Academics):

16. I primarily identify as a researcher, focused on contributing to my field and advancing knowledge.
17. I feel significant pressure to secure research grants and publish, which sometimes overshadows my intellectual curiosity.
18. For me, teaching and mentoring students is a crucial and rewarding part of my identity.
19. I often struggle to balance the demands of research with my teaching responsibilities.
20. I feel that research output is often valued more than teaching excellence when it comes to promotion.
21. I find the growing administrative burden takes away valuable time from my core research and teaching work.
22. My role increasingly involves navigating significant change, uncertainty, and heavy workloads within the sector.
23. I feel the rise of precarious contracts creates anxiety and affects my sense of professional security and identity.
24. My motivation comes primarily from a desire for intellectual expertise and a search for meaning, rather than material rewards or power.
25. I perceive that the increasing managerialism in universities can reduce my professional motivation.

Perspectives on Professional Identity (Administrators):

26. I see my role as essential support for the university's academic mission, ensuring smooth operations.
27. My identity is strongly linked to my expertise in managing complex processes like admissions, quality assurance, finance, and HR.
28. I view myself as a professional with distinct skills, crucial for the university's effective functioning.
29. I believe the increasing professionalization of administrative roles enhances our identity and career paths.
30. For me, facilitating a positive student and staff experience is a key part of my role.
31. I see a positive shift towards more collaboration and integration between academic and professional services staff.
32. I identify as a navigator of efficiency and change, managing budgets and implementing new policies in a challenging environment.
33. I sometimes feel a tension between the need for university-wide consistency and providing flexible, localized support.

Perspectives on Professional Identity (Support Staff):

34. I identify as an essential contributor to the university's fundamental operations.
35. My role is vital for maintaining the framework that allows teaching staff to focus on education.
36. I see myself as a provider of diverse and specialized services, whether in administration, student support, estates, library, HR, IT, or finance.
37. I feel I possess distinct and valuable professional skills within my specific area.
38. For those of us in student-facing roles, enabling student success and wellbeing is a significant part of our identity.
39. I feel like an integral part of the institutional culture and infrastructure, contributing to the university's overall functioning and atmosphere.
40. I believe the growing focus on career development for professional services staff enhances our sense of belonging and identity.

Perspectives on the Current State and Future of UK Higher Education:

41. I am very aware of the significant financial challenges and sustainability concerns facing the sector right now.
42. I worry about the precarious financial situation caused by frozen fees, rising costs, and reliance on international student income.
43. In my opinion, the increasing marketization and competition changes how we operate, sometimes prioritizing financial gain over educational values.
44. I am concerned about maintaining academic quality and standards amidst these pressures.
45. I feel that widespread heavy workloads, stress, and burnout are major issues affecting staff wellbeing.
46. I see the roles and responsibilities in higher education evolving, with more teaching-focused roles and increasing professionalization of administration.
47. I believe we need a more holistic understanding of higher education's purpose, balancing economic goals with broader educational and societal aims.
48. My view is that we need to find more sustainable funding models to ensure the sector's long-term health.
49. I think fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging is crucial for the student experience.

Redo 1:

1. In my view, a key purpose of higher education is to contribute to the economy by producing graduates with the skills needed for successful careers.
2. I believe our role involves preparing students for the demands of various industries, contributing to economic growth and innovation.
3. From my perspective, the focus on employability sometimes feels like it's overshadowing the equally important goals of academic and personal development.
4. I think the financial necessity of attracting international students might influence the types of programs we prioritize.
5. It feels like government policies pushing "gainful employment" really shape how we design our courses and student support.
6. For me, a fundamental purpose of my work is contributing to research and innovation, expanding knowledge in my field.
7. I see my role as contributing both to research and to educating the next generation of researchers.
8. In my opinion, there's a growing expectation for us to translate our research into tangible economic and societal benefits, not just publish papers.
9. I feel it's important that our research demonstrates its relevance and benefits to the wider world.
10. There seems to be an ongoing debate about how research and teaching should be balanced and integrated in our roles.
11. I believe higher education should focus on developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and independent thought, not just job skills.
12. My aim is to help students learn to see things differently and foster their intellectual curiosity.
13. For me, ensuring equitable access to higher education and addressing social inequity is a central purpose of what we do.

14. I think maintaining our university's global reputation and attracting international talent is crucial for our standing and influence.
15. As an academic, I strongly identify with my role as a researcher, dedicated to advancing knowledge in my discipline.
16. I feel increasing pressure to secure research grants and publish frequently, which can sometimes feel like it overshadows the joy of discovery.
17. In my experience, the "publish or perish" culture can shift focus from genuine intellectual curiosity to just meeting career progression demands.
18. I identify strongly as a teacher and mentor; shaping student learning and development is a core part of my role.
19. I find genuine reward in interacting with students and helping them grow intellectually.
20. It's a constant challenge, in my opinion, to balance my research responsibilities with my teaching commitments effectively.
21. It often feels like research output is valued more than teaching excellence when it comes to promotion.
22. My role also involves administrative duties, like convening modules and student support, which are necessary but not the core of my academic identity.
23. Sometimes, I feel the growing administrative burden takes valuable time away from my research and teaching.
24. As an academic, I feel I'm constantly navigating significant change and uncertainty in the sector – funding issues, rising student numbers, the shift to e-learning.
25. The increasing use of fixed-term contracts and teaching-only roles creates a sense of uncertainty about my professional future.
26. As an administrator, I see my role as fundamentally supporting the academic mission of the university.
27. I believe my work is essential for the smooth operation of the institution, allowing academics to focus on teaching and research.
28. I identify as a professional with expertise in managing complex processes like admissions, quality assurance, finance, and HR.
29. I feel the increasing professionalization of administrative roles provides clearer career paths and recognition for our skills.
30. In my role, I see myself as a key facilitator of a positive student and staff experience.
31. I believe collaboration between academic and professional services staff is improving, leading to a more integrated professional community.
32. My responsibilities include navigating efficiency and change, managing budgets, and implementing new policies in a challenging environment.
33. Sometimes there's a tension between the need for university-wide consistency and providing flexible, tailored support for specific academic departments.
34. As support staff, I see my role as essential for the basic operations of the university.
35. I believe my work allows teaching staff to focus on their core responsibilities.
36. I identify as a provider of specialized services, whether in administration, student support, estates, library, IT, HR, or finance.
37. My role involves specific skills and expertise crucial to the university's functioning.
38. For those of us in student-facing roles, I feel we directly contribute to student success and wellbeing.
39. I feel like an integral part of the institutional culture and infrastructure, contributing to the overall environment.
40. I think the growing emphasis on career development for professional services staff enhances our sense of belonging and identity.
41. I am concerned about the financial challenges facing the sector, like frozen tuition fees and rising costs.

42. The uncertainty about long-term funding models makes me feel anxious about the future stability of our institutions.
43. In my opinion, the increasing marketization and the "student as consumer" idea might risk prioritizing profits over educational values.
44. I am committed to maintaining high academic standards despite the pressures we face.
45. I worry that changes to the quality assurance system might affect the international standing of UK degrees.
46. It feels like heavy workloads, stress, and burnout are widespread issues affecting both academic and professional staff.
47. I feel disillusioned sometimes due to unmanageable workloads, which impacts my professional fulfillment.
48. I see the roles in higher education evolving, with more teaching-focused positions and increasing professionalization of support roles.
49. My professional identity is changing as I adapt to these shifts in the higher education landscape.
50. I believe universities have a responsibility beyond teaching and research, contributing to social mobility, cultural enrichment, and civic life.

Redo 2:

1. "In my opinion, a key purpose of higher education is to equip graduates with the skills they need for successful careers and contribute to economic growth."
2. "I believe the high global ranking of UK universities shows we are providing quality education that prepares students for various industries."
3. "My concern is that the strong focus on employability might overshadow the importance of broader intellectual and personal development for students."
4. "It feels like the financial need to attract international students sometimes influences the types of programmes we prioritize."
5. "I think the government's emphasis on 'gainful employment' shapes how we design our curriculum and student support."
6. "For me, the university's role as a hub for research and innovation is fundamental; it's about creating and sharing knowledge."
7. "I see my purpose as contributing both to expanding knowledge through research and educating the next generation."
8. "My view is that we need to actively demonstrate the real-world relevance and benefits of our research."
9. "I sometimes struggle with balancing the demands of teaching and research, especially when research seems to be valued more for promotion."
10. "I believe university education should be about more than just jobs; it's about fostering critical thinking and learning to see things differently."
11. "It seems there's a tension between developing broad critical thinking skills and the push for purely vocational training."
12. "I feel strongly that universities have a responsibility to promote social mobility and ensure equitable access for students from all backgrounds."
13. "Maintaining our global reputation and attracting international talent is crucial for our university's standing and influence."
14. "As an academic, I primarily identify as a researcher, focused on contributing to my field and advancing knowledge."
15. "I find the constant pressure to secure research grants and publish in top journals quite stressful, shifting focus from discovery to metrics."

16. "I find genuine reward in teaching and mentoring students, helping them grow intellectually."
17. "It often feels like the increasing administrative burden detracts from my core identity as a researcher and teacher."
18. "I see myself navigating constant change – funding issues, rising student numbers, the 'student as consumer' idea, and heavy workloads."
19. "The rise of precarious contracts like fixed-term and teaching-only roles creates a lot of uncertainty about my future in academia."
20. "As an administrator, I see my role as fundamentally supporting the academic mission, ensuring the university runs smoothly so academics can teach and research."
21. "I identify strongly with my professional expertise in managing complex processes like admissions, quality assurance, or finance."
22. "I believe the increasing professionalization of administrative roles offers clearer career paths and recognition for our skills."
23. "My role involves facilitating a positive experience for both students and staff."
24. "I think greater collaboration between academic and professional services staff is creating a more unified professional identity across the university."
25. "I see myself as needing to manage budgets and implement changes efficiently in a constantly evolving sector."
26. "Sometimes I feel a tension between the need for university-wide consistency and providing flexible, tailored support for specific departments."
27. "As support staff, I know my role is essential for the university's operations, allowing teaching staff to focus on education."
28. "I see myself as a provider of specialized services, whether in administration, student support, estates, library, IT, or finance."
29. "In my student-facing role (like careers advisor or counsellor), I feel I directly contribute to student success and wellbeing."
30. "I believe my work, whether in facilities, HR, or IT, contributes fundamentally to the institutional culture and infrastructure."
31. "I'm acutely aware of the precarious financial situation in the sector due to frozen fees, rising costs, and reliance on international students."
32. "I worry about the long-term financial sustainability of the university and the potential for restructuring."
33. "In my opinion, the marketization of higher education and the 'student as consumer' idea risks prioritising profit over educational values."
34. "I am committed to maintaining high academic standards despite the pressures we face."
35. "My workload often feels unmanageable, leading to stress and burnout, which impacts my sense of professional fulfillment."
36. "I feel the nature of our roles is changing, with more teaching-focused positions and 'third space' professionals blurring traditional lines."
37. "I think society expects universities to contribute broadly – to social progress, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement, not just the economy."
38. "My view is that universities should actively foster critical thinking and a passion for lifelong learning, not just vocational skills."
39. "I believe that integrating teaching and research effectively enhances the quality of both."
40. "It feels like we need a clearer national vision for the purpose and role of higher education in the UK's future."

APPENDIX 6: THE Q-SET

1. In my view, a key purpose of higher education is to contribute to the economy by producing graduates with the skills needed for successful careers.
2. For me, there's a tension between focusing on vocational training versus the broader goal of intellectual and personal development.
3. In my opinion, the reliance on international student fees sometimes forces us to prioritise programs attractive to that market, possibly shifting focus from domestic needs.
4. I feel that government policies pushing "gainful employment" shape how we design curricula and support students.
5. My perspective is that universities are fundamentally hubs for research and innovation, creating and sharing new knowledge.
6. I feel it's important that our research demonstrates its relevance and benefits to the wider world.
7. In my view, a crucial outcome of university is developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and independent thought.
8. I think higher education should be transformative, helping students learn to see things differently and fostering intellectual curiosity.
9. For me, a central purpose of higher education is promoting social mobility and ensuring equitable access for people from all backgrounds.
10. My perspective is that maintaining our global reputation and attracting international talent is a key purpose of UK higher education.
11. I believe universities have a significant role in contributing to the social, cultural, and civic life of our communities.
12. I primarily identify as a researcher, focused on contributing to my field and advancing knowledge.
13. In my experience, the "publish or perish" culture can shift focus from genuine intellectual curiosity to just meeting career progression demands.
14. For me, teaching and mentoring students is a crucial and rewarding part of my identity.
15. I find genuine reward in interacting with students and helping them grow intellectually.
16. It's a constant challenge, in my opinion, to balance my research responsibilities with my teaching commitments effectively.
17. I feel that research output is often valued more than teaching excellence when it comes to promotion.
18. I find the growing administrative burden takes away valuable time from my core research and teaching work.
19. My role increasingly involves navigating significant change, uncertainty, and heavy workloads within the sector.
20. I feel the rise of precarious contracts creates anxiety and affects my sense of professional security and identity.
21. My motivation comes primarily from a desire for intellectual expertise and a search for meaning, rather than material rewards or power.
22. As an academic, I feel I'm constantly navigating significant change and uncertainty in the sector – funding issues, rising student numbers, the shift to e-learning.
23. I perceive that the increasing managerialism in universities can reduce my professional motivation.
24. I believe my work is essential for the smooth operation of the institution, allowing academics to focus on teaching and research.
25. My identity is strongly linked to my expertise in managing complex processes like admissions, quality assurance, finance, and HR.

26. I view myself as a professional with distinct skills, crucial for the university's effective functioning.
27. In my role, I see myself as a key facilitator of a positive student and staff experience.
28. I believe collaboration between academic and professional services staff is improving, leading to a more integrated professional community.
29. I identify as a navigator of efficiency and change, managing budgets and implementing new policies in a challenging environment.
30. Sometimes there's a tension between the need for university-wide consistency and providing flexible, tailored support for specific academic departments.
31. For those of us in student-facing roles, enabling student success and wellbeing is a significant part of our identity.
32. I feel like an integral part of the institutional culture and infrastructure, contributing to the overall environment.
33. I think the growing emphasis on career development for professional services staff enhances our sense of belonging and identity.
34. I am very aware of the significant financial challenges and sustainability concerns facing the sector right now.
35. I worry about the precarious financial situation caused by frozen fees, rising costs, and reliance on international student income.
36. In my opinion, the increasing marketisation and the 'student as consumer' idea might risk prioritising profits over educational values.
37. It feels like heavy workloads, stress, and burnout are widespread issues affecting both academic and professional staff.
38. My professional identity is changing as I adapt to these shifts in the higher education landscape.
39. I see the roles and responsibilities in higher education evolving, with more teaching-focused roles and increasing professionalisation of administration.
40. I believe we need a more holistic understanding of higher education's purpose, balancing economic goals with broader educational and societal aims.
41. My view is that we need to find more sustainable funding models to ensure the sector's long-term health.
42. I think fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging is crucial for the student experience.