University Engagement: policy, practice and the public good.

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Abstract

Public and Community Engagement (PCE), as part of the public facing third mission of universities, has been the subject of increasing attention by higher education policy makers, a trend illustrated by the introduction of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) in England in 2020. This dynamic area of university policy and practice has been critiqued for lacking conceptual coherence and for failing to capture the wider public good benefits of the third mission due to evaluative approaches which are too closely aligned to the human capital approach.

This study utilises the Capability Approach (CA) as a human development centred normative framework to address this gap and provide insights into both the practice and purpose of contemporary university PCE in England. Adopting a case study approach, data was gathered from an analysis of Knowledge Exchange Framework PCE Narrative submissions [n.32] and qualitative interviews with university academics and public engagement professionals [n.10]. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings show that whilst there is evidence of strong commitment to the public good potential of PCE at the micro level, there are uneven levels of institutional engagement at the meso level and universities have yet to find a way to ensure the voice of their publics and communities are listened to in the development and operationalisation of their PCE strategies.

This study is significant as it makes two important contributions: one empirical and one conceptual. Firstly, it provides empirical insights at both the meso and micro levels into the policy and practice of PCE after the introduction of KEF. The insights provided will be of interest to policy makers, university leaders and public engagement academics and professionals in, and beyond, the English university sector.

Secondly, it makes an original contribution to the CA literature on universities by applying it as a normative framework to national PCE policy and practice in England; providing a means to address the *why*, in addition to the *what*, of PCE.

Table of Contents

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Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme

(a) Book

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(c) Articles in Refereed Journals

McFaul, H. and Fitzgerald, E. (2019) A realist evaluation of a virtual reality smartphone application. *British Journal of Education Technology*. doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12850 . Lead author.

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List of abbreviations

CA	Capability Approach
CE	Community Engagement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HD	Human Development
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIF	Higher Education Innovation Funding
HEBCI	Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HEBCI)
KE	Knowledge Exchange
KEC	Knowledge Exchange Concordat
KEF	Knowledge Exchange Framework
NCCPE	National Centre for Community and Public Engagement
PEP	Public Engagement Professional
PCE	Public and Community Engagement
QR	Quality Related

REF	Research Excellence Framework
RQ1	Research Question One
RQ2	Research Question Two
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
THE	Times Higher Education
STEM	Science Technology Engineering Mathematics
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Genesis and Rationale

Policy makers have given increasing attention to the public function of universities. Just as English universities have been held accountable for their teaching and research practice through the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) assessment exercises, the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) has now been developed to hold universities to account in their performance of their public facing role. This study aims to explore how English universities have responded to these policy imperatives by investigating their institutional public and community engagement (PCE) policies and practices.

My interest in this topic stems from my professional practice as a member of The Open University Law School, where I have worked directly with community groups, charities and international organisations to develop open education resources aimed at promoting public legal understanding (Open Justice Centre, 2019; Open Justice Centre and UNODC, 2019; Open Justice Centre and Support Through Court, 2020). My experience of this work led to the assumption of strategic leadership responsibilities related to the public function of universities, firstly as Director of Knowledge Exchange and Impact for my Faculty, with the brief to devise and implement a strategy in response to emerging national knowledge exchange (KE) policy, and latterly as Head of the School of Law. My work promoting and facilitating knowledge exchange activity suggested to me that it had the potential to help reinvigorate The

Open University's KE agenda, which appeared to lack a clearly articulated purpose.

My interest in the Capability Approach (CA) stems from my work on Part I of the doctoral programme where I investigated the balance between theory and practice in legal education (McFaul, 2020), evaluated the affordance of VR technology in developing legal competencies (McFaul and FitzGerald, 2020) and used the CA as a theoretical framework for conceptualising legal education (McFaul, 2022). Work done by scholars applying the Capability Approach to issues in the HEI context appeared to hold the promise of providing a normative foundation, and human centred orientation, for the KE agenda.

The aim of my study was thus to undertake an original analysis of the current and emerging PCE practices in English universities, using the Capability Approach as a normative framework. In doing so, I have made an original and timely contribution to the developing literature on PCE in light of the introduction of KEF for the first time in 2020, and have also provided fresh insights into the public good potential of universities.

1.2 Research Context

This study seeks to understand university PCE policy and practice in the context of the first iteration of the KEF. The focus of this policy innovation is HEIs in England, and this provides the parameters and locus of my investigation of how universities have responded. The policy context for my research is set out below.

1.2.1 PCE policy context

The development of the KEF has given fresh impetus to university PCE. The emergence of this form of HEI performance metric can be seen as an articulation of a wider trend towards marketisation and efficiency in the delivery of public services (Hazenberg and Hall, 2016) leading increased expectations of universities (discussed further in Chapter 2). Brennan (2008, p. 384) argues is a result of wider forces such as a decline in welfarism and an increase in globalisation and marketisation resulting in 'expectations that higher education should be more visibly useful for economy and society; that higher education should be more efficient and effective.' This drive to accountability has also been framed as emerging from the post-war democratisation of social decision making which demands that institutions, including universities, receive their licence to operate through social legitimacy and accountability (Weymans, 2010; Hurth and Stewart, 2022).

Reflecting these expectations, the recent history of PCE policy in England, has displayed a concern for universities to be seen as socially and economically useful. For example, Miller (2001), Watermeyer (2015; 2018) and Lebeau and Cochrane (2015) trace one of the roots of contemporary English policy on PCE to the attempts to increase the public understanding of, and confidence in, science and scientific research from the 1980s onwards. The Bodmer Report (Collins and Bodmer, 1986) was influential in calling for steps to increase the public's understanding of science to ensure ongoing public support of scientific activities and address concerns about modes and methods of scientific enquiry (Weldon and Whitchurch, 2004; Bauer *et al.*,

2007; Burchell *et al.*, 2009). Despite being instituted into various funding mechanisms there was little evidence that this approach shifted public attitudes and was critiqued for operating on a deficit model with universities being perceived as experts and the public, lacking in expertise, placed as passive recipients of academic knowledge (Watermeyer, 2011; 2015; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018). This lack of impact led to a change in focus from 'understanding' to 'engagement' (Irwin and Michael, 2003; Gregory and Lock, 2008) evidenced in later funding initiatives such as those administered by UK Higher Education Funding Councils in the 1990s, prompting the quantification of public engagement activities and attempts to assess their impacts (Molas-Gallart *et al.*, 2021).[1]

Lebeau and Cochrane (2015) argue that the emphasis on public engagement was subsequently side-lined in the early twenty first century, due to increasing political and policy focus on how to fund the expansion of student participation in higher education. The advent of the KEF provided renewed policy impetus for PCE and will be discussed further below.

1.2.2 PCE and the Knowledge Exchange Framework

[1] The contemporary funding landscape includes Higher Education Innovation Funding, which can be used to support engagement activities subject to being reported in the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HEBCI) survey (Research England, 2023).

Since the 1998 devolution settlement, education policy is a devolved matter within the UK, hence the KEF applies to English, rather than all UK universities. KEF was initiated by UK Government Minister, Jo Johnson, who envisioned that in addition to England, other UK higher education funding bodies might utilise the framework 'if they so choose' (Johnson, 2017). In his letter initiating the development of KEF, the Minister outlines a threefold mission of universities: 'the creation, transmission and exploitation of knowledge' and identifies an accountability gap in relation to its third mission of the 'exploitation of knowledge.' Whereas the teaching mission was assessed by the TEF and the research mission is assessed by the REF, the proposed Knowledge Exchange Framework was intended to 'bridge this gap' by providing 'comparable, benchmarked and publicly available performance information about universities' knowledge exchange activities' (Johnson, 2017).

Johnson's letter does not make explicit reference to PCE, but does refer to the need to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of 'universities' external engagement.' Although 'external engagement' is only mentioned once in Johnson's letter (compared to seven appearances for economy/ economic / business) the first iteration of the KEF in 2020 included a requirement for universities to include a narrative statement describing their PCE activity which may not otherwise be reflected in other data concerning business and economic activities (Research England, 2020). The inclusion of the PCE narrative as a late addition to other largely economic and quantitative metrics aimed to accommodate the nuances of engagement beyond the

STEM disciplines (Coates-Ulrichsen 2018, p.4; Research England 2020). However, the explicit focus of Johnson's (2017) letter is on catalysing the economic benefits of university activity, particularly in relation to interaction with businesses.

Identifying and promoting the economic contribution of universities is therefore presented as the key policy driver in the development of KEF and is seen as critical in justifying public investment in research. In this way, the KEF aimed to 'create a constructively competitive dynamic which will ensure universities' responsiveness and accountability, benchmark and develop their own performance' as well as providing a means for the effective dissemination of public investment (Johnson 2017).

1.2.3 Implementation of the Knowledge Exchange Framework

The UK Parliament passed the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 which provided a definition of Knowledge Exchange at section 93(4):

> "knowledge exchange" in relation to science, technology, humanities or new ideas, means a process or other activity by which knowledge is exchanged where—
>
> (a) the knowledge is in, or in connection with, science, technology, humanities or new ideas (as the case may be), and
>
> (b) the exchange contributes, or is likely to contribute, (whether directly or indirectly) to an economic or social benefit in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

Subsequently, Research England consulted on the new framework in 2019 (Research England, 2019) and English universities were required to respond to the first iteration in October 2020, following a pilot in 2019, and the results of the exercise were published in March 2021. KEF was designed to be metrics driven, relying largely on existing publicly available data, such as the Higher Education Business and Community Interactions Survey (HEBCI), to avoid additional reporting burdens (Research England, 2019). Data is collected across seven areas of KE activity:

1. Research Partnerships

2. Working with business

3. Working with the public and third sector

4. Skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship

5. Local growth and regeneration

6. IP and Commercialisation

7. Public and community engagement

The consultation and pilot exercises led to the inclusion of three narrative statements to help capture activity not easily reflected in existing numerical data. In addition to PCE, these cover Institutional Context and Local Growth and Regeneration perspectives (Research England, 2020). The Institutional Context narrative was intended to provide a ‘brief statement setting out the geographic, economic and social context within which the higher education

institution is operating' and the Local Growth and Regeneration narrative required a separate account of the HEI's local area and a description of activities undertaken to support economic growth and regeneration, such as activities supporting employers and businesses (Research England, 2020 p.16). The declared purpose of the PCE narrative was unique in explicitly seeking to look beyond the economic impact of HEIs and capture how universities identified and addressed the needs of their local communities and publics (Research England, 2020 p.16).

For comparison purposes, KEF clustered universities together with those of a similar size and type, to provide more meaningful and accessible comparisons (Research England, 2020), as illustrated in Table 1.1 and Figures 1.1. and 1.2. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the characteristics of the five broad discipline-based HEI clusters, labelled E, J, M, V, X which were the focus of this study.

Cluster	Characteristics
E	• Large universities with broad discipline portfolio across both STEM and non-STEM generating excellent research across all disciplines. • Significant amount of research funded by government bodies/hospitals; 9.5% from industry. • Large proportion of part-time undergraduate students. • Small postgraduate population dominated by taught postgraduate

J	• Mid-sized universities with more of a teaching focus (although research is still in evidence). • Academic activity across STEM and non-STEM disciplines including other health, computer sciences, architecture/planning, social sciences and business, humanities, arts and design. • Research activity funded largely by government bodies/hospitals; 13.7% from industry.
M	• Smaller universities, often with a teaching focus. • Academic activity across disciplines, particularly in other health domains and non-STEM. • More research activity funded by government bodies/hospitals; 14.7% from industry.
V	• Very large, very high research intensive and broad-discipline universities undertaking significant amounts of excellent research. • Research funded by range of sources including UKRI, other government bodies and charities; 10.2% from industry. • Significant activity in clinical medicine and STEM. • Student body includes significant numbers of taught and research postgraduates

X	• Large, high research intensive and broad-discipline universities undertaking a significant amount of excellent research. • Much of research funded by UKRI and other government bodies; 8.5% from industry. • Discipline portfolio balanced across STEM and non-STEM although less clinical medicine activity. • Large proportion of taught postgraduates in student population.

Table 1.1 Definitions of clusters used to classify universities participating in the Knowledge Exchange Framework (Source: Research England, 2020)

Figure 1.1 illustrates how the five clusters of broad discipline-based HEIs are distinguished from specialist STEM and Arts HEIs for the purposes of KEF.

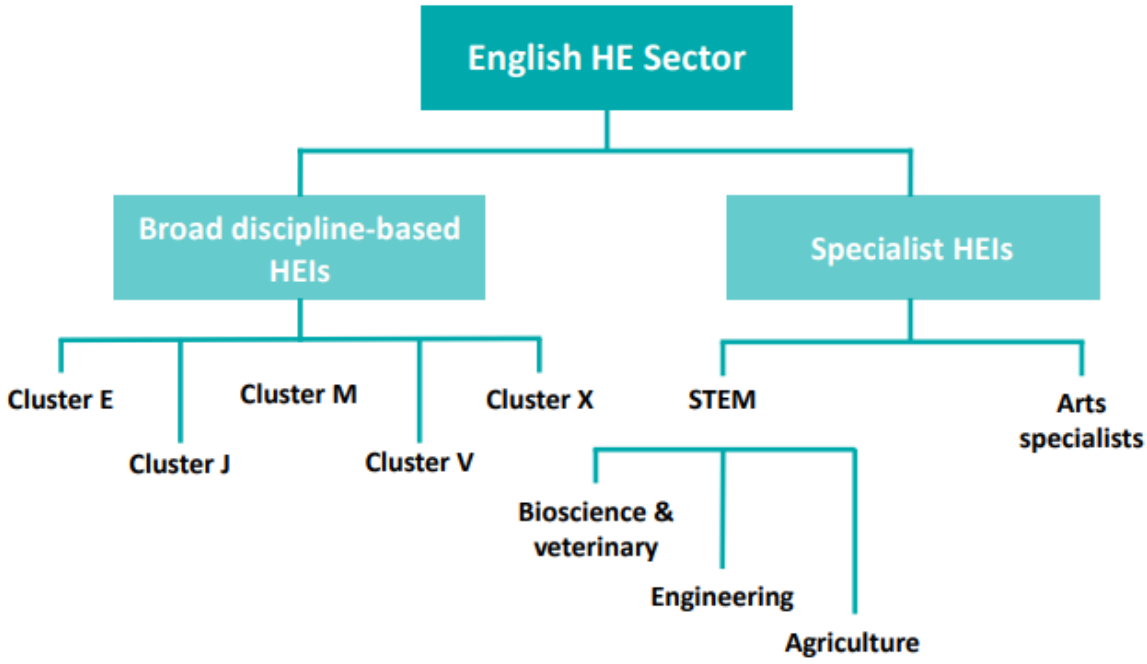

Figure 1.1 Cluster groupings illustrating distinction between broad-based and specialist HEIs participating in KEF (Source https://kef.ac.uk/about).

Figure 1.2 provides an illustration of how the KEF data is presented on the KEF website providing a visual indication of how each HEI has performed across the seven KEF perspectives relative to other HEIs in their cluster.

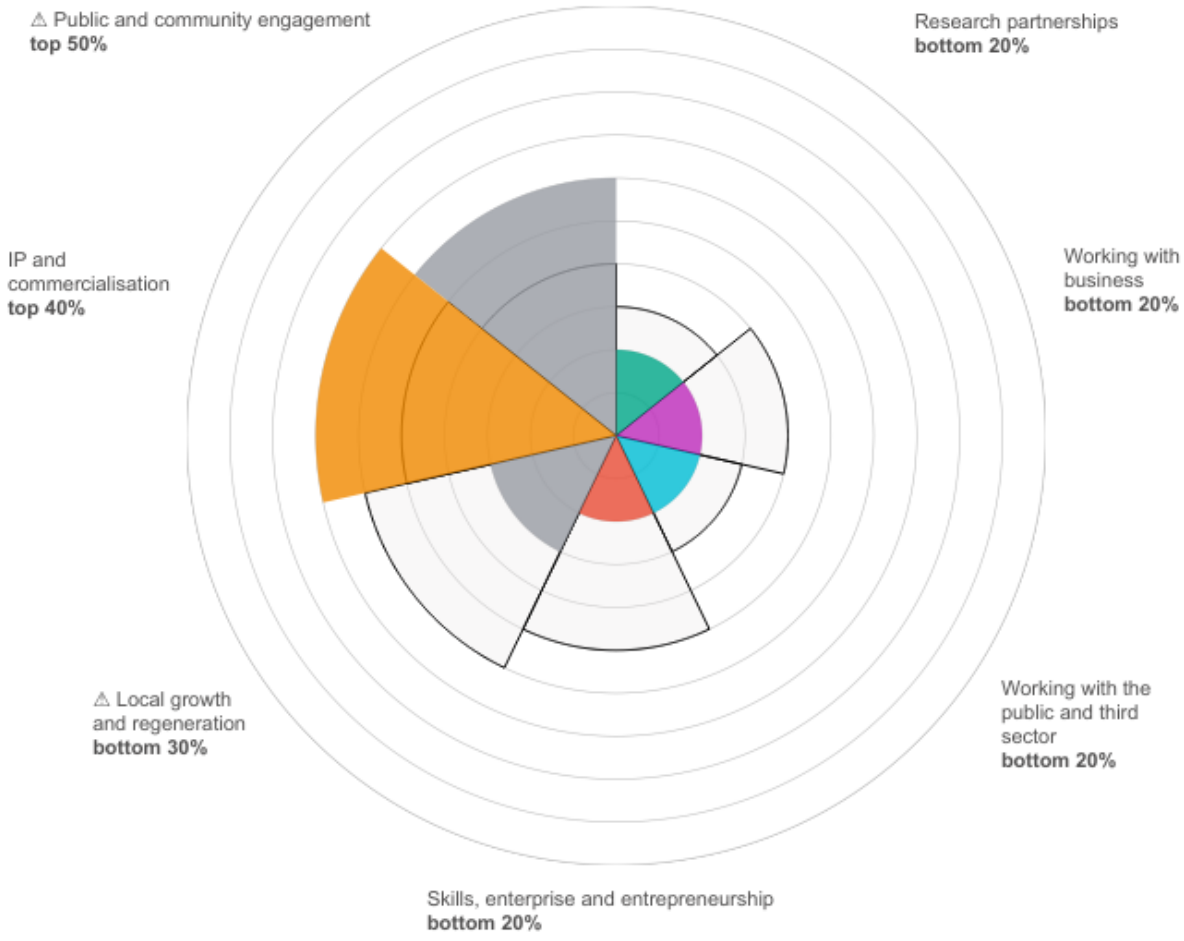

Figure 1.2 Example of the KEF dashboard reporting comparative results across the six KEF perspectives (Source: https://kef.ac.uk/about)

1.2.4 Public and Community Engagement Narrative

The PCE narrative template invites institutions to report on five areas within a 2,000-word limit and is used as one of two data sources in my study. These relate to the development of strategy, level of support to provide PCE, types of activity undertaken, evidence of results and how results are communicated and acted upon (UKRI, 2020). The institution is also invited to self-assess

against their progress in relation to a rank where a score of 1 identifies the institution to be in a planning stage with no engagement activity undertaken, rising to a score of 5, where activities are fully developed and embedded across the institution and where there is a culture of continuous improvement based on evidence of good outcomes and impacts (Research England, 2020).

Research England (2019) acknowledge the influence of the National Centre for Public and Community Engagement (NCCPE) in the development of both the self-assessment metric and the definition of *Public and Community Engagement* as a form of knowledge exchange, which they define as:

> the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public… a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit (NCCPE, no date).

The KEF was later supplemented by the Knowledge Exchange Concordat (Knowledge Exchange Concordat, 2022). Led by Universities UK (the sectoral body rather than UK Government), this is principle, rather than metric focused, and aims to support the KE agenda by inviting universities to commit to eight knowledge exchange principles and thereby to:

> support HE providers in enhancing the clarity of their KE mission and strategic objectives, and consequently to enable staff to have a clear understanding of institutional priorities and focus. Importantly, the KE Concordat is intended to give external partners an increased insight into what HE providers do and why such activity is taking place, as well

> as to provide clear indicators of their approaches to performance improvement, and to give governing bodies and government broad confidence in the activity that is taking place in institutions. (Knowledge Exchange Concordat, 2022, p.2)

Thus, in terms of national HEI policy in England, PCE can be considered a subset of knowledge exchange policy. The relevance of my research in relation to this policy context is outlined below.

1.3 Contribution to the literature

My study is significant as it provides an insight into both the practice and purpose of a dynamic and emerging area of HEI policy and practice. As such, it makes two important contributions: one empirical and one conceptual.

Firstly, it provides empirical insights at both the meso and micro levels into the policy and practice of PCE after the introduction of KEF. The insights provided will be of interest to policy makers, university leaders and public engagement academics and professionals in, and beyond, the English university sector. As such it makes an empirical contribution to the body of scholarly literature on the third mission of universities reviewed in Chapter 2, which has critiqued this area for a being poorly understood and weakly institutionalised (Watermeyer, 2015; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Reed and Fazey, 2021).

Secondly, it makes an original contribution to the capability literature on universities by applying it as a normative framework to national PCE policy and practice in England; providing a human centred means to answer the

why, in addition to the *what* of PCE. In this way it builds on the foundational work of capability scholars who have researched the public good function of university education (Walker, 2006b; Unterhalter, 2013; Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020; Nussey *et al.*, 2022) which delineated the human development and capability promoting potential of universities, along with studies by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019) who have applied these insights to the pedagogy of community engagement and service learning in the South African context. My study builds on this work, but makes an original conceptual contribution by using CA to interrogate English national PCE policy and practice with a focus on institutional responses, rather than its application to pedagogic practice. In using the CA in this novel way, my study provides fresh conceptual insights into the practice and potential of university PCE.

1.4 Research design and questions

My study was guided by the following research questions which are informed by the Capability Approach:

1. What are the values and capabilities promoted by English universities in their Public and Community Engagement practices?
2. How and why do universities decide on what PCE work they undertake?

I adopted a qualitative case study design, utilising both desk-based documentary research and gathering empirical data through semi-structured interviews. Documentary research consisted of a thematic analysis of 32 Public and Community Engagement Narratives submitted by English HEIs as part of the 2020 Knowledge Exchange Framework exercise. Of the three KEF narratives available, the PCE narratives provided a unique source of detailed information on how universities understood and engaged directly with the needs of their communities and publics, as distinct from their role in promoting economic growth which is evidenced in other, mostly quantitative metrics in the KEF. Interview participants [n.10, 5 male, 5 female] included five academics with experience of PCE and five PEPs. The analysis of the narratives provided meso level insights into PCE policy and practice which was triangulated against insights from the micro level provided by the interview participants. I adopted the Capability Approach as the theoretical framework to inform my research questions and to analyse my data as it provided the conceptual tools to conduct a normative evaluation of university PCE policy and practice, sensitive to the full variety of PCE activities that cannot be captured by economic metrics alone and which can provide a substantive foundation to evaluate the public good function of this aspect of the emerging third mission of universities.

1.5 Research Problem and Importance of Research

In summary, my study seeks to understand the current and PCE practices in English universities using the Capability Approach as a normative framework. In doing so, it seeks to make an original and timely contribution to the developing literature on PCE at a critical juncture in the development of national HEI policy in light of the first KEF exercise in 2020.

My study is important as this dynamic area of university policy and practice has been critiqued for lacking conceptual coherence and for failing to capture the wider public good benefits of the third mission, due to evaluative approaches which are too closely aligned to the human capital approach. As such it makes two important contributions, one empirical and one conceptual. Firstly, it provides empirical insights at both the meso and micro levels into the policy and practice of PCE after the introduction of KEF. The insights provided will be of interest to policy makers, university leaders and public engagement academics and professionals in, and beyond, the English university sector. Secondly, it makes an original contribution to the capability literature on universities by applying it as a normative framework to national PCE policy and practice in England; providing a means to answer the *why*, in addition the *what* of PCE.

1.6 Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 will situate my study of PCE in the context of the wider literature on the third mission of universities and in conceptualisations of the university's contribution to the public good. Chapter

3 provides a rationale for adopting the Capability Approach as the overarching theoretical framework and explains how it will be operationalised in my study. Chapter 4 outlines the design I have utilised for this enquiry. It will address the philosophical assumptions informing the research design, the research approach and methods used to gather and analyse the data and will discuss the ethical issues and limitations presented by my study. Chapters 5 and 6 set out the key findings arising from a combined thematic analysis of two sources of data: the PCE sections of the 2020 Knowledge Exchange Framework returns [n.32] and semi-structured interviews with academics and PEPs [n.10] based in English HEIs. The findings are interpreted and discussed in light of my theoretical framework, which is informed by the Capability Approach. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion demonstrating how my findings address my research questions and outlining my contribution to knowledge, both in relation to practice and theory and finally provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this review is to illuminate how the scholarly literature situates PCE policy and practice, both in relation to understandings of the function of universities, and regarding conceptualisations of the university's contribution to the public good.

The definition and purpose of a university (what a university *is* and what it is *for*) has spawned a voluminous literature in which two interrelated themes can be detected: historical and normative (Collini, 2012; Marginson, 2016; Palfreyman and Temple, 2017; Barnett and Fulford, 2020; Moser and Fazey, 2021). The narrative about the historical development of the institution being used to orientate, contextualise and justify normative claims regarding the proper function of universities. This normative theme can be seen in the critiques of contemporary policy and practice of universities and in arguments which defend an ideal of the university, or make a moral case for universities to promote particular social goods (MacIntyre, 2009; Nussbaum, 2010; Collini, 2012; Moser and Fazey, 2021), an approach critiqued by Ashwin (2022, p.

1241) for having a disproportionate focus on the university as an institution, rather than the social impact[2] of higher education systems.

Although the historical and normative themes often overlap in the literature outlined below, this review will attempt to disentangle them; firstly, by addressing how the literature has presented the historical development of the university, particularly in relation to the emergence of its third mission, before exploring key normative claims around the public good function of universities. Finally, it will consider how these two themes can be used to contextualise the emerging PCE policy and practice of English universities and, in doing so, will identify gaps in the existing literature.

2.2 The purpose of universities in historical perspective

Universities are recognised as being amongst the longest standing institutions on the planet (Fazey *et al.*, 2021) and the literature indicates that the history of the university is a history of change; showing an ability to adapt its aims

[2] The literature presents a variety of definitions of social impact (Hazenberg and Paterson-Young, 2022), but a widely acknowledged definition is provided by European Commission's Groupe d'Experts de la Commission sur l'Entrepreneuriat Social (GECES) sub-committee on impact measurement:

> the reflection of social outcomes as measurements, both long-term and short-term, adjusted for the effects achieved by others (alternative attribution), for effects that would have happened anyway (deadweight), for negative consequences (displacement), and for effects declining over time (drop-off) (Clifford *et al.*, 2014, p.12).

and function in response to societal change (Palfreyman and Temple, 2017; Fazey *et al.*, 2021). This history of the evolution in the mission of universities has been depicted as moving through three key developmental phases (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015; Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021). Firstly, the focus on preserving and transmitting existing knowledge, evident in the creation of medieval European universities. Secondly, an increasing focus on the generation of new knowledge (the research function), apparent in the development of the European and American institutions of the nineteenth century. Thirdly, the focus on engagement with the public, the so called third mission of universities which gained increasing levels of scholarly attention from the late twentieth century; a period also defined by the expansion of universities, both in terms of their global reach but also in the proportion of the population having access to them (Etzkowitz *et al.*, 2000; King et al., 2013; Tight, 2019b). Each phase will be briefly discussed below.

2.2.1 Origins of the first and second missions

The roots of universities have been identified in educational institutions such as the Lyceum in classical Greece, the great library of Alexandria in Egypt, sites of religious learning in India and in the Islamic world such as the University of al-Qarawinyyin in Morocco, founded in AD 859 (Palfreyman and Temple 2017; Fazey *et al.*, 2021). However, the most recognisable origins of the modern western conception of a university stem from the medieval

iterations established in Bologna, Oxford, Salamanca, Cambridge, often established with an overtly religious purpose, such as improving the education of clergy. The slow separation of universities from engaging in religious to overtly rational enquiry was illustrated in the adaption and change in the method of enquiry engaged in by universities, marked by a shift from a focus on dialectical argument of a disputed question, to a process based on the empirical method of observation, hypotheses formulation and testing through experimentation (Jenkins, 2018).

Although some of these medieval institutions have survived into the contemporary context, the purpose of their earlier iterations was narrower in that their emphasis was on the preservation and transmission of existing knowledge (the first mission). The focus on the generation of new knowledge, (the second mission) became apparent from the nineteenth century, as illustrated in institutions such as the civic universities in England's provincial cities and London (Dimitriou, 2023), as well as the Humboldtian reforms to German higher education which institutionalized research as a core university mission (Etzkowitz, 1998; Rüegg, 2004), and also the US institutions established as part of the Land-Grant College Acts of 1862 and 1890 (Palfreyman and Temple, 2017; University, 2023). These institutions were marked by a pragmatic approach to responding to the changing needs of their communities, resulting from the social challenges they faced as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, and aimed to provide practical instruction in the fields of science, agriculture, engineering and related disciplines. (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015). This account of the history of the development of the university

up until the early twentieth century points to the consolidation of the first two missions of preserving and transmitting, as well as creating new knowledge, evident in the research and teaching functions of the modern university (Palfreyman and Temple, 2017; University, 2023). The next subsection will begin to address the main substance of this literature review: the increasing profile of the third mission of the university in the mid to late twentieth century.

2.2.2 The rise of the third mission

The twentieth century has seen an exponential growth, both in the number of universities around the world, and in proportion of the population who can access higher education. These themes of globalisation and massification have produced a substantial literature, along with a discourse concerning the rise in online and distance learning which is disrupting the traditional models of place-based university education (Tight, 2019b, 2019c). This discourse largely relates to changes in how universities fulfil their existing mission; how higher education is delivered and who is able to access it. However, another change is identified as occurring in this period (the focus of this review), amounting to a change in function, rather than delivery.

The above discussion shows that the primary purpose of the medieval European universities was to preserve and transmit knowledge (Cooper 2011), a purpose that was augmented by the second mission of the creation of new knowledge exemplified in the research focus of nineteenth century institutions (Rüegg 2004; Etzkowitz 1998). An emerging third mission, with roots in the civic orientation of universities established in the nineteenth

century, has been identified as receiving increasing attention since the 1980s (Etzkowitz 2001; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015) involving an explicit public focus and the direct transfer of knowledge and technology to society (Zomer and Benneworth, 2011; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020; Hurth and Stewart, 2022). Examples of this type of activity include the commodification of knowledge marked by the conversion of research findings into intellectual property (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), proactively embracing the contributions of non-expert communities to knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) and an emphasis on university accountability and transparency (Holmwood, 2011), as well as the direct focus on activities to promote economic and social development or impact (O'Carroll *et al.*, 2006). Such activity being dependent on the proactive generation of synergies resulting from university / community partnerships (Percy *et al.*, 2006) and momentum from 'triple-helix' interactions between industry, government and universities (Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1996; Etzkowitz, 2003).

The perceived change in orientation has been conceptualised as a reorientation away from the idea of the university as occupying an ivory tower, where research and teaching are seen as ends in themselves (Watermeyer, 2015; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020), to engaging with the public to fulfil the promise of societal engagement implicit in reforms of the nineteenth century civic and land grant institutions, and in the Deweyan conception of the academic as a public intellectual (Dewey, 1927; Watermeyer, 2015).

In the English context, the third mission of universities is illustrated by the attempts to re energise the place-based community engagement of the civic

university (Goddard *et al.*, 2016) which aims to be a catalyst for the creation of local systems of knowledge which link to wider national and international issues and expertise (Goddard *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, the third mission, is also seen as emerging from the post-war democratisation of social decision making which demands that institutions, including universities, receive their licence to operate through social legitimacy and accountability (Weymans, 2010; Hurth and Stewart, 2022).

Given that the third mission is recognised as being a recent addition to the more established academic missions of teaching and research (Hurth and Stewart, 2022), it is therefore not yet fully institutionalised (Zomer and Benneworth, 2011), or indeed adequately conceptualised (Watermeyer, 2011; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018). Other concerns focus on the dangers of universities being co-opted to uncritically implement government policy (Bengtsen and Barnett, 2018) or concerns that universities are being asked to move too far beyond their core competencies and act as proxies for state agencies (Marginson, 2018).

The extent of this change in focus is recognised as an invisible revolution (Etzkowitz, 1998) and is seen as raising fundamental questions regarding what universities are expected to accomplish, how they should be accountable to society and how they should interact with other social actors (Maassen *et al.*, 2019). The following section will explore how PCE, as a manifestation of the third mission of universities, is presented in the literature.

2.3 Public and community engagement & the third mission

This section considers how the literature defines PCE in the context of the discourse on the third mission. Within the literature addressing the English HEI context, the third mission of universities has often been articulated as 'public engagement' or 'public and community engagement' and is therefore treated largely as a synonym for the third mission of universities; although providing a neat definition of either is recognised as problematic (Watermeyer 2011, 2015; Lebau and Cochrane, 2015; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). It is often defined negatively as the public facing activities that aren't strictly teaching and research and Watermeyer and Lewis (2015, p.45) argue it is easier to recognise than define, being used to cover a 'smorgasboard of activities' to the extent that:

> public engagement in HEIs is still attempting to secure coherence as to what it is, who does it and what it attempts to achieve. Is it a deliberative method enabling laypeople and policy makers to have a say in social and scientific policy? Is it a phenomenon encouraging the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and the researched? Is it a form of education, inspiring others at some remove from academic life? Is it a platform to disseminate research? Is it all of the above? Or is it something else?

Mtawa (2019, p. 8), writing on the South African context, notes that community engagement has been given a variety of definitions in the literature and is 'is a complex concept associated with multiple terms such as outreach, community service, regional engagement, public service, civic engagement,

public engagement, knowledge transfer and exchange, third mission, triple-helix and social innovation.'

These definitional uncertainties are perhaps reflective of the emergent character of this type of activity and (as will be seen below) that this is also a highly contested space, partly as a result of changing expectations regarding the role of the university in meeting societal challenges and perceived threats to academic identity *(Chubb et al*., 2017; Reed and Fazey, 2021). Pinheiro *et al.* (2015) also point to a similar lack of coherence in the definition of the third mission, a result of the greater breadth of activities in comparison to the more established functions of teaching and research, along with the need to take contextual factors into account when categorising them.

Whilst acknowledging the lack of a settled definition of PCE in the literature, I have chosen the definition provided by the National Centre for Public Engagement (discussed in Chapter 1) as the overarching definition for the purposes of my study:

> Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit. (NCCPE, n.d.)

The rationale for using this definition is that it was a result of consultation with the English HEI sector and was also the definition provided in the guidance issued to institutions for completion of the KEF narrative returns and is

therefore the one that was familiar to my interview participants. Secondly, it is sufficiently broad to be compatible with the human centred public good rationale for PCE discussed in Chapter 3. As such, and following Mtawa (2019, p.8), I also note the utility of the more comprehensive definition offered by Fitzgerald *et al.* (2016, p.229), as this makes explicit both the public good potential of this type of activity and the democratic values which guide it:

> the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

Arguably, it is in this public good and value-based aspect of Fitzgerald *et al.'s* definition that a clear distinction can be made between the public and community engagement and the third mission in general.

2.4 Critical perspectives on public engagement

The policy background outlined in Chapter 1, shows that the primary rationale behind the KEF is to encourage the development of metrics which will support the exercise of the third mission of universities, a mission framed as transmitting and exploiting knowledge for economic benefit (Johnson, 2017). In this sense it can be seen as contributing to a neoliberal audit culture (Shore

and Wright, 2000) and arguably gives prominence to the potential to monetise aspects of the third mission, particularly as it relates to STEM subjects (Johnson, 2020). This economic framing of the third mission, resonates with aspects of the Civic University movement, particularly in relation to Johnson's call for the need for universities to be 'more deeply connected to their local economies' (Johnson, 2017) which is indicative of the way universities are seen as anchor institutions in local communities (Johnson, 2020). Indeed, the policy literature presents KEF as playing a role in encouraging universities to deliver Government policy objectives, including the current Government's levelling up policy:

> Effective and positive partnerships are a key part of successful KE. These have proved invaluable in supporting the UK in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and will have a vital role to play in supporting the UK Government's ambition to build back better through social and economic growth and levelling up. (Knowledge Exchange Concordat, 2022, p. 2)

However there is a perceived tension in KE discourse between the measurable economic impact of KE activities and the broader public good (Goddard, 2009; Tang and Chau, 2020). The explicit role universities are being asked to play in the delivery of public goods has been problematized by a range of scholars (Collini, 2012; Ishkanian and Glasius, 2018; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Johnson, 2020) a critique which Johnson (2020, p.1) applies to the KEF:

> The simultaneous expansion of the sector and the decline in state investment in the economy has created a context in which Government has sought to delegate responsibility to HE for dealing with issues that it itself is reluctant directly to address.

Although the substantive scholarly literature on public engagement as it relates to the KEF is sparse, the wider literature on the third mission and public engagement reflects some of the ambivalence identified by Johnson's comment above. Among the positive features identified is the argument that it can complement rather than threaten the other two core missions of the university: teaching and research, as Pinheiro *et al.* (2015) point out:

> While the Third Mission is often thought to privilege research-intensive universities, it has the capacity to develop the research base of all [types of] institutions ... [it] also has a potentially positive recursive impact on teaching and training missions ... Just as the involvement of faculty in their own research agendas enhances the value of teaching … enterprising academics with links to industry, collaborative research experience and/or commercial experience, can also deepen the scope of the learning experience.

Also, there is recognition that the agenda resonates with the democratic ideal of the academic researcher moving down from the ivory tower and being responsive and representative of their communities; being not only in, but *of* their communities (Bond and Patterson, 2005). This is reflective of an increasing acceptance of the evolution in the mission of the university where

public engagement or the third mission has developed incrementally from being a ‘nice to have’ towards becoming a ‘moral responsibility’ (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015, p. 234). Such conceptions see the agenda as an opportunity to promote social justice and civic change (Ostrander, 2004) or similarly as ‘part of paying back on the public’s investment in universities and academics as incubators and producers of new knowledge’ (Watermeyer, 2015, p. 332) and is therefore an intrinsic good in that it exemplifies an ideal of virtuous university public service (Macfarlane, 2007).

However, the literature is also replete with concerns and critiques of the PCE agenda (Watermeyer, 2015; Pinheiro *et al.*,2015) and the related emphasis on the measurement of research impact in the REF in the UK and international comparators such as the Times Higher Education rankings (Gonzales and Nunez, 2014; Olssen, 2015; Lee *et al*., 2020). Some authors raise concerns regarding the inherent power imbalances between universities and some of the publics and communities engaged with (Nyirenda *et al.*, 2022) which can lead to expectations being placed on academics by the publics and communities they are engaging with which they are unable to meet (Nouvet *et al*., 2022). , Other concerns primarily coalesce around issues of performativity, its threat to academic identities, its definitional looseness (discussed above), institutional ambivalence and a lack of critical rigour in analysis. The argument from performativity suggests that as public engagement becomes more of a mandatory and managerialist feature of higher education, it succumbs to the prevailing neoliberal culture within HE and results in hollowed out and choreographed forms of public engagement

activity which are amenable to institutional audit (Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005; Watermeyer, 2015) and co-opted for martketization (Bok, 2003). In this way, Watermeyer (2015, p.332) argues that

> 'academics' commitment to (or choreographing of) societal connectivity, public kinship and reciprocity originates not purely and selflessly in the terms of responsible citizenship but pragmatically and for the purpose of being economically accountable and therefore occupationally survivalist.

Likewise, Bandola-Gill and Smith (2021) argue that the institutional audit of societal engagement through measures such as the REF impact case-studies can drive behaviours such as the construction of narratives to retrospectively demonstrate engagement that wasn't intended or embedded from the beginning.

The agenda is also perceived as creating a similarly survivalist mentality at the institutional level where public engagement and the third mission is seen as a strategic opportunity to generate public support and funding for the university's core functions (Clark, 1998; Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, institutional engagement with the third mission becomes a defensive strategy borne of an anxiety that the traditional research and teaching functions are insufficient socio-economic justification for the legitimacy of the university mission (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015).

This process therefore amounts to a perceived attack on academic identity and corrosive of the perceived ideal of the function of the university (Henkel,

2000; 2005) and a product of neoliberal governmentality (Burawoy, 2011; Giroux, 2014; Reed and Fazey, 2021) causing ‘a culture of individual, institutional and systemic ambivalence and resistance’ which leaves the agenda, ‘lost, in-between the ardour of its academic apologists; the misanthropy of its academic detractors; and the ambiguity of HE management as lukewarm advocates’ (Watermeyer 2015, p.332). The clash with perceived academic values and culture has led to calls for more committed institutional leadership in support of PCE (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015), a point echoed by Watermeyer and Rowe (2022) who highlight the difficulties faced by PEPs in working across academic and professional boundaries in the absence of institutional commitment to PCE as a formal strategic priority.

The increasing priority that the third mission has within higher education policy and funding environments (Benneworth *et al.*, 2015) is not yet matched by an equivalent scholarly interest in the subject, resulting, it is argued, in a lack of rigour in the analysis of public engagement compared to that which would be expected in other forms of academic output, resulting in an area suffering from:

> a lack of clarity in terms of its definition as an activity, much less a topic for investigation, and in being habitually conflated with widening participation; recruitment and alumni networking; and marketing and public relations activities – administrative rather than academic pursuits. (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2016, p. 47)

This combination of criticisms has, according to Watermeyer (2011; 2015; 2018) left the public engagement agenda at the edge of academic subjectivity and perceived as a faddish encumbrance to academic practice.

2.5 Universities and the Public Good

Implicit in this critique of PCE are normative conceptions of universities' contribution to the public good which inform the perspectives on the merits of the PCE agenda. This section will offer a brief survey of how the literature approaches the public good contribution of universities, before providing some concluding remarks on how the literature on the history, purpose and public good function of universities illuminate current PCE policy and practice, before proceeding to identify the key gaps in the literature.

The concept of the public good is used across the higher education literature and is interpreted in widely different ways, often depending upon underlying conceptual frameworks and understandings of social justice (Weerts and Lyftogt, 2023). A related concept, the common good, is used largely synonymously in the higher education literature (Deem and McCowan, 2018) but has been used as a way of bridging the gap between notions of private and public goods arising from higher education (Marginson, 2016, 2018) and will be returned to below.

A good can be defined as something of benefit to people, and a *public* good extends beyond an individual to a larger group such as a state or 'in fuzzier ways delimited by a set of social, cultural or ethical ties of affiliation' (Unterhalter *et al.*, 2018, p.12). Weerts and Lyftogt (2023) argue that the

conceptualisation of the public good in the context of universities can be understood in three broad (and often overlapping) categories; classical liberalism, progressive liberalism and theological, or metaphysical, traditions.

Within classical liberalism, freedom and individual liberty and the free-market economy are seen as the most efficient means of distributing public goods. Samuelson's Nobel Prize winning research provides a seminal insight into the distinction between public and private goods for this tradition (Samuelson, 1954). He argues that goods are either public or private dependent on their rivalry and excludability. A public good isn't rivalrous if additional consumption of it doesn't degrade it. A public good isn't excludable if it isn't possible to prevent anyone from consuming that good. When applied to universities it is apparent that the goods they provide can be categorised as private as well as public. As Deem and McCowan (2018, p. 63) point out, the clearest example of a public good provided by universities is their contribution of new knowledge through their research activities, 'it is not possible to exclude certain people from the benefit of a mathematical theorem, and use of it by one person does not detract from its use by another.'

However, Samuelson's (1954) contribution also shows that other work done in universities can also be seen as private goods, particularly in relation to their teaching function. Arguably, consumption rivalry exists in relation to teaching as the quality of the learning experience may be degraded with increased class size, and (Nixon, 2011) shows that for research intensive universities the credentialing function necessarily requires exclusion, resulting in the restriction of access to elite institutions (Marginson, 2011). The extensive

literature on the marketization of higher education is largely critical of this state of affairs (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Brown and Carasso, 2013), but recognises that the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy sees the free market to be an appropriate means by which the private goods offered by higher education are distributed (Nixon, 2011; Marginson and Yang, 2023).

However, those writing from within the classical liberal tradition also recognise that universities offer more than public goods arising from new knowledge (research), and private goods enjoyed by individuals receiving a good quality higher education (teaching). The private benefit of gaining a degree also provides a number of positive externalities which can be seen as public goods, particularly as seen from the perspective of human capital theory. This spill-over effect is seen as including greater economic growth and increased social cohesion through greater participation in democratic processes (Fitzsimons, 2017; Tight, 2018).

The notion that universities offer spill-over benefits supportive of democracy has been substantiated by the related work of Habermas on the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). The public sphere provides an arena for informed public discussion and democratic engagement which Marginson (2011) argues universities play a central role in facilitating as autonomous and critical non-state actors. Based on the premise of these external, or spill over, public goods, human capital theory justifies public investment in higher education as an investment in future growth and prosperity. This logic can be seen as highly influential in the contemporary martektization of higher education, where universities provide a public good narrative around their contribution to

the creation of new knowledge and through educating a future workforce that will have social and economic benefits beyond the private advantage accrued by individual graduates (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Brown and Carasso, 2013).

In contrast, the progressive liberal tradition is concerned with the perceived injustices that arise from an unregulated free market, arguing for state intervention to promote more equitable outcomes. In relation to higher education, the progressive liberal tradition would focus less on human capital when identifying the public good provided by higher education and more on its potential to help achieve more just social outcomes, both through addressing injustices and inequities within higher education and also seeking to tackle those existing in wider society. This perspective is articulated in university narratives about their public good function through an internal commitment to widening participation, to equality diversity and inclusion, decolonising the curriculum and, externally, through applying research expertise to address societal challenges, including engaging with communities in the co-creation of solutions. This approach to the public good is very well represented in the literature (Calhoun, 2006; Marginson, 2011, 2018; Nixon, 2011; Walker and McLean, 2013; Boni and Walker, 2016).

Finally, the theological or metaphysical traditions utilise Aristotelean notions of human flourishing to inform understandings of higher education which emphasise a holistic formation of the whole person. These principles inform Roman Catholic understandings of the value of higher education where Aristotelean conceptions have been interpreted by thinkers such as Aquinas and Newman. Here universities are seen as contributing to a wider

humanitarian project of allowing individuals to flourish and, in turn, to support the flourishing of their societies. Aristotelean notions of flourishing can be seen in arguments made by Nussbaum (2010) and others defending the humanities as a means of democratic formation as well as the wider application of the capability approach and its application to education (Sen, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011; Boni and Walker, 2016). These can also be seen in the emerging discourse on the development of civic, or public good, professionalism (Walker and McLean, 2013) and calls for universities to give priority to the problems of living, rather than solving the problems of knowledge (Maxwell, 2007, 2021).

The notion of the common good, is often used to articulate Aristotelean conceptions of the role of higher education in promoting societal flourishing and emphasises the shared construction of public goods. Deneulin and Townsend (2007, p. 25) offer the following definition:

> [T]he common good is not the outcome of a collective action which makes everybody better off than if they acted individually, but is the good of that shared enterprise itself. It is the good of the community which comes into being in and through that enterprise.

This has been applied to universities as a way of critiquing individualist conceptions of the benefits of universities by Marginson (2016, p.17) who defines the common good in relation to higher education as ‘formation of common relationships and joint (collective) benefits in solidaristic social relations within a country.’

In summary, the literature offers a variety of ways to conceptualise the public good function of universities and indicates a confidence amongst scholars that leaning towards the public good is part of the ethos of the university mission (Nixon, 2011; Leibowitz, 2012). However, as Walker (2015, p. 314) suggests:

> foregrounding universities and the public good faces considerable challenges, not least of which is to develop a new language that challenges that of the market and managerialism.

Walker's approach to meeting that challenge is to ground the public good function of universities within the human development paradigm, recognising the university's potential to address 'global and national development agendas and offering an interdisciplinary, multidimensional, reflexive, and justice-enhancing approach' (2015, p.315). Following Haq's (1999) delineation of (1) the core aspects of the human development paradigm of empowerment (expansion of capabilities), (2) values of equality and non-discrimination in the expansion of capabilities and security and (3) sustainability of people's valued achievement and freedoms, Walker (2015, p.316) argues a university oriented towards the public good would:

> work to infuse their core functions of teaching, research, and community service [or public engagement] with the principles drawn from human development and operationalised as the development of human capabilities inside and outside the university.

Walker's suggested approach of grounding the definition of the public good function of universities in the human development paradigm, provides an

appropriate way forward for my study. Not only is this conception of the public good consistent with the definition of PCE outlined in section 2.3, it also provides the means to undertake a normative analysis of the extent to which current PCE policy and practice is supportive of human capability development.

2.6 Connecting university PCE with the public good

This section will offer a brief conclusion on how the literature on the history and public good function of universities illuminates current policy and practice on PCE and will highlight the gap in the current literature that this study seeks to address, namely: insufficient clarity in the conceptualisation of public engagement and its relation to the public good.

This review illustrates that universities are seen as long standing and influential institutions which have adapted their practices to respond to social change over time (Fazey *et al.*, 2021; Palfreyman and Temple 2017). These changes are reflected in the development from largely religious to secular oriented organisations and in their adaption of a mode of enquiry embracing empirical methods and the development of a mission going beyond the *transmission*, to the *creation* of knowledge, as well as their global and social expansion (Palfreyman and Temple, 2017; Fazey *et al.*, 2021; Clark, 1983). Against this mercurial background, the third mission of universities has, since the 1990s, received increasing attention by policy makers and scholars, with suggestions that it amounts to an invisible revolution (Etzkowitz, 1998) and raising fundamental questions regarding the purpose and social function of

universities (Maassen *et al.*, 2019). As outlined in Chapter 1, the KEF and KEC have been introduced in the English HEI context to encourage and measure third mission university activity, including PCE as a subset of this activity.

The scholarly literature shows that this emerging area is weakly institutionalised, inadequately conceptualised and poorly defined (Watermeyer, 2011; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018), resulting in the agenda existing at the edge of academic subjectivity (Watermeyer, 2018). Authors such as Watermeyer (2018), Benneworth *et al.* (2015) and Hurth and Stewart (2022) have identified that policy interest in the third mission of universities is not yet matched by an equivalent scholarly interest; resulting in a gap in the substantive literature on public engagement, particularly as it relates to the KEF (Johnson, 2020). My study aims to help address this gap.

In addition to the lack of academic attention given to the public engagement agenda, this review also identifies calls for further work on conceptualising the purpose(s) of public engagement activity, (McCowan, 2020; Maxwell, 2021; Stewart *et al.*, 2022). Authors such as Berzonsky and Moser (2017); Vogt and Weber (2020); Maxwell (2021) and Moser and Fazey (2021) call for universities to develop a grammar of responsibility and become institutions of human development, not merely education or research focused. This line of critique acknowledges that metric driven assessment, such as that provided by REF and TEF (and behind the rationale of KEF), may be able to identify the quality and extent of PCE, particularly in regard to its economic impact, but is unable to determine, evaluate or articulate what its fundamental

purpose should be; in short the *why* of PCE (Green, 2021; Moser and Fazey 2021; Hurth and Stewart, 2022).

This review of the literature on universities and the public good illustrates a widely held view that the university's core mission leans towards the public good (Nixon, 2011; Leibowitz, 2012). Walker's (2015) argument suggests that using the Capability Approach as part of the human development paradigm provides the conceptual apparatus to ground the public good function of universities. This opens a way forward for my study to develop a normative analysis of PCE, informed by the Capability Approach.

Using the Capability Approach to conceptualise and evaluate university PCE in England in light of the introduction of the KEF, is therefore intended to address the gap identified in this literature review; namely the lack of clarity in the conceptualisation of PCE, particularly in regard to its relation to the public good. How applying the Capability Approach will address this gap will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for adopting the Capability Approach (CA) as the overarching theoretical framework for my study. The previous chapter demonstrated that higher education policy has increasingly focused on the third mission of universities, but that this area is relatively undertheorized, and activities related to PCE lack conceptual coherence and tools for rigorous evaluation. The evaluation that exists has been critiqued for only being able to quantify the level of activity in this space, but not evaluate its purpose; the *what* and *how*, rather than the *why*. It has also been criticised for being too closely aligned to the human capital approach, which utilises metrics foregrounding the economic benefits of university activities and fails to capture the wider public good benefits of the third mission. This highlights the need for conceptual tools which can offer a normative evaluation of university public engagement policy and practices, sensitive to the full variety of PCE activities that cannot be captured by economic metrics alone, and which can provide a substantive foundation to evaluate the public good function of this aspect of the third mission.

This chapter begins by outlining the foundational elements of the CA and explaining their relevance to this study, before discussing key CA research on universities. The CA has not yet been used to evaluate the PCE policy and practice of English universities. However, I will draw on literature which uses

the CA to evaluate the related domains of education, including work done by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019) in the South African context in relation to pedagogies of lifelong learning and service learning. I will also outline its emergent application in the analysis of university policy to better conceptualise the relationship between human development and PCE policy and practice.

3.2 The Capability Approach

Developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the Capability Approach has had a significant influence on social science and humanities literature (Robeyns and Byskov, 2023). Robeyns (2005, p. 94) describes it as 'a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social change in society.' Formulated to provide an alternative to welfarist and utilitarian based approaches to conceptualising human development and social justice (Sen, 1979; Robeyns, 2005), it is motivated by the intuitive notion of human potential, potential which contingent environmental, social and economic forces may nurture or diminish (Chiappero-Martinetti *et al.*, 2020; Nussbaum, 2020).

In his Tanner Lecture (Sen, 1979), Sen argued that contemporary methods of measuring wellbeing were inadequate, as their emphasis on means rather than ends missed something important about the diversity of the human experience. He argued that focusing on the equitable distribution of primary goods or commodities is to be 'concerned with good things rather than with

what these good things do to human beings,' and that a shift in focus is required from goods, to what goods do to human beings; as two people with the similar sets of commodities or resources may achieve different outcomes depending on their social, environmental and personal circumstances (Sen 1979, p.218).

Likewise, he rejected relying exclusively on utilitarian measures of reported levels of happiness, as this can leave out important contextual information such as additional physical needs, moral norms such as pay equality for men and women, or the development of lowered expectations by those living in poverty (Sen, 1979; Kynch and Sen, 1983; Robeyns, 2005). So, rather than focus only on resources, or reported happiness, the CA posits that wellbeing should be seen through the expanded lens of individual beings and doings (functionings), and the genuine freedom of opportunity (capabilities) of individuals to realise these functionings (Robeyns, 2017, p. 26). Robeyns argues that the CA is an open-ended approach and sufficiently versatile to provide a 'framework within which to design and evaluate policies and institutions' (Robeyns 2017, p.27) but can also be used to provide descriptive and conceptual analysis (Robeyns, 2017, p.28).

This flexibility is particularly useful for my study as it provides a means of addressing the gap in the literature identified in Chapter 2 by allowing for a conceptual connection between PCE and the public good. With its clear moral focus on developing individual capabilities, it provides a normatively grounded framework able to account for the *why* as well as the *what* of University PCE policy and practice, and in doing so, offers a means to see beyond economic

metrics informed by human capital evaluations of the third mission and capture the full variety of PCE practice.

Therefore, following Boni and Walker (2016, p.56), I take the Capability Approach as a means of theorising human development in the university context, which they argue 'offers a tremendous resource … in defining and characterising what a good university should be, the kind of social change universities should work towards, and how this can be responsive to the world and pressing development challenges.' In addition to providing a contribution to the literature on PCE, using the CA for this study also makes a contribution to the CA literature. Otto *et al.* (2018, p. 301) observe that there is 'surprisingly little research on capability promoting policies in real life contexts', so my study will provide a contribution to this developing area of CA informed policy research as will be discussed further in Section 3.5 below.

The following subsections will outline the relevance for my study of key concepts from the CA; capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, before outlining some of the criticisms of the approach and discussing the developing conception of agency in the CA.

3.2.1 Capabilities and Functionings

As outlined above, the CA can be distinguished from approaches based on measuring the material means of achieving wellbeing, such as wealth or income, or broadly utilitarian approaches which seek to measure reported, and therefore subjective, levels of happiness, life satisfaction or well-being (Robeyns, 2023; Chiappero-Martinetti *et al.*, 2020). The focus for the CA is

therefore on ends of human wellbeing, rather than using the means, such as resources or primary goods, as a proxy for wellbeing (Sen, 1992). Achieving well-being ‘is a matter of what people are able to do and to be, and thus the kind of life they are effectively able to lead’ (Robeyns and Byskov, 2023), so the relative standard of advantage is therefore the ability to achieve valuable functionings, not a measure of resources (as in GDP) or levels of perceived satisfaction (Leopold, 2020).

In this way, capabilities and functionings are ‘core concepts’ for CA scholars (Robeyns, 2017, p.38). Capabilities refer to the full range of people’s real freedoms and opportunities to be and to do, and functionings are their ‘corresponding achievements’ (Robeyns, 2017, p.38). For example, the freedom and opportunity to be well-nourished, to be sheltered in suitable housing, to be part of a social network, to be educated can be considered *capabilities* which, if realised by being well nourished, suitably housed, part of a social network and educated are the corresponding *functionings* (Robeyns 2017, p.39).

Sen (1999) recognises the central role of education to the development of substantive opportunities, arguing that it functions as a capability multiplier, and Walker (2006a, pp.128–129) applies these concepts in the development of her list of key capabilities that can be fostered amongst students through higher education pedagogies, including for example, practical reason, educational resilience and knowledge and imagination. As will be discussed in detail at sections 3.4 and 3.5 below, these concepts have provided the tools to develop broader lists of capabilities which universities can seek to develop

amongst their key stakeholders and provide a normative focus for the development of university policy (Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020). In the context of my study of HEI policy and practice, the concepts of capabilities draw attention to the full variety of freedoms and opportunities that universities can promote in their PCE policy and how that can serve to enable their communities and publics to achieve a variety of valuable functionings, not just those which can be captured by economic metrics.

3.2.2 Conversion factors and adaptive preferences

The CA is given intuitive force by its recognition that the limitations of the human condition are such that there are marked differences in the ability of individuals to convert resources into valued ways of being (Nussbaum, 2020). These contingencies are conceptualised as *conversion factors* and can be categorised as personal (physical condition, intelligence, sex) or social (stemming from public policies, social norms, and practices) or environmental (the influence of the built environment, climate, availability of transportation and communication) (Robeyns, 2017, p.46; Leopold, 2020).

The concept of conversion factors therefore draws attention to both the internal and external influences on the ability of an individual to convert resources into valued ends. In the higher education context, Boni and Walker (2016, p.66) argue that this can serve to illuminate why some people are able to convert educational opportunities into the achieved functionings of becoming educated and receiving the appropriate credentials, and why others may not succeed in doing so. The inclusion of social forces such as public

policies in the conceptualisation of conversion factors provides a useful tool for my study to conceptualise the role of university policy and practice on PCE as a *conversion factor* in the promotion and development of individual capabilities for members of the communities and publics who are the intended beneficiaries of university engagement. It also provides a means to undertake a granular analysis of how norms, values, policy arrangements, institutional structures within universities can support or inhibit the agency of university academics and professionals in their PCE work.

The related, and complementary, concept of adaptive preferences can also aid understanding of how social circumstances can impact upon individual capabilities and achieved functionings (Sen, 2002; Nussbaum, 2011; Ibrahim, 2020). This concept recognises that deprivation can have a negative impact on aspiration. For example, women in patriarchal societies who are excluded from education may not aspire to be educated partly because they may have 'deeply internalized the idea that a proper woman does not go in for schooling' (Nussbaum, 2011, p.84). This concept provides useful insights for my study, as many universities declare an interest in focusing their PCE activity on marginalised groups, and scholars using the CA to investigate education's role in developing capabilities argue that education can foster the capability of aspiration and therefore seek to challenge adaptive preferences (Hart, 2013).

3.2.3 Criticisms of the Capability Approach

As the Capability Approach has grown in popularity it has been the subject of critical appraisal which has, in turn, prompted CA scholars to clarify and develop the approach (Robeyns, 2017; Ibrahim, 2020; Nussbaum, 2020). Points of criticism include arguments that the CA is not sufficiently different from more established theories or that it is difficult to operationalise (Robeyns, 2017). Other critiques are based on the idea that it is an approach, rather than a complete theory of justice, and is therefore often applied in tandem with supplementary theories, leading to a 'considerable internal divergence' (Robeyns, 2017; Powell and McGrath 2019, p.31). Powell and McGrath (2019, p.31) summarise other areas of critique as including its ability to account for structural injustices, relational and collective capabilities, intergenerational justice, its treatment of capitalism, personhood and responsibility and issues of power.

The constraints of space in this study prevents a full discussion of the merits of these critiques, or how CA scholars have responded to them. However, two areas of criticism are particularly relevant for key aspects of my theoretical framework: agency and institutions. Critiques of the CA concept of agency will be addressed at 3.2.4, and secondly, critiques concerning the ability of the CA to provide a sufficiently robust account of the social role of institutions, given that individuals are the fundamental units of moral concern in the CA, will be addressed at 3.3 below.

3.2.4 Agency

The focus on individual freedom to achieve valued functionings is indicative of the importance of human agency to the CA and Robeyns (2017, p.64) maintains that all applications of the CA should address the concept of agency; 'agency cannot simply be ignored and must be accounted for.' Although agency is foundational to Sen's development of the CA, his account of it has been criticised for lacking 'the careful analysis that we have come to expect of him' (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009, p. 80) and for failing to take sufficient account of structural injustices, political economy and power relations (Frediani, 2010; Powell and McGrath, 2019; Dejaeghere, 2020).

The implications of agency in the applications of the CA have been developed and refined in the secondary CA literature (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009, p.80; Ibrahim, 2020) with scholars utilising supplementary social theories to augment the open ended normative framework provided by the CA (Gangas, 2016; Powell and McGrath, 2019; Dejaeghere, 2020). For example, in addition to the CA, Walker's (2018) study incorporated Hannah Arendt's conceptualisation of speech and action in the public sphere, Preece's (2018) study added community asset based theory to her CA framework and Boni and Walker (2020) incorporated Fricker's conception of epistemic justice in addition to the CA. Following Mtawa's (2019) solely CA based investigation of university community engagement and service learning (discussed further at 3.5.1 below), I chose not to incorporate supplementary social theories into my

framework in this study for two reasons. Firstly, the constraints imposed by the relatively short length of this study and, secondly, as will be explained below, the CA's conception of agency was sufficiently rich to explore how national university PCE policy was mediated through the meso and micro levels, without including additional theories on policy diffusion in institutions.

The CA account of agency is informed by Sen (1999, p.19), who defines an agent as 'someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievement can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well.' Sen's definition highlights the fact that his account of agency brings to the fore the agent's role in acting in terms of their own values and aims such that improving individual wellbeing is insufficient unless individuals are also agents in that improvement, that they are 'active participant[s] in change, rather than . . . passive and docile recipient[s] of instructions or of dispensed assistance' (Sen, 1999, p.281). The participation of individuals in deciding the valued ends that constitute their wellbeing is helpfully summarised by Crocker and Robeyns (2009, p.75):

> 'It is important to ask not only what it means for an individual's life to go well or for a group to be doing well, and which capabilities and functionings are most important, but also who should decide these questions, how they should do so, and who should act to effect change. If well-being freedoms and functionings were the only items with normative importance, it would not matter who decided what was

> important or the process by which these decisions were made or enacted.'

This conceptualisation of agency is significant for my study in at least two important ways. Firstly, it draws attention to the importance of the manner in which universities engage with their publics and communities in their PCE activities, for example the extent to which communities are active participants in the activities and in the development of PCE strategy and priorities. Secondly, the CA's conception of agency also highlights the potential that PCE has in supporting the development of agency freedoms more generally, particularly in light of the fact that individual agency operates and develops within a social context, 'not only should individuals exercise their agency by shaping or determining their own lives, but it is by exercising joint agency that communities can and should select, weigh, and trade off capabilities, functionings, and other normative considerations' (Crocker and Robeyns 2009, p.76). The CA's conception of agency thus provides a conceptual tool which connects individual agency freedom and the interconnected web of social and environmental factors (of which universities are a part):

> The freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. (Sen,1999, p.xi).

The general role of institutions in promoting agency freedoms is discussed further in the section below, after which the remainder of this chapter will focus on how CA scholars have applied these insights to universities.

3.3 CA and institutions

The CA has received criticism that its focus on the promotion of individual capabilities means that it cannot pay sufficient attention to social forces, collective action or interpersonal relations (Gore, 1997; Evans, 2002; Stewart and Deneulin, 2002; Stewart, 2005). However, although the CA is ethically individualist as it 'postulates that individuals, and only individuals, are the units of moral concern' it is not ontologically or methodologically individualist (Robeyns 2005, p.107). Although the freedom and dignity of the individual is the fundamental unit of moral concern animating the CA, the insights it provides for social policy and institutional actors are presented through the evaluative frame of *individual* human development (Ibrahim, 2020).

As the discussion on agency and conversion factors above illustrates, institutions are recognised by the CA as playing a key role in shaping individual capabilities (Ibrahim, 2020). Sen (1999, p.142) recognises that individual opportunities and prospects 'depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function' and 'the options that a person has depend greatly on relations with others and on what the state and other institutions do' (Drèze and Sen, 2002, p.6). So, institutions, including universities, have a key role to play in fostering, or inhibiting, capabilities and agency. In the terminology of

the CA, institutions can act as a conversion factor impacting on an individual's ability to convert their available resources, or commodities, into achieved functionings (Robeyns, 2005, Ibrahim, 2020; Leopold, 2020) and also in shaping individual values, identities and affiliations:

> 'There are strong influences of the community, and of the people with whom we identify and associate, in shaping our knowledge and comprehension as well as our ethics and norms. In this sense, social identity cannot but be central to human life' (Sen, 1999, p.5).

This understanding of the role of institutions provides the tools for me to conceptualise the role of PCE policy and practice as a potential conversion factor in the promotion of capabilities, values and agency. The conceptualisation in my study of PCE as a conversion factor is augmented by two overlapping areas of Sen's thought which add depth to my institutional analysis: imperfect obligations and democratic institutions. Each of these will be explored in the subsections below.

3.3.1 Imperfect obligations

Sen (2009, p.129) utilises Immanuel Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect obligations to explore the extent to which individuals and institutions have a moral imperative to promote justice and remedy injustice. Imperfect obligations can be distinguished from perfect obligations on the grounds that the extent of the obligations is subject to contingencies which makes their requirements less specific and more contextually dependent:

> The perfectly specified demand not to torture anyone is supplemented by the more general – and less exactly specified – requirement to consider the ways and means through which torture can be prevented and then to decide what one should, in this particular case, reasonably do. (Sen, 2009, p.76)

The lack of specificity of imperfect obligations should not disguise their moral force. Sen, argues that this distinction is particularly relevant to assessing individual and institutional obligations for the promotion of human rights:

> The recognition of human rights is not an insistence that everyone rises to help prevent any violation of any human right no matter where it occurs. It is, rather, an acknowledgement that if one is in a position to do something effective in preventing the violation of such a right, then one does have a good reason to do just that – a reason that must be taken into account in deciding what should be done. It is still possible that other obligations, or non-obligational concerns, may overwhelm the reason for the particular action in question, but the reason is not simply brushed away as being 'none of one's business'. There is a universal ethical demand here, but not one that automatically identifies contingency-free, ready-made actions. (Sen, 2009, p.373)

Sen's presentation of the concept of imperfect obligations provides a useful tool for my study, as PCE can be understood as a way in which universities should support, rather than 'brush aside' the individuals who are not formally part of their immediate academic community. The contextualised nature of

these obligations, and the need to balance them with other obligations, also helps to frame the process of prioritisation for PCE activities undertaken by the universities in my study, all of whom are dealing with competing priorities and operating in particular contexts shaped by the differing nature of their local communities. As such it further develops the normative framework for interrogating university public engagement policy and practice and provides a counterbalance to the economic imperatives for the third mission critiqued in Chapter 2.

3.3.2 Democratic institutions

Key to Sen's (1999, 2009) thinking on institutions is the idea that institutional influence is not unidirectional but reciprocal, as individuals have a key role to play in influencing institutional arrangements and improving their appropriateness and effectiveness, both from the inside (individuals exercising their agency whilst working in the institution) and the outside (members of the public engaged in democratic public reasoning).

Sen (2009) presents an approach to justice which aims to refocus the attention of moral and political philosophy from seeking to substantiate and define ideal or perfect justice, which usually focuses on a discussion of just institutional arrangements, to the more pragmatic (non-ideal) task of seeking to enhance justice and remove, or mitigate examples of injustice (Sen, 2009, p. ix). Public reasoning is central to Sen's non-ideal conception of justice as it presupposes the need to be able to engage diverse voices in discussion and

practical reasoning for determining institutional priorities and how social improvements can be made:

> Understanding the demands of justice is not any more of a solitarist exercise than any other discipline of human understanding. When we try to determine how justice can be advanced, there is a basic need for public reasoning, involving arguments coming from different quarters and divergent perspectives (Sen, 2009, p.392).

This also implies the importance of engaging the voices of marginalised groups is not only necessary from the perspective of their right to participate as citizens, but that the perspectives of marginalised groups have epistemological value:

> assessment of justice demands engagement with the 'eyes of mankind', first, because we may variously identify with the others elsewhere and not just with our local community; second, because our choices and actions may affect the lives of others far as well as near; and third, because what they see from their respective perspectives of history and geography may help us to overcome our own parochialism (Sen, 2009, p.130).

Therefore, diverse voices from the community have a key role to play in influencing institutions from the outside, but Sen's analysis also provides the tools to acknowledge the agency and influence of those working *within* institutions. In seeking to create 'institutions that promote justice, rather than treating the institutions as themselves manifestations of justice' we have to

acknowledge that this work ‘depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization’ (Sen, 2009, p.82 and p.354).

This account has a number of implications for my study as it provides a means to conceptualise universities’ public facing role, but also acknowledges the important role of individuals working within universities. In terms of university publics, it shows the importance of the accountability of universities to their communities and points to the role of collaborative and participatory approaches to deciding which activities and publics universities should prioritise in their PCE strategies. It also resonates with a broader conception of PCE which can promote community capability and agency freedoms by facilitating participation in the public practical reasoning on which Sen’s conception of a just democracy depends. This conceptualisation of promoting public reasoning provides a purposive focus for university public engagement which has been called for by Fazey *et al.* (2021) in relation to their demand for renewed university leadership in response to current societal challenges, and also acts as an additional counterweight to the purely economic justifications for PCE work discussed in Chapter 2. Also, the recognition of the importance of the individual agency of those working inside institutions is particularly useful for my study as it provides a frame to conceptualise the experience of the academics and public engagement professionals who facilitate and deliver PCE activity.

The following section will examine how the CA has been applied to universities.

3.4 CA and universities

The CA has been utilised to research universities in a number of contexts, most obviously in relation to their education mission. From the CA perspective, access to education is of foundational importance for the development of individual capabilities and societal development; a fertile functioning of the highest order (Sen, 2003, p. 55; Nussbaum, 2011, p. 152). Sen (1992) argues education is centrally important to functionings that are crucial to wellbeing, and its significance to the CA has been delineated in five areas by Drèze *et al.* (1996). Firstly, as an intrinsic good, secondly an extrinsic personal good in supporting access to economic opportunities, thirdly its role in developing the public reasoning skills crucial for democracy, fourthly a process role in widening horizons and perspectives and finally helping to empower individuals and groups to organise politically to challenge injustice.

The foundational importance of education to capabilities development renders it a significant subject of research for capability scholars (Walker, 2020) and a growing scholarly literature has used this framework to research education in a number of areas including gender, disability, children and foreign language acquisition and learning outcomes (Unterhalter, 2007; Terzi, 2008; Biggeri *et al.*, 2011; Walker, 2022). Of particular relevance to my study of PCE (which includes work to promote education opportunities), CA has been used to highlight the role of education in shaping or challenging individuals' adaptive preferences and aspirations (Hart, 2013) sometimes through foregrounding

the development of wonder as an ethical experience that education can catalyse (Bendik-Keymer, 2020).

The CA has also been applied specifically to education at university level (Boni and Walker, 2013; Walker and McLean, 2013; Walker and Wilson-Strydom, 2017). A large proportion of this work has tended to focus on the role universities can play in supporting the capability development of students and the related issue developing graduates with a public good orientation, (McLean and Walker, 2016; Kreber, 2019). Capability scholars including Walker (2018) and Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020) have also begun to explore how university education can develop the political capabilities of university students. Both of these seams of research are relevant to PCE practice, as they offer a means of conceptualising the practice of universities involving their students in their PCE practice and points to the potential for universities in fostering political agency capabilities amongst the publics and communities they are engaging with.[3]

[3] My definition of political agency capabilities is informed by Bohman (1996), Sen (2009) and Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020). Sen (2009) suggests that participating in public reasoning is essential for democracy and justice and by Bonham (1996, p.110) who argues that a political agent has the ability to 'avoid being excluded from public life and to avoid having their concerns consistently ignored.' Building on this literature, Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020, p.173) define this political capability as the freedom to 'influence the outcomes of public deliberation or see their voices and ideas represented and recognised.'

The next section will explore further how this foundational work on CA and universities can assist in conceptualising and evaluating policies concerning university PCE.

3.5 CA and university policy

For the purpose of my study, I acknowledge that policy is more than a document encapsulating a written policy and that policy making is not confined to the production of official documents by government or other forms of institutional authority. Following Spence and Deneulin (2009), and in light of the discussion of Sen's approach to democratic institutions at 3.3.2 above, I also interpret policy making to occur across a web of many decisions such that the boundary between governmental policy making at the macro level, and its implementation at the meso and micro levels, can be blurred due to institutional level mediation by universities, and by the street level bureaucrats (academics and PEPs) tasked with delivery (Lipsky, 2010).

From a CA perspective, the focus of policy analysis is to understand the extent to which a policy is conducive to human development, as measured by the expansion of individual capabilities (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009); described as the final ends of policy making for human development (Richardson, 2015). Otto *et al.* (2018, p.9) argue that the 'capabilities approach offers a rich alternative to mere critique of current policy making by asking what we can and what we should do in the interests of justice', although they admit that this remains 'relatively unchartered territory,' an observation which holds true for analysis of PCE policy.

In comparison to the considerable CA literature on the teaching function of universities (discussed at 3.4), relatively little attention has been paid to university policy on PCE. As Preece (2018, p.27,35) argues, capability scholars working on higher education issues have so far focused on developing a pro-social orientation amongst university students, but that this analysis 'does not sufficiently capture the 'community' perspective in terms of exploring community engagement as a collaborative and partnership relationship' and are yet to 'fully capture the essence of how the university as a public institution should be a capability resource in its entirety for community development.'

A number of studies have begun to consider how broader issues of university policy can be addressed from a human development and capabilities perspective and I have utilised six complementary studies in this developing field of applied capability research; Boni and Gasper (2012), Boni and Walker (2016), Preece (2018), Mtawa (2019), Velasco and Boni (2020) and Nussey *et al.* (2022) as the principle guides to assist me in applying key concepts from the CA to my investigation of PCE. This group of studies are connected by their application of aspects of the CA to understand the human development potential of universities and are iterative to the extent that the later studies are informed by the insights and applications of the former, a process which continues in my study.

In the next subsection, I outline how CA has been applied to analyse University policy in this collection of studies and demonstrate how my

application of the CA differs, thereby providing an original but complementary contribution to the literature.

3.5.1 Developing a CA framework for PCE policy and practice in England

In their 2012 paper, Boni and Gasper address the policy issue of university quality from the perspective of a human development framework in an attempt to take a more holistic approach to the role of universities. They apply four fundamental concepts which are complementary to the CA from human development thinking (well-being, participation and empowerment, equity and diversity, and sustainability) to a wide range of university work beyond pedagogy and curriculum. This included research, social engagement, internal governance, admissions and investment policies in addition to their physical environment. Boni and Gasper's (2012) framework was adapted and developed by Boni and Walker (2016, p.186) and applies the four core human development principles as a normative tool to frame the human development-friendly university with the addition of key aspects of the CA, encompassing teaching and research functions and related policies which promote valued capabilities and functionings. Although the framework doesn't directly address public engagement, their list of Human Development values is a useful tool for my study as it provides a framework to help me identify the values evident in my data. This includes the values evident in both the KEF narratives, which provide a representation of institutional approaches to PCE represent the institutional approach to PCE, as well as the values evident in the perspectives of the academics and PEPs who took part in the interviews. Such applications were envisaged by the authors when creating this matrix:

> we can easily perceive the connections between university activities inspired by human development values and the expansion of capabilities… universities can develop their own proposals for valuable capabilities through public deliberation, as a way to evaluate the activities proposed and implemented in university policies (Boni and Walker 2016, p.187).

Boni and Walker (2016) also highlight the implications of the agency-oriented nature of the capability approach outlined by Crocker and Robeyns (2009). This implies that deciding which capabilities universities should seek to promote should be a matter of public deliberation, and not just the unilateral decision of the university. Therefore, the need for democratic and participatory practices in the prioritisation of the capabilities universities promote and develop is highlighted in their study:

> we not only need to pay attention to the capabilities and functionings we would like to expand among the university community and external groups linked to this community, but also who decides which are going to be those capabilities and functionings, and how external structural factors influence the process of decision-making (Boni and Walker, 2016p.69).

This question has been explored further by Velasco and Boni (2020) who utilised participatory action research methods to engage with the community to develop a capabilities list for the full range of activities of a Columbian university in order to provide a normative focus for the development of

university policy. Although the capabilities list developed by Velasco and Boni (2020) embrace a horizon wider than only PCE activity, some of the capabilities highlighted do align with PCE activity and are thus instructive for my study. For example, the focus on building community capabilities through 'constructive interaction' seeks to promote and strengthen dialogue to empower social and political action and the capability to 'weave nets' seeks to develop interconnections with companies, communities to make possible truly local development with a global perspective (Velasco and Boni, 2020, p.48).

These conceptual applications are particularly relevant to my study of public engagement policy, as it highlights not only the role universities can play as a conversion factor in the expansion of capabilities and agency amongst their communities, but also the importance of the process and inclusivity of decision making regarding which publics and which capabilities universities should prioritise, an issue which strongly resonates with Sen's emphasis on democratic reasoning discussed at 3.3.2 above.

Although the existing CA literature on universities and public deliberation has mostly drawn attention to the role universities can play in developing capabilities amongst students, recent studies utilising the capability approach by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019), researching in the South African context, have begun to orientate their analysis towards the public good potential of university community engagement, both in the context of the pedagogy of lifelong learning (Preece, 2018) and community partnerships arising from service-learning opportunities provided to undergraduate students (Mtawa 2019). Both authors build on the foundation created by Boni and Walker's

(2016) study to argue the capability approach has the potential to highlight the opportunity universities have to turn their 'position of privilege into a resource for the common good; still retaining its teaching and research mission to advance new knowledge' (Preece, 2018, p.xii).

Mtawa (2019, p.24) argues that community engagement has the potential for universities to respond to Sen's (2009) call for institutions to do what they can to address remediable injustice, particularly in addressing limited political participation by playing 'a leading role in cultivating citizenship capacities among community members.' Following Boni and Walker (2016), he provides a framework summarising how community engagement and service learning informed by human development values and capabilities can support the common good (Mtawa, 2019, p. 283). In a similar vein, Preece (2018, p.36) argues that not only does a university have resources which, if shared, can contribute to expanded capability sets amongst their communities, but also points to the need to recognise communities have resources and knowledge that can be harnessed to solve societal problems through the development of democratic, participatory and collaborative approaches which increase community agency:

> The role of higher education, in partnership with other agencies is to expand, through relevant interventions, potential conversion factors, which can build capability sets that are deemed worthwhile for those concerned (Preece, 2018, p.170).

My study builds on the foundation provided by these two South African studies as it also uses the CA to understand the aspects of the public facing role of universities. However, my study is both distinct and original in that the locus of the study is England and the focus is widened to encompass an investigation of national PCE policy. Thus, it goes beyond examining PCE in relation to the pedagogical practice of service and lifelong learning, to encompass the full breadth of university PCE activity at the national level. It also departs from the South African studies by offering a distinct conceptual focus, which has been informed by a recent conceptual innovation offered by Nussey *et al.* (2022).

Nussey *et al.'s* (2022) study provides a conceptual development in the evolution of CA scholarship on universities which provides a foundation for me to make a novel application of the CA to university PCE. Their study does not focus on PCE policy in general, but utilises the CA literature to evaluate universities' capabilities for societal engagement on the particular issue of promoting climate justice. The innovation in their conceptual framing is that rather than investigate how universities can play a role in expanding people's capabilities, they focus on 'the university itself as an institutional agent, with contested and disputed goals, freedoms and unfreedoms' and thereby investigate the capabilities of universities to bring about social and environmental justice (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.102).

The conceptual innovation in investigating the capabilities of universities (rather than university students or their wider community) is consistent with the CA paradigm and is a continuation of the work of Velasco and Boni

(2020), which used participatory action research methods to develop a capability list for a Colombian university, which is itself a development of work done by Boni and Walker(2016) and Boni and Gasper (2016), discussed above. They define university capabilities as 'the choices, abilities and opportunities universities have to advance a particular set of outcomes' (Nussey *et al*., 2022, p.102) and to investigate these they have developed a framework, copied in Table 3.1 below. Table 3.1 illustrates how the framework proposed by Nussey *et al*. (2022, p.96), adapted from earlier work by Frediani (2021, p.15), identifies seven key concepts which illuminate the capabilities of universities to act as 'agents of social change' for their communities and publics by promoting the public good through acting for climate justice.

Concepts	Definition
Drivers	These are the historical and contemporary social, political, economic and ecological contextual conditions that shape university capabilities. These influence the values and aspirations prioritised by universities. They also shape the conversion factors (Robeyns, 2005) enabling or constraining universities to pursue those climate-oriented values and aspirations.
Practices	Practices are the different ways that universities can act to towards climate related outcomes. These relate to core

	areas of university activities, such as teaching, research, public engagement or campus operations.
Abilities	These refer to the resources and capacities available for those engaged in university practices to advance climate justice. These can include access to financial, social and human resources among others.
Opportunities	University opportunities refer to the socio-economic-political-cultural conditions enabling or constraining universities to advance climate justice. These refer particularly to how policies and norms are produced within the university landscape, and how these distribute power among different actors within the university community.
Aspirations	These are the values and outcomes that universities prioritise in response to climate change. These can be situated within university policies as well as within the experiences and preferences of university actors, such as academic staff, students and partners.
Agency	Agency is the capacity of the university to reflect, imagine and act in relation to climate change. In our project, this is particularly concerned with the extent to which universities can and decide to take a position and act towards climate justice.

Trajectories	These are the university pathways and sequencing of activities when pursuing climate justice. In our research, we are concerned with trajectories pursued through the activities of the participatory action research group.

Table 3.1 Capability Elements (Source: Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.103)

The conceptual development illustrated in Table 3.1 provides a useful orientation for my study. Whilst Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.102) are focusing on university capabilities to engage with society through the promotion of climate justice by uncovering the 'the drivers, practices, abilities, opportunities, aspirations, agency and trajectories of universities' my study is concerned to uncover similar capacities in relation to the public good potential of university PCE. Their framework can therefore be usefully transposed to help frame my data in a way that uncovers the capability promoting potential of PCE policy and how this is mediated at the meso level by institutional responses, and the micro level by individual academics and PEPs working in this area..

In summary, the seam of scholarship represented by these six studies applying human development values and the CA to university policy identified above, provides a foundation for me to transpose the insights from the extant literature to my novel study on English PCE post the introduction of the KEF, bringing into focus three key aspects of university PCE policy and practice. Firstly, it provides a framework to identify which capabilities and human

development values are promoted by university PCE policies, secondly, to consider the extent to which universities engage with their communities in developing their PCE approaches and, thirdly, to consider the university as an institutional agent facing freedoms and unfreedoms in their development and operationalisation of capability friendly PCE strategies.

3.6 University public and community engagement and the capability approach

The review of the capabilities literature presented above justifies my decision to use the CA as the normative framework for my study of PCE policy and practice in England. The CA provides a means of addressing the gap in the literature identified in Chapter 2 by allowing for a conceptual connection between PCE and the public good, summarised in Figure 3.1 below. With its clear moral focus on human development through the expansion of individual freedoms, it thus provides a normatively grounded framework to evaluate PCE policy and practice and thus provide for an exploration of the *purpose* as well as the *practice* of public engagement. Chapter 2 also demonstrated that PCE remains an open-ended area of activity which has yet to be clearly conceptualised in the literature. This chapter has discussed how the core CA concepts of capabilities and functionings enables an investigation of how institutions can support the expansion of a variety of human freedoms. In this way, the CA allows me to navigate this uncertain conceptual terrain by taking into account the full variety of activities that are provided under the umbrella of university PCE, not just those that are amenable to measurement by economic metrics.

The concept of conversion factors provides the opportunity for a nuanced and contextualised understanding of the potential for PCE policy and practice to positively impact communities and publics by seeing PCE activities as a potential conversion factor in the expansion of their capabilities. It also draws attention to the range of contextual factors in, and outside, universities which support or inhibit the promotion of capability friendly PCE activities.

I have argued that agency is a key concept in the CA and is also of central importance to my study. It provides the means for my study to consider how universities can discharge their obligations as democratic institutions through their PCE policy and practice. Sen's foundational concepts of non-ideal justice and imperfect obligations resonate here and underpin the relevance of the CA to my study, as these point to the moral imperative for institutions (including universities) to do what they can, including reaching out beyond the walls of the academy in their public engagement work, to promote justice and remedy injustice. To paraphrase Sen (2009, p. 373), the imperfect obligations of universities demands that they do not simply brush away the interests of their publics and communities as being 'none of one's business'. Also, Sen's conception of democratic institutions is significant in three respects: firstly, in highlighting how PCE activities by universities might support and facilitate agency capabilities development and, secondly, highlighting the importance of collaborative and participatory approaches in deciding which activities and publics universities should prioritise in their PCE strategies and, thirdly, in recognising the influence of the agency of those working within universities to operationalise and interpret PCE policies.

My review of the seam of recent literature that has applied the CA to investigate university policy and activity (section 3.5.1) has provided contextualised examples of how I can transpose core CA concepts to my novel study of university PCE in England, paying particular attention to the institutional freedoms and unfreedoms that can support or inhibit the promotion of human development values and capabilities through PCE, which Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) conceptualise as a series of seven university capability elements. Figure 3.1 below, illustrates how I will operationalise Nussey *et al.'s* (2022) framework in my study. Paraphrasing their explanation (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.102), their list of capability elements will help me identify the 'choices, abilities and opportunities' universities have to advance, interpret and act on national PCE policy in a way that expands public and community capability sets (Preece, 2018).

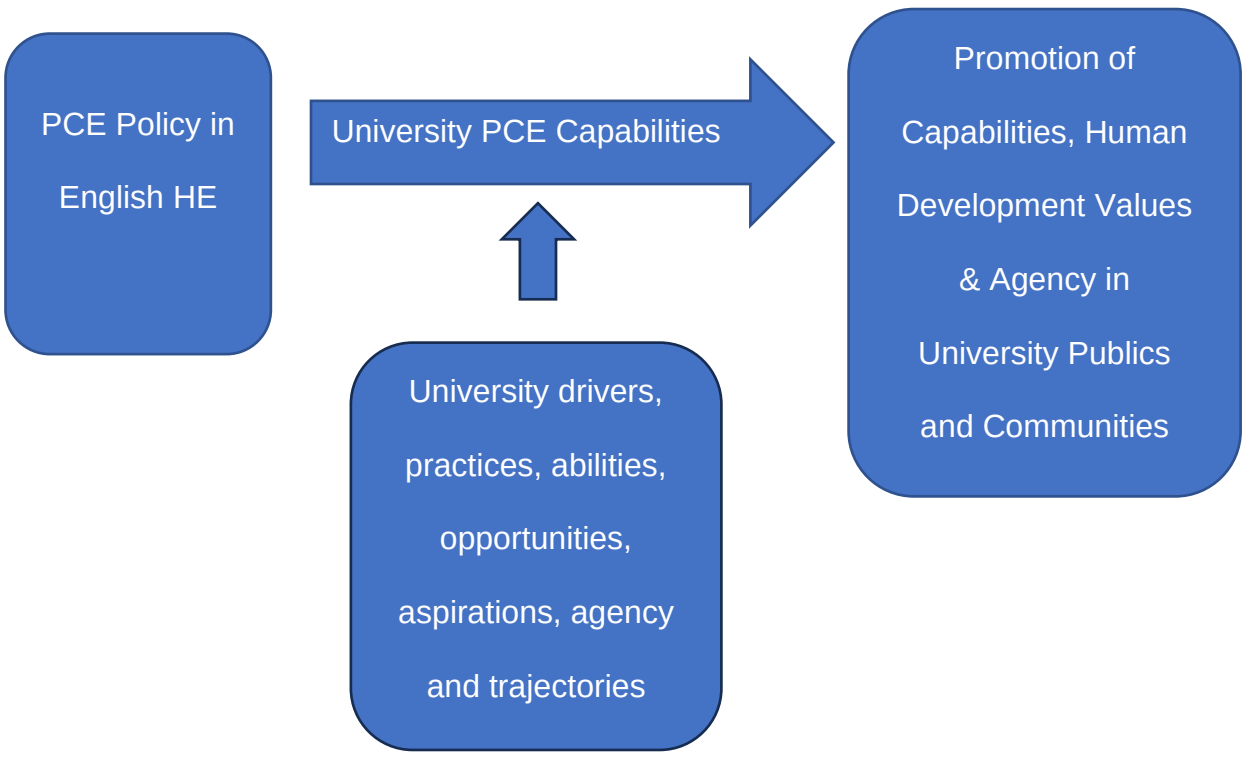

Figure 3.1 Applying the CA to PCE in the current study

Incorporating these elements of the capability approach into my theoretical framework addresses the gap in the literature identified in Chapter 2 by providing a normative foundation for PCE which can serve to orientate this emerging policy area towards the public good, an aspiration articulated in similar terms by Walker (2015, p.323) in the context of the UK's research impact agenda:

> If social science is understood as a public good, a normative interpretation of knowledge impacts should flow from this so that we are directed not to any old impact but impact that advances the public good and the policies and actions that support this.

The following chapter will outline the methodology utilised in my study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter outlines the design I have utilised for this enquiry. It will address the philosophical assumptions informing the research design and outline the research approach and methods used to gather and analyse the data. The chapter will then address the ethical issues raised by my study and outline the steps taken to mitigate them, before addressing the limitations inherent in my approach.

4.1 Philosophical orientation

My study explores the policy and practice of university PCE from a capabilities perspective, and seeks to understand perspectives of individual academics and PEPs operating at the micro level, in addition to the meso level representations of the practices of higher education institutions who participated in the 2020 KEF exercise. Therefore, I have adopted a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology to frame my research. My ontology is informed by philosophical traditions including phenomenology and hermeneutics which focus on human meaning making and posit an ontology that is intersubjective or constructivist (Schwartz-Shea and Yannow, 2020).

Interpretivist epistemology posits that meaning is both constructed and communicated in social contexts and through words and actions and ‘its focus on context and on situated actors’ own understandings can generate insights unavailable through other approaches’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2020, p.10). As such, it is an approach which is ‘concerned with the empathic

understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it' (Bryman, 2012, p.28). From this perspective, gaining an understanding of social phenomena requires an interpretive understanding which allows the researcher to grasp 'the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2012, p.30).

The importance of paying attention to the subjective constructs by which social actors interpret their lives is emphasised by Schutz (1962, p.59, quoted in Bryman,2012, p.30):

> The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within the social world.

An interpretivist epistemology was chosen to guide my study because it aims to understand the social phenomena of university PCE through identifying the experiences, understandings and perceptions of those working in this field. Furthermore, as Bryman (2012, p.31) points interpretivism also acknowledges the second and third levels of interpretivism that are present in my study. Not only does my research seek to understand the perspectives of those working in university PCE, but the process of that understanding is also an act of interpretation by the researcher which is also placed in a third interpretive plane of the context of the existing scholarly literature and theoretical framing outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

The following section will outline how my philosophical orientation has informed the design of my study.

4.2 Methodology

Consistent with the philosophical orientation outlined above, I have adopted a qualitative research design to explore the understandings and perceptions of participants, guided by my research questions:

1. What are the values and capabilities promoted by English universities in their Public and Community Engagement practices?
2. How and why do universities decide on what PCE work they undertake?

As Bryman (2012, p. 380) suggests, in qualitative research the 'stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants.' Several methodologies are relevant to my chosen paradigm, all of which seek to gain a rich understanding of socially constructed realities. These include case study, surveys, ethnographies and phenomenographies, and the discussion below will provide the rationale for my choice of adopting a case study methodology.

Yin (2009, p.18) defines case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.' Labaree (Labaree, n.d.) argues that it provides a means for an in-depth study, rather than a 'sweeping statistical survey or comprehensive

comparative enquiry' which can be utilised to 'narrow down a very broad field of research into one or a few easily researchable examples.' It is also recognised by Mills *et al.* (2010) as a useful approach for monitoring policy implementation in an education context. My study of university PCE involves important contextual conditions in relation to the HEI institutional and policy landscape and the boundaries between individual participants, and the HEI context in which they operate, are not clearly demarcated (Yin, 2009).

There are different forms of case study recognised in the literature: descriptive, interpretative and evaluative (Merriam, 1998) or descriptive, explanatory and exploratory (Yin, 2009), whereas Stake (1995) identifies collective, instrumental and intrinsic studies. My study adopts elements of an exploratory and explanatory case study, with no predetermined outcomes but an intention to answer what, how and why questions with a view to opening up avenues or further research (Yin, 2009; Bryman, 2012). My study seeks to develop an in depth understanding of which types of PCE universities engage in, how they do so and why certain types of activity and publics are prioritised.

The case selection and case study design will be discussed further at Sections 3.3 and 3.4 below.

4.3 Sampling

4.3.1 Purposive sampling

In line with my qualitative research paradigm, I adopted purposive sampling to select the units of analysis for my study. Bryman (2012, p.418) argues that

most qualitative research entails purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can be distinguished from probability-based sampling commonly used in quantitative research as it aims to select participants in a strategic, purposeful way, rather than randomly. An advantage of this form of sampling is the researcher can take steps to ensure that 'there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question' (Bryman, 2012 p.418), which can add to the richness of the sample, but as a form of non-probability sampling, this advantage is won at the cost of generalisability.

Two categories of data were utilised in my study: interviews and institutional documentation. Purposive sampling was used for selection purposes across both data sources. Each will be addressed below.

4.3.2 Sampling of KEF Narratives

I adopted a purposive sampling approach by selecting 32 PCE narrative statements submitted to KEF 2020 by HEIs in England. Purposive sampling involved selecting a proportion of returns from five of the seven university clusters, selecting returns from across the range of scores to include the highest and lowest scoring. Sampling was conducted using clusters from the 101 broad discipline-based (non-specialist) HEIs submitting to the KEF (Clusters E, J, M, V and X) and excluded clusters of specialist science and arts-based institutions to avoid an overemphasis on particular forms of disciplinary based PCE in the data (Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 explained the cluster structure utilised for the KEF). The narrative statements analysed in

my study represent 32% of the broad discipline-based HEIs and 24% of the total number of HEIs who submitted to KEF 2020.

4.3.3 Sampling of interview participants

When generating a sample of interview participants for my study, I aimed to secure a wide variety of experiences of PCE in the university context to augment the data from the sample of KEF narratives, discussed above. I aimed to try to identify participants with direct experience of facilitating PCE, whether as professional services staff or those with academic contracts, and to gain perspectives of staff with a variety of levels of responsibility. I also aimed to recruit two participants from each of the five KEF non-specialist HEI clusters to ensure that the findings from the KEF data were triangulated against the interview data.

To achieve this, I adopted the snowball sampling technique. This is a form of purposive sampling where:

> the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research. These participants will then suggest others and so on. (Bryman 2012, p.424)

As an insider researcher (discussed further at 3.8.4), I was able to make the initial selection of six participants, of whom the majority agreed to participate in the research. The remaining participants were recruited after introductions

provided by other participants. That the interview participants included an equal number of those holding academic and professional based contracts illustrates that a clear consensus has yet to emerge regarding whether KEF strategy and activity should be led by academic or professional staff.

Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the interview participants who are referred to by pseudonyms:

Pseudonym	Role	PEP / Academic	Cluster
Alex	PE Manager	PEP	V
Beth	Research Impact Manager	PEP	V
Chris	Head of Engaged Scholarship	Academic	E
Dev	KE and Impact Officer	PEP	E
Ella	Institutional Director of Engagement	PEP	X
Fiona	Professor & Departmental Engagement Director	Academic	X
Graham	Professor and Departmental Research Director	Academic	J

Hannah	Senior Lecturer and Departmental Knowledge Exchange Lead	Academic	J
Ian	University Head of Knowledge Exchange	Pep	M
Jo	Senior Lecturer and Departmental Public Engagement Lead	Academic	M

Table 4.1 Interview Participant Pseudonyms and Profiles

4.4 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for my study were chosen in line with my qualitative research paradigm and case study design. Yin (2009) and Bryman (2012) identify a range of applicable data collection methods in this context including interviews, questionnaires, observations and documentary analysis. I chose two data sources: firstly documentary analysis of the PCE narrative returns from the 2020 Knowledge Exchange Framework, in addition to interviews with ten academics and public engagement professionals. Using two data sources facilitated triangulation of the data. Bryman (2012, p.392) defines triangulation as 'using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena with a view to cross-checking findings.' Each of my data collection methods will be discussed in more detail below.

4.4.1 Documents

Documentary research is an overlooked aspect of social research but one which Tight argues is critical to its successful practice and can offer data sets that ‘may be much larger, more representative and more detailed than an individual researcher, or a small team, could hope to collect in the time they have available’ (Tight, 2019a, p.14). My choice to analyse 32 of the publicly available PCE narrative statements allowed me to access a much larger data set than I would have been able to generate given the time and resources available to me when conducting my study. Combining this form of documentary analysis with additional participant interviews ensured that the data analysed in my study had both breadth and depth.

4.4.2 Interviews

Interviews are an established feature of qualitative research and, consistent with my interpretivist paradigm, can provide depth and richness to the data in a case study (Denscombe, 2010; Bryman, 2012). I chose to adopt a semi-structured interview format which provided both structure and flexibility to the interview process, allowing me to cover similar ground in each interview, but also affording me the space to explore areas of particular interest or relevance presented by the participant. A copy of the interview schedule is provided in Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted between January and April 2023 and lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. When inviting participants to take part in the study I provided the means for them to raise any questions or concerns with

me or Lancaster University, in line with the guidance provided by Lancaster University's Research Ethics Code of Conduct (2021).

Following standard approaches to qualitative interviews (Denscombe, 2010), I began each interview by introducing myself and the purpose of the research, reiterating the steps (outlined in the participant information document previously circulated via email) that would be taken to ensure that participant data would remain confidential. I reiterated that participants could withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the interview and confirmed that they consented to take part. I offered to answer any questions about the research project and explained my motivation for the study. Once these preliminaries were completed, I informed the participants that the interview recording would start, using the Lancaster University TEAMS system. During the interview I used non-verbal queues and verbal responses to reflect interest and attention in the participants responses with the aim of putting them at ease. Steps taken to ensure confidentiality and security of the interview participant data are explained at 4.6 below.

4.5 Data Analysis

Both the KEF PCE statements and the participant interview transcripts were analysed using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach, utilising the NVivo software package. Qualitative content analysis of publicly available documentation is an established method within the social science literature (Bryman, 2012, p. 557) and there are numerous examples of qualitative analysis of REF Impact Case Studies and TEF returns in the literature

(Jordan, 2020; Matthews and Kotzee, 2019) . This approach is substantively similar to the approach discussed by Braun and Clarke as thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that despite some differences in emphasis in the literature, there is a sufficient level of similarity between approaches to identify a thematic content analysis as a generic approach to qualitative data analysis and suggest a six-step process, paraphrased below:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Begin coding
3. Identify commonalities amongst codes to generate themes
4. Review and consolidate themes and subthemes
5. Define and name the themes
6. Create a narrative which identifies why the themes are significant, relating where relevant to existing literature and research questions, using quotations from the data to illustrate the narrative.

They note that the process is iterative, rather than linear, and emphasise that identifying themes merely by observing repetition, is insufficiently analytical. Rather, identifying themes should assist in developing a theoretical understanding of the research topic.

My choice of thematic content analysis as my preferred analytical approach is consistent with my interpretivist stance and allows the data to be interpreted and not just described (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Also, it is an approach common in capability scholarship and provided the means for the presentation

of my data to be clearly related to the relevant capability scholarship outlined in my theoretical framework in Chapter 3.

Guided by the steps of the process outlined above, my analysis proceeded as follows:

1. *Familiarisation*

   Starting with the KEF narrative returns, I read each of the 32 PCE narratives in full, several times, and in the order of their KEF clusters. Although this was time consuming it allowed me to begin to see some of the similarities and differences in the data. The narratives were then uploaded to Nvivo for analysis.

2. *Generating initial codes*

   This stage involved identifying chunks of text, a few sentences or paragraphs, which appeared to be of significance and of potential relevance for themes.

3. *Generate themes*

   Using the Nvivo software application, I began to consolidate the codes in potential themes. This was a time consuming part of the process, given the large amount of text involved across the 32 PCE narratives under analysis. Consistent with the exploratory case study design, this process was inductive and themes began to emerge which seemed relevant to issues identified in my literature review and theoretical framework.

4. *Reviewing and consolidating themes and subthemes*

This process developed iteratively and, over time, I was able to merge some themes and subthemes to facilitate a more meaningful analysis. This stage was completed prior to the commencement of the participant interviews in January 2023. This allowed me to conduct the interviews against the background of the initial analysis of the KEF PCE narratives. The analysis of the interview data involved familiarisation through listening to the audio recordings to check the veracity of the computer-generated transcript, making adjustments where appropriate. The interview transcripts were then uploaded to Nvivo for analysis and the initial generation of codes and the generation of themes. At this point I began to review and consolidate the data from both sources (documents and interviews) to generate overarching themes and subthemes.

5. *Define and name the themes and subthemes*

   This process occurred iteratively, with continued development as I began to consider how my data would be presented in the context of the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

6. *Presenting and displaying the data*

   My analysis of the data is presented in Chapters 5 and 6, in tandem with a discussion highlighting the significance of the themes in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework, thereby demonstrating how they contribute to a theoretically informed response to my research questions. This stage included some refinement and merging of the themes and subthemes to facilitate a more coherent analysis consistent with my research questions. The data is presented

with quotations to provide context and illustrate the narrative and a summary of the themes identified is presented in Table 5.1.

The next section addressed the ethical issues I encountered in my study.

4.6 Ethical issues

4.6.1 Ethical oversight and approval

Ethical oversight for my study was provided by the University of Lancaster Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was granted by this committee after the submission of my formal application, prepared in collaboration with my PhD supervisor, outlining the ethical issues associated with the collection, storage, confidentiality and use of the data I intended to collect as part of my study, covering the analysis of secondary data (KEF statements) and collection of interview participant data. My ethics application, and subsequent data collection, followed the most recent university and departmental guidelines on undertaking empirical research during the Covid-19 pandemic and was guided by the Lancaster University Research Ethics Code of Practice (Lancaster University, 2021).

4.6.2 Informed consent of interview participants

Interview participants were invited to participate via email. The invitation email included a participant information document which fully outlined the purpose of my study and my status as a PhD researcher at the University of Lancaster. It also outlined why I had approached them to invite them to take part, explained that the extent of their time commitment would be up to 45 minutes

for an interview and outlined the benefits of their participation and that they had the option off withdrawing from the study at any point up to two weeks after the interview had taken place.

4.6.3 Confidentiality and data security

In line Lancaster University's Research Privacy Notice (Lancaster University, n.d.) compliance with the EU General Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 was assured by interview participants being informed in advance of the steps to be taken to safeguard their data and to maintain their confidentiality. The lawful basis for processing participants identifiable personal data was undertaking 'task in the public interest' (Lancaster University, n.d). It was explained all personal information including their name and employer institution would not be shared with others, any personal information would be removed from the written record of the study and all reasonable steps would be taken to protect their anonymity. For example, in writing up my thesis, I have only used anonymised quotes from interviews and individual participants are referred to by pseudonyms and institutions have been deidentified by being referred to by a letter and cluster number.

Interviews were carried out, recorded and then transcribed using University data recording, transcribing, and processing applications. Data from the interviews was stored using the University's cloud storage in encrypted files; no hard copies were retained. In line with Lancaster University policy, interview transcription data will be stored securely for a minimum of ten years and interview recordings will be deleted on completion of my PhD studies.

Only my supervisor and I had access to interview data, which were anonymised when shared.

The KEF PCE narratives were selected from a publicly available website, but for the purposes of this study, identifying information such as the name or location of the institutions were removed and referred to by an assigned number.

4.7 Limitations

I have adopted an interpretivist orientation for my study, as explained at 4.1 above. Given this orientation I acknowledge that the contribution to knowledge offered by my study is subjective and context-bound (Bryman, 2012) but note that the validity of the study should not be judged by the positivist standards that guide quantitative research, as qualitative research does not aim to generalise in the same manner as quantitative studies. Rather, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit, qualitative studies should aim for *trustworthiness* rather than aspire to strict positivist standards of *validity*. My claim to trustworthiness is based on a deliberate transparency in the genesis, rationale and execution of my study which intends to provide, as Denscombe (2010, p.300) advocates 'the path and key decisions taken by the researcher from conception of the research through to the findings and conclusions derived from the research.' In addition, I have sought to provide a detailed description of the data that underpins my findings and have been deliberate in selecting two mutually supportive data sources. I will consider the limitations of each below.

4.7.1 Documents

Using publicly available official documents as a data source is subject to a number of limitations. Bryman (2012, p.554) argues that it may be 'tempting to assume that documents reveal something about an underlying social reality' which could be seen as 'windows onto social and organizational realities' but that the researcher should be advised to take a more critical stance. As Coffey (2014) argues, documents should not be seen as a window on reality but having a distinct and constructed intertextual reality. Thus, the researcher should examine such documents in a manner that is sensitive to the context of their production, their intended audience, the intentions behind their production and their relation to other documents.

Therefore, in the context of my analysis of the PCE narratives, submitted as part of the KEF exercise, it is important that the narratives presented in the documents should be seen as *narratives* rather than as windows onto social and organizational realities. In this context, this means being aware that they are publicly available official documents which have been generated for the purpose of complying with officially mandated KEF policy and priorities. Their genesis needs to be seen in light of their intertextual relationship with KEF policy documentation, the intended audience, which includes UK Government, the public, business, current and future students and, given the marketisation of higher education (Marginson, 2011), other HEIs. However, these documents do have the capacity to illustrate how institutions have chosen to represent their engagement with PCE, which will itself be revealing of their declared institutional priorities and practices. My decision to supplement this

data with interviews with a sample of PEPs and academics working on PCE at the micro level is intended to not only add richness and detail to the data collected, but also serves as a form of triangulation of the data presented in the KEF PCE narratives.

4.7.2 Interviews

Given the preponderance of interview data in qualitative research, the limitations of using this form of data are well represented in the scholarly literature, for example discussions by Bryman (2012) and Denscombe (2010). These discussions echo some of the limitations outlined in relation to documentary research discussed above, in that the data presented by interview participants is inevitably socially constructed, subjective and partial. The social context in which the interviews are undertaken is noted as potentially influencing the responses received as the subjects are likely to change their behaviour in light of the fact that they are participating in the research, perhaps as a result of social desirability bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Social desirability bias suggests that participants self-reporting can lean towards a favourable rather than strictly factual response to questions. To counter this effect, I used a range of open ended and follow up questions which aimed to provide the participants with a non-judgemental space to articulate their perspectives as fully and as freely as possible and develop an in depth understanding, supported by purposive sampling and triangulation against the documentary data discussed above.

4.8 Researcher positionality

Bryman (2012, p.39) alerts the researcher to be aware of the influence of their own values on their research decisions. I acknowledge my commitment to the emancipatory potential of qualitative research aligned to the interpretivist paradigm, which can foreground the understanding, perceptions and experience of the research participants. My study aims to develop an empathic understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the participants in the research, combined with the theoretical framework developed from the Capability Approach emphasising a 'non-ideal' approach to justice (outlined in Chapter 3). Therefore, my study aims to facilitate the generation of new knowledge to understand the social phenomena of university PCE, but also seek to understand how institutions such as universities can respond to Sen's (2009) call to address remediable injustice through their community engagement practices.

I also acknowledge my status as an insider researcher (Trowler, 2014). In my professional role in higher education I have had responsibility for the facilitation and delivery of university PCE activities. Trowler (2014, p. 26) describes this status as holding 'both promise and dangers,' the dangers include that the researcher may themselves be subject to the same tacit theories held by respondents or be enthralled to institutional discourses. However, the promise the insider brings is that their prior knowledge of the context can be an advantage as, for the insider researcher, 'knowledgeability and sense-making are foregrounded' (Trowler, 2014, p.26). In light of this, and in line with the qualitative paradigm, I have attempted to mitigate against my

own tacit assumptions by taking a reflexive approach to my research and attempting to give a sufficiently rich account of the data to allow it to speak for itself.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology adopted in my study. As the aim of my study is to understand the institutional level representations and individual perspectives of academics and PEPs working in university PCE I adopted a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology to frame my research. This orientation emphasises the role of the researcher in developing an understanding which grasps the subjective constructs by which social actors interpret their social worlds, offering a rich and contextualised understanding of university PCE. Informed by, and consistent with, this philosophical orientation I adopted a qualitative research design to explore two research questions:

1. What are the values and capabilities promoted by English universities in their Public and Community Engagement practices?
2. How and why do universities decide on what PCE work they undertake?

Consistent with my qualitative research design, I adopted a case study methodology to frame my data collection and analysis to enable an in depth understanding of which types of PCE universities engage in, how they do so and why certain types of activity and publics are prioritised. I utilised purposive sampling to collect data across two sources: semi-structured

participant interviews [n.10] and KEF institutional PCE narratives [n.32]. Using two sources provided the opportunity for triangulation of the data collected. The data was consolidated and analysed using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach, utilising the NVivo software package. Data analysis was iterative and themes were developed and refined in light of the literature review and theoretical framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3.

I took care to follow sound ethical practice throughout my project, and ethical oversight was provide by the University of Lancaster Research Ethics Committee. Data collection and processing followed the Lancaster University Research Ethics Code of Practice (Lancaster University, 2021) and complied with the EU General Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act 2018. The limitations of my study have also been addressed by this chapter, including an acknowledgement of the KEF PCE narratives should be seen as social constructed, rather than windows on institutional narratives. Likewise, the interview data was acknowledged as inevitable socially constructed, subjective and partial. This chapter also highlighted my positionality in the study as an insider researcher (Trowler, 2014) which brings advantages of prior knowledge of context, but also the possibility of tacit assumptions.

The following two chapters will present and discuss my research findings.

Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion Part I: PCE Conceptions, Practices, Agents and Publics

My study aims to provide insight into both the practice and purpose of university PCE and makes both empirical and conceptual contributions to the literature. The findings offer empirical insights at both the meso and micro levels into the policy and practice of PCE after the introduction of the KEF in 2020, which will be of interest to policy makers, university leaders and public engagement academics and professionals in, and beyond, the English university sector. In this way it makes an empirical contribution to the body of scholarly literature on the third mission of universities reviewed in Chapter 2, which has critiqued PCE for being poorly understood and weakly institutionalised (Watermeyer, 2015; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Reed and Fazey, 2021).

Additionally, as outlined in Chapter 3, the findings make an original contribution to the capability literature on universities by applying it as a normative framework to national PCE policy and practice in England; providing a human centred means to answer the *why*, in addition to the *what* of PCE. In this way it builds on the foundational work of capability scholars who have researched the public good function of university education (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020; Nussey *et al.*, 2022) delineating the human development and capability potential of universities, along with studies by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019), who have applied these insights to the pedagogy of community engagement and service learning in the South African context. The findings build on this work, but also make an original conceptual contribution, by using the CA to

interrogate English national PCE policy and practice with a focus on institutional responses, rather than its application to pedagogic practice. In using the CA in this novel way, these findings provide fresh conceptual insights into the practice and potential of university PCE.

As outlined in Chapter 4, the findings arise from a combined thematic analysis of the data which was comprised of two sources: the PCE narratives from the 2020 KEF returns and semi-structured interviews with ten PEPs and academics based in English HEIs. Each respondent university is identified by a number and their KEF cluster letter (Table 1.1) and each interview participant is identified by a pseudonym and KEF cluster letter (Table 4.1). The division of respondent universities and interview participants into clusters follows the same groupings developed and employed in the 2020 KEF exercise which clustered HEIs together with those of a similar size and type, with the of aim providing meaningful comparisons within clusters and across the seven KEF perspectives (Research England, 2020). My findings on PCE were mostly consistent across different clusters, with the emerging themes broadly applicable across the sample of five clusters, however the discussion below highlights where relevant differences could be discerned between clusters.

Applying the theoretical framework based on the Capability Approach, outlined in Chapter 3, and informed by Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103) framework of capability elements (Table 3.1), and illustrated at Figure 3.1, six themes and 15 subthemes were identified (summarised in Table 5.1 below), each of which will be explored below and illustrated with quotations.

Combined Themes from KEF Narratives & Interviews		
PCE Conceptions, Practices, Agents & Publics	**PCE Drivers**	**PCE Opportunities**
Conceptions of PCE	National HEI Policy • Explicit • Implicit	Evaluation & Accountability
University PCE Practices • Resource Sharing • Activities • Topics	Funders & Funding	Shifting identities
University PCE Agents • Institutional leadership • Academics • PEPs	Aspirations	National PCE Policy Reform
Publics & Communities • Developing organic relationships • Inclusion of community voices	Territory	

Table 5.1: Summary of themes and subthemes

This chapter will outline four themes and eight subthemes arising from the data. The first theme addresses RQ2, as it provides insights into how

universities conceptualise PCE, conceptions which guide and inform decisions and aspirations concerning their PCE activity (Nussey *et al.*, 2022).

The second theme identifies which PCE practices universities engage in. This addresses RQ1, as it points both to the types of activities prioritised by universities in their PCE work and to the potential role these activities can have as conversion factors in the expansion of the capability sets and in the promotion of human development values (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020; Preece, 2018; Mtawa 2019).

The third theme considers the key university agents involved in delivering PCE (institutional leaders, academics and PEPs). This theme primarily addresses RQ2 as it provides insights into the way PCE policy and practice is mediated through the meso and micro levels by the aspirations and agency of university actors (Sen, 2009; Nussey *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, the fourth theme provides insights into who universities identify as their publics and communities for the purposes of PCE, addressing both RQ1 and RQ2. In relation to RQ1 it brings attention to the drivers, practices and opportunities (Nussey *et al.*, 2022) which inform university choices regarding which of their communities and publics they prioritise for PCE purposes, and in relation to RQ2, it also highlights the extent to which universities engage with the publics as active partners rather than passive recipients of PCE, and thus the extent to which PCE practices are consistent with the agency-oriented nature of the capability approach (Boni and Walker, 2016, p.69).

Following this, Chapter 6 continues to address the capabilities, or 'choices, abilities and opportunities', universities have in relation to the promotion of human development focused PCE practices by considering the contemporary drivers and emerging trajectories of PCE (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.102). A visual summary of the findings is provided at Figure 7.1

5.1 Conceptions of PCE

The data demonstrate a looseness in understandings of the definitional parameters of PCE. This lack of definitional clarity is manifested most strongly in institutions which have yet to develop an embedded commitment to PCE and where the strategic vision for this activity has yet to reach maturity. In such contexts, the articulation of PCE activity can be eclipsed by other institutional priorities, such as student recruitment, marketing activities or the widening participation agenda. This definitional looseness has been identified as a key feature of PCE in the literature, for example Watermeyer and Lewis (2018) argue that the PCE agenda is loosely defined and poorly conceptualised, Preece (2018) identifies PCE as a 'messy business' and Mtawa (2019) argues it is subject to overlapping sets of terminology.

The data demonstrates that this messiness does not appear to lend itself to the clear institutional policy making required for the development of targeted and effective capability promoting PCE activity, argued for in the capability literature on universities (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016). Likewise, Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) argue that to be effective in the promotion of capabilities a university community needs to be capable of

‘purposeful critical reflection’ in light of their ‘collective aspirations’ which is made very difficult without collective understandings of what PCE actually is. The lack of definitional consensus evident in the data is arguably a result of PCE’s emergence as a subset of the ‘third mission’ of universities, which is itself an emergent and emerging form of university activity, the parameters of which have yet to solidify (Fazey *et al.*, 2021).

The data shows that the interview participants recognised ‘multiple interpretations of public engagement’ (Alex V)[4] or multiple ‘flavours of engagement’ spanning ‘public engagement, community engagement, policy engagement, business engagement,’ (Beth V) but all highlighted a fundamental connection with the research function of the university; the following quotation from Alex V is representative:

> the idea is that research is not generated by someone's kind of idea of what should be done next because they just intrigued by it, it's actually shaped by the people that they're trying to benefit.

The looseness of the definition was recognised as being at least partly the result of a lack of clarity in the policy architecture for PCE:

[4] Each interview participant is identified by a pseudonym and a letter indicating the KEF cluster of their HEI (see Figure 1.1 for KEF cluster definitions and Table 4.1 for a summary of interview participant profiles).

> I think this stuff was never properly categorized or labelled right at the beginning … universities were given a pot of money (higher education innovation funding), they were told that you need to use this to do the most benefit economically or socially. And nobody really knew what that meant. (Beth V)

There was also recognition that the understanding of the terminology surrounding PCE has become increasingly opaque as the agenda has developed:

> I think the terminology has really become more and more blurred over time. I think these kind of ideas, these concepts bump into each other and overlap. (Ella X)

The recognition of this definitional looseness supports Watermeyer and Lewis's (2018) argument that PCE is under conceptualised but was also recognised as presenting both opportunities and challenges for the development of the PCE agenda. Chris E argued that the fluidity in the definitional parameters of PCE was in some respects a positive feature:

> I don't necessarily think that that's a bad thing, because I think that it can take many forms and you can be somewhat constrained by a strict definition.

A particular advantage of the definitional fluidity of the agenda recognised by the interview participants was the fact that it allowed space for them to develop and shape their own professional approaches to the agenda:

> my boss is the director of the centre and she just lets me get on with it because she doesn't have any background in public engagement. In fact, I'm training her how to do public engagement. So, I think that creates a space where if you look at the 16 research centres that were funded, every single one of them has their own fingerprint of the type of engagement they do. (Alex V)

The wide latitude provided by the definitional looseness of the PCE agenda highlights the importance of understanding the human agency of academics and PEPs in the mediation of PCE policy, a principle recognised in the CA literature (Spence and Deneulin, 2009; Sen, 2009) and is discussed further at 5.3 below.

However, the definitional looseness of PCE was also recognised as presenting several challenges or disadvantages, including a potential lack of visibility and accountability for PCE activity, barriers in providing appropriate professional support and the potential that a lack of clarity of purpose can result in superficial engagement: ‘we do an enormous amount of public engagement work, but quite often it's fairly under the radar and a lot of the time it is classified as research impact rather than public engagement specifically’ (Chris E). This lack of clarity makes it difficult to co-ordinate activities internally and provide external accountability:

> A thing that we do fall down on is capturing that data internally and using it properly. You know, most people are going out and doing the stuff, we don't collate it properly so we don't consolidate… but the potential is still there (Ian M).

This also leads to problems training and supporting staff working in this area:

> ‘And so I think that the challenge with not really having a firm definition is actually it's not supported or professionalized in the way in which it could be and recognize those skills that are needed … and getting people to be able to have a career path’ (Chris E).

The lack of definitional clarity was seen as leading to a diffused approach to the strategic ownership of the PCE agenda, resulting in a burdensome requirement of ‘having to kind of matrix manage the whole time’ (Ella X) and also, in some contexts, leading to only superficial PCE activity, ‘It has to be embedded all the way through as something purposeful, meaningful, really’ (Ian M).

This section has shown that the data supports the contention in the literature that PCE remains only loosely defined. However, the definitional messiness does have some advantages as it gives those engaged in PCE a degree of latitude which allows them to play to their strengths and have due regard to their particular institutional and disciplinary contexts. However, it was also recognised that a number of difficulties arise from the absence of a settled definition, including problems with accountability, superficiality and professionalisation. As such, and applying the conceptual framework outlined by Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1), the data demonstrates a perception that the absence of a clear definitional understanding of what PCE is, limits the agency of universities to ‘reflect, imagine and act’ in way which is effective in promoting capability friendly PCE practices.

The following section explores the variety of practices identified by higher education institutions as supporting their PCE work.

5.2 University PCE practices

This theme addresses the activities which universities report as examples of their PCE outreach. The capability frameworks developed by Boni and Gasper (2012), Boni and Walker (2016), Velasco and Boni (2020) and Nussey *et al.* (2022) discussed in Chapter 3 above, all acknowledge the potential of the public facing practices of universities in the promotion of capabilities and human development values. For example, Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) include university public engagement, along with teaching research and campus operations, as part of the practices which contribute to the overall capabilities of universities to 'act towards climate related outcomes.'

The data discussed in this section shows that universities report some practices that have the potential to support capabilities development, but the overall level of activity is patchy, revealing discernible differences in the degree and substance of the engagement. For institutions with relatively mature strategies, methods of PCE engagement are embedded into their research practices and feature examples of co-produced research and community empowerment activities. However, for institutions with more modest and less established strategies, examples include some relatively passive activities including promoting volunteer opportunities for staff and students and permitting (sometimes for a fee) external groups to utilise university buildings for sports and meetings. The reported methods of engagement indicated a priority for localised activity but also reveal an emerging practice around student led engagement. The variety of PCE

practices will be explored via the following subthemes: resource sharing, activities and topics of engagement.

5.2.1 Resource sharing

The data shows that respondents presented making their buildings and facilities available to external users was a significant part of their PCE approach, particularly those that emphasised the importance of local communities in their PCE strategies. Boni and Gasper (2012) highlight that universities sharing their physical resources with their communities is one way of operationalising the human development value of wellbeing. They include this in their quality matrix as part of the university social engagement activity that can support wellbeing by developing 'autonomy, critical thinking, reflexivity, emotions, feelings, spirituality, creativity, physical fitness, etc' (Boni and Gasper, 2012, p.463).

Typically, respondents who made this claim did so in a way that is consistent with the wellbeing value espoused by Boni and Gasper (2012) and referred to allowing local communities to use their facilities for a variety of purposes, including independent use by external groups, in addition to hosting university led activities, but also as a means for university revenue generation. For example, University 10J[5] reported making available:

[5] My study analysed 32 PCE Narratives from the 2020 KEF exercise. The respondent universities are identified by a number from 1 to 32, and their respective KEF cluster letter. See Figure 1.1 for a summary of the KEF clusters.

> a wide range of facilities to support public and community engagement and host social and cultural activities, such as: sports buildings and grounds, a chapel, specialist laboratories, a cinema and theatre, residential accommodation, and teaching and learning and other spaces.

For many respondents, this type of engagement was a significant feature of their local presence in their community and a way to integrate ‘local community with our campus’ (University 21M). However, only a minority of respondents emphasised how their approach to sharing the use of their buildings was informed by their wider strategic goals, including, for example, in support of their widening participation mission or the promotion of social enterprises.

The data illustrated that universities are also sensitive to the revenue generating potential of utilising their buildings for external purposes, which some respondents demonstrated were used for purely commercial purposes such as hosting conferences, events and weddings, which illustrates that neoliberal values also influence public engagement practice (Brackmann, 2015; Tight, 2019) and provides evidence to support Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma’s (2022) critique of aspects of university public engagement which are driven by the creation of private, rather than public goods.

5.2.2 Activities

The data demonstrates that a wide range of activities are reported as examples of university PCE activities, ranging from staff volunteering in the community, student service-learning placements, local outreach activities and open access online engagement. This variety is consistent with the open-ended nature of the way PCE is defined (as discussed in 5.1), a variety that is recognised in the literature (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019; Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2022). Each will be discussed below.

A significant number of respondents reported supporting staff and student volunteering activity as an example of their PCE activity. Some of these instances reflect a relatively passive approach to PCE including where institutions discuss providing a platform for advertising volunteering opportunities created by other organisations, rather than proactively generating the opportunities themselves. Also, few institutions were able to show, other than in generalised and unspecified ways, how this type of activity was integrated into their wider strategic aims. Those that did show a more integrated approach encouraged student volunteering, either by incorporating into the curriculum, or by valorising volunteering by giving academic credit or certification for participation or through providing internships with local charities. Institutions reporting this type of activity recognised it as a basis for understanding the needs of the local community, ‘resulting in stronger relationships and a better understanding of local needs’ (University 28X). Only a small minority of institutions were able to connect their support of voluntary activities with the research produced by their academics.

In addition to the volunteering opportunities outlined above, the data revealed some momentum towards highlighting the role of students in university PCE practices. These included references to public facing activities included in curricular provision, in addition to extracurricular projects supported or supervised by university staff. However, as with other themes emerging from the data, there were marked differences in how substantive the reported activity was. Some respondents recognised that their approaches were in the embryonic stage and requiring more strategic development, and others equated PCE activity with their existing provision of external student placements as part of the curriculum:

> Student placements provide learning opportunities arranged with established and new partners in a diverse range of settings, enabling interaction with public and community engagement work externally. (University 20M).

Many respondents were able to demonstrate disciplinary or curricular links with the student led public engagement activities, these commonly included business, social enterprise and legal clinics providing pro bono services but also some mental health counselling, creative writing and journalism-based engagement including ‘life stories’ courses for refugees (University 11J). The data also pointed to a developing approach of using bespoke modules to give academic credit for student PCE activities. Respondents choosing to highlight student led engagement were also likely to highlight awards aimed at valorising student participation and leadership in this type of activity. Interestingly, institutions defining themselves as having a primarily teaching

focus were able to discuss the strategic pedagogic importance of their student led PCE activities in more detail, University 16M asserting that all its students 'have opportunities to undertake public engagement activities and are encouraged and supported to do so' and University 18M reported that their 'degree programmes have community engagement built into them, both at the course design level and in the specifics of the academic curriculum.' Many of these institutions were also part of the faith-based group of Cathedral Universities (CCUC, n.d.) and made the case that student PCE activities were an important part of the civic and moral development of their students.

This rather patchy commitment to staff volunteering and student service-learning points to a developing area of practice which is recognised in the literature as having the potential to act as a conversion factor in capability development for the community, for students and for staff. Mtawa's (2019) study, builds on earlier work (Walker and McLean, 2013; Boni and Walker 2016; Kreber, 2019) illustrating the role universities can play in developing a public good orientation in future professionals. Mtawa (2019) argues that the development of civic professionals through service learning is dependent on the development of the capability of affiliation, which he describes as architectonic in this context and is defined by Nussbaum (2011, p.34) as 'being able to live with and toward others, having the social bases of self-respect.' However, Mtawa makes the point that the value of this activity is not only in the development of students but also has capability benefits for the communities and staff involved and argues that this is an undertheorized and

overlooked feature of this type of activity (Mtawa, 2019, p.4); a finding which is supported by this data.

The majority of specific examples of PCE activity related to universities' immediate locality (discussed further at 6.1.4). The examples provided were varied and included participation in local and national festivals, open talks, discussion, consultations, exhibitions fun days and cultural events. The emphasis on place was often connected with an expressed intention of using localised events to promote widening participation and included on and off campus events. Partnership was a key theme in delivering localised events, particular with councils, local museums and community organisations, charities etc. The majority of respondents emphasised projects initiated and delivered by university staff, but some respondents also reported more passive approaches to PCE:

> We are heavily involved in and sponsor (sometime in-kind) community events such as the Cambridge Marathon, Cambridge Science Festival, Essex Book Festival and the British Science Festival. (University 2E)

The deadline for submission of the narratives analysed for this research fell in October 2020, approximately six months after the first Covid lockdown. The data does demonstrate some influence of the pandemic on the content of PCE activities and there is some evidence of a move towards digital methods of engagement which were recognised as being accelerated as the impact of the pandemic became more pronounced, 'after the Covid-19 lockdown was

implemented, we have used Zoom for events and for engaging with the community' (University 2E).

However, there is also evidence of an emerging trend towards creative use of online and broadcast media for PCE purposes. This includes dissemination via online media and broadcast outlets, the frequently cited online magazine The Conversation, the development of online courses (Moocs), online masterclasses, as well as interventions to raise the capacity of members of the public to engage with digital technologies. Other examples included producing a film to disseminate historical research and investing in a local TV channel 'underwriting a commitment to P&CE and a thriving, active local democracy' (University 29X).

A minority of respondents chose to highlight their engagement with policy makers as a significant element of their PCE approach. This included reporting individual instances of academic engagement with Parliamentary and Government committees. In addition to individual instances of policy engagement some respondents reported a more developed strategy to engage at this level such as the development of general or disciplinary specific policy hubs to facilitate academic engagement with local and national policy makers.

The range of local and online activities once again illustrate the variety of work that can fall under the PCE umbrella (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2016) and the work done here resonates with Boni and Gasper's (2012) matrix of human development values for universities. The work described aligns with Boni and

Gasper's (2012) matrix as it has the potential to promote the human development values of wellbeing and participation and empowerment through what they describe as university social engagement operationalised via extra mural learning opportunities, supporting student service learning, public engagement events and supporting community organizations. However, the data shows very limited articulation of how universities engage with communities in the development and design of these activities, or in seeing PCE from the point of view of the recipients of these activities, a point recognised in the literature (Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019) and discussed further in 5.4 below.

5.2.3 Topics

Respondents did not categorise their discussion of their PCE activities in terms of disciplinary boundaries, but the data does reveal a number of discipline related themes which will be discussed below, and which can be seen as promoting the development of the foundational capability of education (Sen, 2003; Nussbaum, 2011), thereby providing a means to raise levels of aspiration (Hart, 2013) and challenge adaptive preferences (Ibrahim, 2020). The frequent citing of the provision of services related to vocational subjects such as law and health, in addition to an emphasis on developing education skills all point to the potential for PCE to support wellbeing of and empowerment of the local community, which Boni and Gasper (2012), Velasco and Boni (2020) and Walker (2022) all recognise as integral to universities role in capability development and the promotion of the public good.

1. Cultural activities

Broadly related to the arts and humanities disciplines, a significant proportion of PCE activities related to cultural topics such as literary festivals, historical topics (particularly local history), music and arts, often involving partnerships with local museums. Some institutions were able to connect this type of engagement to their research activity, arguing it 'has enabled us to expand our research activity in a range of Arts and Humanities areas vital to the cultural, artistic, and mental health perspectives of society' (University 18M). The reported range of activities in this space was eclectic and included cookery demonstrations, singing workshops, fashion festivals, literary celebrations and ghost tours. The provision of cultural engagement could be seen as cultivating elements of Nussbaum's (2011) capability list, including affiliation, emotions and play, features echoed in Walker's (2006a, p.128-9) list of capabilities which the development friendly university can promote, particularly in relation to the capabilities of 'knowledge and imagination' and arguably 'emotional integrity …being able to develop emotions for imagination, understanding, empathy, awareness and discernment.'

2. Social Sciences

A significant number of activities had a basis in social science disciplines. These included generalist social science festivals and a frequent citing of law and criminology related activity. This included prison and criminal justice work such as education, legal advice and horticulture projects. The provision of

legal advice or human rights education was frequently cited and demonstrated an aspiration to provide services for members of the community who would not otherwise be able to access support, University 29X's description of their law clinic is representative; '[our] Clinic provides a public legal service to members of the local community, providing a free legal service to those who need representation but cannot afford access to the law' as is University 9E's aim to improve 'the accessibility and affordability of legal advice for marginalised/vulnerable women.' Such activities can also be seen as promoting capabilities. Walker's (2006a, p.128-9) list conceives the capability of knowledge and imagination to include the 'acquisition of knowledge for social action and participation in the world', likewise, following Habbig and Robeyns (2022, p.620), this form of PCE activity is a means of universities promoting legal capabilities, defined as 'as the genuine or real opportunities someone has to get access to justice.'

3. Education and skills

School partnerships featured significantly in the reported PCE practices of respondents, so it is unsurprising that education focused activities were frequently cited as examples of engagement. This included support on coping with exam pressure (University 1E), pedagogic training for primary teachers and support for digital skills development for jobseekers (University 16M). This form of engagement resonates with the capabilities of 'educational resilience' and 'learning disposition' posited by Walker (2006a, p.128-9) as including the ability to navigate study, persevere academically and having confidence in one's ability to learn.

4. STEM & Health

A very common reported topic for engagement were activities related to STEM disciplines. These included science festivals, climate change focused awareness events, external one off events such as ‘Sex, Bugs & Rock ‘n’ Roll” at Glastonbury’ (University 28X) and citizen science projects.

Another commonly cited topic for PCE activities were those related to physical and mental health. University 5E’s counselling centre targets victims of domestic abuse and the bereaved to offer low-cost counselling and University 17M’s Stroke Clinic aims to ‘provide community-based, low-cost, accessible exercise for individuals living with the debilitating effects of stroke’ whereas University 26V’s dental project aims to fight ‘against the initiation and progression of dental caries.’ This illustrates the potential of universities to not only provide educational opportunities to gain ‘knowledge of a chosen subject’ (Walker 2006a, p.128) but to provide engagement activities which promote wellbeing and equity as a human development values both in promoting individual bodily health (Walker and Boni, 2016; Nussbaum, 2011) and in sharing the ‘benefits of research to society’ (Boni and Gasper, 2012, p. 464).

Section 5.2 has addressed the theme of practices reported by universities as relevant to their PCE outreach and included the subthemes of resource sharing, activities and topics of engagement. The literature on the capability promoting role of universities, outlined in Chapter 3, recognises the potential of university PCE as one of several ways that the HEI sector can promote capabilities. This section has argued that there is some evidence to suggest

that the PCE practices of English universities do have the potential to support capabilities development but that this potential has yet to be fully realised as due to discernible differences in the degree and substance of PCE activity across respondent universities.

The following section explores the influence of university agents on the mediation of PCE policy.

5.3 University PCE agents

This section explores how the data identifies three categories of key university agents involved in delivering PCE: senior leaders providing institution level strategic leadership, academics engaged in PCE, and the professional staff who support the delivery of the agenda, referred to as Public Engagement Professionals (PEPs) by the NCCPE (NCCPE, nd).

As discussed in Chapter 3, Sen (2009, p.354) highlights the efficacy of institutions in addressing remediable injustice is mediated through the action, or inaction, of human agents, such that their effectiveness is dependent on 'the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization.' Not only is PCE activity mediated through the agency of individuals at different levels of the organisation, but as, as Spence and Deneulin (2009) point out, policy-making and application occurs across different moments and across a web of decisions from HE policy makers in government to meso level interpretations by university leaders and down the micro level interpretations and negotiations of the academics and PEPs who deliver PCE.

The CA literature on the potential role of universities to support capabilities development, outlined in Chapter 3, also highlights the importance of the agency of those working in universities in mediating and delivering capability promoting outcomes. For example, Boni and Gasper (2012) and Boni and Walker (2016) both point to the importance of university policy making in support of capability development, and Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) refer to the importance of 'integral leadership' which can lead to the 'realisation of joint actions oriented to the common good.' This is also a significant feature of the framework developed by Nussey *et al.*, (2022, p.103) and reproduced at Table. 3.1, which points to the abilities, opportunities and aspirations of universities. Abilities highlight 'the resources and capacities available for those engaged in university practices,' opportunities include 'how policies and norms are produced within the university… and how these distribute power among different actors within the university community' and aspirations refer to 'the values and outcomes that universities prioritise' which 'can be situated within university policies as well as within the experiences and preferences of university actors, such as academic staff, students and partners' (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.103 and Table 3.1).

Guided by this literature, insights and perspectives from senior leaders providing institution level strategic leadership, academics engaged in PCE and PEPs who support the delivery of the agenda will be explored further below. The data presented illustrates the importance of the agency of individuals in shaping real world PCE policy and practice.

5.3.1 Institutional leadership

The KEF PCE narrative form (UKRI, 2020) prompts respondents to outline their strategy for PCE. The responses show that all providers were able to evidence at least some institutional level commitment to PCE, but there was a considerable variety in the extent of that commitment and in the maturity of the strategic vision for this activity, which is supportive of the analysis offered by Zomer and Benneworth (2011) that the third mission of universities has yet to be fully institutionalised and is yet to reach the level of 'integral leadership' or the capacity for 'purposeful critical reflection' at the institutional level as advocated by Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47).

All respondents were able to demonstrate that PCE resonated with their existing institutional strategies, but there was a marked variety in the development of specific PCE strategies and the extent to which it was embedded into core functions. For example, University 2E referred to the way in which their University Strategy emphasised community and partner engagement in both their curriculum offer and research agenda, highlighting the perceived value and importance of public engagement activities, but University 1E recognised that 'strategic governance of [PCE] activity growth continues to evolve.'

Only a minority of respondents were able to point to discrete strategies for PCE. Several respondents highlighted this gap by pointing to their intention to develop a discrete strategy for PCE in the medium term, 'we will build on these existing activities to develop a clearer set of indicators relating more

specifically to knowledge exchange' (University 14J) and 'This is an exciting point in our PCE journey…[we are] embarking on the development of a new University Strategy, to be in place by late 2021' (University 32X). This is again illustrative of the relative novelty of PCE as a discrete focus for university strategic planners, which has raised questions regarding what universities are expected to accomplish, how they should be accountable to society and how they should interact with other social actors (Maassen *et al*., 2019); questions which the data shows universities are only beginning to try to answer.

The majority of respondents pointed to academic oversight of PCE strategy via members of the senior leadership team, especially where the PCE strategy was incorporated into whole university strategy documents, rather than standalone PCE focused documents. Ian M echoed this, commenting that: 'we don't have a senior person that has this specific remit' but this approach arguably results in a lack of clear ownership for this agenda, which was perceived as a barrier to institutional effectiveness.

A tension was perceived between 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' implementation strategies. For example, University 10J commented:

> Our approach to public and community engagement is based on empowering faculties/departments to respond to the often-complex needs identified at local/grass roots level via this strategic planning process.

This was often accompanied by a recognition that PCE activities often benefit from the organic relationships that a built between individual research active academics and their networks of stakeholders and collaborators, a finding echoed in Hazenberg and Paterson-Young (2022, p.16), who argue that relying only on top-down university engagement strategies can lead to reduced 'local relevance and hence buy-in, and disempowering the very people it is intended to support.'

However, some respondents reported that an emphasis on a 'bottom up' approach had led to a lack of strategic direction and some lack of accurate information regarding the extent and nature of PCE activities at ground level. For example, University 32X acknowledged that its distributed approach 'increases the risk of PCE being less co-ordinated' and University 16M recognised the need for 'a more systematic and efficient means of collecting data on the range and breadth of activities.'

These insights resonate with what Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) term the university's capability to 'transcend' defined as being able to generate the knowledge required to respond to the university's aspirations for capability promoting activity. The perspectives revealed in the data illustrate that, in the absence of fully institutionalised approaches to PCE, individuals have wide latitude to determine which types of PCE activities to prioritise and that national policy imperatives become somewhat diluted in the absence of concerted and embedded institution level responses. This finding suggests superficial forms of PCE, critiqued in the literature (Watermeyer 2015; Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005), are less likely to occur in institutions without

an embedded whole university strategy, a point echoed in research on social value creation by Asian universities (Hazenberg et al., 2020, p.17). Thus, it is apparent that a key driver of the PCE agenda in many universities is dependent on the agency of individual academics and PEPs, both of which will be addressed in more detail below.

5.3.2 Academics

The fluidity in the definition of PCE discussed at 5.1 above, was also evident in participant's understanding of, and commitment to, the academic role in developing and delivering PCE. The data demonstrates that there are a number of conversion factors influencing academic agency to respond to the PCE agenda, these included contextual factors such as the personal motivations, capacity, professional networks and disciplinary outlook of individual academics. Note that the related issue of academic identity is discussed at 6.2.2 below.

The literature identifies a potential clash between PCE and perceived academic values and culture (Chubb *et al.*, 2017). However, the data shows that several participants highlighted the relevance of different disciplinary approaches to the response of academics to the PCE agenda; humanities and social science researchers were perceived as being particularly well placed to respond to the PCE agenda due to the methodologies used in their discipline:

> I remember having a conversation with the social science researcher, and they're like, we don't do public engagement because that's what

> we do, you know, public engagement to them is just something that's embedded within the work that they do. (Alex V)

However, there was a general recognition that academic staff need training and support to deliver PCE as the skills required to do so are not necessarily developed as part of academic research training, as illustrated by the following:

> The skill set we're talking about being able to do that kind of work isn't necessarily one that you develop through the academic training that we have at the moment. (Graham J)

The need for institutional support for the university staff engaged in delivering capability promoting activity, is recognised in the CA literature, for example Nussey *et al*. (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) use the term 'abilities' to point to the 'resources and capacities available for those engaged in university practices to advance climate justice,' whereas Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) refer to the institutional capability of 'training' which supports the development of 'critical thinking, ethical principles and sensitivity regarding social differences and needs' that is required to support capabilities development.

All respondents were able to point to training provision for academics that related to PCE activities. As a base-line this included information, toolkits and training sessions for academics on media techniques for dissemination 'with topics including social media; broadcast media; promotion of publications; policy engagement; community engagement; and website design' (University 31X).

Universities with a more developed level of PCE practice pointed to training which went beyond dissemination techniques and highlighted issues relating to evaluation of impact and co-creation methodologies, which for University 24V was evidence of a commitment to moving its academics towards an ‘an engagement mind set, away from an information-deficit model and dissemination-only mind set’ similar to the approach by University 26V which sought to help staff to ‘develop their skills in leading change, building community partnerships, and self-evaluation’ and University 11J’s aspiration to move ‘beyond simply communicating our activities to the public towards bi-directional civic engagement.’

Another common theme to the reported training practices, especially amongst institutions with more developed PCE approaches, was the establishment of internal university networks to promote and develop good practice, supplemented by a system of PCE fellows or champions at school or departmental level. The majority of training was reported as taking place internally, with the exceptions of staff participating in external schemes such as the NCCPE Engage Academy or the Bright Club, which attempts to inject some mirth into PCE by training academics to disseminate their research using stand-up comedy techniques. The importance of the development of networks to support capability promotion is recognised in the CA literature, referred to as the capability of ‘care’ which allows the university community ‘integral growth of the self and the other, through relationships that build trust and recognition amongst its members’ (Velasco and Boni, 2020, p.47).

The literature on PCE also reflects a tension between instrumental and intrinsic motivations for the third mission and expresses a concern that the public good aims are at risk of being subsumed by the demands of the marketized HEI sector (Brackmann 2015), which may result in hollowed out and choreographed forms of public engagement activity which are amenable to institutional audit (Watermeyer 2015; Deem 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005). Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma (2022, p.600) apply this analysis to the micro level of the motivations of academics involved in the third mission and also identify a tension between public and private good incentives, noting that PCE can become 'a convenient horse upon which academics pursue private advantage, such as occupational success and academic visibility,' which may not be consistent with a public good orientation. The data in this study demonstrated an emergence of a range of extrinsic motivations for PCE activity which will be outlined further below.

Respondents frequently pointed to embedded mechanisms for reward and recognition of PCE activity by staff. These included references to internal awards for good practice which included reference to PCE, either as a standalone category or as part of research awards, or as standalone prizes. Universities 8E, 31X and 24V referred to a variety of such mechanisms including a 'Community Engagement Award', 'Annual PE Awards assessed by an external panel of judges' and celebrating PCE achievement at 'an annual Research Showcase.'

Institutions also routinely highlighted external awards for PCE related activities, including the NCCPE Watermark, THE Awards 2019 'Knowledge

Exchange Initiative of the Year', Queens Anniversary Prize , as well as discipline specific awards for PCE activities such as LawWorks & Attorney General Student Pro Bono Awards and the Access to Justice Foundation Award.

Another frequently cited form of instrumental incentive for staff to engage in PCE activities was its inclusion in promotion criteria. This was cited by a significant number, including Univesity 6E, as a recent innovation, for whom 'public engagement was added to academic promotion criteria in 2020.'

Interestingly, what was very rarely mentioned was the inclusion of PCE activities as a dedicated part of academic workload, one exception from University 24V states that 'engagement and social responsibility are recognised in work allocations and rewarded in our promotions and exceptional performance criteria.'

Interview participants argued that there were insufficient incentives for academics to engage in PCE activity and there was a lack of a clear pathway for professional advancement:

> I think that the challenge with not really having a firm definition is actually it's not supported or professionalized in the way in which it could be and recognize those skills that are needed with this agenda … Academics aren't incentivized to do public engagement (Chris E)

In addition to a lack of incentives, capacity was also identified as a key factor in facilitating engagement with the PCE agenda, particularly in teaching

focused universities where a tension was identified between preserving modest allocations for research time and engaging in PCE activities:

> Our teaching load is huge by comparison to another university, so there isn't as much time to do this… my heart sinks because I'm just gonna have to let [them] down because I'm not going to find people… I don't have the resources for it. (Jo M)

Thus, the data related to academic agency shows that traditional academic research training did not necessarily equip academics with the skills and confidence to engage in PCE, although there were disciplinary differences acknowledged in this regard, with social science academics being better trained in this regard and more ready to engage directly with the public in their research.

An emergent theme in the data is the prevalence of involving the public in the creation of research. This approach was not consistently evident across the data, but was a distinct presence especially amongst more research-intensive universities and those with more developed and embedded approaches to PCE and resonates with attempts by CA scholars to utilise participatory approaches in developing capabilities (Boni and Frediani, 2020; Walker, 2018; Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2020, Velasco and Boni, 2020)

Some respondents were able to give very detailed descriptions of how they had engaged the public with the design and production of research activities. For example, University 11J referred to local community partnerships 'to create space for local communities to co-construct discussions on the topics

that are important to them' which seeks to 'leverage the intellectual resources of the University to provide a set of critical tools designed to bring about impactful local community engagement with a range of issues affecting everyday life.' Many co-production examples drew on evidence of health related or citizen science research and one respondent claimed 'embedded co-production as an organising principle' in its research strategy (University 30X).

The data does point to a range of instrumental or extrinsic incentives to motivate staff to engage in PCE, an approach critiqued in some of the literature as being potentially inconsistent with a public good orientation for PCE (Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2022). However, a significant theme that emerged was a perception that many academics felt they had insufficient capacity to engage in developing the external relationships required for meaningful and effective PCE activity, particularly in teaching-oriented institutions. Velasco and Boni (2020, p.48) refer to this as the capability of 'weaving nets' marked by a capacity to 'foster interconnections with companies, communities and students to develop innovative projects …build trust and take care of the common good.' This lack of institutional support to provide sufficient time to engage in PCE activities is one echoed by Mtawa (2019, p.32):

> While academics have to negotiate multiple demands of external communities, they also have to navigate institutional deterrents that impair their efforts to engage in communities.

5.3.3 Public engagement professionals

The majority of institutions reported investment in professional support staff to facilitate relationship building and deliver PCE activity. These take a variety of forms, many featuring as part of pre-existing research or communication / marketing / public relations support roles incorporating bid writing and event functions but also in supporting training, dissemination and managing partnership relations. For example, University 26V reported that its 'Impact & Engagement Services team has supported nearly 400 researchers to incorporate P&CE funding into research applications since 2017, securing over £2.5m in awards.' Many respondents reported the appointment of senior administrative staff to lead the overall co-ordination and direction of PCE activity, for example University 3E referred to a 'newly-appointed Director of … Engagement located within the Vice Chancellor's Office' and tasked with driving PCE initiatives.

Interview participants highlighted the importance of these professional support roles, 'having these dedicated post holders working on these projects where this was a key element of them delivering … [on] the ground was just fantastic.' (Ian M)

Consistent with the insights relevant to academics, PEPs also reported that the fluidity inherent in the agenda meant that the nature of their work was dependent on a range of contextual factors, including their own creative responses to the agenda and the interests of the academics they work with, as illustrated by the following observations: 'It's something you develop on the

job and it's something that is really shaped by the academics and the departments' (Dev E).

These findings are consistent with the literature highlighting the definitional looseness or messiness of PCE (Preece, 2018) which in this case has increased the opportunity for PEPs to exercise their agency as it was perceived as providing a wide latitude to post holders to develop their roles in a way that played to their own strengths and institutional contexts. This finding highlights the importance of the motivations of professional support staff in this context and further reinforces the relevance of Sen's observation that institutional capacity to attend to remediable injustice 'depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization' (Sen, 2009, p. 354).

The next section will explore which publics and communities are given priority by universities for PCE purposes.

5.4 Identifying the publics and communities in university PCE

This theme reveals how the data presents universities' conceptions of who their publics and communities are for PCE purposes, how they prioritise which of them to work with and the extent they are co-creators in their PCE work.

The issues raised in this theme resonate very strongly with key tenets of the Capability Approach. Both Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011) highlight the importance of democratic participation as an important feature of capability development. For Sen (2009), democratic participation is key to the idea of

justice, and institutions can be considered to have an imperfect obligation to address remediable injustice by facilitating democratic engagement with institutions. This idea also resonates in Boni *et al.'s* (2016) argument that, from the CA perspective, we should not just pay attention to which capabilities are promoted but also to who decides what is prioritised (Velasco and Boni, 2020) and what the informational basis for those decisions are (Sen, 1999). Preece (2018) uses insights from this literature to argue that, in their PCE work, universities can be seen as boundary spanning organisations facilitating democratic participation in both civic and international contexts.

The KEF narrative data revealed that the declared focus of university engagement activities included a variety of publics and communities, but the predominant focus was on local audiences, rather than national or international engagement. The establishment of key partnerships was also a significant feature of reported engagements along with a marked concern for audiences labelled as excluded, marginalised or underrepresented. The concern of institutions to prioritise publics described as disadvantaged echoes what McCowan (2020) describes as a pro-poor orientation of human development universities. The importance of equity of access highlighted by these conceptualisations resonates with the human development values articulated in the frameworks for a capability friendly university developed in the work by Boni and Gasper (2012), Boni and Walker (2016) and Walker (2022). These authors point to the importance of institutions being proactive in engaging with marginalised communities and publics as a means of capability

development and as a means of ‘the development of a fair and democratic society’ (Velasco and Boni, p.47).

Perceptions of who the public(s) and communities with whom universities engage varied depending in large part by the way universities understand their own roles and institutional contexts. For example, the perspectives from research intensive institutions would often conceptualise publics as partners or participants in funded research projects and would sometimes draw attention to the international dimensions of their work. Whereas smaller, more teaching-oriented institutions, often conceptualised publics as deriving from their strong civic links (discussed further at 6.1.4) or linked to their widening participation work.

The importance of decisions around prioritising which publics and communities universities should engage with was recognised by interview participants, ‘we have certain priorities, we have to prioritize’ (Ella X). Several participants acknowledged that the need to prioritise raises questions for universities around how the public good is conceptualised and the need for them to respond in an equitable way to wider society. For example, Dev E argued their university’s approach to PCE did aim to serve the public good but acknowledged a lack of transparency and accountability in deciding what that good is, ‘Who decides what is the public good?... if the government decides the public good then it undermines the … inclusivity and democratization of universities.’ Also, Alex V’s comment is illustrative of the concern to ensure that universities engage with wider society in a more inclusive manner:

> I think there's a real focus on working with, you know disadvantaged or low social, economic groups … because the universities are getting hammered by the public by saying that they're ivory towers, they're inaccessible, they're not reaching these kind of groups and they need to change that, they need to be more diverse.

The next sub-section will explore the emphasis on localised PCE activity in more detail.

5.4.1 Developing organic relationships

The influence of the Civic Agenda on the values which inform PCE is explored in more detail at 6.1.4, but the interview data highlighted localised, organic and unpredictable nature of the relationships upon which PCE activity depends. These relationships can be the result of disciplinary or research interest or through the personal networks of university staff. The following observations are illustrative of the often ‘ad hoc manner’ (Hannah J) in which these relationships are formed:

> A lot of the …partners that the universities pick up on and work with tend to come through personal contacts … they will reach out to those organizations that they tend to know and are familiar with. (Fiona X)

The ad hoc nature of the development of these relationships is illustrative of the apparent precarity of PCE activity and participants acknowledged that this exists on both the university and the community partner side. Much of PCE

relationship building depends not only on ‘how much the academic is willing to put in to make the links’ (Dev E) but also on the willingness, interest and capacity of community partners:

> I was researching with a colleague at [XXX] on [XXX] and we're like, yeah, we've got this wonderful stuff. We'll work with these schools [and community groups] and they don't actually want to work with you cause they've got they don't have the time or money for this and they've got their own agendas as well (Graham J).

Participants also acknowledged that their universities could do more to make it easier for community groups interested in developing a relationship to make contact with them, ‘some organizations would reach out but I think we could do a lot better in in having a door for organizations to come in’ (Hannah J). This was recognised by Graham J as being particularly important if universities wanted to reach beyond ‘middle class white pensioners’ as an audience for PCE activity, although it was acknowledged that working proactively to engage beyond these constituencies is ‘harder and takes a lot more work’ requiring specific efforts to listen to the voice of underrepresented groups. The issue of the extent to which universities are able to engage with the voices of their communities in developing their PCE activities will be discussed further in the next section.

5.4.2 Inclusion of community voices

The KEF data demonstrated an uneven approach to universities engaging in a two-way communication with members of the publics and communities with

whom they intended to engage. This resonates with the argument made by Preece (2018, p.58) that there is an 'implicit understanding that when universities engage with their communities they are doing so within an already unequal power relationship' which can result in a tendency to one-way engagement due to the difficulty in establishing equitable relationships.

The CA literature discussed in Chapter 3, brings into focus the role that universities could play in developing the agency of their communities through their PCE work (Sen, 2009), drawing attention to the issue of not only what universities do but also who decides what they do (Boni and Walker, 2016 p.69). This point is echoed in research by Jain *et al*. (2020, p. 887) on the creation of social value by public policy institutions who argue for the 'increased equality and pluralism in the stakeholders and beneficiaries engaged at all stages of public service design, commissioning and delivery.' Although most institutions articulated an aspiration to involve the public in helping to shape their PCE activities, only a minority of institutions reported embedded mechanisms to identify community and public perspectives in a way that would influence their practice. This was confirmed by the data from the interviews which shows that a common theme amongst the participants was an acknowledgement of the importance of trying to listen to the voices of their communities and publics, but an awareness of the challenges involved in doing so, as well as a recognition of the need for universities to do more to meet these challenges. The following provides an illustrative sample of these perspectives:

> So in my experience… it really brought it home to me just how difficult it actually is to really engage and listen [to our publics and communities]… I think that we probably don't ask that much of the community that we're trying to support. I think we probably just do what we think [is best]. (Chris E)

Most respondents acknowledged that PCE activity was a means by which the public could help inform the teaching and research practice of universities, for example University 18M declared that ‘engagement with the public and community groups helps to shape our understanding of their needs and thus drives further research interests and developments’ and is ‘very conscious of engaging external voices and views when designing academic courses.’

Only a minority of respondents were able to go beyond generalised assertions that their PCE activities had a general influence on their institutional practice. Some respondents reported quite a limited approach to inviting the public to shape their PCE activity, relying on greater publicity or expecting the public to be proactive in contacting them. For example, ‘we are raising awareness by … building more active working relationships with the two local newspapers’ (University 4E) and the public ‘are invited to contact us through a dedicated email or via current contacts’ (University 13J).

The difficulties experienced in trying to listen to communities was seen as problematic from the perspective of the interview participants trying to develop PCE practices that are genuinely participatory, emancipatory and democratic,

‘I think there's a danger that we make a lot of assumptions about what people should know as well as what they want to know.’ (Dev E)

The difficulties experienced in trying to listen to the public voice on PCE was seen as being compounded by traditional perceptions of academic identity, ‘it's actually really tricky, particularly with more traditional academics or academics who've been a professor for a while and I'm much more used to that transfer approach’ (Chris E).

In addition, interview participants identified the difficulty of reaching beyond conversations with official community partners, such as representatives of other local anchor institutions, summed up succinctly by Fiona X who argued that ‘I doubt very much if the university knows an awful lot about that beyond what the Council tells it’ which, they suggested, means that the parts of the population who don’t routinely engage with civic institutions are not listened to, so more work needs to be done to reach beyond representatives of civic organisations, ‘The collection of voices … has not been very good … it tends to be driven by those voices which are best organized and best able to put someone forward to, discuss things with the university’ (Fiona X).

The difficulty of listening to voices of underrepresented groups was also seen as being compounded by an element of suspicion or lack of trust from some parts of the public, ‘it's very easy to see the university as an outsider. It's very difficult for young people to actually trust’ (Dev E).

There was some evidence of more proactive attempts by respondent institutions to identify and understand the interests and concerns of their

publics and communities and to shape their PCE activities to meet those needs. These included bespoke surveys, and the informal utilisation of academic and institutional networks. For example, University 7E used survey to explore ‘people’s aims for engagement and preferred subjects/types of activity.’ A minority of respondents were able to demonstrate how they had incorporated the ‘community voice’ into their strategic planning for PCE. For example, University 14J used a public consultation ‘to more fully understand the needs of public and community groups; and ensuring that these groups could inform aligned strategic priorities.’ Other examples included utilising the external membership of university committees and governance bodies and also making use of existing partnerships to guide the design of future PCE activity.

A minority of institutions were able to point to proactive methods to seek input from the community, including utilising community organising methods to develop community leadership structures to facilitate engagement with the university, with underrepresented parents and members of the autism community (Universities 26V & 22V). Institutions involved in this level of engagement were able to demonstrate a clear link between PCE and research priorities articulated by University 23V as leveraging the ‘intellectual resources of the University to provide a set of critical tools designed to bring about impactful local community engagement with a range of issues affecting everyday life.’

5.5 Summary discussion

Chapter 5 has explored four themes arising from the data which were informed by Nussey *et al.'s* (2022) framework of capability elements (Table 3.1) and which address my research questions: conceptions of PCE (RQ2), PCE practices (RQ1), university PCE agents (RQ2) and identifying the publics and communities in university PCE (RQ1&2). A visual summary of the findings is provided at Figure 7.1.

The findings support the argument found in the scholarly literature that the third mission of universities in general, and PCE in particular, remains only loosely defined and weakly conceptualised (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018). It was recognised that a number of difficulties arise from the absence of a settled definition, including problems with accountability, superficiality and professionalisation, which supports calls in the literature for clearer and more committed institutional leadership (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015). This weak conceptualisation therefore provides an uncertain basis to inform the decisions and aspirations of universities concerning their PCE practice (Nussey *et al.*, 2022) and hampers the ability of universities to engage in the 'purposeful critical reflection' in light of their 'collective aspirations' around PCE which Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) argue is necessary for the effective promotion of capabilities by a university community. However, this discussion has also illustrated that the definitional 'messiness' (Preece, 2018) does have some advantages as it provides a degree of latitude which allows PEPs and academics a creative space to play to their strengths and have due regard to their particular institutional and disciplinary contexts. This finding highlights

the importance of being attentive to the interpretation of human agents in operationalizing HEI policy (Spence and Deneulin, 2009; Sen, 2009).

However, the PCE practices reported by the respondent institutions discussed at 5.2 do indicate that PCE interventions can act as 'potential conversion factors which can build capability sets' (Preece, 2018, p.170), particularly for communities in the locality of the institution. Offering the use of buildings and facilities for use by the local community is recognised as contributing to capability expansion (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni *et al.*, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020) and the prevalence of student community engagement activity is illustrative of the capacity for universities to support the development of civic professionalism (Walker and Maclean, 2013; Boni and Walker 2016; Preece, 2018; Kreber, 2019; Mtawa, 2019). Unsurprisingly for university engagement, the majority of PCE events had an educational element and can therefore be seen as promoting the development of the foundational capability of education (Sen 2003; Nussbaum, 2011) and thereby providing a means to raise levels of aspiration (Hart 2013), challenge adaptive preferences (Ibrahim, 2020) and potentially providing opportunities for the development of the capability to engage in democratic public deliberation (Sen, 2009).

The third theme in the data discussed at 5.3 also revealed perspectives on the university agents engaged in delivering PCE, focusing on institutional leadership, academics and PEPs whose aspirations and agency mediate and create university PCE policy and practice (Nussey *et al.*, 2022). This discussion was augmented by the context of Sen's (2009, p.354) argument

that the efficacy of institutions in addressing remediable injustice is mediated through the action, or inaction, of human agents and Spence and Deneulin's (2009) contention that policy-making and application occurs across different moments and across a web of decisions at macro, micro and meso levels.

The data regarding strategic direction at the institutional level showed that PCE was yet to be embedded into the core functions of many universities and only a few had discrete PCE strategies or a single point of accountability at senior level. A tension between bottom up and top-down approaches to developing PCE activity was evident, with some institutions seeking to capitalise on the organic relationships built via academic networks, although it was acknowledged that this led to difficulties with accountability and a potential lack of direction which may result in superficial forms of PCE activity (Watermeyer 2015; Deem 2004; Deem and Brehony 2005).

The data also showed that traditional academic research training did not necessarily equip academics with the skills and confidence to engage in PCE, although there were disciplinary differences acknowledged in this regard. Respondent universities did highlight the provision of training opportunities for academics to support them in delivering PCE, but the data also pointed to difficulties around capacity, concerns echoed by Mtawa (2019). Few respondent institutions gave detail on the allocation of academic time to support PCE, and a key theme from the interview data was a perception that many academics felt they had insufficient capacity to engage in developing the external relationships required for meaningful and effective PCE activity, particularly in teaching-oriented institutions.

The final theme highlighted some of the drivers, practices and opportunities (Nussey *et al.*, 2022) evident in universities approach to identifying the publics and communities to prioritise for PCE purposes. Reports by some institutions of a commitment to co-produced research and community empowerment activities shows that universities have a potential role in facilitating active civic participation and facilitating opportunities for democratic public reasoning (Sen, 2003; 2009; Nussbaum, 2011; Walker, 2018), although this was perceived as a developing, rather than established aspect of PCE practice. Several barriers were identified, particularly in relation to the difficulty of substantive and effective external collaborations.

The data here demonstrated that PEPs and academics recognised the importance of universities engaging in an equitable and democratic manner with their publics and were sensitive to the inherent power imbalance between universities and marginalised members of the community (Boni and Walker, 2016; Preece, 2018). The perceived importance of trying to engage with publics in a meaningful and equitable manner is consistent with the promotion of human development values articulated in the literature (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; McCowan, 2020; Walker, 2022).

However, there was a perceived difficulty in seeking genuinely collaborative engagement with harder to reach groups outside of representatives of official civic forums and, as Graham J put it, beyond ‘middle class white pensioners’ but it was widely acknowledged that doing so requires time, resources and strategic direction that is not yet evident in the majority of universities.

Chapter 6 will now continue to address the capabilities or ‘choices, abilities and opportunities’ universities have in relation to the promotion of human development focused PCE practices by addressing the drivers and emerging trajectories of PCE in English HEIs (Nussey, *et al*., 2022, p.102).

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion Part II – Drivers and Trajectories

Informed by Nussey *et al.*'s (2022) framework of capability elements (Table 3.1), Chapter 6 continues to address the capabilities, or 'choices, abilities and opportunities', universities have in relation to the promotion of human development focused PCE (Nussey, *et al*., 2022, p.102). As explained in Chapter 3, the analysis of my data is informed by prior CA scholarship (Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019; Velasco and Boni, 2020; Nussey *et al.*, 2022) which seeks to investigate the 'role of higher education, in partnership with other agencies to expand, through relevant interventions, potential conversion factors, which can build capability sets that are deemed worthwhile for those concerned' (Preece, 2018, p.170). Guided by the framework proposed by Nussey *et al.* (2022 p.103 and Table 3.1) this chapter identifies two themes and seven subthemes (summarised in Table 5.1) which highlight the capabilities of English universities to develop capability friendly PCE policies and practices, each of which will be explored below and illustrated with quotations.

Drivers, the first theme discussed in this chapter, addresses RQ2 as it provides insights into how national HEI policy, funding influences, aspirations and territory inform their PCE practices. As will be discussed below, these subthemes resonate with aspects of the capability elements identified by Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) as drivers, abilities, aspirations and opportunities.

Opportunities, the second theme in this chapter, also addresses RQ2 and discusses the perceptions regarding the future opportunities of university PCE. Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) include 'opportunities' as one of the university capability elements, defined as 'the socio-economic-political-cultural conditions enabling or constraining universities.' This theme illustrates some of the existing constraints on universities and identifies perceptions concerning how these might be mitigated by future changes to PCE policy and practice. These are presented in three subthemes regarding the extent to which current PCE practices are effectively evaluated, how PCE policy practice is impacting upon academic and institutional identities and perceptions on avenues for future national HEI policy reform. As will be discussed below, these subthemes resonate with aspects of the capability elements identified by Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) including drivers, aspirations, abilities and agency.

6.1 Drivers

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) define 'drivers' as 'the historical and contemporary social, political, economic and ecological contextual conditions that shape university capabilities [and which] influence the values and aspirations prioritised by universities.' Guided by this definition, my analysis of the data presented four subthemes, each of which point to contextual conditions which influence how and why universities decide on the PCE work they undertake (RQ2). Each of these will be discussed below.

6.1.1 National HEI policy

The theme of policy resonates with Nussey *et al.*'s (2022, p.102-3) concept of 'drivers' as a capability element which determines universities 'choices, abilities and opportunities' for universities to deliver capability friendly PCE activities. I chose to group the influence of policy on university PCE into two categories: explicit and implicit, each of which will be explained below.

I identified *explicit* policy drivers as being those national HEI policies (rather than the institutional level strategies discussed at 5.3) which have as their explicit aim the promotion of university activities which engage the public, such as the KEF, KEC or the impact elements of the REF. Very few institutions made explicit reference to the Knowledge Exchange Framework or Knowledge Exchange Concordat as an influence on their current strategy or activity, but this was much more of a significant theme in the participant interview data. Given the policy timeline outlined in Chapter 1 above, this can be explained by the fact that both KEF and KEC were only emerging influences on the sector at the time of the 2020 KEF submission.

I identified *implicit* policy drivers as those which do not have PCE as their declared aim, but where PCE is likely to be relevant to their application, such as the impact aspect of REF (Bandola-Gill and Smith, 2021) and the emerging sustainability agenda articulated by policy such as the UN SDGs, frequently cited by respondents with more developed strategies and often evidence in relation to their performance in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (Lee *et al*., 2020). For example, University 9E commented that their ranking in

this list ‘confirms [our] globally-leading position in sustainability and the strength of its support for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.’ Other implicit drivers included policies related to widening participation or marketing which demand forms of PCE directed specifically at school age children or the framing of PCE activities as a way of marketing or promoting the mainstream teaching or research activities of the institution.

The influence of these explicit and implicit policy drivers will be discussed in more detail below.

6.1.1.1 Explicit policy drivers

The data regarding explicit policy drivers, which aim to promote PCE, such as the KEF, KEC or the impact elements of the REF, did, to some extent, support the contention in the wider HEI literature of the influence of pervasive ‘audit culture’ in higher education (Shore and Wright, 2010; Marginson, 2011). However, this was balanced against the view that these audits did have a positive influence on the sector by enabling more and better quality PCE activity. This perception was based on the idea that universities are unwieldy and have a ‘ramshackle’ (Fiona X) approach to PCE activity. As Beth V explained:

> You can get too sucked into that kind of theoretical understanding of what's going on and you stop recognizing how atomistic a university is and how much of the stuff that goes on is a result of accident and chance and cock-up and so on.

This recognition of the lack of clear strategic leadership at the university level resonates with Watermeyer's (2015) critique that the PCE agenda has been hampered by lukewarm advocacy by HE leaders and the need for more committed institutional leadership (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015). In the face of this difficulty in shaping the strategic direction of university PCE activity, the direction provided by policy makers was seen a largely positive influence:

> I think competition is good. I think you should strive to have these things and I think the REF and the KEF in particular raise it as an agenda within the university that needs senior sign off. (Beth V)

This policy imperative was also seen as a means of providing public support, legitimacy and accountability for university activities, seen as a core element in the development of the third mission in the literature (Clark, 1998; Mahrl and Pausits, 2011; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015). For example, Jo M commented, 'I think it's good to have an exercise like KEF and make organizations accountable for funding that they get.'

The REF was often cited as a more significant influence in prompting individual academics to engage the public with their research, rather than the KEF itself, as the REF was both more direct at holding individual academics to account and made an explicit link between success in REF and increased funding. On an institutional level, the public evaluative comparison involved in exercises such as KEF and REF was seen as prompting institutional leaders to preserve their relative positions and tap into the desire to seek competitive

advantage, a desire which is arguably indicative of the internalisation of the audit culture the literature suggests is prevalent in higher education (Shore and Wright, 2010; Marginson, 2011):

> Well, I think that the only way to motivate people to do stuff in university is to pit them against each other, because that's exactly at the essence of academic culture, right? (Beth V)

Tapping into the competitive outlook of both individual academics and senior leaders was seen as a way of galvanising positive action in an institutional context seen as complex and unwieldy:

> Universities are so complex and there's so many different pressures coming in from different angles that if you don't put pressure on, you won't get anywhere …so it's really important that there is KEF and REF. (Alex V)

Nor was the promotion of competition seen as antithetical to the opportunity for universities to deliver on their 'imperfect obligation' (Sen 2009) to promote the public good. As Ella observed, those working in universities are likely to have an underlying commitment to serving a social purpose which PCE policies can facilitate, a point echoed by Graham J:

> I think the REF has already pushed in a good way and I think if that wasn't there academics would just go back into their silos and just carry on doing what they do and without engaging with the community. (Graham J)

However, participants cautioned that although the metrics presented by PCE promoting policies can galvanise institutions to act in pro-social ways within their communities, they did recognise the danger that this can promote a performative approach to PCE and risk losing valuable activity that might not be easily captured by existing metrics, ‘its so metrics driven that stuff is lost… But you can't change those metrics. And so if you're only metrics driven, that's only what you're gonna get.’ (Chris E). This anxiety is also reflected as a critique in the literature, which points to the danger of an audit driven approach to PCE could succumb to the prevailing marketized culture within HE and results in hollowed out and choreographed forms of public engagement activity amenable to institutional audit (Watermeyer, 2015; Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005).

6.1.1.2 Implicit drivers

As explained above, the data showed that the impetus to engage in PCE activity was not limited to explicit PCE policies such as KEF and REF, but included policy influences which overlapped with a concern to promote PCE related activity, but with other primary aims. The data shows that a concern to promote widening participation, boost recruitment and contribute to overall marketing and publicity strategies helped shape approaches to PCE, all of which will be explored further below.

School engagement was frequently cited by respondents as a significant aspect of university PCE activities, particularly for teaching focused universities, some citing their institutional history as teacher training

institutions. A variety of activity was reported including open days, summer schools, development of resources, GCSE support and health awareness. When specific disciplines were referred to, STEM based subjects were most frequently discussed, although history and social science engagement did also feature, such as initiatives on hate crime (University 11J) and education for girls (University 1E).

The majority of respondents reported short term interventions, but some examples of sustained school level partnerships were provided, including a school governors initiative addressing ‘the need of schools in recruiting appropriate members of the public to their governing boards …we have placed our staff and alumni as governors in schools focussed on disadvantaged areas’ (University 23V). Another example of sustained institutional level collaboration was provided by University 28X which included a place-based education initiative in partnership with the further education sector which aimed to cover education from early years through to higher education.

For many respondents, engagement with schools was seen as part of their widening participation responsibilities and focused on raising aspirations for students to attend higher education, particularly ‘students from less advantaged backgrounds and their parents, carers, teachers and schools’ (University 25V) to encourage ‘widening participation and access to higher education’ (University 26V). The focus on widening participation in higher education clearly illustrates the potential of universities to support capabilities development. Sen and Nussbaum see education as of foundational

importance for the development of individual capabilities and societal development; means for personal development, economic productivity and active civic participation helping concept formation, practical reasoning and critical thinking (Sen, 2003, p. 55; Nussbaum, 2011, p. 152). The focus on students from marginalised backgrounds in this work also points to a pro-poor orientation (McCowan, 2020), and the role universities can play in addressing adaptive preferences and raising aspiration (Hart, 2013).

However, the data shows the institutional motives for school engagement activities were not solely focused on an altruistic desire to enhance capabilities. Rather, implicit in the enthusiasm for school level engagement by universities is also the institutional and economic need to recruit new students to higher education, a connection that is reflected in the fact that one respondent needed to emphasise that their outreach to schools across their region was ‘free and impartial’ (University 12J). Interview participants identified the focus of PCE on school engagement as being disproportionately aimed at recruitment of new students, ‘so there's certainly a sense of serving recruitment, I was really naive to that originally’ (Jo M), and which was recognised as being a source of some resentment for staff asked to engage directly with schools as it jarred with their sense of academic identity (Reed and Fazey, 2021; Chubb *et al.*, 2017), pithily illustrated in a commented made to Jo M, ‘if I wanted to be a primary school teacher, I would have been a primary school teacher.’

The data also points to a tendency for PCE activities to be co-opted for the purposes of marketisation (Bok, 2003). Universities were able to point to well

established mechanisms to publicise their PCE activities, but very often, these were presented as part of a general professionalised marketing and communication strategy, rather than a distinct form of PCE activity, ‘We communicate publicly through social media
(Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube), the national and international media and through our website’ (University 2E) and the ‘Press and Media Strategy continues to highlight public and community engagement activities as a priority focus’(University 16M). Thus often, PCE activity was a way of creating ‘compelling content for the news section of the university website’ (University 4E).

Data from interview participants showed a recognition that PCE was being utilised for marketing and recruitment purposes by universities, ‘because at the end of the day, it's a bit of a marketing exercise’ (Ian M). On the face of it this sentiment supports the concern expressed in the literature that PCE is vulnerable to being hollowed out and choreographed in the interests of marketized audit cultures (Watermeyer, 2015; Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005) and there was concern that this was happening on the ground leading to surface level or superficial engagement:

> ‘I personally get frustrated when people do surface level engagement that actually leads to nothing, because I think it's tokenistic. It's all about raising the profile of the institution without any actual meaningful change and it doesn't break down that ivory tower. (Alex V)

The tendency identified of universities framing PCE as a form of student recruitment or marketing resonates with Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma’s

(2022) critique that although the inherent orientation of community engagement is towards the public good, not all activities given the name of community engagement actually align with this outcome. Indeed, this is a view shared by Research England in the guidance on the next iteration of the KEF, who state that they would not 'expect to see activities focused on recruiting students' being categorised as PCE (Research England, 2022, p. 17).

However, using PCE for marketing purposes was not necessarily seen as incompatible with what was perceived as the existence of a bona fide commitment to the promotion of the public good by several of the interview participants. This line of argument suggested universities needed to show prospective students their commitment to the public good, doing so would help prospective students have confidence in the educational institutions in which they would make significant personal and financial investments:

> I think public engagement is an element that should feed into them thinking that the organization is the type of organization they want to give their fees to. (Ian M)

6.1.2 Funders and funding

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) identify university 'abilities' as one of the capability elements for universities to act towards climate change, and they propose that this includes access to financial resources. The analysis of the data in my study also reveals that sources of funding for PCE activity was recognised as a key driver in determining what PCE activities universities

engaged in. Respondent universities highlighted the influence of funding bodies in relation their development of PCE strategies, illustrating a strategic link between research and PCE, one stating that ‘we align our work with funders and NCCPE’ (University 25V) and another referring to utilising ‘Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s self-assessment process for anchor institutions’ (University 6E).

The majority of respondents reported that the funding for their PCE activity was derived from a variety of routes, rather from one dedicated source. Principally derived from centrally allocated HEIF and QR funding, additional funds were identified as coming from some sponsorship, consultancy and competitive funding bids. Many reported that these were used to employ professional PCE staff and to also provide small pockets of seed corn funding directly to academics to support particular PCE projects. The dispersed nature of the funding sources for PCE work illustrates the range of influences universities need to negotiate in order to carry out this type of work and points to the fragility of the agenda as it is subject to the priorities of a range of external actors.

Interview data showed that participants recognised a need for universities to respond with some agility to be profitable enough to be able to support PCE activity.

> I mean there's a tension pretty much in everything that the university does as an educational institution between its desire to make money and it's achievement of higher purposes (Fiona X).

Participants working in all types of institutions recognised that research funding bodies were prioritising PCE activity, partly as a result of the wider research impact agenda, ‘increasingly funders want to know how you're going to disseminate your information, not just within the academic community, but also wider’ (Jo M).

However, participants working in research intensive universities (clusters V and X); were very clear on highlighting the importance of the strategy of funders in setting the PCE agenda, Alex V argued that their PCE activities were often designed to comply with the funder’s requirements:

> that's the main tune you've got to dance to when you're going for external funding… everything is dictated by whoever's pulling the strings… for research intensive universities you look at who the major funders of that institution are, and they'll be the ones that they …shape themselves by.

The result of which is there are elements of activity ‘that some universities probably spend a lot of time on, and others just don't bother because there's no financial incentive to engage’ (Ian M). For teaching intensive institutions with relatively little external research funding concerns were expressed regarding the level of resourcing required to deliver effective PCE and to successfully report the activity that they do engage in. This finding supports Rentocchini and Rizzo's (2023) argument that policy on tuition fees led some universities in England and Wales to focus on teaching to the detriment of the variety and intensity of their KE activities. This disparity in the resources of

research-intensive institutions compared to teaching focused institutions was also recognised as influencing their ability to respond to the audit exercises of mechanisms such as KEF and REF:

> I also think that the bigger organizations continue to stay big and probably grow because they can have a person at this in their full-time job, or they can pay spin doctors to come in and make this jazzy. I mean at the end of the day, writing the KEF statements, you can be factually correct, but I'm sure in other organisations they'd have some kind of marketing person almost on it as well who would make it sound good (Chris E).

The data on funding shows that PCE activity is seen as being dependent on a patchwork of different sources of income, with the influence of non-governmental funders being particularly important to research intensive institutions. The competition for this funding illustrates that universities are having to operate within a marketized academic culture (Marginson 2011) and have to develop their strategy for PCE keeping in mind the priorities of a range of external funding providers. The importance of external funding bodies for PCE revealed by the data also points to the challenge of universities being able to be truly responsive to the needs and values of their communities, rather than their funders, which is a pre-requisite for capabilities promotion. The type of democratic institutionalism envisaged by Sen (2009) would demand that the influence of the funding institutions should not drown out the voice of the communities who should be served by university PCE, as

doing so will risk a hollowed out form of PCE not sufficiently attentive to the public good (Marginson and Yang, 2023).

6.1.3 Aspirations

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) propose that universities' aspirations are the 'values and outcomes' that they prioritise and which, they argue, can be 'situated in university policies as well as within the experiences and preferences of university actors such as academic staff.' My analysis of the respondent and participant data shows that PCE had general resonance with both the existing institutional objectives and also resonated with the aspirations of both PEPs and academics. These institutional and individual aspirations will be discussed in more details below.

Although respondents at the institutional level were able to point to how their PCE activity aligned to their general strategy, only a minority of respondents claimed that their approach to PCE was relatively mature and embedded into other core activities to the extent it helped to shape their teaching or research activity. This minority were not only able to articulate a clear connection between their research and teaching functions and PCE but also identified how PCE activities complemented and benefitted their core activities. For example, the strategic benefits of a well-developed approach to PCE were seen as particularly relevant to research activity, both in the sense of ensuring relevance, quality and impact and also in accessing research income. University 4E claimed PCE activity:

> enhances research because it can help researchers explore new perspectives and new research angles and can increase awareness or support for a particular research area. It also contributes to the production of better quality and more successful research grant applications which in turn makes research affordable.

The economic benefits of research that engages the public was a widely held view with a recognition that PCE supports the impact agenda and has a direct effect on the success of research funding applications. However, beyond these instrumental concerns, it was recognised that PCE makes for better quality research, with University 32X showing admirable humility in expressing this point:

> Not all the answers exist in the narrow strata of academia and much can be gained by connecting our work to the world around us. We want to share our research, but we also want to involve the public in its development.

The orientation of universities towards proactively embracing the contribution of non-expert communities to knowledge production is recognised as a key feature of the developing third mission of universities (Gibbons *et al.,*1994) and is seen as a rejection of the 'ivory tower' in favour of societal engagement (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). This concern with public participation is illustrative of the potential for the PCE agenda to be able to respond to Sen's (2009) call for the development of institutions which facilitate democratic

participation and social engagement (Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco and Boni, 2020).

The literature also makes the case that PCE has the potential to enhance teaching as well as the knowledge creation function of universities (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015) and respondents also recognised the relevance of PCE activity to their education function. For example some arguing that staff engaging in PCE 'mature into better communicators' and can also 'inspire students to want to give back to their community' (University 4E) and also as a means to provide work experience and volunteering opportunities for students which is supportive of employability strategies. These opportunities are also recognised as valuable by capability scholars. Studies by Preece (2018) and Mtawa's (2019) of community engagement and service-learning builds on the work of Boni and Walker (2016) to highlight how this type of engagement is beneficial for the capability development, particularly in regard to the development of pro-social professionals through fostering the capability of affiliation (Mtawa, 2019).

Some universities reported a fundamental connection between their mission as a university and their PCE activities to the extent that they go to the heart of what it is to be an academic institution, 'Public engagement in its broadest sense fulfils the University's mission by creating bridges between the academic community and the public, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally' (University 25V). The resonance of PCE with core academic values expressed at the institutional level found an echo in the interview data. This showed that participants recognised an obligation to engage with the

public, given that their institutions relied on public funds, ‘we're paid with public funds, part of our role in research when we get research grants is to disseminate that information to the public’ (Jo M). Also, the value of engaging with the public was recognised in terms of improving the research process:

> They're raising different questions. They're pointing to different directions, and they're sharing stuff that they've already done as well. So that helps to move the project in a different direction. (Graham J)

Graham’s point echoes with Preece (2018, p.180), who argues that universities can no longer be considered to have a monopoly over knowledge and communities should be recognised as repositories of localised, socially robust forms of knowledge which universities need to harness in order ‘to build more socially responsible resilient and caring societies.’

Although the general commitment to promoting the public good through PCE was broadly recognised, tensions were identified regarding particular types of engagement, particularly where profit making businesses were the beneficiaries:

> we do have a small business clinic and it's interesting that we identify as a small business clinic rather than a business clinic…I think there's quite a false dichotomy between thinking either that somebody's completely financially driven or community driven (Fiona X).

The data presented in this section supports the claim the university is capable of adapting its aims and function in response to social change (Palfreyman

and Temple 2017; Fazey *et al*., 2021) and there is evidence of the embrace of, rather than cultural resistance to, the third mission's prioritisation of the public role of universities (Watermeyer, 2015).

6.1.4 Territory

Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47-8) identify university capabilities of 'social construction of territory' and to 'weave nets', which they define as the ability of the university community to work with other social actors to collectively rebuild and appropriate its territory and foster 'interconnections with companies, communities and students to develop innovative projects that respond to territorial needs.' This resonates very strongly in the analysis of this subtheme which revealed that the place, or territory, in which universities act was perceived as a significant in enabling and shaping prioritising university PCE.

Several respondent universities highlighted how the PCE agenda resonated with their civic identity (as was seen in the emphasis on local outreach in Chapter 5) and reported that their engagement with sectorial partners such as the UPP Foundation and Civic Universities Network had galvanised aspects of their place based PCE activity. The civic identity of universities was a strong theme for the majority of the interview participants who saw themselves as working in anchor institutions for their local community and arguing that their PCE approach was 'driven' (Hannah J) by their civic commitment to their local population. The strength of the feeling of

commitment to the local communities is expressed in the comments below and is illustrative of the view of the majority of the participants:

> Universities have in their DNA something very important about their links with their local communities. Many universities have forgotten that over the years, but it's very strong here. And I think it's almost the kind of reawakening of those sorts of tendencies that that went to our founding. (Ella X)

These reflections can be seen in the context of the renewal of the idea of the 'civic university' discussed in Chapter 2 which advocates for a holistic concern for engagement with a university's local community across its teaching and research functions which Atterton and Thompson (2010) argue seeks to be a catalyst for the creation of local systems of knowledge which connect with wider national and international issues and expertise. This is seen as a key element of the third mission of universities in the literature and crucial to the development of the globalized knowledge-based societies (Clark,1983; Castells, 2010) with which universities are interconnected and interdependent at local, national and international levels (Jongbloed *et al.*, 2008; Pinheiro, 2015) and is also recognised in the CA literature as a means to develop global citizens and avoid parochialism (Sen, 2009 p.130; Mtawa, 2019, p.96).

The focus on this civic commitment was seen as having a direct impact on the strategy formation of the institutions the interview participants worked. Participants were readily able to point to structural links between civic organisations and their universities through mechanisms such as membership

of steering groups and local partnership bodies and pointed to how the socio-economic context of their location influenced their PCE activities: ‘I think there is an alignment. I think both at the strategic level within the university and at a local level. I think there is emphasis on place’ (Hannah J).

However, participants identified some interesting tensions arising from the focus on civic engagement including the limitations of engaging only with representatives of formal civic groups:

> Those anchor institutions simply are there and they're the ones that you have to deal with. Now what? Who else do we bring into that discussion and how do we hear the voice of the community in those discussions and the consultation process …So that's a really live issue for us (Ella X).

Other tensions identified included the juxtaposition between the socio-economic background of members of the local community and the students attending elite institutions in that locality:

> The University of X has a primarily middle-class white student population. It doesn't take so many students really from the communities around X, so if this is the University of X and it's representative of that city region, it's not really speaking or engaging or working with that community and it should be (Graham J).

Likewise for teaching oriented universities with student bodies more reflective of the local community, a tension arises between the serving the local

community and the international horizons that the university may have:

> You want to provide excellent education and you want to produce graduates that get great jobs …and travel around the world, etcetera, but also we must remember who we are, which is that we are a post polytechnic, post 92 university serving the vast majority of our students who are commuting students from areas around X. (Chris E)

Also, Fiona questioned whether the practice of English universities recruiting international students to help address funding shortfalls may undermine the aspiration for a local university to be a catalyst of knowledge systems which link the local community with international issues. This practice, it was argued, had an impact on the identity of the university community, which raised questions for how the university engaged with its local communities:

> The big challenge for universities right across the board in the UK is what happens if your primary constituency is international students who pay double or three times the fees that UK students do. They're not ordinary members of the public. They are in some cases phenomenally wealthy people. (Fiona X)

6.2 Opportunities

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) include opportunities as one of the university capability elements, defined as 'the socio-economic-political-cultural conditions enabling or constraining universities.' The final theme in this chapter illustrates some of the existing constraints on universities and

identifies perceptions concerning how these might be mitigated by changes to PCE policy and practice. These are presented in three subthemes regarding the extent to which current PCE practices are effectively evaluated, how PCE policy practice is impacting upon academic and institutional identities and perceptions on avenues for future national HEI policy reform.

6.2.1 Evaluation & accountability

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) define agency as 'the capacity of the university to reflect, imagine and act' and, similarly, Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) include 'purposeful critical reflection' in their university capability list, which they define as the capability of the university community to reflect and build 'critically on their being and daily work.' Both of these concepts illustrate the importance of universities being able to understand the effects of their PCE activity. However, the data reveals an uneven approach to the evaluation of PCE activities by universities. Whilst there is a general recognition of the value of assessing the impact of PCE practices, there are stark differences between the quality and extent of evaluations taking place.

Research focused institutions were amongst those with more developed and research informed approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of the PCE strategy. Tensions were also identified between the attempts to develop a whole university approach to PCE and the reality that a lot of PCE activity was developed in a 'bottom-up' process and dependent on the commitment and network of individual academics. The data is therefore supportive of the contention in the literature that PCE is not yet fully institutionalised (Zomer

and Benneworth, 2011) or indeed adequately conceptualised (Watermeyer, 2011; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018) as both depend on robust and sustainable methods of evaluation.

All respondents demonstrated that their evaluation of PCE practices was central to an assessment of their effectiveness and would inform their future strategies, but a significant minority indicated that this work was at an early stage, for example:

> A university wide review of our public engagement was undertaken this year to assess what activities are undertaken and provide a basis to measure how effective the engagement is (University 2E).

For institutions with more developed approaches to PCE, clear links were made between their evaluative practices and their strategic approach.

> Our engagement is guided by actions and measures of success outlined in our institutional indicators and the action implementation plans of our engagement strategies. We also evaluate our engagement success against external frameworks such as the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (University 23V)

Where evaluative practice was in evidence, the data revealed a breadth of evaluative strategies including quantitative and qualitative approaches, large scale surveys and focus groups. However, many respondents referred to difficulties in compiling data to facilitate whole institution evaluations, with

several institutions reported outsourcing their evaluation practices to external evaluation providers including commercial consultants. For example:

> Until recently, there was little centralised consideration of the impact of such activities – rather, research centres and academic departments reflected on impact and adjusted/increased their activities accordingly (University 27X).

A minority of institutions, usually research-intensive universities, were investing and engaging in developing research-based solutions to PCE and 'better measure, recognise and value universities' impact on society' by 'mapping barriers and incentives for P&CE in discussion with researchers and research support staff' (University 26V). Others report 'producing journal articles specifically focused on the pedagogy of public engagement activities' and 'creating toolkits and methodologies that synthesise learning from specific activities' (University 3E), endowing a Chair (University 18M) and sponsoring internal conferences and workshops on PCE.

However, the data revealed the majority of institutions reported that their evaluation practices were in need of improvement. For example, University 13J, explained that up to now only certain projects were evaluated 'we intend to ensure that, going forward, all activities will be evaluated, and their impact assessed using tools consistently and applying theory of change under specific frameworks' and some saying that the first evaluation had occurred withing the previous year: 'We recognise we are on a journey and will be

looking at developing a systematic approach to identifying needs, recording, reviewing, and evidencing our P&CE' (University 29X).

The data from interview participants also illustrated a concern with current practice concerning the ability of universities to effectively evaluate their PCE activities:

> What we don't do is have the space to actually review that post hoc. You know, I think that everyone's always kind of like, OK, that project's done. Let's move on to the next one. (Alex V)

The concerns around the ability of universities to effectively evaluate their activity was seen as being relevant to the public accountability for this form of activity. These resonates strongly with concerns in the CA literature that capability promoting university policy needs to be developed in partnership with the publics and communities they are intended to serve (Boni and Walker, 2016 p.69), a point which Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47-8) capture in their university capability list under the headings of 'care', 'constructive interaction' and the ability to 'weave nets', all of which depend on accountable relationships with communities and public partners. Graham J argued that the value of PCE was that it facilitated 'research that involves and engages and works with the communities, as well as pushing knowledge [which] is much more beneficial.' But Ian M argued that without sufficient means to evaluate PCE activity, meaningful public participation and accountability becomes much more difficult:

> There's still the assumption where we are universities, therefore that's enough…But I think going forward accountability will be more of a thing (Ian M).

Hannah J framed this issue as an existential one for universities:

> I think if universities are going to survive [and] also justify their existence. I think it's an existential issue really about the relationship to the community.

Hannah's challenge has a strong echo in the CA literature on universities. Boni and Walker (2016), Preece (2018), Mtawa (2019), Walker (2022) are just some examples of studies which highlight the importance of universities making themselves accountable to their local communities. This is of foundational importance to the CA analysis of universities as it a means of facilitating the democratic public reasoning (Sen, 2009) which promotes individual and collective agency and highlights the importance of not only what universities do, but how the decision about what they do is reached (Velasco and Boni, 2020).

Ella X indicated that some universities are beginning to respond to this challenge and are developing participatory approaches to the development of their PCE evaluation and strategy development. The civic strategy of her university was leading to a more active efforts to engage with their communities to evaluate and plan their PCE activities:

> We’re having a community forum … inviting as many organizations onto campus as we can …starting a conversation with them to understand what their priorities are, how they want to work with the university and what we can offer them…I think we're very much of the start of that conversation.

6.2.2 Shifting identities

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) point to the relevance of both agency, defined as ‘the capacity for the university to reflect, imagine and act’, and also aspirations, defined as ‘the values and outcomes that universities prioritise’ which can be ‘situated within university policies as well as within the experiences and preferences of university actors, such as academic staff.’ Applying this conceptual frame to the data reveals how participating in PCE practice is reflected in developing academic and institutional identities. The data suggests that the effect of KEF and other drivers not only changes PCE practices, but also feeds back into influences on academic and institutional identities, which in turn, through a process of reflection and imagination, is likely to impact future action, by changing the values and outcomes that individual staff and institutions choose to prioritise.

Discussing the future directions of PCE practice was not an explicit requirement of respondents completing the KEF PCE narratives, so this section only draws on interview data. The interview data revealed a perception that PCE activity was developing in tandem with shifting academic identities; both individual and institutional. The prior model of universities

creating and disseminating knowledge independently of the public is being ‘flipped on its head’ (Alex V) by the developing third mission of universities in general and the PCE agenda in particular. Chris E argued that this creates a:

> challenge [to]… the traditional way of doing it, which is that you create a theory and then you hold an event and you tell people about it and you hope that they make a difference…. the future is that recognition of a kind of equality.

In a similar vein, Hannah J argued that this amounts to a change in the identity of academics working in universities:

> I'm quite excited about, about that. The shift of the primary task. That's also really shifting your ideas, maybe of the shifting identity of what it means to be an academic (Hannah J).

These comments reflect the wider change identified in the scholarly literature on the third mission which posits a shift in orientation from knowledge for its own sake, to an explicit public or societal focus involving the direct transfer of knowledge and technology to society (Zomer and Benneworth, 2011; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020; Hurth and Stewart, 2022). Also, these comments indicate the participants recognise the emphasis that PCE puts on proactively embracing the contribution of non-expert communities to knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) a development argued for in capability scholarship on universities (Preece 2018, Mtawa, 2019, Velasco and Boni, 2022). This finding also resonates with the CA literature on the development of civic professionals which points to the role that universities

have in developing civic minded, or public good oriented professionals, through the education of students (Boni and Walker, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019). However, the data also appears to suggest that by engaging in PCE activities, it is also the academics and institutions themselves whose professional identities are affected, potentially with the result of becoming increasingly oriented to the public good.

The perceived shifts in orientation resulting from PCE, and the wider third mission, were also recognised as a challenge to existing academic identities and values (Chubb *et al.*, 2017). As I referred to in 6.1.2, Jo M described the difficulty of getting colleagues to support PCE in schools reporting the response was sometimes, 'if I wanted to be a primary school teacher, I would have been a primary school teacher.' Likewise, Chris E reflected on how the movement towards a more equal an inclusive relationship with the public can raise questions on what the academic is actually able to contribute: 'but then what [does] the academic bring to the party, other than what they've read?'. Chris's concern about the level of expertise the academic can bring to the challenge of solving societal problems has been problematised in the literature as the result of the state retreating from its responsibilities, resulting in the expectation that universities will move beyond their core competencies to fill the gap (Collini, 2012; Ishkanian and Glasius, 2018; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Johnson, 2020).

6.2.3 National PCE policy reform

Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103) table of university capability elements (Table 3.1) emphasises the importance of 'drivers', which they define as the contemporary 'social, political, economic and ecological contextual conditions that shape university capabilities.' Guided by this concept, interview participants were invited to comment on the contemporary state and future direction of national PCE policy in England. This was not an explicit requirement of respondents completing the KEF PCE narratives, so this section only draws on interview data. The interview data highlighted perceptions of the fragility of the PCE agenda along with the expectation that, given the expected persistence of key PCE policy drivers such as the KEF and REF, PCE is likely to remain a significant and developing feature of the HEI landscape in England and reform of these policy drivers had the potential to strengthen PCE.

The perceived fragility of PCE as a feature of university activity, supports Watermeyer's (2015) contention that PCE remains only 'weakly institutionalised.' This fragility was seen in relation to the approach of research funders, as well as the precarity of the operationalisation of PCE, particularly in relation to the development and maintenance of the external relationships upon which meaningful PCE depends, which Velasco and Boni (2022, p.48) describe as the capabilities of 'constructive interaction' and the collaborative capability to 'weave nets.'

Alex V reflected that the current emphasis on PCE by many funding bodies is subject to being overtaken by other strategic priorities:

> [Funders] have to have strategic priorities and those will shift over time. …But the impact that it has at a local and an institutional level is huge. And we're seeing that, currently, the public engagement sector is in a very fragile state.

This was reflected by predictions of a potential pivot in focus from PCE activities aimed at involving the public, to an emphasis on the diversity of researchers working in university settings:

> And the way that we focus on EDI and the fact that there's already, you know, huge focus on that and the funders are responding to that. So the funders are saying, gosh, we need to change this. (Alex V)

The precarity of working with external partners was recognised by Chris E who commented that working with external partners is ‘brilliant… when those things come together, but it's just not as simple as it's often portrayed to be’ and also by Beth V who observed that partnerships are often dependent on personnel who may move on to other organisations with the result that the institutional relationships are lost:

> If it's a really important relationship, but you know, then things change. The leadership of the Council will change… their whole entire staff will walk away.

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) argue that university 'abilities' include access to financial resources required to support their practices to advance climate justice. Likewise, the interview data also demonstrated the perception that funding arrangements had the potential to address some of the fragilities in PCE practices, both in relation to national policy and funding frameworks and in relation to independent research funders:

> I think a lot of it will be about what Research England's appraisal of this KEF…I think that will continue to shape how universities respond because they have to kind of dance the tune of Research England to a certain extent (Ian M).

However in order to embed PCE practice the data shows that funding needs to more directly align to PCE activity: 'if… money …came as a result of really good KEF return, then I think that would be a game changer' (Ella X).

6.3 Summary discussion

Informed by Nussey *et al.*'s (2022) framework of capability elements (Table 3.1), this chapter answers RQ2 by addressing the capabilities, or 'choices, abilities and opportunities' universities have in relation to the promotion of CA friendly PCE (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.102). It has explored two key themes emerging from the data: the drivers and opportunities of PCE. The theme of PCE drivers identified four subthemes of national HEI policy (explicit and implicit), funding, aspirations and territory. The theme of opportunities identified three subthemes of evaluation and accountability, shifting identities

and national PCE policy reform. A visual summary of my findings is provided at Figure 7.1.

HEI policy drivers such as KEF, KEC and REF were evident and supported the narrative in the literature of the influence of an audit culture in higher education (Shore and Wright, 2010; Marginson, 2011). However, data from the interview participants suggested that these policy drivers had a beneficial impact in that they provided strategic direction in the absence of committed institutional leadership on PCE from university leaders (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015) and provided a means of securing public accountability and legitimacy for university activities, seen as a core element in the development of the third mission in the literature (Clark, 1998; Mahrl and Pausits, 2011; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2012). However, the danger of relying too heavily on metrics as a driver of PCE activity was seen as leading to only superficial or hollowed out forms of engagement, (Watermeyer, 2015; Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005). This tension between the public good values of PCE and the requirement for universities to operate in a market system is recognised by Brackmann (2015, p.121), who points out although charging for PCE services may jar with the values of reciprocity and social justice, it may be appropriate if it can sustain other forms of engagement activity.

Implicit policy drivers identified in the data included the motivation of supporting the UN's Sustainability Goals and using PCE for marketing and recruitment purposes. The influence of the SDG's reflected in the data can be seen as indicative of some universities recognising their potential role in

responding to human development challenges (Boni and Walker, 2016; McCowan, 2020) but also of their need to compete in the THE Impact rankings. A similarly mixed motivation could be assigned to school engagement activity (Mtawa and Nkhoma, 2020; Mtawa and Wangenge-Ouma, 2022). This activity has the potential to raise the aspirations of marginalised groups and thereby address adaptive preferences, encouraging potential students to avail themselves of the potential benefits of higher education (Hart, 2013), but was also seen as a more calculated attempt to increase student numbers in a manner which was sometimes seen as a threat to academic identity (Reed and Fazey 2021; Chubb *et al.*, 2017), pithily expressed by Jo M as 'if I wanted to be a primary school teacher, I would have been a primary school teacher.'

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) identify that financial resources are an important aspect of the 'abilities' for universities to act towards climate change. Likewise, the funders and funding sub-theme showed that interview participants were united in their view that universities operate as businesses and are dependent on a patchwork of funding sources for their PCE activities. The influence of non-governmental funders being particularly important to research intensive institutions. The competition for this funding illustrates that universities are having to operate within a marketized academic culture (Marginson, 2011) and have to develop their strategy for PCE keeping in mind the priorities of a range of external funding providers. This provides both opportunities and challenges to those wishing to prompt universities to orientate their PCE activities towards the public good, as influencing the

funding bodies is likely to be an effective lever in achieving change. However, ensuring that the interests and values and funders do not drown out the voice of publics and communities is essential if Sen's (2009) vision of democratic institutions is to be realised in the context of PCE.

The data discussed in the aspirations subtheme resonated with Nussey *et al.*'s (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) conception of university 'aspirations' defined as the 'values and outcomes' they prioritise. The data here suggests that university aspirations are receptive to capability promoting PCE activity. These findings supported the contention in the literature that the third mission of universities involves an orientation towards proactively embracing the contribution of non-expert communities in knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994) and is seen as a rejection of the 'ivory tower' in favour of societal engagement (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). The concern to involve the public in knowledge creation is illustrative of the potential for the PCE agenda to be able to respond to Sen's (2009) call for institutions that support democratic public reasoning and endorses Velasco and Boni's (2022, p.54) conclusion that universities have the potential to support social justice and community outreach.

The data in the aspirations subtheme also illustrated that universities saw the benefit of PCE activity in relation to their teaching function. These opportunities are also recognised as valuable by capability scholars. Studies by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019) of community engagement and service-learning builds on the work of Boni and Walker (2016) highlight how this type of engagement is beneficial for capability development, particularly in regard

to the development of pro social professionals through fostering the capability of affiliation (Mtawa, 2019). The data presented in this section supports the claim the university is capable of adapting its aims and function in response to social change (Palfreyman and Temple 2017; Fazey *et al.*, 2021).

The fourth subtheme revealed that the territory, or locality, in which universities act was perceived as significant in enabling and shaping prioritising university PCE. This resonated with Velasco and Boni's (2020, p.47-8) concepts of 'social construction of territory' and the capability to 'weave nets' defined as the ability of the university community to work with other social actors to collectively rebuild and appropriate its territory and to foster 'interconnections with companies, communities and students to develop innovative projects that respond to territorial needs.'

The data showed that this was often articulated as a form of civic identity where institutions perceived themselves to be anchor institutions in their local communities and their civic role as their institutional 'DNA' (Ella X). This civic role was seen as including connecting global and local concerns, which resonates with Sen's (2009) argument that institutions need to support public deliberation that overcomes parochialism. However, the data also revealed some tensions in the civic or territorial role of universities, arising from disparities in socio-economic status of university students and members of the local community and the challenge of engaging with truly representative community voices.

Opportunities formed the second theme of Chapter 6 and identified three subthemes of evaluation and accountability, shifting identities and national PCE policy reform. Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) include opportunities as one of the university capability elements, defined as 'the socio-economic-political-cultural conditions enabling or constraining universities.' Applied to my data, this illustrated some of the existing constraints on universities and identifies perceptions concerning how these might be mitigated by future changes to PCE policy and practice.

The first subtheme of evaluation and accountability resonates with Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of university agency defined as 'the capacity of the university to reflect, imagine and act' and also with Velasco and Boni (2020, p.47) who include 'purposeful critical reflection' as a university capability, defined as the ability of a university community to reflect and build 'critically on their being and daily work.' Applied to my data, these concepts revealed an uneven approach to the evaluation of PCE activities by universities which is supportive of the contention in the literature that PCE is a weakly institutionalised agenda and suffers from a lack of committed institutional leadership (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015).

A key obstacle to effective evaluation was perceived to be the tension between a 'bottom up' or 'top down' approach to PCE which stems from the fact that often the driver for PCE activity is often from a small number of highly committed members of staff with their own community contacts. The data suggested that research intensive institutions are beginning to invest in more systematic and scholarly approaches to evaluation and there is some

evidence that institutions are using participatory and collaborative approaches for the development of PCE strategies, as modelled by Velasco and Boni's (2020) participatory action research study of UI Columbia. This suggests that universities are not routinely engaging their communities in the design of PCE activities, but there is an openness and willingness to begin to do so amongst some parts of the sector.

Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) point to the relevance of both university agency, defined as 'the capacity for the university to reflect, imagine and act', and also university aspirations, defined as 'the values and outcomes that universities prioritise' which can be 'situated within university policies as well as within the experiences and preferences of university actors, such as academic staff.' Applying this conceptual frame to the data revealed how participating in PCE practice is reflected in developing academic and institutional identities. The data suggests that the effect of KEF and other drivers not only changes PCE practices, but also feeds back into influences on academic and institutional identities, which in turn, through a process of reflection and imagination, is likely to impact future action, by changing the values and outcomes that individual staff and institutions choose to prioritise, potentially resulting in an increased or renewed public good orientation (Boni and Walker, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019).

The second subtheme, shifting identities, is illustrative of the extent of the reorientation that the third mission expects of the academic community in moving away from teaching and research for its own sake, to addressing societal problems and supporting human development (Maxwell, 2007, 2021;

Berzonsky and Moser, 2017; Fazey *et al.*, 2021; Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021; Walker, 2022). The interview participants were supportive of this orientation, contrary to the argument in some of the scholarly literature that PCE and the third mission can be perceived as a threat to academic identity. However, this may be accounted for by the fact that participants were selected to take part in my study as they were involved in PCE strategy or activities. However, even amongst this group, concerns were expressed regarding whether academics had the capacity or expertise to really make a difference, an issue which is critiqued in the literature of the state retreating from its responsibilities and expecting universities to fill the gap without adequate resourcing or support (Collini, 2012; Ishkanian and Glasius, 2018; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Johnson, 2020).

The final subtheme, national PCE policy reform, applied Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of university 'drivers', defined as including the contemporary 'social, political, economic and ecological contextual conditions that shape university capabilities.' The data showed that reform is expected in this developing area of HEI policy and that national policy approaches may help to provide the necessary sector wide leadership to address some of the fragilities evident in PCE activity at the meso level. In this context, the priorities of governmental and independent funding bodies are seen as a pivotal driver in leading the change that would be required to fully embed PCE practice into university strategies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The final chapter provides a summary of the aims and scope of my study, the key findings, an outline of my contribution to knowledge, policy recommendations and suggestions for further research, before offering some final reflections.

7.1 Aim and scope of research

The aim of this empirical study was to undertake an original analysis of the current and emerging PCE policy and practices in English universities using the Capability Approach as a normative framework. In doing so, I have made an original and timely contribution to the developing literature on PCE in light of the introduction of the first KEF exercise in 2020, and also provided fresh insights into the public good potential of universities.

Consistent with my constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, I adopted a qualitative case study design, gathering data via desk-based documentary research and semi-structured interviews to answer two research questions:

1. What are the values and capabilities promoted by English universities in their Public and Community Engagement practices?
2. How and why do universities decide on what PCE work they undertake?

Documentary research consisted of a thematic analysis of 32 PCE narratives submitted by English HEIs as part of the 2020 Knowledge Exchange

Framework exercise. Interview participants [n.10, 5 male, 5 female] included five academics with experience of PCE and five PEPS. The analysis of the KEF PCE narratives provided meso level insights into PCE policy and practice which were triangulated against insights of the interview participants at the micro level. Analysis was conducted using Nvivo to identify themes across the two data sources. My study used literature based on the Capability Approach to develop a theoretical framework to interpret the data.

7.2 Summary of research findings

In broad terms, my findings show that universities have the potential to support capability development in their communities and publics and that a significant feature of the motivations for engaging with this work align with human development values. However, my findings also show that much of the sector are in the very early stages in their development of their approach to PCE and the capacity of all institutions to work with their communities to promote capabilities is subject to a complex range of external and internal drivers. This section will proceed to provide a detailed summary of my key findings as they relate to my research questions, demonstrating how they are contextualised in relation to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, before presenting a diagrammatic summary of this discussion at Figure 7.1 below.

7.2.1 Research question one

As discussed in Chapter 3, my findings used a theoretical framework based on the Capability Approach and were guided by the application of Nussey *et*

al.'s (2022) framework of university capability elements reproduced at Table 3.1. Using the CA as my theoretical frame allowed me to conceptualise university PCE as a means (conversion factor) in the expansion of human freedoms (capabilities) which, consistent with the categorisation of PCE as an open-ended form of university activity (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019), facilitated a consideration of the full variety of PCE activities apparent in the data. The concept of conversion factors was useful in facilitating an exploration of how university PCE interventions can provide opportunities for the promotion of capabilities and human development values (Preece, 2018). Consistent with the literature review on PCE and the third mission in Chapter 2, and the discussion of KEF and the national policy context provided in Chapter 1, my findings confirmed that university PCE is an emerging policy area which has often been met with a muddled institutional response. As such, the data in relation to RQ1 reflects a lack of clarity in the overall institutional ambition and intent regarding capability promoting PCE activities. However, the data discussed at 5.2 PCE Practices, did also reveal that CA friendly PCE activities were being undertaken, often as a result of 'bottom up' activities, rather than the result of co-ordinated and intentional whole institution strategies. These 'bottom-up' activities reveal both the existence of some CA promoting PCE activity, but also point to the potential and receptivity of the sector to take a more intentional approach to capability promotion in their PCE activity, which supports the assertion that PCE interventions can act as 'potential conversion factors which can build capability sets' (Preece, 2018, p.170).

Examples of this potential in my findings include that university PCE activity often seeks to promote the capability of education for communities in the locality, or 'territory', of the institution (Velasco and Boni, 2020, p.47-8). Promoting the development of the foundational capability of education (Sen 2003; Nussbaum, 2011) also provides a means to raise levels of aspiration (Hart, 2013), challenge adaptive preferences (Ibrahim, 2020) and potentially provides opportunities for the development of the capability to engage in democratic public deliberation (Sen, 2009). The prevalence of student community engagement activity also points to the capacity for universities to support the development of civic professionalism (Walker and Maclean, 2013; Boni and Walker, 2016; Preece, 2018; Kreber, 2019; Mtawa, 2019).

Utilising the CA concept of agency (Sen, 2009), highlighted the importance of the voice of the publics and communities in the development and delivery of PCE activity (discussed at 5.4 and 6.2) and illustrated the potential for this form of activity to develop agency capabilities in university publics and communities (Walker, 2018; Preece, 2018). There was strong evidence of a concern for capability development amongst marginalised groups and for the promotion of equity of access to education and a participatory ethos to PCE activities, which is consistent with the promotion of human development values (Boni and Walker, 2016) and a pro-poor orientation (McCowan, 2020; Walker, 2022). This was illustrated in the reports by institutions of a commitment to co-produced research and community empowerment activities illustrating that universities can play a role in facilitating active civic participation, democratic public reasoning and in the promotion of human

development values (Sen 2003, 2009; Nussbaum 2011). The data did also point to a recognition of the inherent power imbalance between universities and marginalised members of the community (Preece, 2018) which made it challenging to generate genuinely collaborative engagement with harder to reach groups outside of representatives of official civic forums; a finding which could guide further research.

7.2.2 Research question two

In relation to RQ2, my findings identified a range of influences which informed meso and micro level decisions on what PCE work was undertaken.

The findings support the argument found in the scholarly literature that the third mission of universities in general, and PCE in particular, remains only loosely defined and weakly conceptualised (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2016) with a patchy level of institutionalisation (Watermeyer, 2011; 2015; Lebau and Cochrane, 2015; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). The fragility in the institutional strategic commitment to PCE was evidenced by the findings at 5.1 and 5.3 that PCE was yet to be embedded into the core functions of many universities and only a few had discrete PCE strategies or a single point of accountability at senior level. A tension between bottom up and top-down approaches to developing PCE activity was evident, with some institutions seeking to capitalise on the organic relationships built via academic networks, although it was acknowledged that this may lead to difficulties with accountability, limited evaluation and a potential lack of direction, potentially

resulting in superficial forms of PCE activity (Watermeyer, 2015; Deem, 2004; Deem and Brehony, 2005).

The CA concept of agency (Sen, 2009) was used again in interpreting the data on the definitional 'messiness' of PCE (Preece, 2018). The findings (5.3, 6.2) showed that the open-ended nature of PCE has some advantages as it gave academics and PEPs engaged in this area a degree of latitude to exercise their agency by playing to their professional strengths and having due regard to their particular institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Using Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of 'drivers' helped bring into focus a broad range of factors which influence PCE practice, including the influence of explicit HEI policies on PCE activity including KEF, KEC and REF, which supports the narrative in the scholarly literature of the influence of an audit culture in HE (Shore and Wright, 2010; Marginson, 2011). However, data from the interview participants revealed perceptions that these policy drivers and audits have an energising rather than corrosive effect on institutional agency, and identified a largely beneficial impact in that they provided strategic direction in the absence of committed institutional leadership (Laredo, 2007; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015), and also provided a means of securing public accountability and legitimacy for university PCE, seen as a core element in the development of the third mission in the literature (Clark, 1998; Mahrl and Pausits, 2011; Pinheiro *et al.*, 2015) .

Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of university 'abilities' informed the discussion of the funders and funding theme at 6.1.2 and

highlighted the marketized environment in which contemporary universities operate, evidenced in the findings by the apparent pressure for universities to operate as businesses, being dependent on a patchwork of funding sources for their PCE activities. The influence of non-governmental funders being particularly important to research intensive institutions, and the impetus to use PCE to promote student recruitment being particularly relevant for teaching focused institutions. These findings support concerns identified in the literature identifying a tension between public good orientations of HEIs and the need for them to operate within a marketized academic culture (Marginson, 2011; Marginson and Yang, 2023).

Nussey *et al.'s* (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of university 'aspirations' was used at 6.1.3 to highlight how decisions regarding PCE activities were influenced by the values of university agents responsible for operationalising the agenda. The data here suggests that university aspirations are receptive to capability promoting PCE activity and recognise its relevance both their teaching and research missions. The data supported the contention in the literature that the third mission of universities involves an orientation towards proactively embracing the contribution of non-expert communities in knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.*,1994) and is seen as a rejection of the 'ivory tower' in favour of societal engagement (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020). The aspiration to involve the public in knowledge creation is illustrative of the potential for the PCE agenda to be able to respond to Sen's (2009) call for institutions that support democratic public reasoning and endorses

Velasco and Boni's (2020, p.54) conclusion that universities have the potential to support social justice and community outreach.

The sub-theme of territory discussed at 6.1.4 illuminated the complementarity between PCE and the Civic University agenda's focus on local communities (Goddard and Kempton, 2016), which also resonates with Velasco and Boni's concept of territory (2020, p.47-8). Perceptions of the civic role of universities informed decisions about place-based engagement and raised questions regarding the role of universities in providing a bridge between local communities and international issues. This bridging of the local, national and international, was seen as an important, but underexplored aspect of the aims of PCE. However, the practice of UK universities seeking to recruit increasing number of international students to fill gaps in their budgets was perceived as providing a challenge to universities' place-based identity. The issue of how a local university connects with global society and develops a sense of global citizenship is recognised in the capability literature as an important feature of the human development friendly university (Boni and Walker, 2016; Mtawa, 2019; McCowan, 2020) and also resonates with Sen's (2009) concern to elevate democratic public reasoning beyond parochial horizons.

The final theme (6.2) in my findings utilised Nussey *et al's*, (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of 'opportunities' defined 'the socio-economic-political-cultural conditions enabling or constraining universities.' Discussed at 6.2.3, this revealed perceptions of how some of the existing constraints on universities PCE practice could be mitigated by changes to PCE policy. Key amongst these findings was an expectation that reform of HEI funding policy

to promote PCE was key to embedding this agenda into institutional strategies.

At 6.2.2, the final theme also addressed shifting identities, illustrating the extent of the reorientation that the third mission expects of the academic community in moving away from teaching and research for its own sake, to addressing societal problems and supporting human development (Fazey *et al.*, 2021; Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021; Walker, 2022). Although generally supportive of this shift, interview participants reflected concerns regarding whether academics had the capacity or expertise to really make a difference, an issue reflective of wider concerns regarding universities being expected to fill the gap left by the retreat of the state from its social (Collini, 2012; Ishkanian and Glasius, 2018; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Johnson, 2020).

At 6.2.1, the final theme also applied Nussey *et al*.'s (2022, p.103 and Table 3.1) concept of 'university agency,' defined as 'the capacity of the university to reflect, imagine and act' along with Velasco and Boni's (2020, p.47-8) concept of 'purposeful critical reflection.' This revealed that universities' capacity to listen and make themselves accountable to the voice of their publics and communities is patchy at best, and that they have a long road to travel before they meet the standard set by Sen (2009) for democratic institutions.

7.2.3 Diagrammatic summary

Figure 7.1 below provides a visual summary of my key findings. The diagram illustrates the influences, identified by my research findings, which inform and shape university PCE capabilities which, in turn, shape their PCE practices. The diagram shows two key influences on the formation of university PCE capabilities: national HEI policy drives and institutional PCE capability elements which combine to collectively inform the 'choices, abilities and opportunities' (Nussey *et al.*, 2022, p.102) universities have to engage in PCE practices which expand public and community capability sets (Preece, 2018).

The box at the top left (*National HEI Policy Drivers*) illustrates how the national HEI policy environment acts as a driver on university PCE capabilities. However, this national policy influence is mediated through the institutional level capability elements identified in the central box (*Institutional PCE Capability Elements)* as drivers, aspirations , abilities and agency. These two sets of influences collectively inform university's PCE practices. The box on the top right (*Practices*) summarises my findings regarding the capabilities and human development values that university PCE practices can promote.

My findings also highlighted that there are grounds to suggest that the process of engaging in PCE may itself begin to influence both the institutional capability elements and potentially the national policy drives. Informed by insights drawn from the work of capability scholars discussed in Chapter 3 including Boni and Walker (2016), Preece (2018), Mtawa (2019) and Velasco and Boni (2020), my findings show that the capacity of universities to critically reflect on and evaluate their PCE practice, combined with an emphasis on public accountability and co-creation in the delivery of PCE, are likely to

influence future PCE aspirations and identities of universities and the agents working in them. This dynamic is illustrated by the reverse arrow on the right-hand side. This in turn, may potentially lead to universities having some influence on the future direction of national PCE policy as was seen by the inclusion of the decision to include the KEF PCE narratives discussed in Chapter1. This potential influence is illustrated by the dotted reverse arrow on the left.

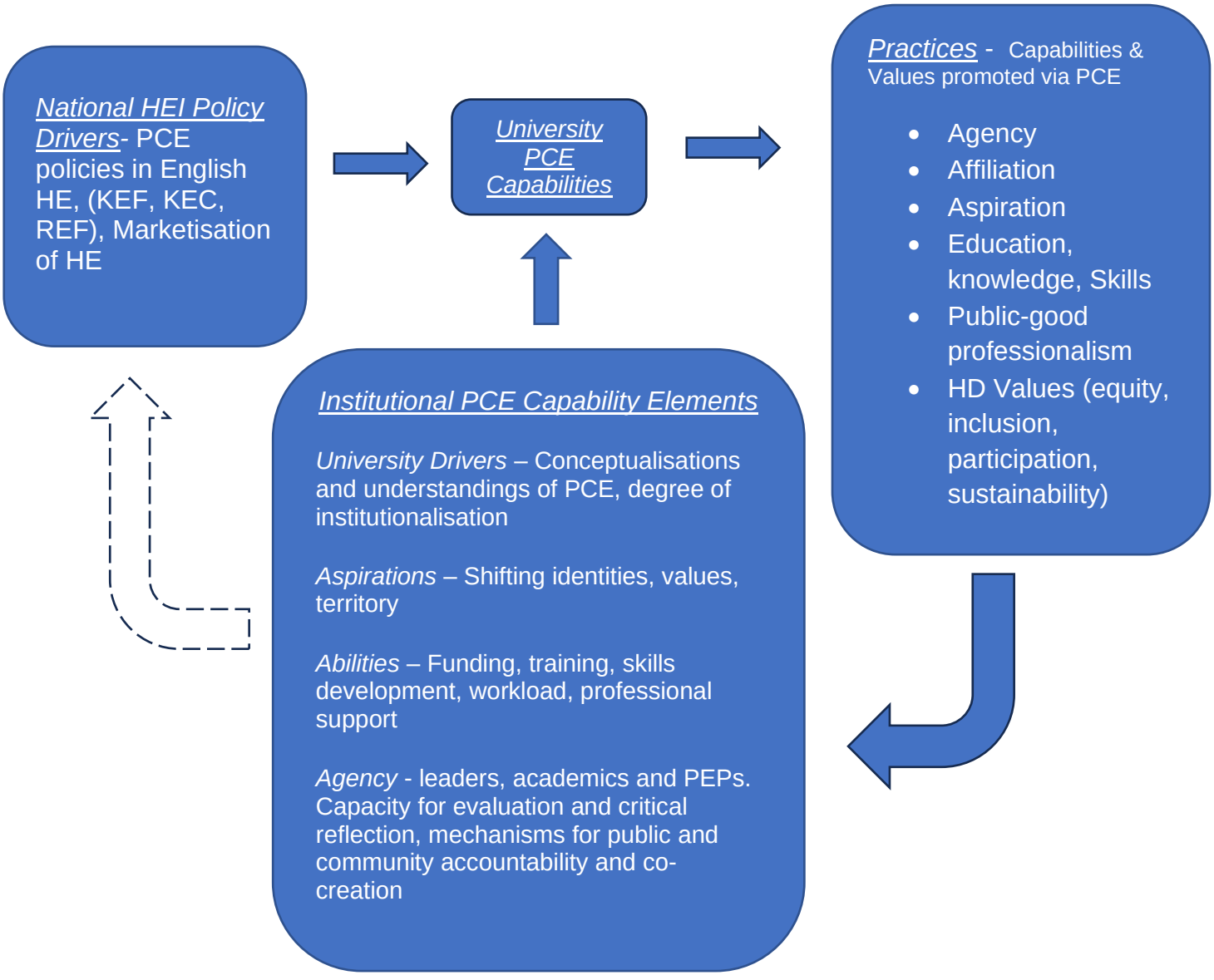

Figure 7.1 Summary of key findings

7.3 Contribution to knowledge

My study is significant as it provides an insight into both the *what* and the *why* of a dynamic and emerging area of HEI policy and practice. As such, it makes two important contributions: one empirical and one conceptual.

Undertaken at a critical juncture in the development of PCE policy in England, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first study to address the relationship between PCE and the public good in England after the emergence of KEF. In doing so, it provides empirical insights at both the meso and micro levels into a dynamic and significant area of HEI policy and practice. The insights provided will be of interest to policy makers, university leaders and public engagement academics and professionals in, and beyond, the English university sector. As such it makes an empirical contribution to the body of scholarly literature on the third mission of universities reviewed in Chapter 2, which has critiqued this area for a being poorly understood and weakly institutionalised (Watermeyer, 2015; Watermeyer and Lewis, 2018; Reed and Fazey, 2021).

Secondly, it makes an original contribution to the CA literature on universities by applying it as a normative framework to national PCE policy and practice in England; providing a means for a granular, person-centred analysis to orientate the purpose of PCE, in addition to illuminating current PCE practice.

In this way, it builds on the foundational work of capability scholars who have researched the public good function of university education (Walker, 2006b; Unterhalter, 2013; Boni and Gasper, 2012; Boni and Walker, 2016; Velasco

and Boni, 2020; Nussey *et al.*, 2022) which delineated the human development and capability potential of universities, along with studies by Preece (2018) and Mtawa (2019) who have applied these insights to the pedagogy of community engagement and service learning in the South African context.

My study makes original contributions both by its interrogation of the English HEI policy context, but also with its focus on institutional responses, rather than pedagogic practice. In doing so, it has identified some of the capabilities that PCE interventions could promote, and forms the basis for a more comprehensive list that could be developed by further research. It has also provided an analysis of the institutional conversion factors which can promote or inhibit capability friendly PCE policy and practice.

Utilising the list of institutional capability elements developed by Nussey *et al.* (2022, p.103) and reproduced at Table 3.1, my study therefore provides original conceptual insights into the practice and potential of PCE at the institutional level. In light of my findings, I have produced an adapted version of Nussey *et al.'s* (2022) university capability elements list, which could inform future CA based studies on PCE policy and practice at Table 7.1 below.

Concepts	Definition	Example findings
Drivers	Historical and contemporary social, political, policy and economic conditions that enable or constrain universities' understandings and approach to PCE. For example the contemporary marketized HEI environment, formal policy drivers such as KEF, KEC, REF.	5.1, 5.3.1.1, 6.1

Practices	How PCE is integrated into core teaching and research activity and the extent to which PCE practices effectively promote capabilities and human development values.	5.2
Abilities	These refer to the resources and capacities available for those engaged in university PCE practices to promote capabilities. These can include access to funding, training, skills development, promotion pathways, professional support, workload allocation.	5.3, 6.1.2
Aspirations	The values that inform university PCE and the outcomes that are prioritised in their approach PCE activity. These include choices regarding which communities and publics universities prioritise in their PCE activity and the extent to which these partners have the opportunity to inform and shape PCE strategies and approaches and how universities make themselves accountable for their PCE practice	6.1.3, 6.1.4
Agency	The impact of the choices and values of the institution, funders, academics and PEPs and those of the publics and communities who are the subjects / partners in PCE activities. This also includes the ability of these agents to evaluate and critically reflect on their PCE related activities, which in turn impacts their professional and institutional identities and informs decisions on emergent PCE priorities and strategies.	5.3, 5.4, 6.2

Table 7.1 Institutional capability elements for PCE policy and practice
Source**:** Adapted from Nussey *et al*. (2022, p.103 and at Table 3.1)

7.4 Policy recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, four policy recommendations can be proposed.

Firstly, the findings show that the developing PCE policy and practice in England shows a commitment for university academics to reach beyond the 'ivory tower' in favour of societal engagement (Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020), evidenced by the promotion of co-produced research and some evidence of the involvement of publics in the development of PCE strategies. This commitment is illustrative of the potential for the PCE agenda to be able to respond to Sen's (2009) call for institutions that support democratic public reasoning and endorses Velasco and Boni's (2022, p.54) conclusion that universities have the potential to support social justice and community outreach. However, the findings show that universities' capacity to listen and respond to the voice of their publics and communities is patchy at best and that they have a long road to travel before they meet the standard set by Sen (2009) for democratic institutions. If PCE is to fulfil its potential in the development of capabilities of university communities and publics, more attention needs to be given to how universities are able to listen and respond to the voice of those communities and publics when developing and delivering PCE.

Secondly, the findings confirm that PCE remains only loosely defined (Watermeyer and Lewis, 2015) with a patchy level of institutionalisation of this agenda across the sector (Watermeyer 2011; 2015; Lebau and Cochrane,

2015; Compagnucci and Spigarelli, 2020) but also point to the open-ended nature of PCE activity (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2016; Preece, 2018; Mtawa, 2019). This fragility in the institutional strategic commitment to PCE was evidenced by the finding that PCE was yet to be embedded into the core functions of many universities and only a few had discrete PCE strategies or a single point of accountability at senior level. A tension between bottom up and top-down approaches to developing PCE activity was evident, with some institutions seeking to capitalise on the organic relationships built via academic networks, although it was acknowledged that this can lead to difficulties with accountability, limited evaluation and a potential lack of direction which may result in superficial forms of PCE activity. Thus, the second recommendation for policy makers and HE leaders is to develop coherent whole institutions strategies to co-ordinate and promote focused and human centred forms of PCE activity.

Thirdly, the findings showed the pressure for universities to operate as businesses, being dependent on a patchwork of funding sources for their PCE activities, with the influence of non-governmental funders being particularly important to research intensive institutions, and the impetus to use PCE to promote student recruitment being particularly relevant for teaching focused institutions. The findings show that reform in national policy approaches may help to provide the necessary sector wide leadership to address some of the fragilities evident in PCE activity. In this context, co-ordinating the priorities of governmental and independent funding bodies is seen as pivotal in leading

the change that would be required to fully embed PCE practice into university strategies.

Finally, the findings show a lack of robust evaluation and accountability for PCE activity. These findings suggest that more strategic attention needs to be given to evaluating and learning from what works in PCE policy and activity to ensure limited university resources are being used most effectively.

7.5 Further research

My study illustrates the potential for the application of the capability approach for further research into university policy on PCE. This would help address the gap in the literature identified by Otto et al (2018, p.301) who observe that there is ‘surprisingly little research on capability promoting policies in real life contexts.’ My study highlights several avenues for further research into PCE using CA as a framework.

Firstly, the concept of agency has illustrated how national policy developed at the macro level is mediated at the institutional (meso) level and through the individual actions and decisions of academics and PEPs working at the micro level. My research has found that academics and PEPs are pivotal in the operationalisation of PCE policy and currently have a wide latitude in developing their role. Further work researching the conversion factors that limit or enhance their capabilities to deliver PCE, in line with human development values, is recommended.

Secondly, my study indicates that universities can play a potential role as a conversion factor in the promotion of community capabilities. Further research is recommended into what are the most efficient and effective mechanisms for universities to support this form of capability expansion amongst their communities and to create contextualised capability lists to identify which capabilities to prioritise.

Thirdly, my study has also highlighted the potential universities have in promoting political agency and participation in democratic public deliberation. This relates both to the type of PCE activities universities deliver, but also in regards to the extent publics are involved in deciding which PCE strategies should be developed. However, the issue of the power imbalance between universities and communities is noted in the findings and this is an area that requires further research to understand and remedy. The CA has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to power imbalances (Crocker, 2009), but as an open-ended approach, this issue could be explored in a longer study by utilising additional and complementary theoretical framings which are able to interrogate the extent and implications of these power differentials.

Finally, my study highlights the importance of funding mechanisms as a conversion factor for the development of PCE policy and activity. Further research on the capabilities and values that funding bodies seek to promote would provide significant insights into a key influence on university PCE activity.

7.6 Final reflections

I began with an assumption that KEF and other metric driven audits had a deadening influence on PCE, but was surprised to find that PEPs and academics in my study had a more balanced view, perceiving these external drivers to have a positive effect by improving institutional focus. I was also impressed by the commitment and creativity of academics and PEPs working to facilitate university PCE, leaving me optimistic that the emerging third mission of universities is one way in which universities can respond to Sen's inspirational challenge:

> The success of democracy is not merely a matter of having the most perfect institutional structure that we can think of. It depends inescapably on our actual behaviour patterns and the working of political and social interactions. There is no chance of resting the matter in the 'safe' hands of purely institutional virtuosity. The working of democratic institutions, like that of all other institutions, depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization (Sen, 2009, p. 354).

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Appendix A Interview Schedule

1. Preliminaries – reprise purpose of study, consent form points, length of interview. Check for any issues / concerns.

2. How would you define university public engagement? What do you see as the purpose / benefits of PCE?

3. How do you / your university support PCE ?

4. How is PCE perceived in your university? (is it understood, is it important?)

5. How do you / your university decide on the type of engagement activities and which audiences to engage with?

6. How do you / your university involve the pubic in the development / delivery of your PCE strategy?

7. What is the relationship between your role and the role of academic colleagues in the design and delivery of PCE activities?

8. What challenges do you / your university face in relation to public engagement? How could they be overcome?

9. What do you see as the future of university public engagement?

10. Does PCE contribute to the public good?

11. Any further comments?

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant information sheet

Title: University Public Engagement and the Public Good

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage:

www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about university public engagement.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?
This study aims to explore perceptions of university public engagement and its relation to the public good.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am interested in understanding how those working in universities understand and approach university public engagement practices.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, it would involve participating in a telephone interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes where you will be invited to answer questions about your professional role as it relates to university public engagement.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will allow you to share your experiences of university public engagement practices and your insights will contribute to our understanding of the potential for this activity to contribute to the public good.

Do I have to take part?
No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your position in the university and your relations with your employer.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 2 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. However you will be committing to giving between 30-60 minutes of your time for the interview.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview only I, the researcher conducting this study, and my PhD supervisor, Dr Melis Cin, will have access to the ideas you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?
I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic and practitioner conferences and inform policy-makers about my study.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?
If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself at h.mcfaul@lancaster.ac.uk or my PhD Supervisor, Dr Melis Cin, Department of Education Research, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD m.cin@lancaster.ac.uk, tel: +44 -1524-593572

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Professor Paul Ashwin Department of Education Research, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk, tel: +44 -1524-593572

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: University Public Engagement and the Public Good

Name of Researchers: Hugh McFaul
Email: h.mcfaul@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 2 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	☐
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐
5. I understand that any interviews or focus groups will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____ Date _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University