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AN EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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PhD 2020

AN EXPLORATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I declare the thesis:

"An Exploration of the Influence of the Research Excellence Framework on the Implementation of Responsible Management Education in UK Business Schools"

Is mine and have to the best of my knowledge acknowledged information derived from other sources.

PUBLICATIONS

Works related to this thesis was presented in the form of peer-reviewed journal article and conferences, some of which are outlined below.

Articles

Ndubuka, N. N. and Rey-Marmonier, E., 2019. Capability approach for realising the Sustainable Development Goals through Responsible Management Education: The case of UK business school academics. *The International Journal of Management Education*, *17*(3), p.100319.

Conference presentations

Ndubuka, N. N. and Rey-Marmonier, E., 2018. Realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Challenges for Business School Academics in the Responsible Management Education (RME) Field. Conference Paper. 5th UK & Ireland PRME Regional Chapter Conference, 25-27 June 2018. School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London

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Ndubuka, N. N., 2015. *Critical Effectiveness of the Implementation of Responsible Management Education (RME) within UK Business Schools: A Process Change Perspective*. Conference Paper. The Business of Business Schools: Learning from the past. Building for the future. ABS50 Conference 12-13 November 2015, Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Sir (Engr) Louis O. Ndubuka. Daddy, for sacrificing your dream for mine, I remain eternally grateful. This ultimate sacrifice and the unwavering support of your wife and my mother, Lady (Mrs) Theresa C. Ndubuka, kept me going despite the 1,000 and more reasons I had to quit.

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Not even Covid-19 could take this one away from us.

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"To institutionalise is to infuse with value beyond technical requirements of the task at hand"
(Selznick, 1957, p. 17).

ABSTRACT

A previous work by Doherty et al. (2015) identified the Research Excellence Framework (REF) as one of the barriers to embedding Responsible Management Education (RME) within six UK business and management schools. Since the study concluded, no other study had attempted to single out the REF to explore in-depth, if and how it may be influencing RME advancement in UK business schools.

Therein lies the relevance of this study which sought to explore the possible influence of the REF on the implementation of RME in UK business schools. The phenomenon was explored and understood through the lens of seventeen RME-oriented academics (and/or those involved in and committed to the latter) situated in fifteen UK business schools in both Scotland and England. Their experiences and perceptions related to the subject of inquiry were explored and gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews of varied mediums, including face-to-face (in person), Skype (audio and video call), and Google Hangout audio call and telephone call.

The collected data were analysed thematically, and the findings interpreted using a framework that was developed from the six principles of PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) – a proxy to RME as the study argued. Institutional theory also played a useful role in this aspect of the project, aside from being the overview theory underpinning the work.

It was found that the REF can enable and hinder RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools. It was found to have a minimal and/or no influence on the actual commitments of the frontline academics that are involved in RME implementation/advancement in their business school. The REF also was found to have moderate influence on senior executives' support for RME implementation/advancement. Those whose research interests are connected to RME or related subjects such as ethics, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability (ERS) may be more supportive than their counterparts.

Both RME and the REF are keen on having positive impacts on business and society through teaching, research and thought leadership for RME (via PRME), and research (including public engagement) for the REF. Thus, they can be compatible and complement each other in a UK business school context with impact as the common denominator. The degree of compatibility and complementarity that can be attained varies with factors such as leadership, location, resources, and time. However, they could be strengthened with the additional responsibility on PRME signatories to promote the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs and RME are believed to be laden with impact - a core component of the REF. Furthermore, the extent to which the differences between RME and the REF are understood and the preparedness of leaders and academics to bridge those and exploit their similarities/commonalities (particularly impact), will determine the degree of RME embeddedness an institution will attain and how long that will take.

The thesis contributes to extend existing literature around RME and the REF, particularly uncovering the mechanism by which the latter can influence the former positively and negatively in UK business schools. Conceptually, some of the models produced are useful for unpacking different ways the REF may impede RME implementation, and the ways it may support academics and institutions to leverage the areas of opportunities identified. Methodologically, the study is the first to deliberately explore in-depth the interplay between RME and the REF in a given context - UK business schools. It is hoped that this thesis provides a solid footing for other researchers to attempt to explore some of the suggested areas for further studies without some of the difficulties experienced in this study. This thesis will hopefully serve as a useful guide on such a research journey. Practical contributions to policy, theory, and practice, and recommendations for further studies are also offered within this thesis.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
ABIS	Academy of Business in Society
AcFin	Accounting and Finance
BMS	Business and Management Studies
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EFMD	European Foundation for Management Development
EPAS	EFMD Programme Accreditation System
EQUIS	EFMD Quality Improvement System
ERS	Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
PRME	Principles for Responsible Management Education
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
RME	Responsible Management Education
RSE	Research Selectivity Exercise
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIP	Sharing Information on Progress (Report)
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TME	Traditional Management Education
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UoA	Unit of Assessment

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 Chapter Introduction

There is empirical evidence to suggest that the Research Excellence Framework (REF) may be affecting the implementation of the Responsible Management Education (RME) agenda within business and management schools in the UK. Specifically, Doherty et al. (2015) explored the perceptions of academics in order to uncover the business case and barriers for the implementation of responsible management education in UK business schools. The authors identified the REF as one of the external factors hindering RME implementation in six UK business schools, hence the focus of the study.

Since Doherty et al.'s study concluded, to the best of the researcher's knowledge no other study has attempted to explore the REF as a single factor to understand if and how it does influence RME implementation in UK business schools. The identified gap is what this exploratory study attempted to fill. The remaining sections of this chapter discuss the rationale for the study, followed by the presentation of the aims and objectives, research questions, the study scope and assumptions, theoretical framework, and an outline of the eight chapters that make up the thesis.

1.2 Research Rationale

Responsible management education (RME) is generally concerned with instilling the principles of ethics, responsibility (i.e. CSR) and sustainability (ERS) into business school students to enable them to become responsible future leaders. In recent years, RME has garnered significant momentum (Holland, 2009; Samuelson, 2011), but there seems to substantial evidence that it remains an unfilled promise in most business schools (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015). According to Doherty et al. (2015), business schools appear to be slow in embracing and embedding RME into their core curriculum, practices, and operations. Their research and teaching practices fail to address pertinent societal challenges, albeit they actively continue to add organisational "bells" and "whistles" in the form of dedicated ERS (ethics, responsibility and sustainability) courses, and establish research centres/institutes (Hommel et al., 2012).

Since leading business schools became signatories to the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME[1]), the initiative has not significantly helped or inspired schools to embed RME (Sharma and Hart, 2014). Nonetheless, PRME rhetoric remains widely visible in the communication and marketing tools of business schools (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). This may suggest that the adoption of the PRME initiative and the implementation of RME by some schools are purely for "window dressing" purposes – talking the talk but not walking the much-needed walk to either gain specific accreditations (e.g. EQUIS[2] and EPAS[3]) or increase their marketability. However, several authors (see Solitander et al., 2012; Godemann et al., 2014; Cornuel et al., 2015; Doherty et al., 2015; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015) have identified several barriers believed to be hindering business schools from implementing and/or embedding RME into their core areas and practices. Of interest in the context of the current study is the Research Excellence Framework (REF), an assessment exercise whose outcome determines the allocation of research funds by the four regional research councils in the UK.

Doherty et al.'s (2015) remark about few UK universities having made an institutional-level commitment to RME compared to the employability/skills agendas and the REF agenda, suggests that the REF is, in fact, one of the important (if not the most essential) agendas in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) these days[4]. That said, Doherty et al. (2015) in their longitudinal study of six UK business and management schools, identified the REF as a *barrier* to the implementation of RME just around the time UK HEIs were preparing for their very first REF2014 submissions. Its over-prioritisation in four out of the six business and management schools surveyed meant that very little or no attention was being paid to the development of the RME curriculum; individuals treated it as a lower priority. The authors were optimistic that it would change, noting that impact will feature in the next REF exercise and that given its focus on the social and environmental impacts of business, RME can contribute to it. RME should help business school academics

[1] A United Nations-backed initiative launched in 2007 to globally extend the idea of RME and develop responsible leaders in business and management schools.
[2] European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) - https://efmdglobal.org/accreditations/business-schools/equis/
[3] EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) Programme Accreditation System (EPAS) - https://efmdglobal.org/accreditations/business-schools/epas/
[4] The identified over-prioritisation seemed to be the case for other research assessment exercises (RAEs) before the current tier (REF), as can be inferred in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

strengthen their REF impact profile across the social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Another relevant study by Harley (2002) explored how the research selectivity exercises[5] (RAE) impacted on academic work and identity in UK universities. She found that the RAE had detrimental consequences for non-research active academics, and in turn, for students. It enhanced the research income of some schools, raised the profile of a few academics – the high-flyers - but demoted scholarship and threatened the standing of academics on teaching-only contracts. Some schools saw the latter as a liability for not pulling in funds through research. That ultimately had negative effects on students in terms of reading, critical thought, and reflection. However, the study was not precisely within the RME or business school context. Furthermore, almost two decades have now passed since the study was conducted, meaning that the mechanism for assessing HEIs' research has since then undergone some structural, procedural, and methodological changes. Hence the relevance of the current study.

Additionally, Murphy and Sage (2014) explored, through media analysis, the perceptions of the UK's REF2014 in terms of its implications for individuals, institutions and, more broadly, academia. They reported the media portrayal of the REF as widely negative and warned that the push for HEIs and their academics to publish more impactful and REFable outputs could cause the demise of longitudinal research despite its relevance. The churning out of publications in the shortest amount of time is also counterproductive to an important objective of the REF, which is to enhance the quality of research that is carried out across UK HEIs.

However, their study, just like Harley's, differs from the current study because of the methodology employed. They quantitatively analysed media articles related to the REF, including editorial and commentary pieces by academic contributors and journalists. The REF-referenced publications that formed the basis of their data collection and analysis were between 1st July 2011 and 30th June 2013. It implies that HEIs had not formally submitted their research outputs for the REF2014 assessment exercise at the time of the study. This study was also not in the context

[5] Specifically, Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)

of RME; neither was the primary focus on UK business schools and/or their academics. They found the perceptions related to the REF2014 exercise to be widely negative, with a chance those might have changed since the study concluded and the outcome of the first assessment under the REF (not RAE) was published.

The studies mentioned above are useful because of the REF-related useful insight they provide. However, they do not undermine the originality, relevance, and contributions of this current study, but accentuate them (see section 7.5). No other study (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) has attempted to explore how the REF might have influenced RME implementation via the lens of business school academics committed to RME-related cause and directly involved the implementation and advancement of RME. Therein lies the significance of the study. It is the first study in the UK to consider both RME and the REF within the business school context.

This study is timely, given its usefulness to the imminent REF2021 exercise and/or the subsequent one, as well as the sustainable development goals agenda, to which business schools can contribute through RME. The UK higher education landscape is rapidly changing due to uncertainties such as Brexit and austerity in some governmental policies (e.g. funding cuts), including opportunities such as the decision to allow teaching-related impact in the REF2021 exercise. HEIs can leverage the latter, with the RME agenda as a potential catalyst in this arena for several UK business schools, as asserted by Doherty et al. (2015) and reinforced by the findings related to this study.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The research aims to explore the perceptions of UK business school academics regarding the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation in their institutions; to uncover the areas of complementarity and tensions; and to recommend practical ways of leveraging and reducing those, respectively.

The following objectives facilitated the achievement of the study aim:

1. To identify the agenda and the challenges of RME in UK business schools
2. To identify the main characteristics of the REF process

3. To explore the possible influence of the REF on UK business schools' pledge to implement RME.
4. To critically evaluate and model the complementarity and compatibility and the areas of tension between RME and the REF.
5. To proffer practical recommendations to relevant stakeholders based on the study findings.

The next section looks at the research questions that underpin the study.

1.4 Research Questions

Five research questions guided the study:

1. What are the main features of RME, and what factors are impeding its implementation/advancement in UK business schools?
2. What are the main characteristics of the REF process?
3. How is the REF influencing the implementation/advancement of RME in UK business schools?
4. What are the areas of complementarity and tension between the REF and RME?
5. How can the complementarity of both agendas be strengthened in the context of business schools in the UK?

Following the research questions are the study scope and assumptions.

1.5 Study Scope and Assumptions

The study was conducted within the boundaries outlined in Table 1 below. These are beneficial for the understanding of the scope within which this study is situated, given that RME and the REF are broad concepts in general.

Table 1: An outline of the Study Scope

#	Scope
1	The exploration of responsible management education (RME) predominantly focuses on the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). PRME as a body and an initiative is famous across the globe for its commitment to encouraging and supporting HEIs (mostly business schools) worldwide to transform their business and management education through its six guiding principles. It believes that in doing so, schools can raise future responsible leaders and professionals who will be committed to building a sustainable future for both current and future generations. That is, leaders who will positively impact both business and society due to the principles/ideas of ethics, social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability they are exposed to – i.e. instilled into them by schools. Hence, PRME is regarded as a global champion of RME. Responsible management education is closely linked to PRME – it is difficult to discuss the former without mentioning the latter. PRME (including its six principles) is treated somewhat as a proxy for RME.
2	Although 780+ HEIs from 80+ countries across the globe account for the entire PRME population (as of November 2019), UK PRME signatories (business schools) are the focal point.
3	'Academics within UK business schools' refers to those who research/teach within the RME field or conduct RME-related research, including ERS (ethics, responsibility and sustainability) – three primary components of RME.
4	Although previous research assessment exercises (RAEs) are referenced, the research questions outlined in section 1.4 are predominantly based on the REF2014 exercise. The interview questions posed to the study participants are also related mainly to the same exercise, including the responses (except where REF2021 is mentioned explicitly).
5	An attempt has been made to cover some of the key changes enacted for the upcoming REF2021 exercise. However, there is a possibility that some details may have been left out and a few may be outdated given the rapid pace of change in this arena.
6	The study relied mostly on primary data that were collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth literature reviews were conducted around RME and REF related publications.
7	The study participants' discussions of experiences related to the REF revealed that the REF does influence academic life (see Schäfer, 2016; Clark, 1989), which in a way connects with objective 2 – the characteristics of the REF. However, the associated findings are not part of the current study scope. Therefore, they are not presented in this thesis as the link with the implementation of RME was more tenuous in the data collected. They are useful and will be disseminated through further paper publication(s).
8	Institutional theory played a significant role in the interpretation of some aspects of the study findings. The study is exploratory, given its context. Thus, it was particularly challenging to identify a suitable theoretical lens at the start without limiting the findings that emerged from the study. However, the relevance of the institutional theory to the study was known from the start because it is the theory on which the study by Doherty et al. (2015) rests. The current study utilised it in an overview manner. "Institutionalisation is the process by which people in an ongoing relation orient their actions to a common set of normative standards and value patterns (e.g. RME-related), resulting in internalisation; conformity to it becomes a need-disposition in the individuals' personality structure" (Scott, 2014, p. 16, citing Parsons, 1951, p. 37).
9	PRME's six guiding principles were also used to interpret part of the study findings (chapter 6, mostly) because of the discussion around point 1 above.
10	RME in terms of teaching, research and engagement broadly relates to ethics, responsibility (i.e. CSR) and sustainability (i.e. ERS) and associated activities. RME-related research is widely viewed as pedagogical research; however, disciplinary research can be conducted with any of the three main pillars as a primary focus; all three or a combination can also be explored in a given context. Both the pedagogical and disciplinary aspects are covered within this study and are generally classified as RME-related research to avoid ambiguity.

Source: Compiled by Author

Following the outline of the study's scope are the assumptions the researcher made about the current study (see Table 2), which equally are essential for the better comprehension of the study.

Table 2: An outline of the Study Assumptions

#	Assumptions
1	Pedagogical research[6] seems to be less valued and is perceived as being of a lower status within HEIs and the higher education sector, compared to disciplinary research, whether or not they are RME-related. It seems to be that higher-ranked journals are less accepting of related research outputs. This has had (and has) certain implications for the UK research assessment exercise, including the RSE, RAE and the current iteration, the REF (see Lingwood et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2018; Kneale et al., 2016).
2	Study participants answered truthfully.
3	The purposively sampled participants are business school academics within the RME field – teach/research RME-related topics/subjects and were at the time involved/committed in the implementation of PRME in their schools.
4	Participants' responses were based primarily on their experiences and perceptions of the REF. They may have also drawn on the experiences of colleagues within and outside their institution.
5	Participants' recount of experiences related to the REF predominantly reflects those associated with the REF2014 exercise, with a chance that a few are related to the upcoming REF2021 exercise. Thus, all experiences are considered under REF2014 exercise except where REF2021 exercise is stated explicitly in their discussion.
6	The researcher's viewpoints did not interfere with the integrity, reliability, and validity of the study. The researcher identified a few held biases, bracketed those before the field study and clearly outlined the study scopes. Thus, it is assumed that the data was collected and analysed with care, was mostly free of bias, and was presented to reflect the diverse voices, perceptions, and experiences of participants in their words.
7	The researcher's interpretation of the study findings is subjective; so, other authors and readers of this thesis will interpret it as they deem fit.
8	Participants' viewpoints about RME as a concept might have informed how they responded to the questions they were asked at the data collection stage of the current study. There is no specific definition as far as the RME concept is concerned (see Nonet et al., 2016).

Source: Compiled by Author

We will now conclude this chapter with a presentation of the thesis outline – what will be covered in each of the eight chapters that make up this thesis.

1.6 Thesis Outline

This dissertation is organised into eight chapters. The breakdown of each of the chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1: Research Overview. This chapter provides readers with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the rationale for conducting this study in the first instance, in order to appreciate the knowledge gap to be filled. It also outlines the research aims and objectives, research questions, and study scope and assumptions.

[6] "Explores various activities linked to learning, teaching and assessment that may (or not) include empirical research but must continue to contribute to and advance the body of knowledge and pedagogic theories, respectively…It may take several forms including systematic reviews, case studies, evaluations and observations, which together have individual benefit and contribute to the continuous improvement of practice. It is interlinked with local and sector practices, the likes of governance, student engagement leadership and policy, and regarded as a mechanism for the sense-making of the shifting sands of higher education by the academic community" (Clements et al., 2018, p. 1-2).

Chapter 2: RME Literature Review. This chapter presents a critical review of current literature on RME. It commences by providing a detailed account of the development of RME, how and why the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) emerged and the state of RME implementation in UK business schools (drivers, barriers, and challenges). The REF was identified as an external barrier to RME implementation in one of the studies that were reviewed, which informed the next chapter.

Chapter 3: REF Literature Review. The literature review in this chapter predominantly focuses on the Research Excellence Framework. The chapter starts with a historical review of prior systems (predecessors of REF, i.e. Research Selectivity Exercise - RSE, and Research Assessment Exercise - RAE), for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. This is followed by an overview of the new system (REF), including its impact component and its operational difficulties in UK HEIs. It concludes with reasonable consideration of the decisions and requirements related to the looming REF2021 exercise.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework. This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins the current study based on the in-depth literature reviews carried out in chapter 2, covering responsible management education (RME) and chapter 3, covering the research excellence framework. These include institutional theory and the six principles of PRME. How both were applied, and their weaknesses, are also covered.

Chapter 5: Methodology. This chapter answers the question of how the study was conducted. It takes into consideration the philosophical stance of the researcher about reality and knowledge and how they informed the manner in which the phenomenon was explored. It also covers the rationale for the methodological choices made relating to data collection and analysis, as well as outline of some of the challenges encountered and how they were addressed. The chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical considerations surrounding the study.

Chapter 6: Presentation and Discussion of Findings Related to the REF's Possible Influence on RME Implementation. This chapter presents and discusses the findings that emerged from the exploration of the lived experiences and perceptions of the study participants relating to the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation/advancement in UK business schools. Also presented and discussed was their viewpoints about its possible influence on senior executives' commitment to the implementation/advancement of RME in their schools.

Chapter 7: Presentation and Discussion of Findings Related to the Perceived Potential Relationship between the RME and the REF Agenda. The chapter presents and discusses the findings that related to the extent to which RME and the REF might be compatible and complementary in a UK business school context. It outlines how the REF can support the integration of RME across UK business schools and seem to hinder its progress. How RME, supported by the SDGs, can promote the impact agenda of the REF is also covered.

Chapter 8: Conclusion, Recommendations and Contributions. This chapter outlines the key takeaways from the findings and the practical recommendations proffered to relevant stakeholders and suggestions for further studies. The limitations of the study are also outlined, with the chapter concluding with an outline of the study contributions.

We will now process to the next chapter which comprehensively unpacks relevant literature surrounding responsible management education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ON RME

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of existing literature on the Responsible Management Education (RME) agenda, which underpins this research project. It starts by exploring its evolution, meaning, engagement levels, and both the internal and external drivers, enablers, and barriers for its institutionalisation in business schools. The chapter then concludes by taking a closer look at the Principles for Responsible Management Education Agenda (PRME), within both the global and UK communities.

2.2 Towards a Necessary Responsible Management Education in Business Schools: A Societal Point of View

To several scholars, the launch of Agenda 21 and the United Nations' Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) was an awakening to the realisation of the role that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) ought to be playing to shift the awareness of society towards sustainable development (Lee et al., 2013). As a result, sustainability issues have gained tremendous attention from both the public and policymakers (Ceulemans et al., 2015; Jorge et al., 2015; Hasrouni-Beirut, 2012). Adomßent et al. (2014) maintain that the Decade offered HEIs the best opportunity to make deep-rooted changes that are essential for building a better and more sustainable world. Consistent with Milutinovic and Nikolic (2014), the days when a university was viewed predominantly as a training ground for would-be professionals are gone. A time when Vasilescu et al. (2010) hinted that business schools were awarding diplomas to students but failing to support them to develop social relevance and a sense of direction.

The traditional view of the business school as a knowledge hub where cutting-edge management theories and best practices are created is no longer sufficient as knowledge and skills are not the only essential elements needed to encourage effective leadership (Petriglieri, 2012). Business school students will become custodians of the global society (Pradini et al., 2012). It is recommended that they are exposed to ERS (ethics, responsibility, and sustainability) principles in order to increase their likelihood of generating sustainable value for business and society

(Arac and Madran, 2014). Higher education is uniquely placed to catalyse a societal transition towards environmental sustainability (Cortese, 2003). However, Lozano et al. (2010) observed that many university and college actors (e.g. staff, students, and local community groups) are finding it difficult to contribute significantly to sustainability. In the case of business schools, they allegedly are one of the best-funded on campus and have resources that are the envy of other faculties (Acito et al., 2008). Their intellectual ability, creativity, and entrepreneurial vision should see them creating robust global solutions to current and emerging challenges (Arac and Madran, 2014). However, they have been slow to act despite the increase in the number of organisations advocating for schools to create global citizens with sustainability mindsets (Adam, 2013).

In recent years, however, we have been witnessing a significant period of serious consideration regarding what the specific roles and responsibilities of contemporary management education should be (Burchell et al., 2015). For the series of corporate scandal, fraud, and economic malpractices that ultimately resulted in a global financial crisis have not only brought enormous attention to the business community, but also to the culpability of business schools in educating and training most of the senior executives (see Brooks, 2009). The recession unmasked some of the unsustainable and irresponsible ways of doing business, according to Doherty et al. (2015). It perhaps explains why business schools have shouldered and continue to shoulder many criticisms.

Several authors (e.g. Blasco, 2012; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Pfeffer and Fong, 2004) have charged business schools with being overly market-driven and sold out to the "tyranny of rankings" (Durand and Dameron, 2011; Adler and Harzing, 2009; Khurana, 2007). They purportedly have the propensity to engage in trivial/inconsequential research (Dunne et al., 2008; Pettigrew, 2001; Hambrick, 1994). While Mintzberg (2004) notes that business schools often offer courses that are too specialised, Ghoshal (2005) on the other hand has accused them of "propagating ideologically inspired amoral management theories[7] that have actively

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7 Business schools through agency theory which underpins their corporate governance courses have taught students that managers cannot be trusted to do their jobs (i.e. profit/value maximisation for shareholders) and for managers to overcome agency problems, they have to align their interests and incentives with those of shareholders (Ghosal, 2005, citing Jensen and Meckling, 1976). Through transaction cost economics which underpin courses on organisation design, business schools have preached the need for close monitoring and control of people as ways to prevent opportunistic behaviour (Ghosal, 2005, citing Williamson, 1975). The five forces

freed their students from a sense of moral responsibility" (p. 76). Others have blamed them for being partly responsible for one of the world's major financial crises and climate change-related issues (Hayes et al., 2017; Petriglieri, 2012; Podolny, 2009; Starkey and Tempest, 2009; Fassin, 2005).

Durand and Dameron (2011, p. 559) have questioned: "how the community of researchers in finance could not see the subprime nonsense that their sophisticated models made possible." They (business schools) reportedly have misconstrued the well-meaning suggestion (to gain and maintain legitimacy[8] through the pursuit of scientific rigour) proffered by the 1959 Ford and Carnegie Foundation report. They have increasingly become a self-absorbed community infested by the silo syndrome that only allows for very minimal connection to be made with the broader society (Dyllick, 2015). It has been argued that business school students lack both critical and reflective thinking skills that are necessary for addressing day-to-day complex organisational issues (see Colby et al., 2011; Khurana and Penrice, 2011; Morsing and Rovira, 2011; Datar et al., 2010; Martin, 2007; Aronowitz, 2000). Some authors (e.g. Bieger, 2011; Swaen et al., 2011) point out their abysmal failure to appreciate the importance of statesmanship. Even Dyllick (2015) has questioned their ability to function in today's ever-changing work environment effectively and efficiently.

Thomas (1977) states that "management education cannot continue to be viewed as an objective value-free transmission of knowledge" (p. 484). The problem with business schools' educational offerings revolves around three questions - what students learn (and do not), what learning looks like (arguably inside and outside the classroom) and what type of students are attracted to business schools. Some business schools further exacerbate these problems through continued over-reliance on traditional management education; henceforth TME in the context of this study. As already hinted, TME promotes a narrow functional knowledge characterised by dominant market logic and underpinned by amoral theories (Ghoshal, 2005). Concerning what students learn and do not, TME fails to elevate students' integrative, reflexive and critical thinking, and soft skills. It is not inclusive in that it favours large,

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framework is another one. By presenting it to students, business schools suggest that it is not only okay for companies to compete with their competitors, but they must also compete with their customers, suppliers, employees and regulators (Ghosal, 2005, citing Porter, 1980).

[8]Social acceptance that stems from complying with regulative and normative organisational policies and cognitive norms and beliefs (Lammers and Garcia, 2017, citing Deephouse and Carter, 2005), hence, a symbolic resource for firms (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

powerful corporations over small firms. Considering what learning looks like, the principal focus on teaching arguably makes TME detrimental to self-directed learning. The learning that TME promotes is one typified by a knowledge-doing and doing-being gap. Given the third question, the type of students that are attracted to business schools, TME does little or nothing to balance or challenge the overt learning-to-earning mindset long-held by some of the students that business schools absorb. If anything, it reinforces the instrumental value of education, fuelling the narrative that the only measure of success is the ability to bag a well-paid job (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019, citing Dyllick, 2015).

At the forefront of the re-examination of business schools' educational offerings is an increased concern with ideas of morality, corporate social responsibility, business ethics, and sustainability. This reflects societal concerns regarding excessive materialism, the lack of accountability on the part of firms and their role in environmental degradation and human rights violations (Blowfield and Murray, 2011; Burchell, 2008). Business and management schools have been urged by Burchell et al. (2014) to develop students' societal skills, instead of teaching Milton Friedman's view of the world. A doctrine that scholars like Henisz (2011) and Ghoshal (2005) have blamed for business managers over-prioritisation of financial considerations in comparison to social and environmental ones.

However, to reiterate Thomas' (1977, p. 484) remark, "the image of management education can no longer continue to be retained as an objective, value-free transmission of knowledge." Several authors (e.g. Milutinović and Nikolić, 2014; Bieger, 2011; Nejati et al., 2011; Vasilescu et al., 2010) note that more than ever, business schools are increasingly expected to contribute to the broader sustainability agenda. Hence the need to discontinue TME through the adoption, implementation, and institutionalisation of Responsible Management Education (RME). The following section will now discuss the RME concept in greater detail.

2.3 The Concept of Responsible Management Education (RME)

RME is a broad field and a concept that is undefined in part (Storey et al., 2017). As a process, it transcends curriculum development (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). Its interpretation varies across disciplines, geographical locations, and initiatives such as PRME (to be discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter), including accreditation standards like EQUIS and EPAS (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015). Nonet et al.'s (2016) study found that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of responsible management. It is supportive of Wersun's (2017) remark about context having a crucial role to play in the manner RME is understood, received, and implemented in a business school or university.

Warin and Beddewela (2016) define RME as any teaching, research or enterprise practices around ethics, responsibility and sustainability (ERS) aimed at developing students' knowledge of self, particularly their values, goals and intentions, and how those influence their interaction with others with a proper appreciation of the consequences. In other words, business or management education, research or enterprise-related activities that aim to develop a more strategic focus on ERS (Ibid, 2016). It is perhaps a worthy replacement for what Antonacopoulou (2010) describes as an uncritical approach to teaching and learning about management which business schools historically employed, failing to inspire students to challenge and explore ideas that operate outside the dominant financial logic though. It seeks to develop students' critical and systemic thinking skills to become responsible leaders who will consider the consequences (social, financial or environmental) of management's decision-making on all stakeholders holistically (Nonet et al., 2016; Rasche and Escudero, 2009). Not those who will always portray corporate profits as the crux and symbol of competence, neglecting the social and political aspects of management (Antonacopoulou, 2010).

Other authors (e.g. Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Godemann et al., 2014; Forray and Leigh, 2012) regard it as being about the normalisation of ethics, responsibility and sustainability (ERS) related discussions in business schools through the integration of related topics into courses that have traditionally not addressed these areas. Figure 1 below visually encapsulates these three main components of RME (ERS).

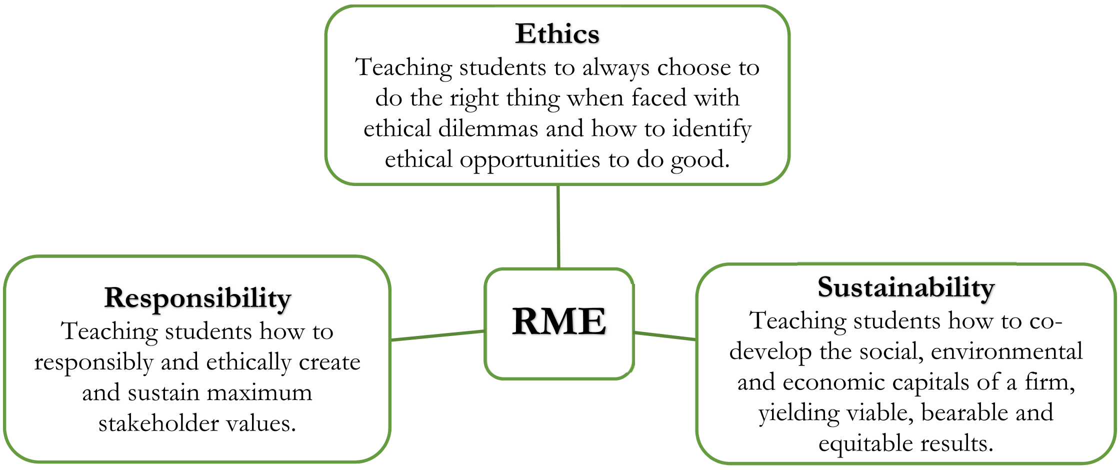

Figure 1. RME Concept

Source: Adapted from Laasch and Conaway (2015).

Developed by Laasch and Conaway (2015), the authors' concept of RME implies that a business school can claim to be embedding and instilling ERS principles and values in students if they:

1. Do the right thing and do good on a normative basis, regardless of the difficult ethical situations they might face (Ethics).
2. Deliver relevant courses/topics efficiently and demonstrate to students that it is possible to secure and deliver maximum value to stakeholders while maintaining a high level of integrity and accountability (Responsibility).
3. Continuously highlight the relevance of developing social, environmental, and economic resources simultaneously in both business and society context, and show students fair, practical, and acceptable ways of doing so (Sustainability).

Responsible Management Education (RME) is both a field and an agenda. As a field, RME's focus is to develop the quality, integrity, and social responsibility of business school students to become future 'responsible' managers and leaders (Marvin, 2015). Individuals who will assume responsibility for the triple bottom line; ensuring social, environmental, and economic sustainability, building stakeholder value, and addressing moral dilemmas (Laasch and Cornaway, 2015) towards building a sustainable future (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). Those who will be committed to building a sustainable future for all, including current and future generations. Hence, RME is considered an antidote for traditional management education (TME). The latter is partly blamed for the 2008 Wall Street financial crisis (Koljatic and Silva, 2015) due to its shortcomings mentioned in the previous section.

As an agenda, RME reportedly shares similar values and ideologies that underpin Education for Sustainability Development – ESD (Doherty et al., 2015). It is closely associated with the PRME – the Principles for Responsible Management Education - a United Nations-backed initiative launched in 2007 to raise the profile of responsible management education (RME) in business schools and management-related institutions across the globe. PRME urges business schools to reform their educational provisions via RME and equip students with the core skills needed to address societal, financial, cultural, and environmental dilemmas. It is committed to supporting them in achieving this, including more recently the promotion of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019), because ESD fundamentally addresses all three pillars of sustainable development - society, environment, and economy (Venkataraman, 2009). The initiative, PRME, is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter both at the global and national level (i.e. the UK and Ireland PRME chapter).

Responsible management is reinforced through constant learning (Nonet et al., 2016), which necessitates that business schools invest adequately in staff development (Disterheft et al., 2015). A report designed by Hazel Godoy and commissioned by the PRME Secretariat stresses that PRME-related faculty development plays a vital role in RME implementation across HEIs (worldwide) via the six principles of PRME. This is mostly because of the regular contact that educators have with students. These educators need ample time to develop a robust curricular around RME even as they work towards generating impactful research for the REF. In doing so, they would be addressing a critical pedagogical constraint - the lack of time to connect relevant RME subjects such as ERS in the classroom (Doh and Tasman, 2014). Business schools also need to create a respectful and inclusive environment that will empower and encourage the pursuit of a shared vision towards achieving RME embeddedness (Nonet al., 2016). To draw on Beer and Eisenstat's (1996) second principle of effective strategy implementation, business schools need to encourage open discussion of the barriers and challenges to RME implementation. It is difficult for firms to achieve real change through relevant change initiatives if the barriers linked to their implementation are not brought to the fore and discussed. This is often due to the fear of being embarrassed/threatened by others, including senior management (Argyis, 1990). Drawing on Burchell and Cook (2008), a business school could resist having an open dialogue with stakeholders who are keen to support them to embed RME due to not knowing to what extent that would impact on other aspects of their activities. Hence the need to be specific and transparent to foster trust between all involved and increase the likelihood for tangible positive outcomes.

Furthermore, responsible management demands that business schools complement the theoretical knowledge around their educational offerings with practical, real-world experience(s) so that students are adequately supported to develop and improve essential leadership and managerial skills (Nonet et al., 2016). It echoes Sunley and Leigh's (2016) remark concerning RME requiring that management educators use experiential and more engaged approaches to help guide students and emerging leaders. It equally validates Prandini et al.'s (2012) point about real-life case studies and students' projects as the two most effective methods of creating exceptional learning environments, as either approach could encourage buy-in from relevant actors (e.g. students, staff, and companies). However, it is not enough to merely equip business school students with essential skills/tools for making responsible and ethical decisions. They ought to be nurtured in an accountable and transparent environment; one that promotes morally sound and sustainable behaviours, and practices, which business schools can achieve through leading by example (Warin and Beddewela, 2016) – walk their talk, not the opposite. It is somewhat tied to the maturity level of a school's management education, as discussed in the following sub-section.

2.3.1 Developmental stages of management education

An understanding of how management education has evolved over the years is essential for business and management schools (and indeed other HEIs that offer related programmes/courses) that are looking to transform their education offerings in this area. According to Visser (2016), management education has developed and unfolded in a similar pattern to CSR.

The latter experienced a shift in the use of defensive, charitable and promotional approaches towards the use of more strategic and transformative methods. The author alludes to the fact that most business schools have not yet attained the highest level of maturity in their teaching and research practices. Instead, the majority of them seem to be operating at level 3, where CSR/Sustainability-related modules are offered on an optional basis to students, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Stages of Evolution in Management Education

#	Stages of maturity	Keywords	Typical practices
1.	Defensive	Compliance, risk	Links ethics to corporate governance or legal context.
2.	Charitable	Voluntary, philanthropic	Business ethics offered as an elective.
3.	Promotional	Marketing, branding	CSR or sustainability offered as elective modules.
4.	Strategic	Management, codes	CSR or sustainability offered as compulsory modules.
5.	Transformative	Integration, innovation	Has integrated social, ethical, and environmental considerations into all management subjects; emphasizes systemic leadership, futures thinking, eco-innovation, social entrepreneurship, inclusive business and circular economy.

Source: Visser (2016, in Sunley and Leigh, 2016, p. viii).

Ibid (2016) goes on to endorse a textbook[9] entitled "Educating for Responsible Management: Putting Theory into Practice" as a timely and useful resource, especially for business schools that are keen to make the journey to maturation – level 5. As shown in Table 3 above, level 5 is the point where business schools begin to consciously appreciate the importance of incorporating (innovatively[10]) ERS values across all management-related subjects. The Responsible Management Education (RME) agenda is part of that journey to maturation since according to Cornuel and Hommel (2015) it offers business schools the chance to progress from treating ERS as mere elective modules/courses to a more integrative approach. Such a transition from the status quo to the transformative stage mentioned in Table 3, may entail a switch to pedagogical approaches that can stimulate behavioural change (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015); enough to encourage students to explore solutions within complex systems (Taylor and Theyel, 2010).

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[9] It was one of the useful resources the researcher consulted in the course of this study, consisting of book chapters on RME-related contents.

[10] Includes action learning, role plays, immersive learning, alternative reality gaming, video, social action campaigns etc. Click this link for details. https://primetime.unprme.org/2019/06/27/innovative-pedagogy-for-responsible-business-teaching-prme-uk-and-ireland-

Having discussed the RME concept in a general context, the following section will now present a snapshot of the UK context.

2.4 The UK Context of Responsible Management Education: An Institutional Perspective

In the UK context, Responsible Management Education (RME) is often implemented by business schools through their curricula. It is usually in the form of specialist degree courses or through core modules or elective subjects (Beddewela et al., 2017; Warin and Beddewela, 2016). Rasche et al.'s (2013) study found that schools were including courses on responsibility in their curricular, albeit a staggering 75% of them were electives and thus, disconnected from core disciplines. Nicholls et al. (2013) have found evidence indicative of the fact that European students tend to prefer optional/elective modules/subjects. However, these electives may not significantly help in the effort to embed relevant RME content into business schools' curricula due to the self-selection bias of students; hence they remain limited in their reach (Bell et al., 2009).

Matten and Moon (2004) have urged business schools to adopt a more interdisciplinary approach that focuses on responsibility and incorporates it across all subject areas such as finance, marketing, and economics. An interdisciplinary approach not only allows staff from all disciplines to learn how to reflect and engage with complex issues but also provides the most significant leverage for HEIs to promote essential global citizenship education (Reade et al., 2013). However, the approach is not devoid of difficulties. One such challenge is how schools can embed and sustain an inclusive and multidisciplinary programme characterised by a strategic and systemic design. One that allows academics and students from all disciplines to learn how to reflect on and engage with complex issues (Reade et al., 2013, citing Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011; and Cooperrider and Fry 2010).

Concerning business ethics, a study by Cowton and Cummins (2003) found it to be a core subject in 18 out of 105 schools they surveyed. The problem can be addressed if business schools embrace ethically and socially responsible thinking. However, they must take proactive steps to provide ethical teaching by recruiting committed, qualified, engaged, and experienced staff; a reactive approach will not suffice (Cornelius et al., 2008).

Regarding CSR education, Matten and Moon (2004) strongly advocate that it needs to be fully integrated and embedded within the core strategic approach of business and management schools to guarantee success, and argue that the UK is the leading country in Europe in the provision of CSR teaching and research. However, Moratis (2016) argues that schools that only integrate CSR into core courses may paradoxically be suggesting that RME is of secondary importance. Thus, students may find it challenging to recognise or value it adequately, especially if a dedicated CSR course to support their learning process via the provision of a solid frame of reference is not offered at the start of every academic year (once per semester). Ibid (2016) further recommends that institutions take a critical stance on whatever approach they are adopting towards educating students to increase the chance of that having a positive influence on students' worldviews and behaviours. In contrast, Sharland et al. (2013) warn that overloading RME-related contents or subjects across a curriculum can potentially dilute its effectiveness amongst students. This can sometimes become a hindrance in the teaching of other subjects/topics (Exter et al., 2013).

Speaking of curriculum, Blasco (2012) stresses the need for management educators to understand the hidden curriculum as much as they do the formal curriculum since implicit dimensions of educational settings also play a crucial role in enhancing students' sense of responsibility (Trevino and McCabe, 1994). Blasco (2012) identifies three interlinked message sites[11] for the hidden curriculum in business schools, including formal curriculum, interpersonal interactions, and governance (see Figure 2 below). Practices within the formal curriculum include course organisation, delivery, and assessment. Course assessment is useful for identifying gaps and opportunities for the mainstreaming of social and environmental responsibility. Business school students' interpersonal interactions include, but are not limited to, dialogue, jokes, anecdotes, folklore, and competitions.

[11] Where school actors interact, generating meta-messages – messages about appropriate conduct which students apprehend. These may vary considerably from intended formal curricular messages (Blasco, 2012).

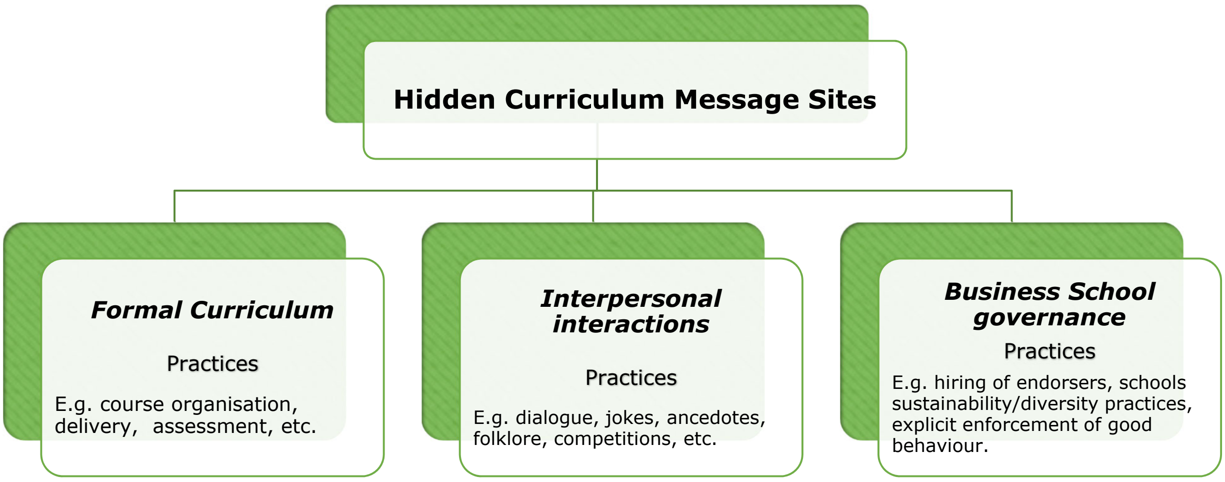

Figure 2: Hidden curriculum message sites

Source: Compiled by Author (based on Nhamo and Nhamo, 2014, p. 98; Blasco, 2012, p. 274).

Within the governance platform of business schools are practices like hiring of endorsers and enforcing of socially and environmentally responsible behaviour (Nhamo and Nhamo, 2014, citing Blasco, 2012).

For the first message site, the delivery of RME-related courses, it is recommended that business school educators adopt approaches that will challenge students' long-held assumptions regarding what constitutes good business theory and practice, and endorse critical reflection on practice as value-laden viewpoints (Blasco, 2012, citing Waddock et al., 2010; and Keeley, 1983). Other authors (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Apple, 1971) believe the second message site, interpersonal interactions, offer school actors much-needed socialisation moments. Some can occur during or outside formal teaching and may be passed on from one generation of school actors to another, which can then either support or undermine RME in business schools (Blasco, 2012). Conversely, the third message site, business school governance, allows the endorsement of role modelling (Ibid, 2012). This is deemed particularly necessary since students are said to become cynical when schools fail to practice what they preach (see Waddock et al., 2010; Trevino and McCabe, 1994).

Aside from the curriculum, there are other ways that business schools can promote RME. Through ERS (ethics, responsibility, and sustainability) related research, and staff and student-focused voluntary projects, community initiatives and organisation-related policies (e.g. environmental, carbon and recycling policy) business schools can promote the understanding and awareness of RME. However, the time required for a business school to institutionalise RME will depend on the level of RME the institution is looking to attain. A more significant level will mainly require more time and a substantial investment compared to a lower level of RME. Committing firmly to the RME agenda may also entail that business schools recruit qualified experts/staff within the RME field, adopt RME-related initiatives (e.g. ESD) and introduce or reorganise their curriculum to integrate ERS-related contents. Presumably, a business school that wants a low-level commitment to RME has a limited budget and may (or may not) adopt RME-related initiatives and create optional ERS-related modules (Warin and Beddewela, 2016).

Drawing on Warin and Beddewela's (2016) study, three main stages by which business schools and universities engage with the RME agenda in their effort to institutionalise it include the advanced, middle, and initial stages. Again, PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) is closely related to RME. It is a renowned global champion and an initiative committed to supporting business schools to institutionalise RME to foster the development of future responsible leaders who will employ ERS principles in all aspects of their daily activities/operations in service to both business and society. Thus, it explains why PRME features in the discussion of the earlier mentioned three engagement levels, expanded on below.

2.4.1 Advanced engagement level

Warin and Beddewela’s (2016) study found the teaching activities of advanced institutions to consist of Specialist Masters courses with titles that mirrored Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability related features. It is unclear from their paper if the surveyed schools in this category equally had Specialist degree programs at undergraduate levels dedicated to ERS. However, the authors hint that advanced institutions have dedicated RME research groups, significant ERS components in their research agenda and several activities like schemes and policies that support a green agenda[12]. The business schools that fall into this category are mostly pioneer signatories to RME-related initiatives such as PRME which we will develop later in this chapter. However, it is essential to note that not all "pioneer signatories" of PRME might still be participating or current members of the initiative.

2.4.2 Middle engagement level

Here, institutions wanting to attain a middle engagement/participation level presumably ought to have an excellent combination of undergraduate and postgraduate core and optional modules with ERS-related content. Some were found to have research centres focused on RME themes and many activities supporting green agendas. What may be distinguishing institutions at this engagement level from those at the advanced level is their lack of Specialist Masters/undergraduate degree courses dedicated to ERS/RME. The sign-up date to the PRME initiative, though mentioned, is not necessarily a factor here. For instance, a "pioneer signatory" could be at (or be aiming only to attain) a middle engagement level. It may also be that a pioneer signatory has only achieved the initial engagement level discussed below for various reasons (e.g. a matter of choice and the lack of management support), despite being a long-standing signatory to PRME.

2.4.3 Initial engagement level

Institutions at this engagement level usually offer limited elective modules with RME-content, have a lower number of activities supporting a green agenda, and have (or are planning to establish) research areas with RME components. They predominantly are new PRME signatories with no SIP report (Sharing Information on Progress report – a biannual report that highlights the progress made in implementing RME) - most likely in contrast to advanced and middle institutions (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). Table 4 is an adaptation from Warin and Beddewela's (2016) findings which show three engagement levels of RME in UK business schools. While the information provided may not be exhaustive, it presumably should help UK HEIs seeking to institutionalise RME to decide what level to aim for, albeit advanced institutionalisation may be preferred.

Table 4: Institutionalisation levels of Responsible Management Education in UK Business Schools

Engagement Level	Teaching	Research	Enterprise/Green Agenda
Advanced	Offers Specialist Masters course(s) dedicated to RME & possibly also at the undergraduate level.	Has an established RME focused Research group and possibly a research centre dedicated to RME.	Has several activities promoting green agendas, including schemes and policies.
Middle	Offers a selection of core & optional modules with RME-related content at undergraduate & postgraduate levels.	May have already established an RME focused research group or research centre.	Has several activities supporting green agendas.
Initial	Offers limited modules with RME-related content (e.g. Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility or Sustainability - ERS).	Has or planning to create a research group with a focus on RME.	Has a weak level of green agenda with few activities.

Source: Adapted from Warin and Beddewela (2016, in Sunley and Leigh, 2016, p. 311)

The next section examines some of the drivers, barriers, and enablers for embedding RME in the UK business school context. Understanding these factors should help schools provide strategic support for its institutionalisation (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). However, we are told that reforms in the higher education sector occurs in three stages - mobilisation, implementation, and institutionalisation, with the last stage a particular challenge. The institutionalisation stage is seldomly attained partly due to factors such as resistance from leaders and faculty members (Kezar and Sam, 2013). This resonates with parts of the discussions covered in the section below.

2.5 The Drivers, Barriers and Enablers for Embedding RME in UK Business Schools

The behaviour, values, actions, and knowledge an organisation possesses must reflect those expected within the social system where it operates (Pfeffer, 1975). To thrive there, it would require more material resources and technical information (Scott et al., 2000) because firms that operate in the same sector must compete for customers and resources, as well as legitimacy and political power; for social and financial stability (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983; Schuman, 1995). The decision by a business school to adopt RME may either be perceived as a planned deployment to gain pragmatic-based legitimacy or, be rooted in its constitutive belief (what it must do) with a chance to enhance its institutional legitimacy (Doherty et al., 2015).

Several authors (e.g. Maloni et al., 2012; Barber et al., 2014; Doherty et al., 2015; Sobczak and Mukhi, 2015) have explored a range of factors that aid and hinder the implementation of RME in business schools. These key terms though mostly not defined by scholars, are defined by Warin and Beddewela (2016). The authors regard *drivers* as those stakeholders or their actions that are bringing about the institutionalisation of RME. *Barriers*, as any action/rule/situation that hinder the process and prevent business schools from making RME a part of the whole system or culture - the prevailing norm. *Enablers*, as those stakeholders or their actions supporting and aiding business schools in engaging with the RME process.

These drivers, barriers and enablers are discussed in more depth in the subsequent section according to their positioning within (internal factors) and outside (external factors) the UK business school environment, which is the current study context. Internal factors are the stakeholders (and their actions) working within a business school and influencing the inside-in. In contrast, external factors are initiatives, firms or stakeholders situated (and operating) outside the business school and creating an impact from the outside (Warin and Beddewela, 2016).

2.5.1 Internal factors

The internal factors considered here include, but are not limited to, the ethos[13]/mission of a business school, its current structure, and the roles that management (leadership), business school faculty and students play, including the research agenda in UK HEIs. These are briefly discussed in the sub-sections that are outlined below:

2.5.1.1 Internal Drivers for institutionalising RME in UK business schools

Faculty staff members: Business school faculty can drive the institutionalisation of RME through their enthusiasm and passion (Beddewela et al., 2017). They, followed by senior management, were identified as a top driving force in Matten and Moon's (2004) study that explored CSR education (teaching and research) within European business schools. This finding is supportive of Cowton and Cummins' (2003) study that found that educators of business ethics had a substantial personal interest in the subject. Thus, they note that a passionate and enthusiastic faculty can indeed effect

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[13] Drawing on Beddewela et al. (2017), a business school or university that desires to institutionalise RME should be prepared to re-evaluate their ethos. They hinted that the extent to which the resources (monetary and non-financial) required to attain RME embeddedness by committed faculty members is somewhat reliant on the former. In other words, senior executives are likely to support the agenda if their institutions' ethos are reflective of ERS principles. However, with the concept of decoupling, this be not always be the case.

change in business school policy. Similarly, Fukukawa et al.'s (2013) study found that motivated faculty staff members played a significant role in the diffusion of RME within the curriculum of a UK business school.

Leadership: Top management plays a crucial role in the institutionalisation of RME (Muff et al., 2013; Wersun, 2017) because they control resources including financial budgets and staff resources, and ultimately would have the final say in matters such as the institutionalisation of RME within the business school (Beddewela et al., 2017). Prior research has evidenced the paramount role that top management plays in the implementation of RME. For instance, Doherty et al. (2015) who surveyed six UK business schools found that only two reported having the backing of their Vice-Chancellor and Head of School in their effort to embed social issues across all departments and develop expertise in RME.

Students: Students can become key players in the institutionalisation process by showing interest, which can be acquired through participation in the promotion of RME within business schools, and by taking up RME focused modules and degree programs in a bid to sustain the acquired interest (Beddewela et al., 2017). Their interest and participation can drive course development in business schools, as Christensen et al.'s (2007) study has shown. Drawing on a survey by HESA[14] (2015), business school students can help raise the critical mass needed to make changes around the RME agenda and in turn society – they can be a force for good. 15% of all UK graduates (approx. 1.7 million) in year 2013/2014 came from business and administration-based disciplines alone.

Therefore, business schools need to expose their students to RME-related topics like ERS - Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability. Concerning sustainability, BSkyB[15] Group's (2012) study reported that 70% of UK undergraduate trainees (working in business-related disciplines) said it is relevant to businesses, with 35% of them admitted having not received adequate training in this area. Regarding ethics, Luthar and Karri (2005) found that exposure to it via the curriculum impacted significantly

[14] Higher Education Statistics Agency (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/) collects, processes, and publishes data about UK Higher Education sector.

[15] British Sky Broadcasting

on students' perception of what should be the ideal linkages between business ethics and performance. Relating to CSR, Kolodinsky et al.'s (2010) study found that students that have a more ethically idealist view are more likely to favour CSR education, and therefore RME (Beddewela et al., 2017). Matten and Moon (2004) assert that students can become future drivers of CSR teaching in business schools. A respondent from their study suggested that a moral foundation developed from Sunday school days might cause more students to develop an interest in CSR - it is another way they can become drivers for RME implementation in business schools. However, Warin and Beddewela (2016) question the extent to which the respondent's insinuation aligns with the strategies of business schools – it is something they most likely have no control over.

2.5.1.2 Internal Enablers for institutionalising RME in UK business schools

Mission/Vision Terminology: According to Rasche and Gilbert (2015), business schools are increasingly incorporating RME-related terminologies into both their mission and vision statements. Such a move for Warin and Beddewela (2016) can motivate and enable them to effect RME-related changes into their curricula and strategies since these statements often reflect the values and the fundamental character of an institution (Beddewela et al., 2017). Moreover, Pfeffer and Fong (2004) have urged business schools to place greater emphasis on professional ethics, and concerning RME, state what their purpose is. Consequently, a business school ethos that exudes strong sustainability or responsibility value will encourage the adoption of a consistent and pervasive approach towards the institutionalisation of RME in UK business schools (Beddewela et al., 2017; Warin and Beddewela, 2016).

Research Agenda: Warin and Beddewela (2016) have alluded to the "research agenda" that is dominant in UK HEIs contributing to the institutionalisation process of the RME agenda in UK business schools, the reason being that academics are increasingly required to research and publish high-quality papers in diverse disciplines to help their institutions to rank well in benchmarking initiatives like the REF. They believe that academics who already research within the RME field would contribute towards its institutionalisation in this manner. Similarly, Doherty et al. (2015) have asserted that a focus on RME should support business schools to develop their REF impact profile across much broader impact metrics for the next REF exercise since RME is concerned with the social and environmental impact of business.

Leadership: Top management/their action(s) is the last but not the least factor that can support the institutionalisation of the RME agenda in UK business schools. Their willingness to adopt initiatives such as PRME can encourage and aid business school faculty and students to engage with the RME process (Exter et al., 2013).

2.5.1.3 Internal Barriers to institutionalising RME in UK business schools

Existing structures: It has been argued that existing structures in business schools can hinder the implementation of RME due to tensions between conflicting goals about the stance of business schools as "cash cows" within universities (Doherty et al., 2015). This tension may then work against any change perceived as less commercially relevant (e.g. RME implementation), supporting Podolny (2009) and Starkey's (2009) claims that business schools over-prioritise profit maximisation much to the detriment of social and environmental concerns. Additionally, Warin and Beddewela (2016) and Doh and Tashman (2014) hinted that business schools have limited space to hold new modules and pedagogical techniques, despite both being relevant to the implementation of RME-related changes.

Faculty staff members*:* The integration of RME content across business schools' curricula can often be met with resistance from faculty members (Warin and Beddewela, 2016, citing Benn and Dunphy, 2009). Either because some of them fail to appreciate its importance as non-specialists in RME, or they are unwilling to alter existing courses and/or adopt new RME-related courses and approaches because they perceive it as extraneous to a business school's core values (Doh and Tashman, 2014). It is argued that embedding RME can sometimes require substantial disruption of institutionalised practices which academics have a proclivity to support (e.g. REF-related practices), often resulting in resistance (Beddewela et al., 2017, citing Reay et al., 2013). In Doherty et al.'s study (2015), a respondent recounted how he/she suffered ridicule and hostility from colleagues in his/her effort to champion the integration of RME. It is unclear whether "resistance" in this case is due to natural resistance to change or it stems from conflicting priorities for the use of limited resources. However, the authors unequivocally consider such a hostile reaction from "educators" a matter of genuine concern.

Faculty staff members may also feel uncomfortable to teach/support RME contents due to a lack of personal interest and exposure to formal training in this area (Sharland et al., 2013). This point is supportive of Doherty et al.'s (2015) study which found a gap in business schools' knowledge in teaching RME, hence the need to bring in qualified and experienced staff from other departments. The lack of trained faculty members or specialists in RME is however not unique to a few business schools; it is a common issue encountered by most business schools (Muff et al., 2013; Podolyny, 2009).

Also, faculty members can create the greatest resistance owing to their professional understanding and interpretation of the RME concept (Reay et al., 2013). A previous study by Westphal and Zajac (2001) observed that some organisations decouple certain formal structures from their primary activities/routines because prominent actors lacked interest in their implementation. Beggs and Dean's (2007) study found that faculty members were doubtful that teaching responsibility and ethics would have largely prevented the series of corporate accounting scandals that pervaded year 2000/2001. In line with Yip et al. (2012), faculty's lack of interest or inertia can equally act as an obstacle to implementing RME-related changes in business schools.

Evans and Weiss' (2008) study suggests that though some business school Deans are publicly supportive of RME, they internally might have limited influence on RME curriculum development due to faculty resistance. This limited influence might be further exacerbated and restricted by the degree of significance that business school faculty attach to academic freedom (see Gross-Schaefer, 2010).

Peters (2012) suggests that academics' focus on peer-reviewed theoretically focused 4* academic journals for career progression can militate against multi-disciplinary thinking. However, institutionalising RME necessitates that schools integrate relevant topics/subjects like sustainability across their curriculum and engage with multiple stakeholders and the wider community; all of which require multidisciplinary efforts (Weybrecht, 2017).

Leadership: Previous studies by Shuayto (2013) and Zell (2005) found that business school Deans encounter conflicting priorities when looking to adopt RME (or not). They must choose between balancing the need to preserve core institutional activity and the need to adapt to, and embrace, change to stay relevant. However, managing competing logics can be complicated, especially when there are incompatible missions that need balancing (Brandsen and Karré, 2011; Smith, 2010). Even where faculty members are enthusiastic and passionate about RME, if top management fails to support related processes, any subsequent action risks losing momentum (Muff et al., 2013). This is because the implementation of RME-related reforms requires time and relevant expertise, and each of these in turn demand that schools invest financial and non-financial resources (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Beusch, 2014). This is all the more so if a school opts for a full-range integration instead of a piecemeal approach – adding optional modules/courses to existing programs (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

A full-range approach may necessitate that business schools change their organisational culture, which Ottewill et al. (2005) believe will require more attention from top management and, therefore, more resources. Rasche and Gilbert (2015) hinted that these resource requirements are substantial enough to bring about conflict between institutional pressures and resource availability. They also alluded to schools often being left to shoulder the associated costs, which can be challenging in an increasing era of austerity; government funds are increasingly becoming tighter and harder to access (see Fethke and Policano, 2013; Peters and Thomas, 2011).

Authors like Muff et al. (2013) and Podolny (2009) assert that inadequate training (or its total absence) is an issue that pervades most business schools. This argument aligns with Petriglieri (2012) and O'Toole's (2005) study that identified a weakness in both business school and university leadership as it pertains to RME. Hence, top management's support and understanding of the RME agenda is pertinent for gaining and providing access to resources needed to effect change (Evans and Robertson, 2003). Equally important is the need for RME faculty training programs to be designed to broadly address the various cognitive mindsets about sustainability (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008), an issue that Maloni et al.'s (2012) study highlighted. Their exploration of how to build faculty support for integrating sustainability through RME focused initiatives (like PRME) also notes the importance for training materials to be tailored to specific business school academic fields in order to help all faculty members appreciate sustainability applications.

Millar et al. (2012) note that mainstreaming sustainability (and, therefore, RME) is a full challenge for business schools and indeed, other organisations. In some instances, this task may entail an overall change of identity, which is sometimes crucial for securing legitimacy (Dacin et al., 2002). Top executives must therefore have an extensive consultation with staff before adopting RME-related initiatives like PRME. Doing so can reduce the likelihood of encountering resistance (Exter et al., 2013), which can hamper the institutionalisation process of RME (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). Beer and Eisenstat's (1996) third principle of effective strategy implementation and organisational adaptation stresses that a change process should develop a partnership with all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, business schools must make necessary adjustments and maintain mutual influences between stakeholders to ensure that RME via ERS (Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability) is implemented effectively (Fukukawa et al., 2013).

Students: The lack of interest and low enrolment of students in RME-related modules (optional/elective) can cause senior management to reject these courses, impeding the implementation of RME (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). Doherty et al. (2015) found that prior educational experiences and the focus on strategic learning can cause some students to resist the critical and challenging nature of RME-related subjects/courses. A mix of curriculum content (i.e. mandatory and optional courses) can also send mixed messages to students and thus provoke a feeling of hostility/confusion amongst them.

Benn and Dunphy's (2009) exploratory study on sustainability integration in the core subjects of an Australian university's MBA program reported resistance from some students who felt the RME-related contents were abstract and irrelevant. Therein lies the relevance of critical pedagogies and experiential learning. The former can take the form of a legitimised and critical review of organisation management and the latter, teaching practices that recognise on-the-job learning and reflection (Cicmil et al., 2017), thereby preventing the viewing of RME-related subjects/contents "as an abstract endeavour or as a purely academic work subject" (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 5).

Students' unethical perceptions and attitudes may also hinder RME implementation in business schools. For instance, Kidwell's (2001) study found that students believe that the line between right and wrong is increasingly becoming blurred. Thus, they assume that managers will necessarily engage in unethical behaviour with the risk of this becoming normalised.

2.5.2 External Factors

This section looks at the factors that affect the institutionalisation of RME from outside the business school environment. They include RME-related initiatives, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), accreditation and professional bodies, and business and society. They are explored under similar subsections to the internal factors.

2.5.2.1 External Drivers for institutionalising RME in UK business schools

Accreditation: There are a few accreditation bodies that work to regulate the quality of courses and programs that business schools are offering (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). Most UK business schools seem keen and are working towards gaining a triple accreditation status from the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) and AMBA (The Association of MBAs). The AACSB always has (since 1974) required ethics-related content as part of its criteria. The manner it should be achieved by prospective applicants can however be quite varied (Sharland et al., 2013). Hence Storey et al. (2017) deem it a less obvious way that accrediting bodies can help drive change in business education.

EQUIS, which is operated by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), demands that schools declare if they are signatories to PRME or not in their application (PRME, 2013; Brammer et al., 2012). Their recent accreditation guidelines have a chapter dedicated to responsible management education (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015), where they require schools to demonstrate a more explicit social responsibility policy and strategy, as well as apportion resources to that (Rive et al., 2017). This requirement is for Storey et al. (2017) an illustration of how accrediting bodies' influence can be particularly significant in overtly driving change in business education.

AMBA, on the other hand, demands that the MBA program of business schools be substantially designed to expose students to understand "the impact of sustainability, ethics, and risk management on business decisions and performance, and on society as a whole" (AMBA, 2016, p. 8). All three of these institutions have RME related contents within their criteria (Beddewela et al., 2017) with a proposal to further integrate RME across their accreditation criteria in the coming years (Cooper et al., 2014; Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). Their stringent nature may be evidenced by how only a few (82, as of July 2017) business schools (worldwide) can boast of holding the "triple crown" accreditation (MBA Today, 2017) — making their reach and potential influence on business schools quite significant (Beddewela et al., 2017). The new Business Graduate Association (BGA) accreditation[16] and the AMBA accreditation have a core focus on RME. Coincidentally, the researcher's institution of study is the first HEI (worldwide) to gain a double AMBA/BGA accreditation in the year 2019.

Therefore, these accrediting bodies can become drivers requiring business schools to integrate RME-related contents and activities according to their standards (Warin and Beddewela, 2016), implying that the failure to comply may result in a sanction (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). Accreditation(s) is a significant source of legitimacy for schools (Durand and McGuire, 2005), which makes it difficult for top management not to execute and preserve these standards (Warin and Beddewela, 2016), albeit some accreditation criteria are written in a flexible manner (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). After all, Wilson and McKiernan (2011) state that "arguably, accrediting agencies have created a degree of dependence on the part of business schools by 'calling the shots' in an influential process" (p. 460).

Peers/Competitors: A business school can be driven to embed RME because their peers or competitors have done, or are doing, so. According to Doherty et al. (2015), business schools do replicate the offerings of their competitors. Firms are also inclined to imitate other organisations they perceive to have attained more success and legitimacy than themselves (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman, 1989) in the face of

[16] An international membership and quality assurance body of world-leading and high-potential Business Schools. Those specifically with a shared commitment for fostering responsible management practices and lifelong learning, and who are seeking to positively impact their students, communities, and the wider economy. BGA currently has 120 members from five continents. More details are available at: https://businessgraduatesassociation.com/

uncertainty (Keerasuntonpong and Cordery, 2016), which can then create mimetic isomorphism. Isomorphism, as discussed in section 4.2.2, is a restrictive process that forces an establishment/firm/organisation in a given population to resemble firms (in the same population) that face a similar set of environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968; Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). Organisational change and adaptation in institutional theory[17] can occur through three mechanisms – mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphism (Seyfried et al., 2019). According to Lieberman and Asaba (2006), mimetic isomorphism is the process whereby firms are pressured to model themselves after other firms by copying/imitating their activities, structures and even systems, especially when conditions in their operating environment are uncertain. It suggests that a business school might be pressured to implement/institutionalise RME if other business schools they believe have achieved more success than themselves have embedded RME or are contemplating to do so. This includes the likes of PRME Champions who are viewed as an elite group within the PRME community since they are set up to inspire newcomers to learn and imitate RME-related best practices from them (Rasche et al., 2020).

Employers: Despite the reported diminished public legitimacy of business schools (Clegg et al., 2013), they and universities do not work in isolation as they must engage some key constituencies in society. A key one is employers whom most business school graduates seek employment from in the existing economic market (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). These employers have placed considerable pressure on business schools to change the ideological orientation of their curricula (Doherty et al., 2015). About 9953 businesses from 160+ countries have signed up to the UNGC[18] (United Nations Global Compact) since its launch in 2000; the population was 6000+ in the year 2011 (Kell and Haertle, 2011). A collaborative study by UNGC and Accenture found that 93% of 766 CEOs surveyed believed that sustainability has a significant role to play in the future success of their corporations (Lacy et al., 2010). The finding is indicative of how the desires and interests of employers can force business schools to embed RME. Employers, to an extent, can inform or dictate the

[17] Concerned with institutions' role and the process through which systems become institutionalised in a society (Scott, 1987). The theory is concerned with identifying and examining influences that enhance survival and legitimisation of the activities of organisations including social environment, culture, regulation and financial incentives (Glover et al., 2014; Bruton et al., 2010; Hirsch, 1975). See section 1.6.2 for more details on institutional theory.

[18] UNGC is committed to facilitate a global movement of companies and stakeholders that will commit to shifting to sustainable practices towards the realisation of a more sustainable future.

skills and competencies that should be taught in the curricula of business schools. The pressure is heightened by the inclusion of employment statistics on national rankings (Doherty et al., 2015).

Prospective students: Like current students, Doherty et al. (2015) argue that prospective students can generate normative isomorphic pressures that can cause business schools to include RME in their curriculum. This normative isomorphic pressure relates to what is widely considered a moral duty (Suchman, 1995) or an appropriate course of action (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008), and it is entrenched in professionalism (Kent et al., 2014). However, with time, prospective students' influence may become mainstreamed and consequently progress into pragmatic pressures to conform, especially for those institutions that initially failed to realise its importance.

Rasche et al. (2020) reported that an online survey by PRME in the year 2016, revealed that 79% out of the 1800 student participants agreed/strongly agreed that business schools need to educate students in business ethics or associated areas. 68% called for combined incorporation of sustainability and ethics in the curriculum. Hence the normative pressure for business schools to effect appropriate changes in response or risk losing the market share of students within this category to other institutions that can help cater to their needs, with a possible knock-on their perceived societal legitimacy. Beddewela et al.'s (2017) study found that over 70% of the students they surveyed considered universities' inclusion of ERS (including resilience) related teaching into degree courses when choosing where to study. Two-thirds of the students surveyed said they would be happy to go for a £1000 lower starting salary average of £20,000 for a graduate job in a firm with a strong focus on environmental protection and social responsibility. This indicates that students can, indeed drive RME advancement in institutions.

A survey by Cone Communication in the year 2016 is another one cited by Rasche et al. (2020). They found that 64% millennials would not be willing to work with firms that are not committed to fostering CSR values, with 88% associating jobs with positive societal impact dimension with greater levels of fulfilment. These increased pressures on business schools by students to develop RME-related curricula extends to related social enterprise activities such as Enactus[19]. Working with universities across the globe, Enactus is committed to supporting students that are keen to take entrepreneurial actions in order to have a positive impact on others. In the UK context, a session titled "Enactus Showcase" was dedicated to encouraging the Northumbria University Enactus team to share their social entrepreneurial action at the 2017 PRME UK and Ireland Annual Chapter Conference[20].

2.5.2.2 External Enablers for institutionalising RME in UK business schools

External initiatives and League tables: There are a few past and current external initiatives (PRME, ESD, GRLI, ABIS, WBSCSB, 50+20 agenda, the SDGs) and league tables (Beyond Grey Pinstripes, People & Planet University League, Green Gown Awards) that may encourage business schools with embedding RME. A short description of these initiatives is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Initiatives that may Influence the Institutionalisation of RME in UK Business Schools

Year	Initiatives	Description
1993	Net Impact	Founded as Students for Responsible Business, it is concerned with driving transformational change in the workplace and across the globe.
1998	Beyond Grey Pinstripes	A collaborative effort between the Aspen Institute and the World Resources Institute, concerned with business school rankings.
2001	The Academy of Business in Society (ABIS)	Formerly EABIS, ABIS was launched in 2002 with the support of 11 key business schools in Europe in collaboration with five leading multinational firms. It is based on a shared belief that sustainable development (SD) and global-related challenges require new management skills, mindsets, and capabilities.
2004	Global Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI)	Founded with the support of the UN and European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), GRLI focuses on developing future responsible leaders across the globe.
2004	Green Gown Awards	An initiative that recognises the exceptional sustainability schemes undertaken by universities and colleges, and best sustainability practices within the higher education sector. It is overseen by EAUC -Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges
2005-2014	Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)	A UN-backed initiative that aimed to create a world where all can benefit from good quality education, learning the values, behaviours, and lifestyles necessary for the positive transformation of the society towards a sustainable future.
2007	People & Planet University League	Formerly Green League, People & Planet University League claims to be the most comprehensive, independent league table that ranks universities' environmental and ethical performance annually. It is compiled by the UK's largest student activist network - People & Planet.
2007	Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)	Developed by an international task force of sixty Deans, working with UNGC, EABIS, GRLI, EFMD, AACSB, Net Impact, and the Aspen Institute. PRME claims to be a framework for continuous, systemic change in

[19] For more details visit. https://enactus.org/

[20] Details available at: https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/files/advancement/draft-prme-2017 conference.pdf?la=en&modified=20170602091408&hash=A5051FB862EAD260AE8371B6129622C96B49CB22

		management institutions across the globe and is committed to helping realise the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) via RME.
2010	World Business School Council for Sustainable Business (WBSCSB)	WBSCSB is a sustainability initiative platform that allows for business schools to significantly contribute towards ensuring that businesses become sustainable through education, research, and partnership.
2011	50+20 Agenda	A collaborative effort of three organisations (WBSCSB, PRME, and GRLI) that aims to transform management education to become a force for good.
2015-2030	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Officially known as Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of a set of 17 global goals with 169 targets.

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from Gitsham, 2011).

Of all the initiatives, PRME will be the focus of our in-depth discussion later in this chapter because like the 1990 Talloires Declaration[21], PRME is the very first formal partnership between management-related institutions (worldwide) and the United Nations (Win, 2012). Most importantly, the fact that so many were involved in its formation, and that it is built on previous initiatives is another reason for the in-depth discussion around it. PRME is committed to supporting business schools (worldwide) to transform their education offerings through the implementation and institutionalisation of RME. That is, make RME the norm in these schools, and more recently (between late 2015 and early 2016) help them to promote the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) as part of the agenda2030 for sustainable development[22]. That way, they can develop future responsible leaders and professionals, who will be committed to positively influence business and society and facilitate the achievement of a sustainable future wherever they go.

PRME's mission is to inspire and champion RME, research, and thought leadership on a global scale (UNPRME, 2017a), with an updated vision 2030, to realise the sustainable development goals (SDGs) via responsible management education (RME). Arguably, schools looking to institutionalise RME can look to PRME for support due to its capacity to act as: a conduit for debate and discussion; a framework for encouraging gradual and systemic change; a communication tool to its current/prospective signatories; and a means of assessing institutions' progress in efforts to embed RME (Burchell et al., 2014). The last point indeed suggests that

[21] The first official statement made by university presidents, chancellors, and rectors of a commitment to environmental sustainability in higher education (http://ulsf.org/talloires-declaration/).
[22] Click the link for more details https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

PRME is a legitimisation tool because it validates and communicates the values that institutions have already installed (Beddewela et al., 2017).

2.5.2.3 External Barriers for institutionalising RME in UK business schools

Rasche and Gilbert (2015) identify four conditions that may cause business schools to decouple the public statements that showcase their commitment to embedding RME and their internal actions, which can then act as a barrier to its institutionalisation. Decoupling means the public promotion of RME without the much-needed action backing the commitment to make the rhetoric a reality (Hayes et al., 2017). Figure 3 below represents these four conditions/factors.

Four Conditions for the Decoupling of RME in Business Schools			
1 When faced with resource stringency (Young & Nagpal, 2013)	**2** When facing overt or covert resistance to change (Giacalone, 2007)	**3** When under pressure for competing institutional pressures (Gentile & Samuelson, 2005)	**4** When they perceive institutional demands as ambiguous and therefore think that the symbolic adoption of RME will remain undiscovered (Beddewela et al., 2017).

Figure 3: Four conditions under which business schools may decouple the commitment to implement RME from their formal structures.

Source: Adapted from Rasche and Gilbert (2015)

While the first two conditions are internally driven and relate to features that describe some business schools, the last two, in contrast, are external to business schools and relate to the characteristics of the institutional field wherein schools are embedded (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). The authors do not claim that the decoupling of RME will always occur under the above conditions, but they, however, argue that much will depend on how a business school frames RME in its organisational context. The decoupling concept takes us to the discussion of one of the external barriers for RME implementation in UK business schools - accreditations. A business school arguably could adopt RME to gain a desired accreditation only to decouple it once that objective is achieved as discussed below.

Accreditations: While accreditation bodies can drive business schools to integrate RME contents and activities according to their standards, they can also become a barrier to RME implementation. For instance, the way to achieve the ethics-related content that AACSB requires is not explicit. So, some business schools might think their activities reflect RME actions when that is far from being the case (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). The flexibility it offers to institutions in terms of curriculum development could undermine RME advancement in some schools should they adopt approaches that are both limited in scope and scale (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

Drawing on institutional theory, the requirements of accrediting bodies can occasionally conflict with the internal needs of a firm which can result in the decoupling of formal structures from the day-to-day routines of an organisation (see Oliver, 1991; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Decoupling or loose coupling as will be discussed in section 4.2.2 is a concept that describes when a firm superficially abides by institutional pressures and adopt new structures without essentially implementing the practices that are associated with those (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008). It is "the gap between [a] legitimated model and its immediate enactment" (Meyer et al., 2005, p. 8). Thus, it can encourage dissociation between the commitment to implement RME and the actual actions required to make that happen in business schools (Beddewela et al., 2017). Owing to decoupling, the formal structures adopted by organisations can become mere symbolic functions, especially when there are multiple institutional pressures within a field (Ruef and Scott, 1998). Firms may respond to these institutional pressures through the selective substantive implementation of specific demands, but at the same time decouple the structural effects of other requirements (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

Discipline-specific professional bodies: These institutions often oversee the content of HEIs' curricula and, therefore, can influence the ability to execute new areas like the inclusion of RME content (Doherty et al., 2015). For instance, in the case of ACCA (Association of Certified Chartered Accountants), Warin and Beddewela (2016) point out that ethics is central to the accredited qualification that it offers to professionals. The authors also suggest that schools whose curriculum is governed by a professional body may lack the autonomy to embed ethics, sustainability, and responsibility related topics. Even where autonomy is not an issue, and there is a call for faculty to deliberate on which subjects/topics to include or exclude from the curriculum, RME-related contents risk being excluded due to a lack of the critical mass needed to get it through in such instance. In this context, the critical mass means an adequate number of educators that will favour its inclusion, voting, where required, against its exclusion from the curriculum in some schools (Windsor, 2002).

League tables: While existing league tables can drive the implementation of RME in business schools, they equally can become a barrier to its institutionalisation. This viewpoint aligns with Jones (2014), who acknowledges the usefulness of sustainability league tables, but questions if they provide an accurate picture of how sustainable and responsible business schools are. Some schools will indeed adopt RME related initiative(s) to externally appear compliant and thus rank well in relevant league tables, yet the initiative will only be serving a mere symbolic function internally (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

Previous studies suggest that organisations can create positive outward perceptions (see MacLean and Behnam, 2010), and gain legitimacy by symbolically adopting formal structures without altering their internal practices (see Westphal et al., 1997; Edelman et al., 1991). These studies in Rasche and Gilbert's (2015) view substantiates Meyer and Rowan's (1977) claim that external regulatory bodies may be willing to grant organisations legitimacy if they respond to their demands, even if the responses are symbolic and lack tangible and visible action. A case of the rhetoric not matching the reality.

Rankings undoubtedly play crucial roles in business schools' staff recruitment, policymaking, and admission of students, and even influence the decisions of their private and public donors (Morgeson and Nahgang, 2008). Their reputational effects are significant, as many often see them as an acceptable signal of quality and positional status (Wedlin, 2007). Thus, "schools may strategically invest in activities to align themselves with ranking criteria while trying to decouple the structural effects of responsible management education, whose adoption would generate comparatively lower reputational effects" (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015, p. 246).

Consistent with Espeland and Sauder (2007), a business school's reaction to some of these rankings (e.g. The Financial Times, People and Planet, or the Green Gown Awards) may depend on the reach of the ranking (i.e. dissemination), and its perceived credibility. Speaking of credibility and reach, Di Meglio (2012) said the Aspen Institute's Beyond Grey Pinstripes ranking was suspended because some leading business schools pulled out of the initiative. This is despite the fact that the initiative aimed at supporting schools to integrate social and environmental contents in the fabric of their MBA programs (Laasch, 2001). However, Cornuel and Hommel (2015) warn that playing the ranking game can be detrimental to the implementation of the RME agenda in business schools. Furthermore, it requires investment (Corley and Gioia, 2000), especially the areas highlighted by the underlying accreditation criteria (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015), which then could limit or stop the investment of resources in other essential areas such as the implementation of RME in a school's core curriculum and practices.

The Research Excellence Framework: As earlier mentioned in the internal factors, the REF like other benchmarking or league table type initiatives does influence the practices of UK business schools (Warin and Beddewela, 2016). It was found to be a barrier to the implementation of the RME agenda in Doherty et al.'s (2015) study. Here, a longitudinal study by the authors attempted to gain a greater understanding of the pressures and barriers for embedding RME within six UK business and management schools. They surprisingly identified the REF, amongst other factors, as a key institutional barrier to embedding RME.

Although other factors[23] were identified, only REF-referenced barriers are presented in Table 6, which further justifies the current study. The over-prioritization of REF meant that academics had no time, resources, or the support to develop the RME curriculum; they treated it as a lower priority. One of the key informants (H) even reported that the REF was driving the performance management of academics at the time, and argued that until that changes, RME would not be embedded - for people will continue to work in small silos purely focused on research.

In contrast, informant G offered a more optimistic view suggesting that the introduction of impact case studies in the REF will to some extent reorient academics into considering the social and environmental impacts of their research on external stakeholders (e.g. communities).

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[23] ***External factors*** (Accreditation bodies, Market drivers, Available external collaborators, Institutional initiatives, Research Excellence Framework), ***Organisational factors*** (Structure, Leadership, Performance measurement criteria, Culture, Supporting infrastructure), ***Resource factors*** (Available expertise, Available materials, Available facilities) and ***Individual/personal factors*** (Risks/reactions, Time pressures, Commitment, Staff development, Reward/incentives, Student responsiveness).

Table 6: REF Associated Barriers to RME Development in Six UK Business and Management Schools

External Factors	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Research excellence framework (REF)					x	x
Case 5 reported the REF as having a negative influence because academics only focus on themselves and their research and are not prepared to invest time in supporting or developing new RME programmes. Difficult to get a paper (e.g. related to marketing) accepted in higher-ranked journals until recently. Similarly, Case 6 noted that the sole focus on the REF meant that teaching and learning were neglected.						
Accreditation bodies					x	
Case 5 reported that accrediting bodies, executive programme clients and the REF are negatives for academics solely focused on themselves and their research; they are not ready to put in the time to develop or support new programmes.						
Organisational Factors	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Structures					x	
Case 5 claimed that the REF was driving their complete focus as an institution.						
Performance measurement criteria					x	
Case 5 saw no incentive to develop their curriculum since the above was based on REF criteria of publications and not on curriculum impact.						
Supporting Infrastructure					x	x
Cases 5 and 6 reported very minimal support at curriculum level - most of the support was primarily focused on REF outputs.						
Individual/personal factors	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6
Time pressures			x	x	x	x
Cases 3, 4, 5 and 6 claimed that the REF and grant income was heavily being prioritised, which translated into time constraints for RME development.						
Staff development	x				x	x
Cases 1, 5 and 6 reported that all resources for the above were at the time targeted at REF-related activity and barely any for RME development. Case 5 also claimed that a few staff with interest/expertise in RME were self-taught. Case 6 lost some staff within the RME field to European business schools that prioritise RME.						
Reward/incentives			x	x	x	x
Cases 3, 4, 5 and 6 implied that there was no reward or incentive for developing the RME curriculum, rather REF at the time was the primary reward mechanism.						

Source: Compiled by Author (Adapted from Doherty et al., 2015)

The difficulty experienced in getting a paper published in high-ranked journals in the marketing department as reported by Case 5 (in the table above) may partly explain the 10% (approx.) reduction in the number of outputs submitted in REF2014 compared to submissions received in RAE2008. Despite the reduction, the outputs were of higher quality with 70% recognised (in terms of originality, significance, and rigour) as internationally excellent or world leading. There was a reported scarcity of marketing related impact case studies submitted, with only a few that attempted to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This finding was worrisome for the impact assessors given that the marketing discipline is largely practice-based. (see Main Panel C summary report under the marketing sub-field, p. 63).

Doherty et al. (2015) concluded that the REF at the time of their study was a priority, which caused individuals to treat RME curriculum development as a lower priority. However, they were optimistic for a change. In their words:

> *"a focus on RME should provide business schools with the opportunity to build their impact case studies across a wider range of impact metrics, including economic, environmental, societal and cultural impact. It will allow research groups to strengthen this element of their research profile and improve their reputation management" (p. 56).*

Sharland et al. (2013) suggest that some faculty members with interdisciplinary research interests may potentially encounter pressures and expectations to publish within their disciplines, hindering them from giving any consideration to RME specific issues. Likewise, staff who spend considerable time developing RME modules or establishing RME focused research groups may be sacrificing their ability to advance their career through the research agenda (REF) in HEIs (Warin and Beddewela, 2016; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that a chapter (3) will be dedicated to the critical exploration of the REF to enable a further understanding of its main characteristics, owing to it having been identified as one of the external barriers to RME implementation in this section via Doherty et al.'s (2015) study. The rationale for the current study's focus on the REF in terms of its possible influence on RME implementation is covered in chapter 1. RME and the REF are the two main strands of the current study, which makes it necessary for each to be comprehensively unpacked as is being done for RME in this chapter.

Now, having looked at some of the drivers, enablers, and barriers for institutionalising RME within UK business schools, the next section will discuss the PRME initiative (in the context of UK business schools) in detail for the reasons stated earlier in section 2.5.2.2.

2.6 The PRME initiative

Manuel Escudero, the former head of PRME, described PRME in an interview held on the 15th of June 2009 in New York (USA) as a global call for business and management institutions to update/revise their curricular, research and teaching methods, to the realities and social demands/challenges of the 21st century. He notes that PRME recognises the strong impact that business schools can create by institutionalising

RME to become a norm across their curriculum, practices (teaching and research) and operations (see Alcaraz and Thiruvattal, 2010).

According to Ban Ki-moon (2008) the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations, with nine years service, "the Principles for Responsible Management Education can take the case for universal values and business schools into classrooms on every continent." PRME was published to develop future responsible leaders through RME and more recently help promote the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a collection of 17 global goals (underpinned by 169 targets) that provides a framework for realising a sustainable future for both current and future generations, leaving no one behind (Wersun, 2017). The task to develop responsible leaders has never been more important since bold leadership, and innovative thinking are crucial if the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved. Therefore, business and management related HEIs have a significant role to play towards ensuring that the global Goals are communicated effectively to the next generation of executives, managers, politicians, and policymakers. Arguably, students who understand the values of ethics, responsibility, and sustainability are more likely to become future effective change agents, whose work can advance the common good (Guterres, 2017).

For some authors, PRME offers schools the opportunity to distinguish their program offerings in a highly competitive environment (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). Beyond that though, PRME arguably has a real transformational change potential (Buono et al., 2015; Godemann et al., 2011), and has effectively improved HEIs engagement with sustainability (Waddock et al., 2010). This is a clear contrast to its antecedents that allegedly have failed to maintain a strong influence on the activities of HEIs and colleges, albeit they may continue to attract new signatories (Rasche et al., 2020; Grindsted, 2011; Bekessy et al., 2007; Wright, 2003, 2002; McIntosh et al., 2001).

The PRME initiative provides three-fold benefits to participating institutions:

1. It serves as a framework for integrating ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability into their core curricular, research and learning approaches.
2. It provides participating institutions with recognition for promoting corporate sustainability.

3. It gives them access to a plethora of relevant resources from global learning communities that are committed to a similar cause (Griffith Business School, 2012).

PRME's building blocks are its six guiding principles outlined in Table 7. All six of them technically reflect the three core activities of business and management schools, including education, research, and community engagement (Win, 2012).

Table 7: Six Principles of the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education

Principles	Description	
1	Purpose: We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.	Education
2	Values: We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.	
3	Method: We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes, and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.	
4	Research: We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding of the roles, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental, and economic value.	Research
5	Partnership: We will interact with managers of corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.	Community Engagement
6	Dialogue: We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global responsibility and sustainability.	

Source: Adapted from UNPRME (2017)

It is important to reiterate that the outlined six principles of PRME were adapted and utilised as an interpretative framework in this study; it enabled the researcher to make sense of some aspects of the findings. In-depth information around the principles is covered in sections 4.3, including the interpretation rendered in chapter 6. That said, participation in PRME is strictly voluntary. Hence many believe the initiative seeks to instigate change using mostly soft governance and self-regulation, promoting academic freedom (Hayes et al., 2017; Burchell et al., 2015; Win, 2012). Some regulators/accreditors seem to push it forward as already pointed out in section 2.5.2.1. Signatories are encouraged to transform their pedagogy slowly but progressively, aligning research, curricular and organisation strategies with acceptable global values (e.g. those underpinning the UNGC) that support an inclusive and sustainable global economy (UNPRME, 2017b).

All signatories are required to comply with the SIP policy, which requires them to include the following in their Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports:

1. A detailed description of practical actions taken to implement and embed one or more of the six principles since becoming a signatory or since the last submission of SIP (i.e. in the past 24 months).
2. The extent to which the previously outlined goals were met, including both quantitative and qualitative evaluative results (i.e. an assessment of outcomes).
3. An outline of specific primary objectives for the next cycle (24 months) concerning the implementation of one or more (or all) of the six principles.

At the minimum, all signatories are expected to commit to implementing one or more of these six principles and submit their progress reports (known as Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports) biannually. The SIP reports are intended for signatories to communicate progress attained in their efforts to implement the six principles with their respective stakeholders and other signatories, because of their usefulness in promoting a learning community (UNPRME, 2012) and facilitating stakeholder dialogue (Hayes et al., 2017). Failing to meet the SIP deadline leads to the relegation of a signatory from an "active" to a "non-communicating" status. In such an instance, signatories are at the risk of being delisted but can regain an "active" status by submitting the overdue SIP report. However, those listed as non-communicating signatories for more than one year are subsequently delisted in June and December, yearly. They will be allowed to re-join PRME but must reapply and submit a new SIP report (UNPRME, 2017d).

Some collective activities aimed at supporting the implementation of PRME in individual institutions are organised through PRME's Working Groups[24], Regional Chapters[25] (established – 10, and emerging - 4) and PRME Champions[26] (see Hayes et al., 2017). PRME recommends that signatories follow what it refers to as a transformational model for the implementation of PRME which consists of 8 steps (including top-down and bottom-up commitment, long-term planning, resources,

[24] https://www.unprme.org/prme-working-groups
[25] https://www.unprme.org/prme-chapters
[26] https://www.unprme.org/prme-champions

implementation, assessing impact, reporting and communicating and strategy). The steps are briefly discussed in Figure 4 below.

1. Top-down Commitment	•Ensure the commitment of leadership towards the implementation and mainstreaming of PRME in their institution.
2. Bottom-up Commitment	•Leaders to support and incentivize faculty and staff to implement PRME via teaching, research and engagement.
3. Long-Term Planning	•Signatories to develop a plan for the implementation of PRME over a given period
4. Resources	•Leaders to secure and provide necessary resources, both in human and budgetary terms.
5. Implementation	•Signatories to act in line with the long-term plan and given resources
6. Assessing impact	•Signatories to measure impacts achieved and progress towards goals, qualitatively and/or quantitatively
7. Reporting & Communicating	•Signatories to share progress achieved and engage with relevant stakeholders as part of continuous improvement
8. Strategy	•Make PRME values an important, explicit, and effective part of the organisational strategy

Figure 4. Eight Steps for the Implementation of PRME

Source: Compiled by Author (Adapted from Alcaraz et al., 2016)

2.6.1 The Population of the Global PRME Community

Concerning PRME's population, its global community has grown from just consisting of business and management-related institutions to now including universities, colleges, research centres/institutes, foundations, educational groups, and a host of other public and private institutions (UN PRME, 2017d). The current global population at the time of writing (March 2020) sits at 838 (see Figure 5 below), which probably should have been more because as of December 2016 a total of 75 signatories had been delisted for failing to comply with the mandatory SIP reporting system first rolled out in the year 2013. The actual reason(s) for non-compliance were not stated. However, one could assume it was due to admin[27] issues or a symbolic adoption of PRME, as ample time is given before a signatory is delisted, for instance. An additional 27 and 12 signatories were delisted for the same reason in the year 2017 and 2018,

[27] Beddewela et al. (2017) identified that while the faculty in their study were enthusiastic about developing RME curriculum, they felt the administrative system they had in place for the adoption and institutionalisation of curriculum-related changes were not supportive of associated effort. Then again, curriculum development and the compilation of progress report are two different things but within the admin spectrum.

respectively. These are not inclusive of the few (11 in the year 2015, and 2 in the year 2017) who opted to withdraw from the initiative.

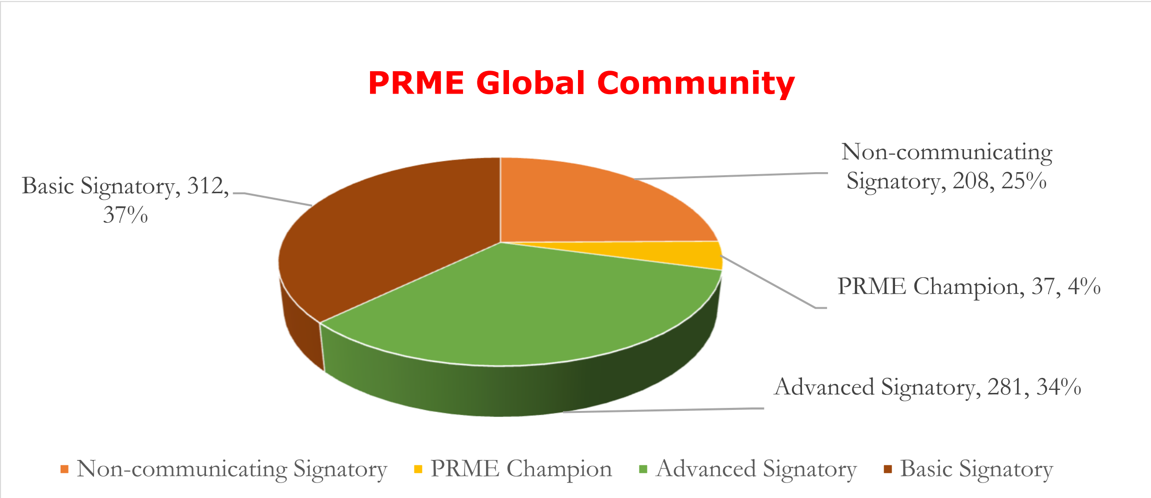

Figure 5: Global population of PRME Community

Source: Author (based on http://www.unprme.org/participants/index.php, accessed March 07, 2020).

A few more have since withdrawn (voluntarily) and been delisted from the initiative for failing to comply with the SIP reporting system. The reason(s) for withdrawals remain unknown, at least it is not explicitly stated by PRME. Studies around this may provide useful insight for PRME, and current and prospective signatories.

Figure 5 (above) also shows that PRME offers different engagement opportunities for institutions. Based on recommendations offered during a strategic review of the initiative by both the PRME Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee in 2016, the PRME Secretariat developed and implemented a model of engagement opportunities for participating institutions, including a way of ensuring that the initiative has a more secure stream of funding. PRME has three primary engagement levels, including PRME Champion, Advanced Signatory and Basic Signatory.

PRME Champions are required to take on advanced tasks and game-changing projects targeted at addressing identified systemic challenges encountered by the global PRME community. Additionally, they are committed to helping proffer practical solutions towards tackling issues identified by the parent organisation, the United Nations as well as the UN Global Compact – with these two bodies actually part of the task force that developed PRME in the year 2007. The leadership group was created out of the need to provide signatories with guidance, a framework, and a roadmap of how to achieve a broad scale implementation of RME, which as of the year 2012 was lacking. No institution at the time had attained that level of success; hence the creation of the leadership group at the Rio Declaration of the 2012 PRME Global Forum. The formal inception of the group – leaders in the space of responsible management education (PRME Champions) - came into effect in 2016-2017.

Their mission is to work collaboratively, serve the global PRME community and contribute to the broader United Nations goals and issues. The benefits associated with being a PRME Champion include being recognised as a thought (and/or action) leader, collaboration with leading HEIs and global compact companies, recognition as a PRME ambassador, full access to a plethora of online resources, eligibility to serve on PRME's advisory committee and receive special access for students (internship and volunteering opportunities with PRME secretariat and global compact). The authorised use of the PRME logo within the prescribed policy guideline is another benefit.

Advanced signatories are also permitted to use the PRME logo (as of the time of writing). They and the PRME Champions are required to comply with the SIP policy and contribute to the annual service fee that allows them access to a plethora of online resources, albeit the latter is more extensive for the PRME Champions. They equally can take on a leadership responsibility within the initiative.

Basic signatories, in contrast, are not granted access to the same resources as they are yet to contribute to the annual service fee; they only have access to basic engagement opportunities. Nonetheless, they are equally required to comply with the SIP policy and are encouraged (not required) to contribute to the annual service fee to make the most of what the initiative has on offer (UNPRME, 2017e). The apparent similarity across the three engagement levels is the requirement to comply with the SIP reporting policy. An overview of the UK PRME community is presented below.

2.6.2 The UK PRME Community

With a total of 79 signatories (see Figure 6 below), the UK PRME community accounts for approximately 10% of the global PRME community (809 signatories from 80+ countries): advanced signatories account for 48% (38 signatories), basic signatories - 37% (29), PRME Champions – 4% (3), and non-communicating signatories – 11% (9).

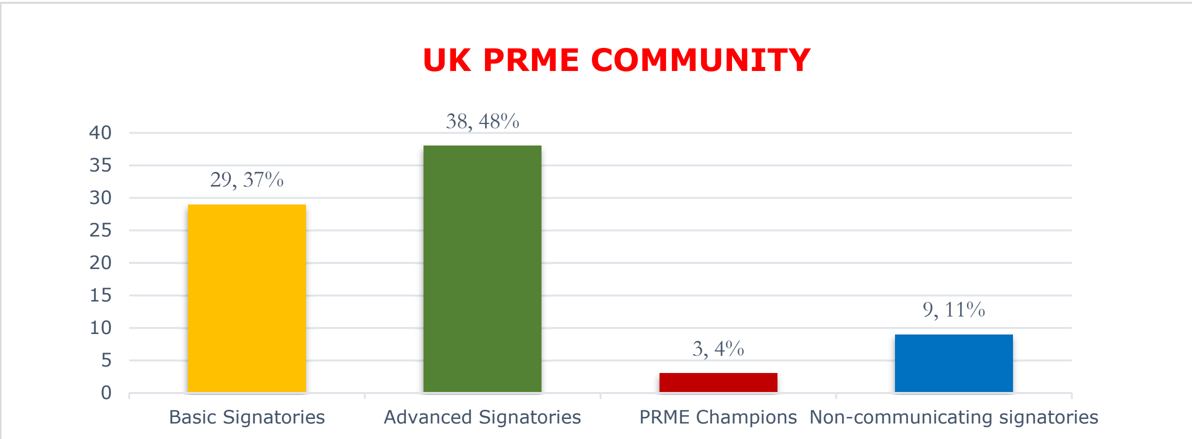

Figure 6. Chart showing the UK PRME Community.

Source: Compiled by Author (based on http://www.unprme.org/participants/index.php, accessed March 2020).

Figure 6 suggests that the advanced signatory status is more attractive to UK business schools possibly because of the associated benefits, including the use of the PRME logo and the access to a plethora of relevant resources and the opportunity to be part of the leadership team within the initiative. It also suggests that the UK has fewer PRME Champions, which leaves more signatories stuck with the advanced signatory level without quite yet qualifying for the Champion level. The basic signatory is the second most attractive engagement level for UK business schools, possibly due to no requirement to pay an annual service fee; however, they cannot use the logo, be part of the leadership team or access useful online resources provided by PRME. The fact that engagement level with the least population is PRME Champions, is not peculiar to the UK context as only a few institutions (signatories) from the countries where PRME has a presence are part of this cohort.

Figure 7 shows the popularity/growth rate of the PRME initiative within higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. It traces the growth of PRME since its inception in 2007 to date (time of writing – March 2020). The blue line in Figure 7 below shows the total yearly population of the UK PRME community, whereas the green line depicts the total number of UK HEIs signing up to join PRME each year.

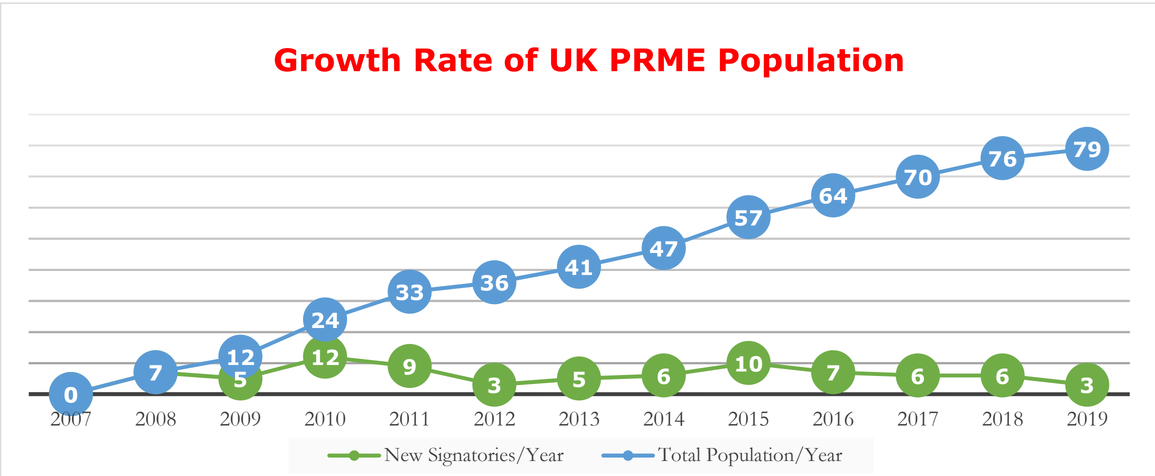

Figure 7: Chart showing the yearly popularity of PRME within UK HEIs and its growth rate[28].

Source: Compiled by Author (based on http://www.unprme.org/participants/index.php, accessed March 2020).

The community welcomed the highest number of new signatories in the year 2010 (12), followed by the year 2015 with a total number of 10 additions to the community. One possible explanation for the population growth in the year 2015 could be the new agenda for the PRME initiative - to promote and contribute towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs[29]). It is an added responsibility to the original agenda of the initiative, which is to globally transform

[28] The blue line does not consider those who decided to withdraw voluntarily and those delisted for not complying with the SIP reporting policy. So, the total population if both were added should have been more.

[29] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs

management education, research and taught leadership towards the development of future responsible leaders and professionals. As previously mentioned, some institutions have been delisted for failing to comply with the mandatory reporting system (SIP policy).

In the context of the UK PRME community, a total of 3 institutions were delisted from the initiative from the year 2013 to the year 2017. However, surprisingly, three leading UK HEIs are among the few (13, worldwide) that voluntarily withdrew from the initiative; the reason for this remains unknown as previously mentioned. They include The Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge, London Business School, and more recently, Imperial College London. An overview of the delisted signatories and those that withdrew voluntarily is presented in Table 8 below. Interestingly, two of the three UK business schools that were delisted have since re-joined PRME by fulfilling the SIP requirement, as discussed in section 2.6.1. The reason for that was not stated.

Table 8: Delisted UK PRME Signatories and Voluntary Withdrawals

Institution	Organisation Type	Sign up date to PRME	Year Delisted	Year of Withdrawal	Year Re-joined
University of Gloucestershire School of Business and Management	Business School	2009	2016	x	x
Stirling Management School, University of Stirling	Business School	o	2013	x	2017
Queen Mary School of Business and Management	Business School	o	2013	x	2016
Judge Business School, University of Cambridge	Business School	2012	x	2015	x
London Business School	Business School	2008	x	2015	x
Imperial College	Business School	2015	x	2017	x

Source: Compiled by the Author (based on PRME's archive).

Note that the original signup dates for these two institutions have been replaced by the date they re-joined PRME. Therefore, this information cannot be found in PRME's database (which explains the symbol "o" in Table 8), unlike the other four (3 withdrawals and 1 delisted) whose sign up date is available, albeit they no longer are signatories to PRME. In other words, an institution that chooses to rejoin PRME after being delisted will be doing so as a "new signatory." Symbol "x" in Table 8 stands for not applicable.

Apart from not welcoming any UK signatory in the year (2007) when it launched, the year 2012 saw the lowest number of HEIs from the UK join the PRME community. The figure for the year 2012 (3) is the same for the year 2019, the year is not yet over, and so there is a chance that an additional one or two UK HEIs may join the PRME community before the year ends (at the time of writing). It is quite clear that the UK PRME community's growth rate is neither exponential nor linear (except maybe for the year 2012 to 2015), albeit relatively constant.

2.7 Some criticisms of the PRME Initiative

While PRME is deemed a new wave of change in management education (Forray and Leigh, 2012) and an opportunity to reconceptualise business schools' operations (Nhamo and Nhamo, 2014), it has been criticised for failing to motivate schools to embed sustainability in their curriculum and practice (Sharma and Hart, 2014). Similarly, Win (2012) observed it had no substantial effect on the activities of signatories, with some feeling that the six principles need to be unpacked further (Louw, 2015).

About ambiguity, Rasche and Gilbert (2015) have argued that schools are likely to adopt formal structures such as RME only symbolically if they feel the institutional demands that they are facing are ambiguous. The broader and more ambiguous a principle is, the higher the chance that schools will go on to construct their meaning of compliance, ensuring it only has a negligible effect on the status quo within their institution (see Edelman, 1992). Similarly, George et al. (2006) have asserted that the framing of institutional demands through ambiguous language will leave adopters with no clear guidance on how to implement these principles, plus their interpretation of them will vary greatly.

However, the flexibility for Rasche and Gilbert (2015), might be put to good use by an organisation if they adapt the implementation processes of PRME to suit their context. However, others may see it as an opportunity to decouple commitments from internal actions. Louw's (2015) paper argued that the main issue with PRME is the way the initiative has represented its six principles as being value-free, especially since they are yet to be systematically scrutinised through a Critical Management Education (CME) lens. The author referring to PRME's principle 5 suggests that PRME positions business schools almost like institutions that solely exist to provide support services to big business corporations. The very same people that caused the global financial crisis (Hayes et al., 2017).

Cornuel and Hommel (2015) speak of business schools seeming slow to adopt RME. However, given the principles of PRME and the total number of business schools worldwide (about 13,000), Nhamo and Nhamo (2014) state that *"one might be biased in expecting a bit more uptake"* (p. 94). Hayes et al. (2017) highlight, however, that PRME has gained considerable popularity and is beginning to influence business schools' actions so much so that prominent management journals like the Journal of Management Education have dedicated space to looking at its implementation (see Forray and Leigh, 2012). Furthermore, the International Journal of Management Education more recently published a Special Issue[30] that coincided with PRME's 10th anniversary.

Solitander et al. (2012), on the other hand, questions if the implementation of PRME for most business and management institutions will transcend beyond just adding "responsibility" to already existing curricula and structure[31]. Citing Sterling (2004), the authors suggest that business schools will be failing to engage in deeper learning if the answer to the posed question is in reality No. Similar to Disterheft et al. (2015) who questioned if the increased implementation of Environmental Management System (EMS) by schools translates into sustainable campuses, one can also question if an increased uptake of the PRME initiative means an effective integration of RME within and beyond UK business schools. There are previous studies in the context of similar initiatives that suggest that is not necessarily the case (see Grindsted, 2011; Clarke and Kouri, 2009; Bekessy et al., 2007; Bekessy and Burgman, 2003; Wright, 2003, 2002; Walton et al., 2000; Clugston and Calder, 1999). This suggests that the benefits of PRME are only as good as the institutions adopting it - the potency of the initiative lies "with its facilitative capacity and the ability to enable active faculty

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[30] http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/14728117/15/2/part/PB?sdc=1

[31] This from the institutional theory perspective is in a way similar to the concept of symbolic or ceremonial adoption of an initiative, enabling organisations to seem conformant in order to gain an accreditation and/or legitimacy; only to then decouple that from their formal structures once the desired accreditation is attained (see Rasche and Gilbert, 2005; Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

members in utilising this capacity" (Burchell et al., 2015, p. 01). The posed question is perhaps pertinent and timely given that PRME recently marked its first decade in July 2017 and is in the very early stages of another.

Despite the criticisms, the six principles of PRME was used as an interpretative framework in this study, as earlier mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis. As an initiative, PRME is a global champion that is focused on helping business and management schools worldwide to develop future responsible leaders through the transformation of their management education via its six guiding principles.

2.8 Chapter Summary

Conclusively, this chapter has provided extant literature on the responsible management education agenda generally and more specifically, in the UK business school environment. According to Weybrecht (2017), the RME agenda offers a unique opportunity for management education which business schools should appreciate. It is essential because business schools influence daily global decisions through graduates or research, publications, books, and frameworks developed and written by faculty. By preparing and equipping future responsible leaders through RME, business schools are likely to fill up organisations with individuals who will appreciate the importance of the triple bottom line and its practical application towards achieving a more sustainable world (Weybrecht, 2017).

While PRME's principles are intuitively sensible, those need to be unpacked and read carefully, as they are a comprehensive set of principles that go beyond the curriculum. The institutionalisation of PRME requires that leaders (a) *make sense* of the initiative in their organisational context to craft a vision for how it fits, and (b) *give sense* to the individuals tasked with the responsibility to implement PRME. Additionally, top management needs to be strategic - not to treat RME as a bolt-on agenda, but get it institutionalised in business and management schools and the university at large (Wersun, 2017).

Having presented RME itself, and PRME (including its six principles) as a strategic means of supporting RME implementation in business and management schools worldwide, especially the UK business schools for this study context, the next chapter will focus on relevant literature on the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF). The

REF was found in Doherty et al.'s seminal work to be a barrier to the implementation of Responsible Management Education (RME) in UK business and management schools, hence the rationale for examining it in detail within chapter 3. It will focus on critically exploring the main characteristics of the REF, which is useful for the research project to further understand the influence the REF process might be having on each of the six principles of PRME. That will then enable the modelling of the manner in which the REF may be influencing RME implementation/advancement in UK business schools, with the perceptions of RME-inclined UK business school academics playing a vital role in all of this (as discussed later in this thesis).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of existing literature on the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is a replacement for the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). It presents a historical background of research within UK higher education institutions (HEIs), principally how research is funded and the different tiers of the assessment exercises that were operational in the past. It then goes on to discuss the research assessment system that is currently being used, providing an overview of the first exercise held under this new system, as well as the challenges/criticisms of the system. This is followed by a brief discussion of the recommendations of the Stern report, and the chapter concludes by discussing some of the decisions relating to REF2021 exercise.

The review covers both REF2014 and REF2021. However, REF2014 is the basis for this study and is therefore discussed much more in-depth than REF2021. How some of the impending exercise requirements differ from the REF2014 exercise are also covered, for instance, the decision to allow teaching-related impacts for the REF2021 exercise, which was not the case for the REF2014 exercise. Cotton et al. (2018) remarked that it was explicitly stated that teaching-related impacts or impacts generated through related activities were not permissible. A section is also focused on the discussion of the impact component of the REF.

We will now discuss the funding framework for research within the higher education sector in the UK in the following section.

3.2 Research Funding in the UK Higher Education

Over the past two to three decades, research in higher education institutions has been subject to ever-increasing scrutiny (Geuna and Piolatto, 2016; Murphy and Sage, 2014; Martin, 2011). In the UK, University research is publicly funded through a dual support system.

While the Research Councils fund specific research projects, the four regional Funding Councils HEFCE[32], SFC[33], HEFCW[34], and DEL[35] finance research infrastructures (Hubble, 2015; Goldfinch and Yamamoto, 2012; Martin, 2011; Bekhradnia, 2009; Macilwain, 2009; Hare, 2002).

Pre-1986, all UK universities received research grants as part of their block grant from the University Grants Committee (UGC) based on the total number of their students (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009). The larger the university (i.e. student population), the bigger the research grant received, irrespective of the volume and quality of its research (Newall, 2003). However, this was followed by intense scrutiny of the higher education sector by the government who wanted to secure value from the public funds HEIs received for research (Martin, 2011; Tapper, 2007). Phillimore (1989) described this as the need to evidence the immediate and better use of research outcomes. Significant cuts in public expenditure made university administrators realise that a selectivity process had to be in place if they are to continue to maintain research excellence in UK HEIs (Lee et al., 2013; Goldfinch and Yamamoto, 2012; Hicks, 2012; Martin, 2011; Macilwain, 2009). All that culminated in the decision to establish a national system for the evaluation of research in UK HEIs (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005).

The following section discusses in detail the different research evaluation systems that have been used in the UK higher education sector, including the current system - the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

3.3 From Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE) to Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE). Held in 1986, the RSE facilitated the first approach to selective research funding across university departments in the UK (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005), replacing the '*laissez-faire'* approach of the University Grants Commission – also known as UGC (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009, p. 322). The

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32 The Higher Education Funding Council for England
33 The Scottish Funding Council
34 The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
35 The Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

exercise applied only to existing universities (Moore et al., 2002). It offered these institutions the opportunity to account for public funds received through the identification of performance indicators, which technically was set as the number of publications (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005).

The RSE was established to appraise academic units of assessment (UoA) for research funds to be explicitly channelled into the most research-active departments in each discipline across universities (Cave et al., 1991). It arguably was an attempt to re-work a very general indicator of performance (e.g. opinions, survey findings, or general statistics - mainly derived outside the institution) into a specific performance indicator (PI) (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005, citing Cave et al., 1991). Unlike simple indicators (e.g. numerical figures) which often are absolute, PIs implied a point of reference (e.g. an assessment, or a comparator). They, therefore, were relative, not absolute (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005, citing Cuenin, 1986).

Moore et al. (2002) note that the UGC conducted the 1986 RSE under financial pressure; the process was launched without formal consultation with the higher education sector. Universities were asked to submit the titles (within each of 37 cost centres or subject areas) of no more than five recent publications that demonstrated their best work since 1980, including books/articles or other comparable examples of research achievements (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009; Cave et al., 1991). They also had to complete a four-part questionnaire providing details about their research income and expenditures, the management of their research resources, their measures in place for supporting research activities/individuals, research plans, and priorities, and a profile of each research area (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005; Jones and Sizer, 1990). The submitted outputs were assessed against a four-point scale (i.e. outstanding, above average, average, or below average), and responses to the questionnaire were evaluated against various standards; some of which Phillimore (1989) outlined as follows:

1. Output – based on the quality of their publications.
2. Impact - based on citations
3. Quality - based on Research Council grants, research studentships, awards/honours, committee memberships, journal editorships, and peer judgement (i.e. reputation).

4. Utility - based on external income, patents, licenses, and contract/external staff.

The outcome of the exercise then informed the allocation of future research funding. It is worth pointing out that at the time there was no stigma attached to non-inclusion of university staff members in such a small data set, neither was there any incentive attached to having one's work included in the return (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009).

Nonetheless, the 1986 RSE was criticised widely for being a 'quick and dirty' exercise driven by political pressures on UGC to handover research funding to the Research Councils (Jones and Sizer, 1990). The request for universities to provide information on just five departmental publications was criticised for being inadequate and biased as it was a move that favoured large departments in comparison to their counterparts – small departments (Moore et al., 2002). Other authors questioned the accuracy of the data collection method used, and therefore, concluded that the exercise lacked consistency and anonymity (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009; Bence and Oppenheim, 2005). Even, Tapper (2007) spoke about the 'glaring absurdity' (p. 191) of the different assessment standards that had been used for different subjects. That not only increased the (subjective) powers of the judging panels but might have resulted in the misallocation of research funds (Moore et al., 2002, citing Adams et al., 2000; and Cave et al., 1991).

Authors like Moore et al. (2002) consider the 1986 RSE as more or less a trial run. They opine that research performance indicators that emerged from the exercise were relatively weak and directed at departments, not individuals. Hence, they concluded that the 1986 RSE had no significant effect on research performance. That said, the exercise was perhaps the first attempt by any country to conduct a systematic and comprehensive evaluation of the quality of university research. Thus, Jones and Sizer (1990) were not surprised that many criticised the 1986 RSE. All that, combined with the general lack of clarity and transparency meant that the process inevitably had to change (Gilroy and McNamara, 2009).

The second RSE was held in the year 1989. As with the previous exercise, the assessment process was one of informed peer review and only existing universities at the time could participate (Jones and Sizer, 1990). They were required to provide information on the total number of publications (e.g. journal articles, books, etc.) and other publicly identifiable output based on the total number of full-time academic staff members (from the year 1984 to 1988) in each subject unit. Other information requested included bibliographic details of up to two publications for each full-time member of staff, the number and value of research grants and contracts secured, and the total number of research studentships within the same four-year period (Moore et al., 2002). This time around, there was a total of 152 subject units that institutions could submit to, with 70 peer review panels assessing the submissions, and the results rated on a five-point scale (Harris, 2016); a point scale higher than that of the 1986 RSE. However, Jones and Sizer (1990) pointed out that groups and panels were not given any clear guidance on how to identify/recognise quality; there was a general assumption that academics would know what was expected. The benefits that larger departments enjoyed in the previous exercise was reduced because the 1989 RSE focused on the per staff number of publications, and the two best publications per academic staff member; a clear indication that both the quantity and quality of research mattered (Moore et al., 2002).

The selectivity process has since undergone several refinements mostly aimed at improving the quality of research and allegedly deterring schools from mastering the "game" (Macilwain, 2009). The first was the 1992 RAE (research assessment exercise), which was more thorough and elaborate than both the 1986 and 1989 RSE (Lee et al., 2013; Martin, 2011). Table 9 shows that the number of publications required per academic staff returned increased from two in the 1989 RSE to four in the 1992 RAE, and there were 72 units of assessments (UoA) open to institutions for submissions.

It can also be noted that the funding council changed from being the UFC (University Funding Council) to the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England), and undoubtedly, the exercise was one that was not free of criticisms.

Table 9: Evolution of Research Assessment Processes in the UK

Name	Year	UoAs	No. of outputs assessed	Other assessment measures submitted (weighting)	Period of assessment (years)	Quality ranking	Funding council	Criticisms	Key changes
RSE	1986	37 cost centres	5/cost centre	Description or research achievements, research grants, studentships & new lectureships. External income, fellowships, prizes & other honours. Peer-review judgements of research performance (weighting unspecified)	5	4-point scale (Outstanding, Above average, Average & below average. No reward for below average)	University Grants Committee (UGC)	Lack of reliability, anonymity, & clarity in both objectives & methods (Bence and Oppenheim, 2005; Willmott, 1995; Phillimore, 1989; Smyth and Anderson, 1987). The use of different assessment standards for different subjects (Tapper, 2007).	N/A
	1989	152 subject units	2/person, in addition to a list of publications/output for unit	Numbers of FTE undergraduate & graduate students, research studentships, successful doctoral thesis submissions, research grants & research contracts, report on 'general observations' (weighting unspecified).	4	5-point scale (5, 4, 3, 2, 1. All were rewarded)	University Funding Councils (UFC)	Deliberate misreporting on submissions & no mention of quality where output was perceived to be reliable (University Funding Council, 1989).	Introduction of a scale, publications per individual, formalisation of process. Submission made by all academic staff.
RAE	1992	72 UoAs	Up to 4/person submitted, plus 2 publications & up to 2 other forms. Publication count for each unit	Students & studentships, external research income (weighting unspecified).	3.5, 4 for humanities	5-point scale (5, 4, 3, 2, 1. No money for 1).	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)	Limited use of publications (quality over quantity). Evidence to suggest favouritism, including panellists' schools (Doyle et al., 1996). Accusations of game playing (Goldfinch & Yamamoto, 2012). The exercise favoured old universities, got 91% of research funding in comparison to new ones. Fear of possible bifurcation of research & teaching activities in pre-1992 institutions (Gilroy & McNamara, 2009).	The options for HEIs to select individuals to put forward – credited on the census date. Four outputs per individual. New universities joined the game, but not all staff contracts specified research, thus the introduction of research-active and non-active staff (Gilroy & McNamara, 2009).
	1996	69 UoAs	Up to 4/person, no publication count	The number of students, research income, peer esteem factors, research plans, general observations (weighting unspecified).	4, 6 for humanities & arts	7-point scale (5*, 5, 4, 3a, 3b, 2, 1. No money for 1 & 2).	HEFCE	No funding was awarded to departments that were graded 1 or 2. Statistical evidence that suggests outcome bias (Piercy, 2000; Roberts, 1999).	Elimination of publication count & quality assessment only 4 outputs submitted. Cross-referral to other panels. Assessment criteria published online. Elimination of the ability to present a different submission on applied & basic research.

	2001	69 UoAs	Up to 4/person	Staff information, descriptions of the research environment, strategies, research funding, research students, studentships, research degrees awarded, peer esteem (weighting unspecified).	5 for science, 7 for humanities	7-point scale (6*, 5*, 5, 4, 3a, 3b, 2. No money for 3b & 2).	HEFCE	Perceived gender inequality in staff selection for submissions, only 25% of the 43,000 academics recorded as research-active were women. Panel members accused of not being fully committed (reading a minimum of 10% of outputs) (AUT, 2005; UNIVERSITAS, 2003).	All submissions to be made available (published) online. Research capability funding introduced (Gilroy & McNamara, 2009).
	2008	67 UoAs	Up to 4/person, with certain exceptions	Research quality (min 50%) Peer esteem (min 5%) Research environment (min 5%) (Weighting set by panels). Staff & other information required.	6+ (1 January 2001 to 31 July 2007)	5-point quality profile (4*, 3*, 2*, 1*, Unclassified. No money 2*, 1* & Unclassified)	HEFCE	Funding outcome believed to have not helped low-tier universities, & irritated top universities. Perceived gender inequality (just 28% of eligible female researchers were submitted compared to 45% of male counterparts). Government interference (Gilroy & McNamara, 2009; Macilwain, 2009).	Weightings given to measures. Explicit criteria (i.e. research outputs, research environment and esteem indicators). Transparency increased.
REF	2014	36 UoAs	Up to 4/person	Research output quality (65%) Environment (15%) Impact (20%). Some metrics, e.g. citations.	5, Impact since January 1993	5-point overall excellence profile ((4*, 3*, 2*, 1*, Unclassified. No money for 2*, 1* & Unclassified)	HEFCE	Staff poaching, gaming, prioritisation of research over teaching, controlling, selective, resource-intensive & political; concerns about the impact element. Perceived gender inequality (51% of women were selected compared to 67% of men) (Davies et al., 2019; Cotton et al., 2018; Kalfa et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2016; Harris, 2016; Yarrow, 2016; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Macdonald & Kam, 2011; Gilroy & McNamara, 2009).	Impact measure introduced.

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from Technopolis group, 2015; Goldfinch and Yamamoto, 2012).

Supported by an existing dataset, Taylor (1994) measured the research performance of UK business and management studies (UoA 46) in the 1992 RAE. The scope did not include the 1986 and 1989 RSE because neither assessment exercises was underpinned by a comprehensive and accurate quantitative dataset, so they were therefore not subjected to rigorous statistical analysis (see Johnes et al., 1993; Johnes and Taylor, 1990). The study principally found that about 80% of the variation in the research rating awarded to business and management studies was accurately predicted by a regression model, which had a small number of regressors (including department size, papers in refereed academic journals, number of research students and research income). Of the 85 business and management departments in the UK higher education sector that took part in the exercise, 7 were awarded a 5-point research quality rating; 5 with, 4-point; 21 with, 3-point; 21 with, 2-point; and 31 with, 1-point research quality ratings. The quality ratings are described in Table 10.

Table 10: Outcome (Basic Rating) of the 1992 RAE for Business and Management Studies (UOA 46)

Rating Scale	Description	Number of Departments
5	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of international excellence in some subareas of activity and attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all others	7
4	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all subareas of activity, possibly showing some evidence of international excellence, or to international level in some and at least national level in a majority.	5
3	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in most of the subareas of activity, or international level in some.	21
2	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in up to half of the subareas of activity.	21
1	Research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in none, or virtually none, of the subareas of activity.	31

Source: REF results (2014)

Some scholars undoubtedly believe that early RAEs helped UK HEIs develop tactical methods for carrying out research - where, when and how they publish, improving the overall quality of their research (Pettigrew, 2011; Adams and Gurney, 2010; Macilwain, 2009; Moed, 2008; Chatterji and Seaman, 2007). Cooper (2011) believes that the RAE profoundly inspired business school researchers to publish their research outputs in top international journals, which enhanced their research portfolio while offering them greater career mobility. However, Martin (2011) and Geuna and Martin (2003) believe that the RAEs were subject to diminishing returns, with pernicious effects on the lives of academics (Morley, 2003; Harley, 2002; Henkel, 1997; Morley and Walsh, 1995). These might have differed in other fields.

The REF and RAE are similar by way of assessing research excellence in UK HEIs (Hubble, 2015; Bishop, 2013; Curry, 2013; Martin, 2011; Bekhradnia, 2009; Grant et al., 2009). Altogether, they are a resource allocation mechanism that rewards higher-performers and punishes lower-performers; a mechanism for assessing research quality; and fundamentally a probable mechanism for the facilitation of culture change for the entire academic community within the UK higher education system (Pettigrew, 2011). However, the introduction of, and emphasis on, the need to demonstrate socio-economic 'impact' is the main difference between the two (Geuna and Piolatto, 2016). Smith et al. (2011, citing Henkel, 2000) had however argued that this "impact" had been implicit in the UK research assessment right from the White Paper *Realising Our Potential* when the government science policy stressed the relevance of impact for UK scientific research. This includes the HEFCE's guide for the 1996 RAE where it was stated that HEIs submissions should include collaborations between institutional strategies and the priorities of government Foresight[36]. Ibid (2011), however, further noted that the proffered advice failed to yield any significant effect in the RAE due to the implicitness of what impact meant.

The following section will now look at the new system in greater detail and discuss the first REF assessment (i.e. the REF 2014 exercise).

3.4 The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) Exercise

To reiterate, the Research Excellence Framework is the current peer review system, with an impact dimension that aims to evaluate excellent research in publicly funded UK HEIs (Lejeune et al., 2015). Excluding the significant difference between RAE and the REF (i.e. impact), the REF2014 exercise followed a similar process to the RAE in 2008, with some minor differences (including the submission of individuals with outputs fewer than the required 4, and the process for the submission of ECRs - Early Career Researchers). The research outputs that participating institutions submitted included portfolios and patents, not only traditional paper publications. They were to

[36] "Was designed to promote more productive relationships between academics and industry" and in particular "to promote collaborations that might support medium- and long-term exploitation of research with a view to securing a lead in [specified] key market areas and improving quality of life" (Henkel, 2000, pp. 76–77).

be submitted alongside supporting statements that evidenced the vitality and sustainability of their research environment for peer review. The REF team situated at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) managed the first REF2014 on behalf of the four regional funding councils (HEFCE, SFC, HEFCW, and DELNI).

According to the REF Manager’s Report (2015), the REF was developed within three years (2007-2010) and executed within four years – 2010 to 2014. Figure 8 below provides an overview of the assessment timeline of events leading up to the REF2014 exercise.

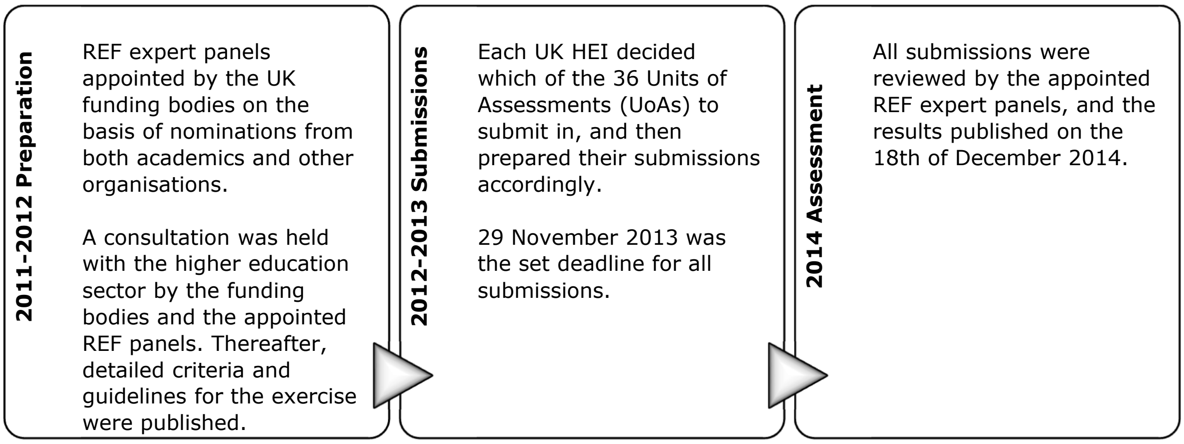

Figure 8: Overview of the REF 2014 assessment timeline

Source: Adapted from REF 01.2014 (2014, p. 5)

The primary purpose of the exercise was to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by UK HEIs. The outcome of the assessment is said to have:

1. Been used by the four higher education funding bodies (i.e. HEFCE, SFC, HEFCE, and DELNI) to selectively allocate research grants (from 2015-2016 onwards) to the UK HEIs they fund.
2. Provided accountability for the use of public funds or taxpayers’ money in financing the research of the UK HEIs, by evidencing the benefits of that investment, and
3. Provided benchmarking information, as well as established reputational yardsticks, both useful to the higher education sector and the public (REF 02.2011).

The assessment exercise attracted 154 UK HEIs who made a total of 1,911 submissions across all 36 Units of Assessment (UoA), comprising 52,061 full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff, 191,150 research outputs, and 6,975 impact case studies (Kneale et al., 2016). Figure 9 below shows the composition of the expert panels. All submissions by participating HEIs were assessed in subject groupings by four main panels (A-D), with a sub-panel for each UoA/subject – i.e. 36 expert sub-panels.

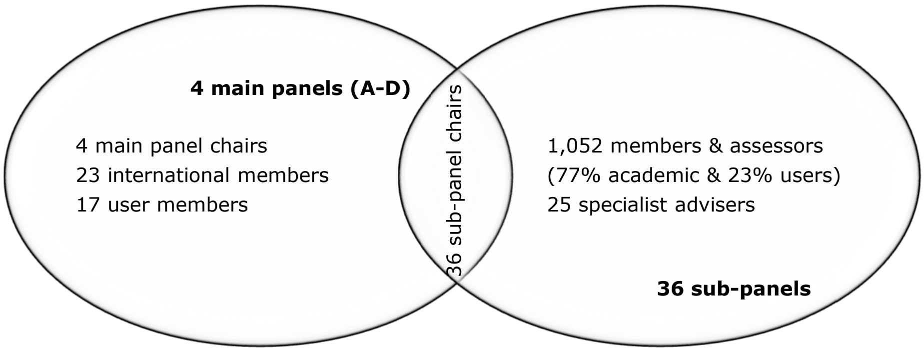

Figure 9: Expert Panels for REF2014 Research Assessment Exercise

Source: Adapted from REF (01.2014, p. 7).

The overall results awarded are discussed in the sub-section below.

3.4. 1 Overall results

The panel members and assessors read and graded the submissions on a scale that ranged from four-star (4*) to unclassified (u/c) and awarded an overall profile for each Unit of Assessment as shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Overall quality profile: Definitions of starred levels

Quality Level	Definition
Four-star - 4*	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Three-star - 3*	Quality that is internationally excellent research in terms of originality, significance and rigour, but fails to achieve the highest standards of excellence.
Two-star -2*	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
One star -1*	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Unclassified – u/c	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Alternatively, work which does not meet the published definition of research for this assessment.

Source: Adapted from REF 01. (2014, p. 60).

The overall profile consisted of three components. They were: (a) outputs – accounting for 65%, where the assessment criteria were *originality*, *significance* and *rigour*; (b) impact – accounting for 20%, where the assessment criteria was *reach* and *significance*, and (c) environment - accounting for 15% and assessed based on *vitality* and *sustainability* (REF, 2012). Academics on the sub-panels assessed all outputs. The impact statements and case studies were assessed together by research users and academics (REF, 2014). These three components are discussed in detail in section 3.4.2.

Table 12 provides a snapshot of the result of both the average overall quality profile and the average sub-profiles (i.e. outputs, impact, and environment) for all submissions made towards the REF2014 assessment exercise.

Table 12: Average overall quality profile and average sub-profiles for all submissions

	4*	**3***	**2***	**1***	**u/c**
Overall quality (%)	30	46	20	3	1
Outputs (65%)	22.4	49.5	23.9	3.6	0.6
Impact (20%)	44.0	39.9	13.0	2.4	0.7
Environment (15%)	44.6	39.9	13.2	2.2	0.1

Source: Adapted from REF 01.2014 (2014, p. 3).

The figures (averages) were derived by weighing the results of each submission according to the number of staff (FTE) that were submitted (REF, 2014). Looking at the table above, there were more four, three- and two-stars submissions compared to the submissions that were awarded 1* and unclassified.

Three-star (46) dominated the average overall quality profile for all submissions, followed by 4* (30), 2* (20) and 1* (3) and the unclassified (1). There were also more three stars for the average sub-profile result for outputs. Unlike the average overall quality profile result, it was followed by two (23.9), then four (22.4) and one (3.6) star and the unclassified (0.6). Impact had more four stars (44.0), with a linear decrease across the other star levels - 3* (39.9), 2* (13.0), 1*(2.4) and u/c (0.7).

The same applies to the environment sub-profile – the average submission that was awarded 3* (39.9) matched that of impact. Table 13 below shows how the average overall profile for Business and Management Studies – BMS (UoA 19) compares with other UoAs within Panel C.

Table 13: Comparison of Business and Management Studies Overall Profile with Other UoAs in Main Panel C

Unit of Assessment		**Average**									
		Overall profile					**Impact**				
		4*	3*	2*	1*	UC	4*	3*	2*	1*	UC
16	Architecture, Built Environment & Planning	29	40	25	6	0	38.4	42	15.3	3.6	0.7
17	Geography, Environmental Studies & Archaeology	27	42	26	5	0	34.3	42.2	19.3	3.9	0.3
19	Economics & Econometrics	30	48	19	2	1	36.3	44.7	14.1	3.4	1.5
19	Business & Management Studies	26	43	26	4	1	37.7	42.5	17	2.2	0.6
20	Law	27	46	23	4	0	38.3	41.1	17.7	2.4	0.5
21	Politics & International Studies	28	40	26	6	0	40	44.2	13	1	2.7
22	Social Work & Social Policy	27	42	25	5	1	43.8	36	14.9	4.1	1.2
23	Sociology	27	45	26	2	0	43.2	39.4	13.6	3.3	0.5
24	Anthropology & Development Studies	27	42	26	4	1	40.8	43.2	11.3	3.8	0.9
25	Education	30	36	26	7	1	42.9	33.6	16.7	6	0.8
26	Sports and Exercise Sciences, Leisure & Tourism	25	41	27	6	1	39.2	32.4	21.8	6.3	0.3
	Average of Panel C UoAs	28	42	25	5	1	39.5	40.1	15.9	3.8	0.7

Source: Adapted from Kneale et al. (2016)

Sub-panel 19 is discussed because it resonates with UK business schools[37], just as sub-panel 16 resonate more with schools of Architecture across UK HEIs, for instance. Most of the submissions of Main panel C in REF2014 were made to UoA 19, BMS had the highest submission[38] (101, was 104 for RAE2008 exercise) compared to the other ten UoAs in Panel C. Their percentage of 4* and 1* papers and impact statements were below average for the Main Panel C, and the same applied to the unclassified impact statements. However, UoA 19 submissions had a higher than average proportion of 3* and 2* profiles and impact case studies, which suggests a wide spread of quality (see Table 14).

[37]Which is the context of this study.
[38] Not all the 101 submissions that came from HEIs that made a submission to the BMS (UoA 19) in the RAE2008. A similar number that submitted to RAE2008 did not to REF2014.

The quality profiles for sub-panel 19 are outlined in Table 14 below. It shows the quality profiles for the output and environment components in addition to the overall and impact profile captured in Table 13.

Table 14: Quality profiles for Sub-Panel 19 – Business and Management Studies (BMS)

Profile Type	4* (%)	3* (%)	2* (%)	1* (%)	UC (%)
Overall	26	43	26	4	1
Output	20.5	42.8	30.1	5.8	0.8
Impact	37.7	42.5	17.0	2.2	0.6
Environment	36.8	39.7	21.0	2.4	0.1

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report

It is important to note that the remit to the Business and Management Studies in REF2014 bears similar name as in RAE2008 (UoA I36), albeit broadened to include research in AcFin – Accounting and Finance (UoA I35). Table 15 encapsulates the main differences between the submissions received for sub-panel 19 (BMS, inclusive of AcFin) comparable to those received for the two sub-panels (AcFin – I35, and BMS – I36) in RAE2008.

Table 15: Comparison of the volume of submissions in REF2014 and RAE2008

	REF2014	RAE2008	
Unit of Assessment (UoA)	BMS (19)	BMS (I36)	AcFin (I35)
Submissions	101	90	14
FTE staff	3,320	3,338	160
Outputs	12,204	Approx. 12600	Approx. 600
Impact Cases	432	n/a	n/a

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report[39]

Looking at Table 15, one may have expected the number of FTE staff submitted in REF2014 to be more than RAE2008 since that included the AcFin. The same applies to the outputs; it was 996 less of what was submitted by the two sub-panels combined in RAE2008. *Impact* was a new introduction in REF2014; hence there are no figures for that in RAE2008 for both sub-panels. The 3,320 FTE Staff amounted to 3,602 per headcount, of which 20% (731[40]) were ECRs. AcFin was separate from the BMS in RAE2008; they returned 160 (FTE staff).

[39]Available at: https://www.ref.ac.uk/2014/media/ref/content/expanel/member/Main%20Panel%20C%20overview%20report.pdf
[40] This figure (731) was deemed positive, but concerns were raised by the sub-panel assessors about the timing of their inclusion. It was late in the assessment period and could have caused a disproportionate effect on some institution's profiles (see the Sub-panel

A comparison of the overall quality profile for BMS in REF2014 and RAE2008 reveals a significant improvement in high quality of research undertaken within the discipline. 69% of the work was assessed as 3* or 4* as shown in Table 16. The data is only based on the staff that were submitted to the two-assessment tiers, and institutions had the flexibility to choose the submissions that were associated with those individuals as they deemed fit.

Table 16: Overall quality profiles for REF2014 compared with RAE2008

Profile Type	UoA	4*	3*	2*	1*	u/c
REF2014	BMS (19)	26%	43%	26%	4%	1%
RAE2008	BMS (I36)	17%	36%	33%	13%	1%
	AcFin (I35)	7%	37%	39%	15%	1%

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report

We will now proceed to discuss the three main components of the REF in the context of the outcome of the REF2014 exercise.

3.4.2 The three sub-profiles (outputs, impact and environment)

For each of the three components of the REF2014 assessment (i.e. outputs, impact, and environment), the 36 expert sub-panels developed a sub-profile, demonstrating the number of submissions that met each of the quality levels (4* to unclassified). The following sub-sections set out the various definitions of these four-starred levels for the outputs, impact, and the environment sub-profiles (with a close focus on Sub-panel 19 – BMS).

3.4.2.1 Outputs

The information provided in submissions consisted of a maximum of 4 outputs per submitted staff, with some flexibility for staff that did not have the required number of outputs; those were submitted on the grounds of inequality, but the associated extenuating circumstance(s) had to be declared. Participating institutions were also allowed to request for expert sub-panels to count output of extended scale and scope as two in the assessment. The outputs submitted consisted of research products of any form such as journal articles, monographs, and book chapters, including those

REF report for more details). Also, there were concerns about the inclusion of contract part-time staff from other countries who were appointed late in the assessment period, suggesting a game-playing behaviour by some HEIs to boost their institution's profile.

disseminated in the form of designs, performances, and exhibitions, published between January 2008 and December 2013.

Compared to the 2008 RAE, the expert panels found an overall significant improvement in the quality of outputs for REF2014. There was an 8% increase (from 14% in RAE2008 to 22% in REF2014) in the average proportion of the research outputs that were judged as world-leading (4*). Likewise, there was a 13% increase (from 37% in RAE 2008 to 50% in REF 2014) in the average proportion of research outputs judged as internationally excellent (3*). Additionally, the international members of the four main panels affirmed that the REF 2014 results were a good reflection of the international standing of UK research. They found excellence across diverse types and forms of research in the "outputs" sub-profile. ECRs and staff with individual circumstances could submit fewer outputs than what was required compared to the total number returned in the 2008 RAE. However, they were mandated to declare what hindered them from producing four outputs. Nonetheless, the quality of the outputs they submitted for the REF2014 exercise was no different from those produced by other staff according to the REF 01. report (2014).

Some sub-panels considered the citation frequency of outputs and used that as contextual information to support the peer review. This did not apply to sub-panel 19 or other sub-panels under the Main Panel C except for Economics and econometrics (sub-panel 18). Table 17 shows how the weighted average output profile for the 101 HEIs that submitted to UoA 19 in REF2014 compared to the profiles for RAE2008.

Table 17: Weighted average output profiles for REF2014 and RAE2008

Profile Type	**UoA**	**4***	**3***	**2***	**1***	**u/c**
REF2014	BMS (19)	20.5%	42.8%	30.1%	5.8%	0.8%
RAE2008	BMS (I36)	13.8%	36.2%	35.4%	13.5%	1.0%
	AcFin (I35)	5.9%	36.4%	41.0%	15.7%	1.0%

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report

It also shows an improvement in the weighted average profile for output in REF2014 compared to the RAE2008 profile. This is consistent with the improvement observed in the quality of the overall result for the output sub-profile. Of the 12,204 outputs submitted (see Table 15), 11,660 were journal articles (95%) that were published in a wide range of outlets in excess of 1,000. The rest consisted of 179 book chapters, 103 working papers and 168 authored books.

Sub-panel 19 assessors claimed to have not used journal lists[41] in their assessment of the quality of the outputs received. A post REF2014 assessment review of 1000 sample outputs from 8 institutions revealed that a range of grades was awarded to outputs in the same journal irrespective of their ABS journal rank (see REF2014 Main Panel C overview report; Pidd and Broadbent, 2015).

3.4.2.2 Impact

This sub-profile was assessed based on reach and significance, and submission included impact templates and impact case studies. As earlier mentioned, 'impact' is a new addition to the UK's assessment framework for HEIs' research (see Table 18 for the definitions of the starred levels for this sub-profile). The REF2014 results reported that a wide range of outstanding (4*) and very considerable (3*) impacts emerged from research in all 36 UoAs. They include various impacts on the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment, and quality of life, within and beyond the UK. These impacts were generated through many research pathways - some created through intended routes, and others came as a surprise (REF 01.2014).

Table 18: Impact sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

Impact (20%): Any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.		
Information provided in submissions	Each submission included impact case studies - a four-page narrative document that explained the impacts that had occurred from January 2008 to July 2013. Submitting institutions were required to have produced high-quality research since 1993 that contributed to the impacts. Each submission included a case study and an additional case study for every 10 full-time equivalents (FTE) staff. In addition to an impact template – a document that described how the submitted unit had supported impact from its research from the year 2008 to 2013, stating future strategy for impact.	
Assessment criteria	Whereas impact case studies were judged against the criteria of *reach and significance*, impact templates were assessed based on how the approach and strategy are conducive to achieving impacts.	
Definitions of starred levels	4*	Outstanding impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
	3*	Very considerable impacts in terms of reach and significance.
	2*	Considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance.

[41] This is interesting, considering that many universities in the UK seem to be keen about their academics publishing in higher-ranked journals. Now, there might be varied reasons for this, but the REF (anecdotally) appear to be one of those. Even relevant existing literature support this claim for assessments under the REF (see Doherty et al., 2015; Watermeyer, 2015; Kneale et al., 2016) and the RAE (see Pettigrew, 2011; Macilwain, 2009). This probably suggest an implicit bias on the part of HEIs (business schools inclusive), cascading down to the academics, about not believing the REF executives and the assessors would not make use of journal lists where that is stated.

	1*	Recognised, but modest impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
	u/c	The impacts of a little or no reach and significance; or the impact was not eligible, or the impact was not underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitted unit.

Source: Adapted from REF 01.2014 (2014, p. 6 & 61).

The number of impact case studies that were required in REF 2014 submissions are outlined in Table 19 below.

Table 19: Number of impact case studies required in the REF 2014 submissions

Number of Category A staff submitted (FTE)	Required number of case studies
Up to 14.99	2
15 – 24.99	3
25 - 34.99	4
35 - 44.99	5
45 or more	6 plus 1 further case study per additional 10 FTE

Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy (2016)

At present, no comparable data exist for the assessment of the quality of impact submissions in REF2014 since impact was not assessed in RAE2008. This makes the upcoming REF2021 exercise crucial, as it should yield useful data that interested parties can consult for comparison and benchmarking purposes. We are told that the impacts evidenced through the REF2014 reflected UK HEIs' productive collaborations with diverse public, private, and third sector organisations; including direct engagements with the public (Mathieson, 2015; REF 01.2014).

Sub-panel 19 (BMS) assessors welcomed the decision to include research impact in REF2014, as they believed it would encourage HEIs and academics to undertake and engage in research that will continue to inform policy and practice. A huge chunk of the submissions made to UoA 19 showed pockets of outstanding impacts that are of clear relevance to policy/practice (or both in some cases). A few were awarded unclassified grade; see Table 18 for possible reasons and see Tables 13 and 14 for the specifics of the weighted average for impact for sub-panel 19. A wide range of impact types was identified, and they included impacts within organisations, on the public, on national policy and international agreements. Overall, the impact templates were awarded lower ratings compared to the impact cases, and there seemed to be confusion[42] observed in this section about what to say in some institutions' submissions.

That said, a section later in this chapter is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the 'impact' criteria, given the enormous debate that ensued across UK HEIs (and beyond) following the decision to include it as part of the elements assessed in REF2014. Recent academic literature and debates in the news tend to suggest that this debate remains on-going in the preparation of the next REF 2021 exercise.

3.4.2.3 Environment

This sub-profile, unlike the other two discussed above, was assessed against the criteria of 'vitality and sustainability.' The definition of the starred levels awarded is outlined in Table 20, including the information required from submitting institutions. A total research income (including income-in-kind) of £24.1 billion was reported in submissions from the year 2008-2009 to 2012-2013. The expert panels did note that the quality of the research environment had improved since RAE 2008; albeit the exact percentage is unknown for the reason stated above (see REF 01.2014, p. 4). These came from various sources, including UK government bodies (19%), the UK Research Councils (38%), UK charities (19%), UK industry (6%) and EU government bodies (9%). Within the same period, submitting institutions reported having awarded a total of 95,184 research doctoral degrees (REF 01.2014).

Table 20: Environment sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

Environment (15%): The strategy, resources and infrastructure that support research activity in the submitted unit and contribute more widely to the discipline.		
Information provided in submissions	Each submission included an environment template – a document that described the research strategy of the submitted unit; its support for research staff and students; its research income; infrastructure and facilities; and its research partnerships and broader contributions to the discipline. Likewise, institutions provided statistical data on the total amount of research-related income received each academic year (from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013) from various sources, plus, the number of research doctoral degrees awarded within the same period. These were based on the data that institutions report yearly to the Higher Education Statistics Agency.	
Assessment criteria	The expert panels judged the environment sub-profile based on *vitality and sustainability.*	
Definitions of starred levels	4*	An environment that is conducive to producing research of world-leading quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
	3*	An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally excellent quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.

[42] A notable problem was that some of the submissions only used the final section of the template as a summary section for each impact case study instead of showing how the template related to the case studies.

	2*	An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally recognised quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
	1*	An environment that is conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
	u/c	An environment that is not conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality.

Source: Adapted from REF 01.2014 (2014, p. 6 & 61).

Sub-panel 19 assessed the environment statements submitted by participating institutions differently in REF2014 compared to how it was done in RAE2008. For the latter, sub-panel members reviewed the statements and approached the development of a profile holistically. In contrast, sub-panels in REF2014 were asked to score the four elements[43] of submitted environment statements separately and then arithmetically combine the scores to produce a profile. See Table 21 for the weighted average for the environment sub-profile for UoA 19 in REF2014 compared to the profiles in RAE2008; the definition of the starred levels can be seen in Table 20.

Table 21: Weighted average environment profiles for REF2014 and RAE2008

Profile Type	UoA	4*	3*	2*	1*	u/c
REF2014	BMS (19)	36.8%	39.7%	21.0%	2.4%	0.1%
RAE2008	BMS (I36)	23.3%	37.0%	28.0%	10.2%	1.6%
	AcFin (I35)	7.2%	41.3%	34.5%	14.5%	2.5%

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report

Despite the varied assessment methods, there was an observed improvement, as shown in the table above. The environment submissions were assessed separately from the research outputs and research impact that were submitted. The total HESA-reported research income of the institutions that made submissions to UoA 19 in REF2014 was over £340m compared to the approximately £360m figure reported for BMS in RAE2008 (i.e. sub-panel I36, excluding AcFin – I35). A slight increase in the average total annual research income (in cash) was suggested in REF2014 compared to RAE2008 because RAE2008 covered a period one-year longer than REF2014.

Also, more doctoral degree awards were reported over the REF period (4,804) compared to the figure (3,450) reported for BMS for the longer period of RAE2008.

[43] 1) Research Strategy. 2) People. 3) Income, Infrastructure and Facilities. 4) Collaboration and Contribution to the Discipline or Research Base.

While this suggested an increase in PhD enrolments and graduations, the quality of the support provided to the PGRs were questioned as some submissions had far too many doctoral enrolments when compared to the staff numbers included in the submission. This resulted in the award of a lower score for that section of the environment template for the related submissions. However, the increased number suggested that the institutions that submitted their work to the sub-panel were serious about succession planning. The envisaged challenge for the BMS community is how they ensure that ECRs are mentored and supported appropriately as they develop to become independent researchers while coping with significant teaching loads in their institutions of employment.

The details about the distribution of excellence overall can be found in the document referenced REF 01.2014 (p. 4). That said, Table 22 below encapsulates sub-field specific outcomes in REF2014 in terms of those closely aligned to the three principal components of RME (i.e. ERS – Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability). The RME concept and agenda is not peculiar to business schools and management institutions, albeit these are the initial target audience for PRME (a renowned global champion of RME) at its inception in the year 2007. The initiative and the RME agenda, as discussed in Chapter 2, has since expanded to universities as a whole, as well as other HEIs worldwide, which suggests that RME is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary.

Table 22: Overview of the Sub-fields Summary Result Closely Associated to the RME

Sub-fields (Management development & management education)
Dissemination was through various publication channels but mostly peer-reviewed journal outlets. A surprising difference in quality, in terms of originality, significance and rigour was observed; most of the weaker outputs did not contribute to theory or practice. Some lacked appropriate theoretical grounding. In many instances, they failed to further advance well-established previous studies in the field, which limits the field in terms of advancement. In terms of methodology, most utilised case study method and relied on rich description to convey associated ideas to readers, which in the assessors' view arguably makes validation and theory generation more difficult. As in RAE2008, a portion of the outputs relied on data generated from sampling managers who were enrolled on taught courses in some institutions, as against evidence from private and public organisations or direct studies. The practice is one that did not seem to sit well with the assessors; they questioned the research design and the generalizability of related findings. Again, like RAE2008, the distribution of the outputs that were submitted to the sub-field was not even across the institutions in REF2014; most came from institutions with a strong professional focus to their work. The assessors were encouraged by the number of submissions received under this theme, and they drew on a wide range of core business and management disciplines such as ethics, finance, accounting, strategy, general management, supply chain management and marketing. Some mentioned both themes as being a formal part of their research strategy, which the assessors deemed useful for the continuing advancement of the area.

Sub-fields (Responsibility and sustainability)
The majority of the papers were associated with for-profit organisations (listed companies, mostly) compared to the others that focused broadly on small and medium-sized organisations, not-for-profit organisations and the public sector which is significantly under-researched. Outputs included interdisciplinary submissions and the collaborations that seemed to be more productive were those between business and management, law, geography, and political or governance studies. Growth was observed at both the theoretical and empirical levels for the sub-field. The assessors were pleased with the outputs that contested responsibility in specific settings due to the in-depth investigation carried out. Some of them were externally funded, and that seemed to have enabled the institutions to demonstrate substantive engagement compared to other outputs. The theoretical debates facilitated through some of these outputs in the areas of ethics, philosophy and governance are deemed essential for the progression of this sub-field. Weaker aspects included replicated studies that had a minimal focus on responsibility, and with relatively standard and small dataset tested for effects. An episodic feel was reported for the sub-field in general, as opposed to being centered around programs of investigation, limiting possible in-depth observations to be carried out. The complexity of the problems that some of the outputs attempted to address did not engage in those fully. Associated areas included human right issues, climate change and biodiversity, therefore risking a disconnect between substantive topics and some of the research undertaken.
Researcher's remark in the context of RME-related research & associated academics
The lower submission than expected could be down to various reasons. The REF2014 exercise was highly selective which could be one of the reasons, plus the output-related requirements per submitted staff could have exacerbated that, aside from the perceived low value of pedagogical research compared to disciplinary research. RME-related outputs might have suffered on this front, but a future study needs to establish the exact numbers as the current study did not look into that. *It seems at least that the sub-field is serious about succession in terms of the focus on doctoral-related studies and training and development, albeit the latter was not specified as relating to PGRs. This is an area that RME-related research could help progress while helping facilitate RME-implementation across institutions. Ethics is at the heart of any doctoral research, at least from the experience of the researcher, and that too is the case for RME. Ethics is one of its primary components aside from responsibility (CSR) and sustainability. The nature of the doctoral studies is not one that the researcher claims to know, hence an area worth exploring by a future study.* *There is need for RME-related studies to be underpinned by appropriate theories as much as possible, as a lack of theoretical underpinning might partly explain why it seems that some higher-ranked journals are less receptive of related outputs aside from them being viewed as mostly pedagogical research.* *The need for RME-related research to be more applied in terms of recommendations and suggestions that can significantly influence practice, rather than perhaps being too theoretically based. RME-related research that is more applied probably stands a better chance of being deemed of a good quality than one that is theoretically based. The same might be said about their impact generation potential; the former may have a higher impact generation potential than the latter.* *Pedagogical research is perhaps deemed as second-order research compared with disciplinary research. It could also explain why higher-ranked journals do not necessarily find them attractive. However, the permission of teaching-related impact in the upcoming REF2021 my even things out on this front. This point is discussed later in the chapter, but it is an area that RME-inclined academics can exploit further.* *An interesting finding for the PRME community, including business schools and universities is the fact that an impact case study entitled "Shaping policy in responsible and sustainable business education" was part of the REF2014 submission to UoA 19. The submitting institution was University of Nottingham, with Professor Jeremy Moon as the lead researcher and grant holder, albeit it was a collaborative effort with researchers from other institutions within and outside the UK. The total value in terms of sponsorship received was £113,000 – £11,000 from ABIS (2007 - 2008), £12,000 from INSEAD (for ABIS) and £90,000 from HEFCE (2010 - 2011). The impact of the series of research and research-related outputs is said to have to have helped shape and inform the policy of institutions such as UNPRME, ABIS, EFMD, and HEA. Further details relating to the impact case study is available at:* https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=28500. *This, in a way, supports the claim that RME-related research has the capacity to generate impact. The grade/rating awarded is unknown, and while an attempt to inquire from a relevant source hinted it might have been 2* or 3*, the response was not definite.* *Overall, the summary for the management development and management education sub-field arguably had a disappointing undertone compared to the responsibility and sustainability sub-field; the issues outlined by the assessors is one that associated academics and their institutions need to critically consider moving forward.*

Source: Adapted from REF2014 Main Panel C overview report

We will now take a closer look at the new component (impact) in the REF because the perceived relationship between RME and the REF is more to do with impact than the other two components – output and environment.

3.5 The Impact component of the Research Excellence Framework

The term 'impact' means different things to different research users (Penfield et al., 2014), who could consist of members of the public, policy or practice communities who conceptually or instrumentally use research (Morton, 2015). It varies across HEIs, research groups and individual researchers (Martin, 2011), and maybe interpreted implicitly as *making a difference*, but not substituted for *influence* as far as the REF is concerned. Indeed, according to Francis (2011), it is one thing to communicate with or even impress a teacher/politician, and another to translate such influence into tangible outcomes (be it a change in policy or practice), and therein lies the real *impact*. Its connotation varies from that of the term 'outcome' which primarily is used to describe a mid-term and intermediary effect of specific research, as opposed to "impact" which is used to explain the long-term and ultimate effect of research (White, 2010). How then is "research impact" defined in the literature? The next section presents the various definitions of impact not only in the context of social and economic research but also inclusive of pedagogic research[44].

3.5.1 Defining Research Impact

In REF2014, impact was defined as the provable and measurable effect of research on society, economy, culture, public policy or services, health, environment, or quality of life, beyond academia. It was assessed based on reach and significance, both of which were considered together not separately by the assessment panels (REF, 2011b; RCUK, 2014). The Economic and Social Research Council - ESRC[45] (2017) defined impact as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. It can either be academic impact - the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes in shifting understanding and advancing scientific, method, theory, and application

[44] Described by Flint (2018) as research into the processes and practices of learning, teaching and assessment, which may involve systematic empirical research as well as contributions to pedagogic theory.
[45] Click of the link for more details on ESRC https://esrc.ukri.org/

across and within disciplines. It could also be economic and societal impact; the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, and its benefits to individuals, organisations and/or nations. Or indeed a combination of both.

Research impact can be *conceptual* – if it advances the understanding of policy issues, *instrumental*, if it shapes legislation or policy development, practice or service provision or modifies behaviour, or *developmental*, if it builds technical/personal capacity (ESRC, 2016). Generally, it is the effect of research (and/or the change/benefit of research) on the activity, attitude, consciousness, behaviour, opportunity, performance, policy and practice of an audience, beneficiary, society, constituency, organisations or individuals irrespective of their geographical locations (HEFCE, 2011b, p. 40). So, the impact created through research can be on a local, regional, national, or international level. For Morton (2015), research impact is those changes in consciousness, knowledge and understanding, ideologies, behaviours and perceptions, and policy and practice that are attributable to research.

While the focus here is the UK system, the impact concept seems to be consistent with other countries related approaches. For instance, in the United States, researchers seeking funding are required to justify their work in terms of broader impacts, be it through the promotion of education and training, widening participation, or the delivery of more societal benefits/values in general (Sarewitz, 2011).

For the Australian Research Quality Framework (RQF), Duryea et al. (2007) note that research impact is the beneficial use of research to realise societal, financial, environmental, and/or cultural outcomes. Ibid (2007) however stressed the need not to confuse the definition offered with impact in the academic domain, which they described as an "indicator of the intrinsic quality of research on scholarly or academic measures" (p. 8).

Canada uses *productive interactions* (instances of knowledge exchange) as a viable mechanism for enabling impact creation, which is recognised and supported by the nation's SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council), who are committed to supporting long-term impact (Penfield et al., 2014). Productive interactions work on the basis that impact is achieved through meaningful interactions between researchers and stakeholders (Ibid, 2014, citing Hughes and Martin, 2012; and Donovan, 2011). The actual framework was developed in the Netherlands and widely known as SIAMPI – Social Impact Assessment Methods for research and funding instruments through the study of Productive Interactions. Therefore, it is not peculiar to Canada, and is not a tool for judging impact, showcasing, or connecting to a given piece of research. Instead, SIAMPI is a learning tool that could enhance the understanding of how research interactions bring about social impact. However, unlike the REF, it cannot capture the full route from research to impact, and that makes it inappropriate in instances where the evidencing of impact is emphasised heavily. But a primary advantage of the SIAMPI approach is that it requires lesser input than the REF (Penfield et al., 2014).

As established, the meaning of impact is diverse, varying across groups, individuals, and organisations (Philips, 2012). How then is impact created/generated through research? This is the focus of the following sub-section.

3.5.2 The Generation of Impact

Research *outputs* such as knowledge generated and publications can be translated into outcome (e.g. new products and services), and impacts or added value (Duryea et al., 2007).

Figure 10 is a visual illustration of the differences between the terms research outputs, outcomes, and impacts. It can be inferred from Figures 10 and 11 that outcome(s) precedes impact(s) which, according to Khazragui and Hudson (2015) is the final level of the causal chain in research. However, Duryea et al. (2007) believe that researchers can achieve lesser impacts at the early stages of a research project. The authors briefly discussed the fundamental nature of impact based on a model (see Figure 11) that the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) developed.

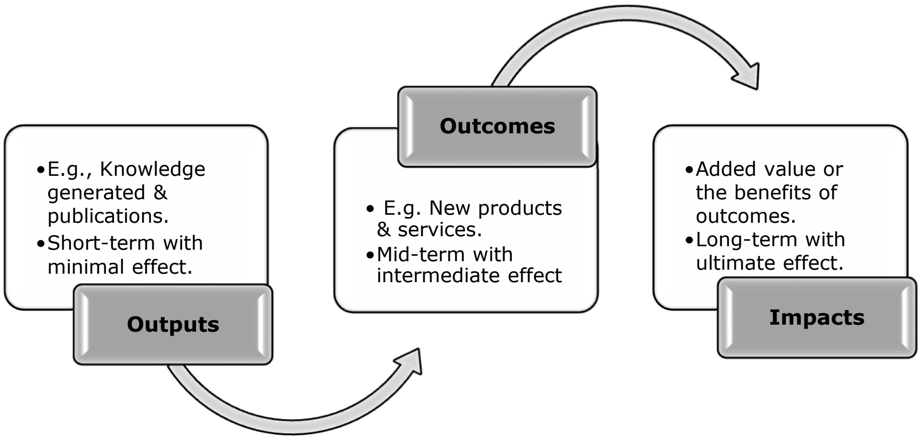

Figure 10: The difference between the terms output, outcome, and impact in the context of research

Source: Author, based on White (2010) and Duryea et al. (2007).

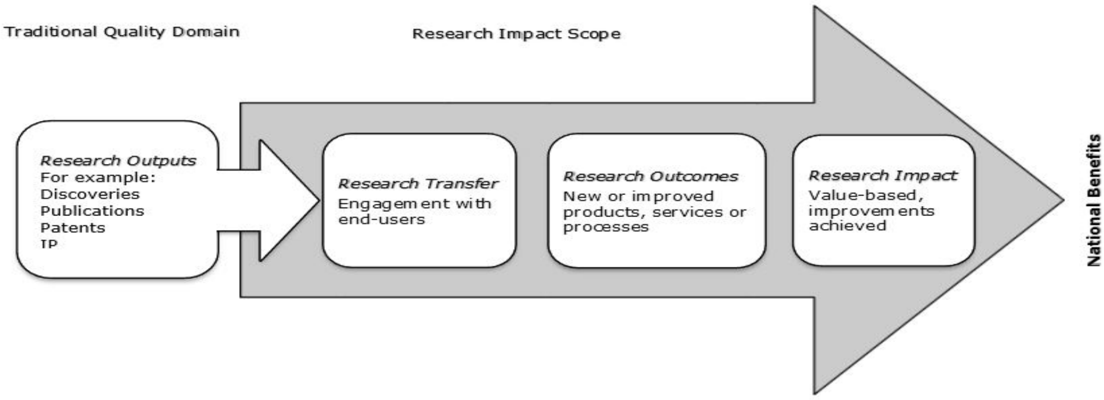

Figure 11: ATN Model of Research Impact Scope

Source: Adapted from Duryea et al. (2007, p. 9).

It also explains the differences between research outputs, research outcomes, and research impact, implying that the journey to impact creation consists of a series of processes with perhaps incremental benefits. Unlike Figure 10, Figure 11 above captures *research transfer,* which could pass for *productive interaction* mentioned earlier in the context of SIAMPI. That is the main difference between both models, aside from the fact that the latter implies that research output is not part of the impact scope, though needed to facilitate its creation.

The distinction between research outputs, outcomes, and impact may be marginal and/or confusing to some individuals (Penfield et al., 2014). However, it is important to highlight their differences in order to enable academics to argue their cases for impact in a manner that demonstrates how the impacts that emerged from their research were generated and corroborated (Kelly and McNicol, 2011).

Moreover, some organisations and stakeholders might be interested in specific aspects of impact contingent on their focus (Penfield et al., 2014). It probably explains why recommendations put forward by several authors and the government, demanded that a precise definition of "impact" is provided for the REF2014 exercise (see Grant et al., 2009; Russell Group, 2009; Duryea et al., 2007). Irrespective of the various languages used (i.e. impacts, returns, benefits, and/or value), the question regarding what sort of difference we are making and by how much remains the same (Penfield et al., 2014, p. 1, citing The Social Return on Investment Network, 2012).

Why, then should the impact of HEIs' and academics' research be evaluated? The section below addresses this.

3.5.3 Why evaluate research impact in UK HEIs?

Whitehead (1928) argued that the purpose of a university is to unite the young and old in the imaginative consideration of learning to impart knowledge for the common good. A university that fails on that front, in their view, is not fit for purpose and should cease to exist. Universities and their academics undertake excellent research in anticipation that great things (e.g. the generation and transformation of knowledge for the common good) will emerge. Thus, it is not unusual for one to expect the funding of excellent research to yield both intended and unintended impacts, albeit the evaluation of HEIs research has historically focused on academic quality and productivity (Penfield et al., 2014).

Similarly, Morton (2015) talks about the increased interest to assess research impact beyond academia in both the UK and elsewhere (e.g. the USA and Australia) as a reflection of a concern with the role of university research in the broader community in terms of economic growth and well-being. Rebora and Turri (2013) believe that impact was introduced to address two keys issues. First, it is to encourage academics to use their research to facilitate meaningful dialogue with the world of practice. Second, it is to stop them from continuing to benefit from self-referential attitudes which the peer review system seems to support.

Expanding on the first issue in great detail is Sealy et al. (2017) who note that there is a long-standing debate regarding the impact of academic research on practice (see Rynes et al., 2001; Tranfield and Starkey, 1998) and the role that business schools play in the society (see Burchell et al., 2015; Chia, 2014; Thorpe and Rawlinson, 2014). These debates show the disconnect between researchers and practitioners and the unsubstantiated ontological assumption "that academic theory provides a precedent for practical action" (Sealy et al. 2017, p. 64, citing Jarzabkowski et al., 2010, p. 1190). However, the claim is counteracted by the summary report for Main Panel C associated with the REF2014 exercise, specifically UoA 19 (Business and Management Studies). According to the report (as hinted in section 3.4.2.2), the assessors were pleased that the majority of the submissions in the impact component received from HEIs showed elements of the impact that were of outstanding quality, with clear significance to policy/practice or both.

Concerning the second issue, some academics allegedly tend to cite or reference their previous works in any new article they are preparing. The practice itself is not bad except where it is within spurious and biased to increase their H-index (Mack, 2018), professional credibility and broader standing in their respective disciplines at all cost (Hyland, 2003). Rebora and Turri (2013) note that both issues were observed through the RAE, hence impact was introduced to address them.

Pettigrew (2011) holds successive RAEs responsible for the behavioural changes observed in individuals, groups and institutions who are now much more accustomed to where, when, and how they publish. While the spotlight of performance probably became an uncomfortable zone for their behaviours, Power (1999) believed the stringency of the audit society undoubtedly had both positive and negative effects. For example, the RAE exacerbated other careers, professional and self-induced related pressures and possibly created a displacement of goals – e.g. some academics view publishing as an end. Therefore, the inclusion of the impact in the REF is an essential corrective to the displacement of goals (Pettigrew, 2011).

Penfield et al. (2014), drawing on Kelly and McNicoll's (2011) remark about the need for charitable organisations to showcase the impact of the donations received to retain donors' support, recommend that HEIs move beyond documenting elements of their impacts (e.g. Intellectual Property - IP) to showcasing them as well.

For the Council for the Defence of British Universities – CDBU (2015), impact was introduced to reduce the disparity between the Golden Triangle (i.e. Oxford, Cambridge, and London) and other HEIs, increasing the chance of the others becoming world-class in research like the other three. This is reflective of the coercive isomorphism discussed in chapter 1 and related to the institutional theory. In contrast, Martin (2011) regards it as perhaps the government's way of securing a relatively explicit social contract with HEIs - in return for public funding received, HEIs are required to contribute to society. Proving impact then becomes a means of justifying the receipt of public funds for both research funders and the institutions they fund (Upton et al., 2014).

Parker and Teijlingen (2012) seem to believe the demand for HEIs to demonstrate the impact of their research is legitimate, particularly in social work and social care where many have questioned the academy-practice articulation. Nonetheless, they admit it is a challenging task to develop a *provable* story and/or put together causal links that demonstrate clearly that a piece of research led to a specific impact. Indeed, Karlsson (2017) reminds us that there are not only explicit change agendas but also underlying implicit ones (with specific consequences for individuals, research groups, universities, and, sometimes, entire nations) associated with research assessment.

Therefore, it would be naïve to view and treat it as a mere fact-finding activity or exercise - it is much more than that. Penfield et al. (2014) outlined some benefits that can be generally derived from the government's decision to evaluate impact with regards to the REF. These are discussed briefly in the following section.

3.5.4 Benefits of evaluating impacts

The following are some of the benefits associated with the evaluation of impact in the REF.

HEIs overview. To aid research organisations and HEIs to take stock of, and manage, their performance, as well as to appreciate and publicly communicate their contributions to communities at local, national, and international levels.

Accountability. To prove to the government, stakeholders, and the public, that the public funding received for research purposes is good value for money (see Parker and Teijlingen, 2012; Hanney and Gonzalez-Block, 2011). Critics have charged management academics with often producing knowledge that predominantly satisfies peers and higher-ranked journals, instead of making their outputs accessible to non-specialists; the evaluation of impact allows HEIs the opportunity to disprove this criticism (Aguinis et al. 2014; Cohen, 2007; Starkey and Madan, 2001). In a similar vein, Bennis and O'Toole (2005) called out management academics for relegating the concerns of practitioners as secondary, thus institutionalising their irrelevance. Many have even called for the redesign of knowledge creation and dissemination (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011). They stress the need for a much closer partnership between researchers and practitioners (Avenier and Cajaiba, 2012; Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2012), starting from the enquiry stage of a research project, which the impact component of the REF can help address (Radaelli et al., 2013).

However, the assessors of the impact submissions made to UoA 19 in REF2014 remarked that researchers within the BMS field should be proud of their work as they are as good as works produced in other parts of the world. The high scores received for the impact component is said to have left a good impression given the concern expressed by some people about UK business schools' research having little or no interest in addressing real-world issues. On the contrary, the field as a collective made an impact on policy, economy, society, and the environment. This, if anything, further legitimises the BMS field and associated research activities.

Inform funding. To understand the socio-economic value of research and thus selectively channel funds towards supporting studies of the best calibre. This point aligns with Donovan's (2011) view of 'impact' as a piece of substantial evidence, and a bargaining tool, for negotiating enhanced research support from both the government and other funding bodies. Herbst (2007) provides the rationale for selectively directing funds to institutions where performance is manifest. He argues that performing institutions should be given more research income compared to counterparts whose performance is subpar. In doing so, he believes that such a mechanism would stir lower-performing HEIs to improve while providing high performers with a competitive edge.

However, the use of impact as a key determinant of funding streams has been questioned. For example, two respondents in McNay's (2015) study said the following in the context of the REF2014 exercise:

> *"impact case studies were pulled together hastily, external assessors were hugely inconsistent, unreliable and indeed frankly quirky in their judgements. It was disappointing as a process and required a huge amount of work to be done by busy researchers numerous times, as items that were submitted were deemed to be lost or needed for yet another parallel system" (g8).*

> *"'Impact' was… in danger of becoming another example of what was countable leading the process rather than any real thought to impact – e.g. how can we measure how our students have taken our practices into their own professional areas" (e21).*

Understand. To comprehend the approaches and pathways of how research yields impact in order to make the most of research findings and cultivate more efficient ways of delivering impact. University research is a crucial component of every nation's innovation system; hence, the relevance of innovative scholars to governments that are looking to enhance their economies through innovation (Hicks, 2012). Similarly, research performance is a vital factor in the economic performance of a nation – one with an impressive profile on this front is assumed to have a better opportunity to enjoy economic growth compared to its counterparts. Therefore, improving the research capacity of universities is essential for building a nation's innovation capacity, which will in turn drive economic growth. This possibly justifies the increased concern for quality and excellence in research, aside from promoting accountability and transparency, encouraging healthy competition among HEIs, and generating useful data that can be used for comparative studies and performance indicators (European Commission, 2010, p. 9).

3.5.5 Conditions necessary for generating impactful research

Pettigrew (2011, citing ESRC, 2009) outlined the following as the vital factors that are crucial for impact generation:

1) Established relationships and networks with research user communities.
2) Active involvement of research users throughout the lifecycle of a research project.
3) Well-designed research user engagement and knowledge exchange approaches.

4) The development of a portfolio of sustained research activities that enhances reputations with users of research.
5) Robust research infrastructure and management support for research users and knowledge exchanges.
6) Engagement with intermediaries and knowledge agents as translators, amplifiers, and network providers, where possible.

Aside from the above, there is also collaboration and time, which are discussed briefly below.

Collaboration. Sealy et al. (2017) in agreement with Scherer and Steinmann (1999) note that the relationship that exists between knowledge and practice is multi-directional, for knowledge is co-created through an unfolding engagement with non-academic stakeholders. Their findings suggest that impactful research is a product of long-term coalitions involving multiple stakeholders or change agents such as in the case of their research, government, policymakers, corporations, media, diversity experts, and women. Marcella et al. (2018) note that influential stakeholders (including end-users of research) play a crucial role in impact creation. A participant in their study recommended that influential stakeholders be involved from the inception of a given research project. Kellard and Śliwa (2016) analysed the REF2014 impact scores within the business and management unit of assessment (i.e. UoA 19, including research in Accounting and Finance). They equally found that 'impactful' research tends to stem from a collaborative effort that encompasses engagement with external stakeholders, working in partnership to produce research output that reinforces impact and securing funding for impact-related activities.

Ample Time. Bayley (2016) argues that the term impact, though a small word, has enormous implications in the context of the REF, and urges schools looking to build impact to *engage* and *not enrage* by giving people adequate time to adjust and collectively build a robust approach together. Similarly, the Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy - BEIS (2016) holds that research is, in fact, a long-term process that requires both commitment and support. In the call for evidence concerning the independent review of the REF 2014 exercise, BEIS found that a reasonable number of people supported the idea of extending the interval between research assessment exercises. While doing so will perhaps allow all those involved to spread the cost associated with the assessment exercise over a period of time, it is possible that it might result in the decline of the overall accuracy of the exercise and related outcomes.

The following section discusses some of the criticisms levied against the REF, specific to the 2014 exercise.

3.5.6 Criticisms of the REF 2014 Exercise

Some believe the continuous refinement of the mechanism for assessing the quality of research in UK HEIs is becoming increasingly intrusive, onerous and expensive (Jump, 2015; Sayer, 2014; Goldfinch and Yamamoto, 2012; Macilwain, 2009; Hicks, 2012; Martin, 2011). It probably explains why Murphy and Sage (2014) found that the media portrayed the REF as widely negative. Academics, like other individuals, may experience role conflicts due to frequent changes in organisational conditions (Navis and Glynn, 2011; Baruch and Hall, 2004). Some organisational changes may require academics to adopt corporate identities that are not akin to their ideals and values, and change some assumed identities (see Watson, 2008 for more details on organisational identity). Identity mostly deals with the meanings that people ascribe to themselves and others; it is concerned with the understanding of self and other people (Gioia et al., 2013; Coupland and Brown, 2012; Watson, 2008; Geijsel and Meijers, 2005; Jenkins, 2004). The REF can instigate the renegotiation of academics' identities[46] since identity can be learnt and re-learnt; its construction is in a continuum and is reliant on the subjective meaning of an individual's actions (see Brown and Lewis, 2011; Billot, 2010; Jenkins, 2004; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Moreover, we are told that the identities that people create are influenced by structure and agency[47], and are "aspired to as much as they are subscribed, regulated, resisted, negotiated and are accepted" (Lamont and Nordberg, 2014, p. 4, citing Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

The cost associated with the REF process is also criticised. The UK government spent approximately a total of £246 million to run the REF 2014 exercise (i.e. 133% more than the total cost of 2008 RAE). Of this cost, HEIs received £212m (including £55m

[46] I.e. REFable stars and non-REFable academics, impact stars, research-active and non-research-active academics, etc.
[47] Defined as one having a sense of willpower and desire to produce work contexts that meet the goals of an individual over a period (Elder, 1998). It is the intentional effort to plan and construct a way forward in the face of constraints (McAlpine, 2012).

for the impact element), £14m was for the four UK HEI funding bodies, and £19m for panellists' time (Technopolis, 2015). However, academics have alluded to costs between £500m and £1 billion as a more realistic figure (Jump, 2015). Hence, the REF is regarded as being resource-intensive for most parties involved (Manville et al., 2015)

Authors like Robert (2003) tell us that most of these assessment mechanisms ultimately distort the processes they purport to assess, hence their risk of triggering the feeling of uncertainty amongst HEIs and academics (Goldstone and Douglas, 2003). Drawing on institutional theory, we could argue that the REF to some extent has the capacity to bring about mimetic isomorphism across and within UK business schools (and indeed universities). As can be inferred from chapters 2 and 4, competitive processes designed to pressure organisations to assume a form prescribed for and adapted to their best chance of survival in a given environment can result in mimetic isomorphism (Scott, 2014, citing Hannan and Freeman, 1989). The REF to some extent seems to portray this ideology through its assessment mechanism that requires UK HEIs seeking research funds/grants to compete by demonstrating value for money[48] received for research in the previous RAE/REF cycle. Drawing on institutional theory, the mandate for participating institutions to conform to associated rules, guidelines and procedures is one mechanism via which the REF can induce mimetic isomorphism. Business schools and other HEIs can become too similar, with potential detrimental consequences for innovation, diversity, and institutional identity. The other side of the coin is potential positives, such as quality enhancement for institutions with an historically poor performance record on the research front.

The other mechanism is possibly through uncertainty – this has been associated with the REF and related processes, as covered in this chapter. This may likely occur with institutions that did not participate in the last REF2014 exercise, since the impending REF2021 exercise will be their first research assessment experience under the REF, including its impact component. While there are set guidelines and relevant supporting resources and materials they can consult in preparation for the

[48] Tangible, measurable positive contributions (impacts) on society at the macro level through high-quality research activities and associated engagements.

assessment, there remains the possibility of them feeling particularly uncertain of what to expect compared to other business schools that partook in REF2014. Even if a school took part in RAE2008, the associated processes, procedures, requirements, and guidelines differed significantly in REF2014, and there are some new changes for REF2021. So, they may be modelling REF2021 related preparations and organisations against those of other institutions; those they believe have attained more success due to having performed brilliantly in REF2014. The same could apply to institutions that performed poorly they may feel uncertain about what strategy would best enable them to secure a better result, causing them to imitate the strategies of more successful competitors, thereby increasing the likelihood of homogenisation (Hanson, 2001).

Drawing on Scott (2014), the sanction process[49] of the REF consists of rewards (funds, reputation, legitimacy etc.) and punishments (no funds awarded, and potential question marks on the reputation and legitimacy of institutions that perform poorly and/or those that fail to participate). The REF through this mechanism can also give rise to coercive isomorphism across and within institutions. UK HEIs, inclusive of business schools, live or die by the extent to which they conform formally to wider rules within their institutional field. The REF is a powerful institution within the UK higher education sector. So, it could be argued that their survival or potential demise in an era of austerity is to some extent hinged on participation in the REF and conformity to associated rule-like prescriptions (Meyer et al., 2005). The economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic[50] have been severe and are expected to be drawn-out in many economies around the world; this could protract the austerity regime and that in turn may exert more coercive pressure on HEIs and their academics to compete in the REF in order to survive.

There is also criticism of the unrealistic expectations that were imposed on academics through the requirement for research outputs for the REF2014 exercise, "with no discernible improvements in the quality of research" (Tierney, 2016, p. 27, citing

[49] Coercive isomorphism can arise from this and it is closely associated with the regulative pillar of institutions, as covered in the theoretical framework section of this thesis.

[50] The COVID-19 virus outbreak that ensued within the timeline of the final preparation of the submission of this thesis.

UCU, 2013); panel C reported an overall improvement for UoA 19 in REF2014 compared with the RAE2008 outcome.

Bayley (2016) argues that the requirement to weave impact into an already pressured environment can be tiring. The nervousness associated with delivering REF-worthy impacts may trigger feelings of anger and anxiety with adverse effects on the mental health of academics, especially the ECRs, some of whom have experienced aggression and bullying (Mathieson, 2015). These can have either productive or paralysing effects on both individuals and organisations (Vince, 2010).

Furthermore, Bayley (2016) commented that the REF is a double-edged sword. It legitimises engagements and outreach activities that may be traditionally ignored in environments such as HEIs. However, on the other hand, it confers unrealistic expectations on disciplinary areas whose work does not have a natural direct linkage to real-world change. In the case of business and management schools, Pettigrew (2011) pointed out that they have links to stakeholders in the financial, industrial, and public policy domains of society and therefore should not be threatened by the impact agenda. He contrasts this, however, with his colleagues in the arts and humanities whom he felt were vulnerable – they supposedly have fewer links, plus impact generation may be more difficult due to the nature of their discipline. Other more specific criticisms of the REF, including its impact agenda, are outlined below.

3.5.6.1 Effect on behaviour

Pettigrew (2011) regards the REF as a mechanism that could potentially change the culture of the entire academic community in the UK higher education sector. Smith and Meer (2012) are almost sure it will shape behaviours. Hence many recommended that the new system (REF) be monitored in order to ascertain how it affects behaviour, consequently proposing a weighting of less than 25% for the impact component. Hazelkorn (2009) tells us that there is significant evidence to show that academics' behaviours and those of research institutes, HEIs and governments are profoundly influenced by elements of the institutional environment related to research evaluation (e.g. the global rankings of higher education research). For instance, McNay (1997) has shown that the RAE informed social science researchers' decisions regarding what research to undertake and within which methodological paradigms. Brew and Boud (2009) also found that the RAE shaped the social construction of academic identity.

3.5.6.2 Silo working and the lack of inclusiveness

The exclusion of some academics from the REF process can be damaging to their careers (Hubble, 2015; Smith and Conroy, 2016), even more so if these academics are "research active." Interestingly, Council for the Defence of British Universities – CDBU (2015) was disappointed with the outcome of REF2014 because they felt that the impact element failed to bridge the gap between the earlier mentioned Golden Triangle (Oxford, Cambridge, and London) and other HEIs. However, Kellard and Śliwa's (2016) analysis of, and reflection on, the business and management impact assessment in REF2014 suggest that creating 'excellent' impact is not peculiar to, or only achievable in, 'elite' HEIs like the Russell Group Universities. Some less research-intensive universities benefitted from the introduction of the profile (McNay, 2015), meaning that HEIs can create significant impact from research irrespective of their organisational contexts.

The narrow field of types of research and impact that were deemed REFable was also highlighted. For example, it appears that pedagogic research and impact generated through teaching and related activities were mostly categorised under non-REFable deliverables, to continued debate and controversy (see Webb and Tierney, 2019; Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton et al., 2018; Townsend, 2012; Macfarlane, 2011). Undervaluing pedagogic research in the REF further weakens the nexus between research and teaching, yet both cannot exist in isolation of the other. It has become a case of the Cinderella story as Cotton et al. (2018) hinted in their paper entitled "*The Cinderella of academia: Is higher education pedagogic research undervalued in UK research assessment?*" Even Jenkins (2002) argued that while pedagogic research is often patronised with encouraging words, the ugly sisters – the QAA[51] and RAE (the precursor of REF) - failed to recognise or truly value it.

CDBU (2015) also notes that the REF is excessively promoting competition rather than collaboration. Competition, though often a force for good, can damage relationships between departments and academics within the same institution when

[51] Quality Assurance Agency – independent body responsible for assuring standards and quality in UK higher education teaching.

in excess. According to Sayer (2014), the REF is damaging to collegiality as far as the UK higher education sector is concerned. Harley's (2002) study found that most of the respondents from schools that benefitted from the RAE exercise felt the loss of scholarly identity. They felt partly responsible for the violence that was meted out to their profession, leaving some of them feeling frustrated and a little bit ashamed.

In contrast, Lejeune et al. (2015) found that the impact agenda encouraged more cross-disciplinary thinking, further legitimising engagement with external stakeholders in nine UK business schools that they surveyed. Collaborative work is an area that the UK PRME community could exploit since they seem to be good at that, such as through the annual chapter conference where academics and professionals from diverse sectors and institutions (and even from countries other than the UK) exchange ideas and share experiences that speak to causes central to RME.

3.5.6.3 Effects on teaching and research

Rankings, be they academic or media-driven, are here to stay (Thomas and Wilson, 2011). In the business school context, they are scrutinised by external relevant actors such as prospective students and funders. They are internally used by senior executives in universities to evaluate the reputation and quality of their business schools (Wilson and McKiernan, 2011). More than ever, Deans who desire to see their business schools ranked highly are inclined to invest in increasing the number of publications in starred journals. This is because of the widely held view that it offers institutions and their academics much more leverage, as opposed to increasing the quality of teaching which reportedly provides marginal returns on investment[52] (Durand and Dameron, 2011).

A survey by Technopolis group (2015) reported that there were feelings that the REF was detrimental to teaching, with cases of unfair workloads. There is evidence to suggest that academics seem to have turned away from writing books in favour of

[52] This is another way that the teaching-research nexus is weakened, instead of strengthened across HEIs. Whether it is an issue that is peculiar to mostly UK HEIs, inclusive of the business schools, is another matter. From the review covered, it could be that other nations' higher education sectors with similar assessment mechanisms as the REF may have similar issues identified. The degree to which such mechanisms exert pressures on HEIs will determine the extent of the issues arising from that, including the extent to which HEIs are reliant on the associated rewards.

journal articles[53] that are considered more productive for REF purposes (Matthews and Eve, 2016). The same applies to pedagogical research which the REF is believed to value less[54] compared to disciplinary research, at least in the context of REF2014 (Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton and Kneale, 2014). The RAE did the same (see Yorke, 2000). It suggests that research outcome is considered more significant in rankings than the quality of teaching, weakening further the nexus between teaching and research. The TEF and the REF could work together to identify ways of strengthening the teaching-research nexus, thereby bringing a balance to the academic community and the wider sector.

In the case of the RAE, Harley (2002) reported that 'non-active' research academics were made to shoulder more teaching responsibilities to allow their counterparts (i.e. the 'active' ones) ample time to engage in RAE-focused research. The resultant effect was tension between 'academic high-flyers' and 'teaching drones,' with negative consequences for students. For instance, a respondent (a Sociologist situated in a new university at the time) in Harley's (2002) study had this to say about the RAE: "it has strengthened empirical, income-oriented research, demoted scholarship (reading, reflection, critique) and has cost students a lot…" (p. 198).

Concerning effects on research, Murphy and Sage (2014) argue that the increasing pressure to publish impactful/REFable outputs might discourage academics from conducting relevant research that happens to have long-term timescales. They are likely to engage in research that increases their chances of churning out more publications in the shortest amount of time, or join forces with external researchers rather than with internal colleagues (Miller and Sabapathy, 2011; Martin and Whitley, 2010; Nightingale and Scott, 2007). Buttressing this claim is Bowring's (2008) account of how he was pressured to publish an article too soon, just because it was needed for RAE submission. Some of his colleagues prematurely resigned due to finding such pressures intolerable, which possibly explains why Bowring concluded that successive RAEs were damaging to his discipline (humanities).

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[53] This is evidenced in the REF2014 summary – both the overall types of outputs and at the UoA 19 level. For the latter, 95% (11,660) of the total outputs were journal articles, 179 were book chapters, 168 authored books and 103 working papers. While the REF via the assessors stated the need for more work to be done in increasing the number of book publications because they equally value those, it is worth ruminating about the low figures recorded and why they are significantly disproportionate to the number of journal articles received. This too perhaps is another way the nexus between teaching and research is further weakened.

[54] This can be limiting for the implementation and advancement of RME through research even though we are told that curriculum development is the primary channel that most UK business schools utilise on that front. However, research and enterprise are other means that institutions should consider utilising in the quest to progress RME implementation (Warina and Beddewela, 2016).

This is not favourable to the progression of RME implementation via research in business schools and universities. Ample time is need to develop related contents/curriculum and teaching methods that would yield desirable outcomes such as student-centred ones, including learning, feedback, assessment and impact on business and society as responsible future leaders (Wersun, 2017; Doherty et al., 2015; Doh and Tasman, 2014). Researching a developed strategy's effectiveness to enable the achievement of desired outcomes also requires time; when you then add the time needed for the impact aspect, we begin to appreciate how important time is for this type of research. The summary report for the *responsibility and sustainability* sub-field of UoA 19 in REF2014 is supportive of this claim to some extent. Some replication studies were identified by the assessors as having only focused on minute changes to responsibility contexts, or having tested for effects utilising very small/standard datasets. Hence, they regarded those as weaker aspects of the sub-field[55]. There were concerns "the sub-field had a rather episodic feel, failing to focus around programs of investigations which they warned may limit more in-depth observations being made" (p. 68). A closer look at these weaknesses to some extent indicates that the associated outputs were developed in a hurry. They needed ample time, with a clear strategy as to how they could contribute to existing studies and inform future ones. It is an assumption worth exploring by a future study.

An independent review of the REF suggests that the desire to be returned in the REF, plus pressures from within HEIs, may well have a strong influence on academics when it comes to choosing what problems to address. It can propel them towards safe topics and short-termism, and disincline them to be part of risky or multidisciplinary projects, so as to ensure reliable, high-quality publications within the REF period; this may in turn inhibit innovative thinking and risk-taking (Sayer, 2014). There remains a concern that the REF does shape the way academics plan and execute their work in ways that sometimes discourage and hinder efforts around long-term and high-risk research (BEIS, 2016). It is somewhat like the criticism levied on the RAE - many felt its existence and nature, mainly through the resource allocation aspect, determined[56] rather than measured the way research was

[55] Torrance (2020) hinted that the REF in general does not value replication, thus, there might have been an element of bias in the assessment of this type of outputs.
[56] This could be the case for the impact component of the REF – it could determine how research is carried out, which could introduce element of bias and possible data manipulation.

conducted in universities (Lee and Harley, 1998). Nutley (2011) believes that the demand to create "impact" in an era of austerity is a new challenge for both academics and their institutions[57]. Even more so for young faculty members on a tenure-track because the pressure put on publishing in starred journals seems to be framing their priorities[58] (Durand and Dameron, 2011).

3.5.6.4 Game-playing

It may sound absurd to ask if academics will jeopardise their professional integrity by intentionally engaging in exaggerations and spurious claims in the pursuit of impact/REFable outputs (Watermeyer, 2014). However, embellishment of some sort may be inevitable (Thomas, 2013) considering the monetary value of "impactful" academics (Gibney, 2012) in the present-day impact market where "impact" remains a prized yet scarce commodity (Watermeyer, 2014). Ibid (2014) alludes to the value of "impactful" academics possibly matching the currency of scholars producing four-star (4*) research.

Martin (2011) draws our attention to Wakefield et al.'s (1998) study[59] on an apparent link between vaccination and autism, reminding us that not all impact may be deemed positive or desirable. Is it possible that some academics selectively reported the impact of their research only to showcase the positives, leaving out the negatives? Emerson et al.'s (2010) study (though within the medical field) reported that reviewers were much more inclined to recommend articles that demonstrated positive results compared to papers that demonstrated null/negative results[60]. The possible implication for RME implementation could be negative. Academics that research within RME could be discouraged from sharing experiences gained from a

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[57] Considering the ongoing global pandemic related to the Covid-19 outbreak (at the time of writing – May 2020), HEIs that can come up with innovative and/or ground-breaking research that can minimise the risk associated with the virus could be on their way to raise the impact profile of their institution in the next REF. Oxford University is one of such institutions - their first human trial (in Europe) of a vaccine that could help address the deadly virus. The claim about time and collaboration as key ingredients for impact creation holds here. While we cannot say in REF terms that the institution for a fact has generated impact through their research on this front until after REF2021, we can only project the impact potential that could be generated from this – worth looking out for this when the outcome of REF2021 exercise is published. An institution that did not take part in the last REF may struggle to identify opportunities which they can leverage promptly as Oxford University has done. There are other factors at play too, resources such as finance, technology and relevant expertise. So, it is not clear cut. This is mostly the researcher's assumptions and viewpoints, some of which is informed by existing literature and news related to the pandemic. Click the link for more details regarding the vaccine. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-52394485

[58] Could this pressure be tempered by the decision to move to an institutional level submission of impact case studies as will be discussed later in this chapter? This is an area that future research could explore – after the REF2021 exercise is concluded or the subsequent one.

[59] Paper was retracted on the grounds of dishonesty.

[60] Torrance (2020) drawing on other authors works mentioned that the frequency of positive words used in publications increased from 2% (1974-80) to 17.5% (2014) and the most cited ones included novel, robust, innovative and unprecedented.

failed trial of a novel teaching method for ERS-related contents, for instance. If there are lessons to be learnt for others, preventing them from making a similar mistake and/or join forces to develop the novel method would be much more useful for achieving the desired learning outcomes. That opportunity will be lost if the related paper is not produced and submitted to the REF because the REF does not value negative results. The same implication applies to other research themes/areas and academics that research within those.

This sort of publication bias (Pride and Knoth, 2018) could give rise to game-playing behaviours. Karlsoon (2017) holds that the proliferation of research evaluation has historically been associated with game-playing as "they evoke normative reactions, expectations, as well as fears" (p. 55). The statement is reinforced by Francis (2011). She notes that British academics over the years have become adroit game-players of the RAE/REF. They tend to be pragmatic in adapting to new regulations irrespective of what they might think of the premise. Similarly, a respondent in McNay's (2015) study said the following:

> *"It seems that a lot of time and effort has gone into 'preparing' for the REF – in the sense of doing trial runs, trying to work out how to play the game. In that sense, it has not been an efficient use of public funds…" (e20).*

Hubble (2015) revealed that the University of Cardiff abruptly reduced the number of their full-time equivalent staff (from 1,030 in the 2008 RAE to 738) in preparation for REF2014 so as to lift their quality rating, regardless of the negative consequences that posed to the individuals who were excluded. Similarly, the respondents (Library and Information Science academics) in Marcella et al.'s (2018) study said the introduction of impact had given rise to game-playing in academia. An independent review of the REF raised an issue against the practice of making submissions to the REF highly selective in terms of staff members returned in REF2014. Some submissions for the 2014 exercise may not, as a result, be a true representation of the overall research activity in a given area in an institution (BEIS, 2016). However, these 'game-playing' behaviours have corrosive effects that do work against the principles of wholeness and those of duty, as a considerable number of academics are excluded on prudential grounds with the concomitant claim in many institutions that this does not affect one's career" (Smith and Conroy, 2016, p. 7).

A review of the REF exercise[61] found that most of the behaviours identified as gaming (at the institutional level – i.e. HEIs) were connected to the recruitment of staff. It was found that some institutions transferred some of their staff (on a compulsory basis) to teaching-only contracts (Technopolis group, 2015). Some others hired staff that were based abroad on fractional contracts to boost their REF returns, yet the staff hired only played minute roles in those institutions where they were submitted. Similar behaviour was observed at the individual level (i.e. academics/researchers), as several of them reportedly moved to new institutions just before the REF census date. The resultant effect was asymmetric salary inflation as HEIs compete to attract, as well as retain key academics (Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy, 2016). Bagshaw (2016) using an analogy often associated with football clubs[62] described the situation stating that "…universities with deep pockets were able to play the academic transfer market to buy in star players just in time for the researcher census date" (p. 1).

These findings, in a way, resonate with Harley's (2002) study that explored the impact of the RAE on academic work and identity in UK HEIs. One of her respondents (a member of marketing staff situated at an old University at the time) said that "recruitment of high-flyers has left us skint. No resource to underpin future research" (p. 199). Another respondent that was rated poorly and situated at an old University (sociology department) at the time claimed the last professor in their department was poached for her performance in the RAE. He/she said the following:

> *"I have worked hard and continue to do so, but RAE has made me more anxious about my achievements, work record, and make it more difficult for me to get the promotion I deserve…I consider the RAE pernicious, invidious[63] and the worst thing to happen to academia in my lifetime…it ranks individuals and departments in a crude and materialist way-and is psychologically destructive to many" (pp. 202-203).*

The financial consequences of this sort of recruitment for HEIs may be justified should the hired "stars" not only support them in boosting their performance in subsequent REF exercises, but also in showing acceptable levels of commitment to teaching, supporting colleagues, and most importantly, students, instead of working in silos

[61] The review was chaired by Lord Nicholas Stern (see https://www.bisa.ac.uk/files/Consultations/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf).

[62] Gianni De Fraja, a professor of economics at the University of Nottingham and a co-author of a study (available: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/higher-pay-for-professors-did-lead-to-better-research-excellence-framework-scores) spoke about how HEIs have been using attractive pay to hire top academics to boost their REF performance, which is no different than football clubs who compete over players to win the league.

[63] Unfair/unpleasant

focusing solely on research (Harley, 2002). This has a crucial implication for RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools and universities. There needs to be a balance between investing in research and teaching to strengthen the nexus between them (Cotton et al., 2018). We are told that most business schools lack specialists in RME, or faculty members trained in the area, hence this is an area that needs appropriate investment (Doherty et al., 2015; Muff et al., 2013).

The ethics dimension is perhaps blurred by the notion that gaming the system could be done through "rule-following or rule-bending" (Butler and Spoelstra, 2020, p. 415), which may explain why "playing the publication game" has so easily become normalised in academia. Its detrimental implications in the sense of eroding ERS principles that RME seeks to normalise are obscured by describing the earlier metaphor as "strategies of academic publishing in the contemporary university" (Ibid, 2020, p. 415).

3.5.6.5 Measurement-related issues

Another criticism of the impact component of the REF is arguably rooted in how "impact" is measured. Martin (2011) and Smith et al. (2011) have questioned the practicality of developing an appropriate scale for measuring and assessing impact since impact may come in varying magnitudes, plus each discipline may have a different view of what impact encompasses. Watermeyer (2014) mentioned how the assessment of impact in the REF is usually confused and conflated with a journal's impact factor (IF) – a calculation of that shows the average number of citations of recent articles in a given journal. Journal ranking lists were not used by UoA 19 (Business and Management Studies) in REF2014, though. In viewing impact evaluation, Penfield et al. (2014) underline the importance of factoring the purpose of the research evaluation, including the individual that evaluated the work, to ascertain the boundaries and significance of an assessment exercise.

Parker and Teijlingen (2012) pointed out that the criteria for impact case studies for the REF2014 exercise failed to acknowledge research that merely advanced teaching within institutions or increased the knowledge around a given phenomenon, though that forced academics to think about the social benefits of their research more broadly. They were concerned about the fact that the support of only outcome-based research could likely result in the loss of those deeper understandings and meanings that have been developed and now pervade practice in the social work sector.

Respondents in McNay's (2015) study said the following:

> *"As someone who has been an external assessor several times, an internal one for 2014 and a subpanel member for the 2001 process, I share those concerns. At times I was expected to grade work at or beyond the fringes of my expertise and saw panel judgements influenced by knowledge beyond the documentation provided…" (g7).*
>
> *"I found the transparency of judgement in our mock REF was low. I was a reviewer, but I have no idea if my judgements were in line with other reviewers or completely out of kilter. There was no moderation process" (e14).*

Khazragui and Hudson (2015) complained that most of the impact case studies submitted for the REF2014 exercise failed to provide measures of total impact as they were too narrative. However, in the HEFCE's blueprint for impact assessment, academic departments were challenged to submit *narrative-based* impact case studies (Watermeyer, 2014, p. 200).

3.5.6.6 Further Differentiation of Academic roles

There is also a possibility that academic roles will be further differentiated should impact weighting increase (Watermeyer, 2014). Pettigrew (2011) predicts the 20% weighting for the impact component of the REF2014 exercise will be increased for subsequent REF exercises[64]. This increase potentially will lead to having research-active academics (Dunleavy, 2012), academics solely conducting 'high impact' research and consultancy, inquiry-led academic researchers, or teaching-focused academics, all occurring in a silo (Watermeyer, 2014). Ibid (2014) already deems the bifurcation of academics into those proficient in "research" or "impact" as an enormously difficult task[65]. However, to prioritise the production of 'best impact' over 'best research' owing to the emerging impact market is in his view utterly absurd, since research should create impact and not impact creating research. The danger is that academics may be inclined to do whatever it takes to force their research to generate impact even if it means manipulating data to make that happen[66]. This is aside from the fact that it takes away the surprise element in research and can be

[64] Which is now the case considering that weighting approved for the upcoming REF2021 exercise sits at 25% - a 5% increase.
[65] Might be tempered by the decision for impact to be submitted at the institution level for REF2021, albeit internally, the academics that contribute on this front may still have more leverage than their counterparts and therefore may not be the demise of research stars.
[66] May still be the case despite the new requirement for institutional level submission of impact for REF2021, unless university top management ceases from using this in deciding who will be promoted or not.

detrimental to the research process. Smith et al. (2011) draw our attention to the consequences that came with bifurcating staff into the research-active or inactive categories in the RAE exercise, such as the consequences on the self-esteem of academics and their career strategies[67] (for more detail see Lucas, 2006).

3.5.6.7 Effect on academic freedom

The autonomy of academics was another issue central to the debate surrounding the new element, impact. According to Smith et al. (2011), autonomy is intrinsically imperative to any field of professional activity. Many therefore voiced their concern about the impact component of the REF potentially posing a threat to researchers' freedom and fundamental academic freedoms. The authors describe researchers' autonomy as a condition for productive professional activity which in turn is reliant on the satisfaction of three inter-connected preconditions: control over knowledge production, control over the uses of knowledge produced, and convincing ways of sharing and disseminating knowledge to the broader society. They went on to assess how the REF (at its proposal stage) could influence each of the three conditions as follows:

Control over knowledge production. This condition is heavily dependent on the cycle of knowledge production - an activity that occurs at a very slow pace in comparison to other modes of knowing according to Bourdieu (2002), and the pace of work is crucial since ample time is needed for reflection and immersion (Smith et al., 2011). A study of five European countries by Felt (2009) revealed that researchers mostly desire to have carved out niches where they can perform *slow research*, including meaningful assimilation and articulation work of knowledge produced at various sites and moments.

This form of autonomy arguably is dependent on the power that researchers can wield in terms of setting aside ample time[68] (both theirs and those of others) for *non-productive* aspects of research (Smith et al., 2011). Some of these include getting used to a study context, modifying problem definitions mid-way into research

[67] May not be as pronounced as it seems to have been with the decision to not publish data relating to the academics that are returned for REF2021.

[68] The lack of adequate time to produce research can potentially stifle creativity and innovation (see Harley, 2000, 2002; Parker et al., 1998; Harley and Lee, 1997; Puxty et al., 1994).

projects, re-negotiating roles, review, and reflection (Ibid, p. 1372). Even though these non-productive aspects of research are related to the liberty to take risks (Smith et al., 2011), Pettigrew (2011) reminds us that research is a probabilistic activity regardless of the field. Thus, it might be a case of dedicating time to do things that may or may not yield results[69], for instance, complying with dominant criteria of research productivity (Smith et al., 2011) like the publication of several papers and maintenance of a high success rate in securing research grants (Felt and Stöckelová, 2009).

Arguably, the REF sends signals that contradict this form of autonomy. It fails to challenge (and seem to have exacerbated – see Technopolis group, 2015) the restrictive regime of performance management within which academics increasingly work, which does not support slow research and risk-taking. Drawing on the literature review carried out in chapter 2, the implementation and advancement of RME via research is probably likely to thrive more via slow research such as a longitudinal research approach (see Doherty et al., 2015). The risk-taking should be within the boundaries of its core components – ERS (ethics, responsibility, and sustainability), though. The reported episodic feel of the responsibility and sustainability sub-field of UoA 19 in REF2014 supports this argument to an extent. Ample time and less restriction are needed to produce comprehensive, focused original or replication studies that can inform further in-depth observations (see p. 68 of the summary report for UoA 19 - REF2014).

However, the REF could allow academics to justify their academic work in more diverse ways than the traditional outputs, with the potential to enhance their individual and collective autonomies, thereby addressing the constraints encountered at the institution level. Some of the non-traditional academic work includes museum catalogues, policy reports, and other forms of knowledge that are fluid and context-sensitive – e.g. "the embodied skills and enhanced confidence of others" (Smith et al., 2011, citing Garforth and Kerr, 2009, p. 31). The claim that the REF could offer

[69] This has rapidly changed and is probably no longer acceptable by HEIs and their leaders on the account of the REF. Torrance (2020) reminds us that the parameters that make for a successful individual researcher career or a successful research department are now guided by the significance of the environment and impact component of the REF considering the guidelines set for the upcoming REF2021 exercise which will be discussed briefly. That said, a well-rounded research profile is one that can demonstrate impact on research users - informing policy and practice, not just debates within the field, as well as external funding for research. Hence, research is gradually redefined as "a manged corporate activity" (p.4). Therefore, results, and preferably positive ones, seem to be a must.

academics other ways of justifying their work is supported by Pettigrew (2011). He said the following: "opening up the impact agenda can create greater legitimacy for a portfolio approach to publishing for scholars deadened by the retreat to defining scholarship just in terms of publication in A-rated scholarly journals" (p. 348). However, journal article is still the primary type of research output submitted in the REF, accounting for 95% of the total research outputs submitted to UoA 19 in REF2014 and likely to be the case in the subsequent REF. RME, and therefore ERS-related journal articles could help facilitate RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools and universities, as could other forms of publication such as authored textbooks, working papers (via PRME working groups[70]) and book chapters[71]. Ample time is needed to produce the latter, though. The REF probably needs to stress that these forms of publications are as important as journal articles (Pidd and Broadbent, 2015).

Control over the uses of knowledge. The autonomy of academics is endangered by the lack of scientific control over the increasing monetary and political value that is accorded to research, which drawing on institutional theory typifies the regulative pillar (Scott, 2014). While it was envisaged that the impact agenda of the REF would ameliorate the situation – restore control (Smith et al., 2011) - it does not seem to have done much on that front. It arguably has exacerbated the situation based on anecdotal and empirical evidence.

Convincing ways of representing knowledge to society. HEIs are increasingly challenged to demonstrate their contributions to professional communities. Smith et al. (2011, citing Gieryn, 1983, 1999) note that a convincing external representation can act as a buffer that protects autonomy at an organisational/institutional level. They opine that this condition for autonomy is under threat due to extensive social trends that have weakened professional jurisdictions, with more judgemental and perhaps hostile public attitudes towards all forms of expertise, as well as a democratisation of the opportunities for knowledge production and access to knowledge. Professional communities increasingly must demonstrate their

[70] Including climate change and environment; anti-corruption in curriculum change; sustainability mindset; gender equality; humanist management; business for peace; business and human rights; poverty, challenge for management education; and PRME innovation challenge.

[71] The likes of "Educating for Responsible Management: Putting Theory into Practice" mentioned in Chapter 2.

accountability to the public to justify their right to self-regulate certain types of knowledge production.

Consequently, the REF invites/compels the academic community to take part in an accountability contest or the sort of boundary-work[72] which Gieryn (1993) refers to as "an impurifying strategy" which is designed to buy academics' freedom of producing autonomous knowledge (Smith et al., 2011, p. 1373).

3.5.6.8 The REF as a managerial tool

Lejeune et al.'s (2015) study sought to uncover the organisational consequences of 'impact thinking' and found that the impact agenda (at the time of their study) influenced the hiring and promotion criteria of some UK business schools. One of them (situated in a technology-oriented university) was for instance allegedly hiring more scientists and individuals with track records of securing research grants in order to change the dynamics of faculty hires and support the design of more impactful research projects. These findings lay credence to Khazragui and Hudson's (2015) argument about universities' reward and hiring strategies possibly being heavily influenced by the impact aspect of the REF, as the value placed on a good impact case study outweighs that of a good 4* paper/book. Likewise, Murphy and Sage's (2014) study found that staffing practices and inequalities within and between institutions were linked to the REF process.

An independent review of the REF found that there are concerns that the REF may lead to some institutions tying research quality too closely to individual staff performance instead of team-based research activity which epitomises modern methods to research in various disciplines, including multidisciplinary teams[73]. That can put collaborative work within departments in individual institutions at risk (Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy, 2016). Gilbert (2010) equally pointed out that some UK observers viewed the requirement to demonstrate the impact of university research along the lines of the then coalition government's alleged aim to make academic researchers "do more for less." Some of the issues

[72] The discursive practices by which scientists attempt to attribute selected qualities to scientists, scientific methods, and scientific claims in order to draw a "rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative, residual non-science" (Gieryn, 1983, p. 781, cited in Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 179).

[73] The move to disassociate academics from outputs as will be discussed later in this chapter should address this concern.

outlined were addressed by Stern through 12 recommendations that are discussed briefly in the following section.

In conclusion, Macilwain (2009) notes that the REF is not all bad. The problem may lie with Senior Executives' desire to use it as a managerial tool. Respondents in Harley's (2002) study in the context of the RAE unequivocally claimed that the changes that came with the exercise were very negative, for there was a general sense of demoralisation. The increasing pressure to publish and demonstrate impact is undeniable (see Fanelli, 2010; Davey, 2013; Murphy and Sage, 2014). This is a situation that Rogers, the Director of research and innovation services at Stirling University has described as an obsession (see Macilwain, 2009); one that can encourage the pursuit of multi-publications of questionable values (Harley, 2002). This is an issue that was reported in the summary report for UoA 19. The value of some of the outputs submitted in REF2014 was questioned, including some that were submitted to the two sub-fields[74] that are closely related to RME.

The following section discusses the twelve proposals offered by Lord Stern (i.e. the Stern recommendations) to try and resolve the issues highlighted in the REF2014 exercise.

3.6 Stern Recommendations and Some Decisions for REF2021

Following the REF 2014 exercise, Johnson, the Minister of Universities and Science commissioned an independent review of the REF chaired by Lord Stern[75] in November 2015. Several of the problems and issues with the current system (REF) highlighted in the Stern report have unsurprisingly been discussed in the previous section. These include the rising cost of assessing research quality, how HEIs and their academics attempted to game the system and the lack of inclusiveness due to high selectivity. This is in addition to detrimental effects on research and scholarship, collaboration, career process and behaviour modifications – all were mostly negative (see BEIS, 2016).

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[74] Responsibility and sustainability, and management development and management education.

[75] Details are available at (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541338/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf).

Despite the issues raised, the report argued that the REF is useful. The assessment of research quality should therefore continue not just to support the efficient and equitable distribution of quality-related research funding, but to also provide vital information for HEIs, other organisations, individuals, groups, and the public. Those are useful for benchmarking, demonstrating accountability, and making informed/strategic decisions.

Table 23 below is an outline of the summary of the Stern report recommendations, following due consideration of the REF process. It is solely based on the document entitled "Building on Success and Learning from Experience: An Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework," popularly known as the Stern Recommendation, published in July 2016. The texts in italics are commentaries by the researcher based on insights gained from the review of existing literature and anecdotal evidence; the rest relates to the document.

Table 23: Stern report recommendations and potential implications for RME and Associated Academics

1. *All research-active academics should be returned in the subsequent REF.* Based on literature review and responses to a Call for Evidence, it is argued that if the next REF is as highly selective as was REF2014, it could have long-term consequences on individuals that are not returned. This includes problems with career choices, progression, morale, and the stigma associated with non-participation. *The recommendation may favour academics that research within the RME field, thereby enabling its implementation/advancement in HEIs through increased visibility and recognition by the REF. Drawing on institutional theory, this could help secure the legitimacy of the field and that of associated institutions and academics, and possibly attract the critical mass needed to move the agenda and the field forward. All without fear of punishment (see Scott, 2014) in terms of career progression, for instance. However, the challenge is whether related outputs will be deemed REFable by HEI senior executives since they are mostly viewed as pedagogical research based on the literature review (see chapter 2). This type of research has been historically perceived as being of lower status and quality and seem to be awarded lower ratings (compared to disciplinary research) in research assessment exercises in the UK, including the RSE, RAE and the current iteration, REF (see Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton et al., 2018). The summary report for UoA 19 in REF2014, specifically the sub-fields that are closely aligned to RME, seem to support this claim (see the Table in the latter part of section 3.4.2.3). Nonetheless, the recommendation provides a solid ground for research-active academics to argue why they should be returned where there is perceived discrimination, RME-related or not.* *Another possible implication is related to the ample time needed to develop related curricula, including their delivery. The fact that related research is more closely tied to teaching, learning, engagement, and assessment activities compared to perhaps disciplinary research, makes it more time-consuming. Associated outputs, outcomes and impact arguably are as good as the quality of the development that one invests in those areas, all of which need time. Therefore, the permission to return a smaller number of outputs in some instances will enhance the impact potential of related outputs for the reasons outlined.*
2. *Research outputs should be submitted at UoA level with a set average number per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE). However, some academics should have the flexibility to submit higher and others less than the set average.* It is recommended that outputs be collated at UoA level to disconnect the direct link between outputs and persons returned and allow for a bit more flexibility. The total number of outputs to be returned in each UoA should continue to be based on staff numbers. To ensure that research-active staff with limited publications are also returned, the required number of outputs per FTE staff should be made flexible – more than two outputs up to a maximum of six, and prescribed minimum or none for others. It presumably will reduce the burden on staff who would need to declare their exceptional circumstances as a justification for submitting less than four outputs as was the case for the REF 2014 exercise. *This from an institutional theory perspective could favour RME inclined research-active academics should their outputs (or some of them) not be deemed REFable and therefore not submitted in the REF. This is assuming there will be no punishment - implicit or explicit (see Scott, 2014). The same could also be said about other academics, but this scenario would not be beneficial for the implementation and advancement of RME via research. It will likely hinder those via limited visibility of related research outputs since they will not be on the REF platform. Although they will already be in the public domain, such as relevant journal outlets, a number of them that cater to related outputs are perceived to be of low quality. The REF (UoA 19) claims not to have used journal ranking lists, but this was considered in selecting whom to return in REF2014 and who not to across HEIs, including business schools - existing literature and anecdotal evidence support this claim.*
3. *Outputs should not be portable.* The suggestion to not submit outputs to more than one UoA is to reduce the burden on panels, albeit the ability to cross-refer would remain. To ensure HEIs get their returns on investment and limit the effects of the transfer market, outputs should be submitted only by the HEI where the output was mostly produced. Should individuals transfer between institutions (locally or overseas) during the REF period, their output(s) should be held by or allocated to the HEI where they were based when they were accepted for publication. For those individuals that left an institution either through retirement or to another institution, a smaller maximum number of outputs may be permitted, with three deemed as appropriate. HEIs who hire staff during the REF cycle can include them in their staff

return - but only outputs accepted for publication after the staff joined the HEI are allowed. This will discourage short-termism and narrowly motivated movement across the higher education sector while encouraging long-term investment in staff development (which is advantageous to UK research) and more significant collaborative works within and across HEIs.

The eradication of short-termism is another area that could be beneficial for RME-related research and academics. This applies to the last point made in the previous section relating to ample time. Instead of churning out outputs of lower quality status[76]*, academics can focus more on putting in the time and effort needed to produce quality papers with potential significant contributions while pushing the field and agenda forward.*

The other aspect of short-termism is on the job mobility front. RME-related research arguably requires more time to produce outputs and impact than researching in other themes and/or pure disciplinary areas. When coupled with the fact career progression and related mobility seems to be closely tied to the number of quality research outputs that an academic has, it is easy to imagine the pressures experienced by academics that research within RME to contemplate whether they might be better off working in other areas. Moves to counter short-termism may provide a level playing ground within the academic community – my research contribution (including theme/area/type) is valued as much as your type of situation. That way, more senior executives are encouraged to invest in developing the wide range of research area in their institutions without fearing that much-needed returns will be lost due to game-playing by academics fixated on capitalising the transfer market created by the REF. Investing in the development of pedagogical research is crucial to the survival of any HEI as that is closely aligned to their core functions and purpose, so it therefore makes good business sense (Lingwood et al., 2018). RME will benefit on this front too.

4. *Peer review should continue to be the basis for panels evaluation. However, metrics should be provided by submitting institutions to aid panel members in their evaluation, and panels should be transparent about their usage.*

It is proposed that the assessment of outputs should still be based on the peer-review system as opposed to metrics - quantitative indicators alone cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the research quality of UK HEIs. However, bibliometric data[77] could be used to support panels in their peer review assessment though they explicitly would need to state how they have used this, to promote transparency.

This recommendation has a significant implication for RME too since as already mentioned, related research is viewed as pedagogical research, which as an approach is typically thought to be of a lower status compared to disciplinary or applied organizational research. Even if highly ranked journals are less receptive of related outputs, that should not be an issue for (and in) the REF, and therefore more associated outputs will be submitted. This probably is a utopian dream as empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that journal ranking lists are utilized both explicitly and implicitly in the judging of the quality of papers for REF submissions. The number of citations a paper receives is not entirely independent of those. Hence RME-related outputs are likely to thrive under the peer-review system as opposed to the metrics system. Although, implicit bias is probably more pronounced under the former than the latter, game-playing via induced or orchestrated citations (i.e. excessive self-citation and getting colleagues to cite one's work and return the favour) generally makes the metrics system less attractive. At the heart of such game-playing is the question of ethics, which is a core component of RME; the implications are worth considering by RME-related academics and indeed, all other academics.

5. *Institutions should have more flexibility to showcase their interdisciplinary and collaborative impacts through the submission of 'institutional' level impact case studies, which will form part of a new assessment on the institutional level.*

Despite the cost (£55m) incurred for the impact element of the REF2014 exercise, the independent review of REF found that 'impact' in fact contributed to the growing culture of broader engagement, improving the delivery of benefits emerging from research. A portion of this cost is projected to reduce in the next REF exercise because HEIs now have processes in place for capturing the required information.

This recommendation could be beneficial for RME, which is interdisciplinary and not just a business school or management institution affair. The array of PRME signatories support this claim, in that there are institutions that have a university-wide status and a business school signatory status. Each of the three primary components of RME is multidisciplinary; ethics is practised in all fields and an institutionalized aspect of research even beyond the UK higher education context

[76] In terms of the actual content and the desired impact, not only by journal ranking lists and the debates around those.
[77] Quantitative data such as citation counts, H-index (measuring the productivity and citation impact of researchers), journal impact factor, etc.

and the wider sector. The same applies to the other two elements but not solely in the context of research practice. HEIs and their academics are expected to demonstrate social responsibility through responsible research practices while ensuring those have minimal or no threat to the sustenance of the wide range of stakeholders involved and who may be influenced by their research. The recommendation could then facilitate or enable the implementation and advancement of RME within and beyond UK business schools, so is supportive of PRME's principle 5 and 6 – partnership and engagement, respectively.

6. *Impact should be based on demonstrable quality research. However, case studies could be associated to a: research activity, body of work and a wide range of research outputs.*

Stern proposes that a more in-depth picture of impact is developed in order address the concern raised about the mechanistic linkages made between specific output and the eventual impact that overly constrained HEIs from submitting examples of where a staff/group's research and expertise had created impact(s) in the last REF exercise; the sort that would capture an individual, group or HEI's research expertise, facilities, and networks that reinforce or result in the eventual impact of research.

The wide range of research outputs may not favour RME that much, assuming senior managers and executives in business schools and universities do not tend to consider the ample time needed to produce RME-related research; it is not an area of research that can be quickly churned out. This is exacerbated by the average time it takes journals to publish manuscripts received from academics in general; this is not peculiar to those who research within RME. The targeting of higher-ranked journals encouraged and preferred by many adds to the mix, as do the perceptions of pedagogical research and RME-related outputs within some such journals. See earlier discussions for a better appreciation of the stated possible implications here.

7. *The REF guidance should be clear that there will be no narrow interpretation of impact case studies. Its focus should not be solely on socio-economic impacts but should include impact on the following: government policy, public engagement and understanding, cultural life, academic impacts outside the field, and teaching.*

While the REF definition of impact is mostly broad, the independent review of the REF2014 exercise found that the community did not entirely understand certain types of impact. Hence the proposal that all panels follow the same broad approach to impact. The review equally found that there was room for a broader range of impact than were showcased in the case studies submitted for the 2014 REF exercise. Thus, Stern recommends that more breadth and depth of impact be captured, including impact(s) generated through public engagements and understanding, impacts on cultural life, and significant impacts on curricula and/or pedagogy within and across disciplines and leading to the establishment of new disciplines. Some respondents to the Call for Evidence demanded that the REF allow for the resubmission of impact case studies (for REF2021), but with additional evidence of the impact generated since the REF2014 exercise concluded. Lord Nicholas Stern deems this argument sensible.

This recommendation could benefit RME and allied academics, in that the impacts generated through ERS-related teaching, learning and engagement activities potentially will be allowed in subsequent REF; whereas Impact produced through teaching was not permitted in REF2014. It could help secure and/or maintain the legitimacy and critical mass needed to move the agenda (via PRME) and the field forward while developing more potential responsible future leaders and making positive contributions to the wider society. Doherty et al. (2015) already projected that RME would likely strengthen the impact profiles of business schools due to its focus in understanding the economic, environmental, and social impacts of business on society. Their assertion and PRME's 4th principle reinforce the argument about pedagogical and disciplinary research as aspects of RME-related research.

8. *A new, institutional level Environment assessment should include a narrative of an institution's strategy for future research environment – a statement of its plan for the promotion of high-quality research and related activities, including its backing for interdisciplinary and cross-institutional initiatives and impact.*

This was proposed to form part of the institutional assessment, to be evaluated by a specialist cross-disciplinary panel.

Sustainability interestingly was one of the assessment criteria for research environment, and that too is a core component of RME. The possible implication(s) for RME and associated academics is hard to say aside from doctoral studies and completions around or about RME and/or ERS. Ethics is at the heart of every *research, as is the associated environment, which is another core component of RME as already pointed out. Furthermore, ERS has great potential to foster interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research-related activities, partnerships, and collaborations, as well as initiatives and impacts.*

9. *Individual UoA environment statements should be condensed, designed to complement the institutional level environment statement. It should also include key metrics on research intensity that are specific to the UoA.*

The review reinforced the importance of assessing the research environment, stressing the need to continue to reward HEIs whose research environments are dynamic and creative, with a clear sense of direction and vision for their research and with related activities, and with strategies in place for delivering impact through their research.

Specific implications for RME and academics within the area are not apparent to the researcher. Perhaps dynamism and creativity would be enhanced further with the proposal to permit the submission of teaching-related impacts in the subsequent REF. Those could be beneficial for facilitating RME implementation and advancement, depending on the array of techniques and methods that are utilised and communicated clearly by participating institutions.

10. *Where possible, REF data and metrics should be open, consistent, and combinable with other research funders' data gathering procedures to simplify the requirements for data collection and lessen the cost of assembling and submitting information.*

Due to the incompatibilities of the information that research funders often require HEIs and researchers to collate and supply, plus HEIs' dependency on infrastructure systems which often are not interoperable, Stern proposes the development of a more accessible, yet standardised, open system that is easy to combine. One that can allow the efficient reuse of the abundant information that currently exists, allowing information to be easily accessed and evaluated while reducing the burden and cost associated with gathering and submitting information.

Specific implications for RME and allied academics are not apparent to the researcher, except maybe for the gathering of data related to the TEF. That may be beneficial to academics and their institution in terms of the reduction of administrative burden.

11. *Government and UKRI should make use of the REF more strategically and imaginatively to understand best: the health of the UK research base, our research-related resources and areas of high potential for future development, and to build the case for substantial investment in research in the UK.*

UKRI[78] is expected to make the research process for the REF more integrated, strategic, and agile. The organisation will be responsible for evaluating the overall health of the research process and innovation emerging from the REF. Stern notes that the REF is useful to the UKRI's vision because of its capacity to offer vital information about the state of the research system in the UK and hence to help the UKRI spot and address inadequacies and opportunities for partnership.

RME and associated academics and institutions would likely benefit if UKRI were to identify high potential in pedagogical research and was to commit to investing in developing the area further, as would other research themes and areas that mostly contribute to pedagogy. Again, it is vital to invest in their development and progression similar to disciplinary research.

12. *The government should ensure that there is no additional administrative burden to HEIs from exchanges between the TEF and REF. Instead, it should see that they both strengthen the vital relationship between teaching and research in HEIs.*

The independent review of the REF 2014 exercise appreciates the desire to improve the quality of HEIs' teaching provisions through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The report suggests that successful HEIs do not necessarily separate their teaching and research missions, thus the need to ensure that the TEF does not reintroduce a binary divide. In line with recommendation 10, Stern proposes the development of a standard dataset that can describe university research and teaching staff, and that the impact element of the REF should be made to consider more broadly teaching-related impact generated through research. Additionally, the review was not oblivious of the potential issues and problems that may arise from running both the REF and TEF. As such, it underlined

[78] UK Research and Innovation is an organisation whose primary focus is to ensure that the UK maintains its world leading position in research and innovation. Available: https://www.ukri.org/

the relevance of ensuring that both systems deliver mutually reinforcing incentives; promoting positive and constructive behaviours, and flexibility in terms of timescales and deadlines, while keeping administrative burden to the minimum. It is envisaged that both the REF and the TEF will provide the UK Government, the Office for Students regulatory framework, and UKRI useful datasets that will aid and facilitate a better understanding of the higher education sector, ensuring its sustainability while driving strategic decisions.

As established, RME-related research is not done in isolation of teaching, and RME-related teaching is advanced and informed by lessons learnt from related research. The purpose behind the recommendation (in terms of strengthening the crucial relationship between the TEF and the REF) is therefore perhaps encouraging for RME, in that academics that teach and research in this area can use related activities and outputs towards either the REF or TEF. The burden for academics and HEIs on this front could be much reduced if considered well.

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from Stern Report).

The next section presents what some authors had to say about the proposal.

3.7 A Few Responses to the Stern Recommendations

Given the scope of the study, this section only discusses recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 5-7 (see Table 24). The other six recommendations are relevant but less related to this research project. Most of the debate that has ensued across HEIs seem to revolve more around the earlier mentioned six recommendations in comparison to the other six.

Table 24: A Few Reactions to the Stern Recommendations – (1, 2, 3 and 5-7)

The debate around Recommendation 1. The notion of a universal return of all research-active staff is one of Stern's main proposals for changes to the REF, according to Watermeyer (2016). The author alluded to how overly selective some HEIs were about the choice of researchers they submitted to the REF 2014 exercise, implying that HEIs claim of "institutional" research excellence was only partial since the exercise only factored in a top slice of "excellence." In other words, the claimed "excellence" is not a faithful holistic reflection of collective achievement because REF 2014 neglected the contributions of others. Ibid (2016) notes that the recommendation seeks to stop the future telling of half-truths that misrepresent and overstate the real state of the UK's research landscape, and further suggests that it could help rectify the damaging effects on some academics and HEIs, including on morale, self-esteem, and trust caused by an institutional policy of only selecting research stars. Wilsdon (2016) opined that the proposal aims to make the management of the REF exercise simpler, and reduce the gaming that goes into HEIs' selection of whom to return. He also remarked that Stern's proposal to submit all research-active staff for the next REF exercise in a way creates a framework that promotes a more flexible approach due to its potential to support various types of research and diverse career pathways for researchers. This can be beneficial for the implementation and advancement of RME in UK business schools and universities, and could be favourable to academics that research and teach within this area. However, there is still enough room for HEIs to attempt to game the system by then establishing who is and is not a research-active staff (Bagshaw, 2016). HEIs could go on to change job classifications or staff contracts and move those deemed "less" eligible for the REF to "teaching-only" contracts (Watermeyer, 2016). Consequently, academics could be consistently deemed less competitive due to having a significant teaching focus, putting them at risk of being marginalised in the next REF exercise[79]. There is, therefore, a danger that the REF process may ultimately culminate in the weakening of HEIs definition of the researcher role, and contribute to a narrow emphasis on the steady attraction of research grants and the demonstration of research prominence/reputation, and reinforce a disconnect with teaching[80] (Watermeyer, 2016).
Recommendation 2. The proposal for more flexibility concerning the number of outputs that staff who will be returned by their HEIs can submit for the next REF should encourage more departmental submissions (Bagshaw, 2016), contrary to the REF2014 exercise which was divisive, de-moralising, and failed to promote team-based working and collaboration, as well as equality and diversity (Bass, 2016). However, HEIs could nonetheless exploit this proposal by making sure that their "best" researchers dominate the exercise through their submission of more outputs in comparison to their counterparts who allegedly will be deemed less eligible for the REF (Bagshaw, 2016). While Stern's proposals seem logical, they are probably complicated by the acute uncertainties surrounding Brexit, especially what its implication would be for research collaboration and staff mobility (Wilsdon, 2016). However, to UCU[81] (2016), the proposal is beneficial because of its potential to reduce the pressure to publish. Goldberg (2016) believes that recommendations 1 and 2 remove the need for HEIs and individuals to declare any extenuating circumstance to reduce the number of outputs required and break the direct link between individuals and outputs. The former is much to the relief of some individuals that can only submit a smaller number of outputs due to perhaps health-related issues. Unlike their counterpart (relating to REF2014 exercise), they would not go

[79] This is worth exploring after the outcome of the impending REF2021 exercise is published. A study with a focus on RME inclined academics would be useful.

[80] Again, a further hint that the REF may unintentionally be weakening the nexus between teaching and research across UK HEIs. A collaborative engagement between the REF and the TEF, or the merging of both systems could be useful for addressing the issues surrounding this. The feasibility of this proposal is one the researcher cannot speak on at present; nonetheless, it is worth exploring.

[81] University and College Union

through the stressful and intrusive process of declaring personal circumstances that they would rather keep private for the REF2021 exercise.
Recommendation 3. The proposal that outputs should not be portable was in Hewson's (2016) view the heartbeat of the public debate. It is aimed at discouraging HEIs from hiring new staff just before the REF census date. So, when hiring staff an institution will no longer inherit publications mostly produced in another HEI – ownership lies with the researcher's former institution who arguably invested heavily in supporting the preparation of the publication (Bass, 2016). Similarly, Watermeyer (2016) notes that this recommendation primarily seeks to curb the often-aggressive poaching and "rent-seeking" behavior[82] that occurred close to the REF2014 deadline, and can potentially reduce the bargaining power of academics with some prestigious publications behind them when moving jobs (Matthews and Eve, 2016). Ibid (2016) notes that the end of research portability could cause the REF to become more about the rating of departments as opposed to the assessment of individuals. It is worth pointing out that some academics could delay publications to extract lucrative job offers in return for the release of their results at their new HEI (Watermeyer, 2016), exacerbating the often-lengthy delays already associated with academic publishing (Matthews and Eve, 2016). According to UCU (2016), this proposal could impact negatively on career access, the mobility of individuals, and the ownership of research. For instance, Early career researchers (ECRs) were concerned that the proposal would make it a lot more difficult for them to find jobs. They may struggle to publish the required number of outputs within a short time compared to more experienced academics who supposedly have mastered the craft of publishing. In contrast, Goldberg (2016) opined it might favor them. It could take the form of full portability granted to those on a fixed-term contract, a transfer portability window of a year or more, or a grant of portability to individuals within X years upon the completion of their doctoral degrees. Wilsdon (2016) even proposed the total exemption of ECRs on fixed term contract until HEIs award them permanent contracts. He reminded us that the REF is an assessment of the research strength of HEIs and not individuals, implying that the proposal to reduce the number of outputs and decouple them from individuals should in effect lessen the pressure on ECRs. If no HEI can recruit based on outputs they did not contribute to developing, then the game is probably changed for everyone. Individuals presumably will find jobs based on their potential. This includes ECRs, albeit further into the future for those with no publications (Matthews and Eve, 2016).
Recommendation 5-7. Notwithstanding the burdens and problems that accompanied the inclusion of impact in the REF 2014 exercise, it appears that the higher education sector has grown firmly attached to it (Wilsdon, 2016). The flexibility to link research and impact offered by an institutional level submission of impact case studies (c) should arguably encourage HEIs to produce some interesting cross-disciplinary examples of research impact more easily (Bagshaw, 2016). The British Academy (2017) welcomes the proposal to broaden the definition of impact, stating that "impact is often achieved through a 'web of influence' rather than a linear progression" (p. 7). The Academy supports the move to include the impact of research on teaching in higher education within the broader impact measure. That, from Watermeyer's (2016) standpoint, should help bridge the gap/division that exists between teaching and research cultures within the sector. It is believed that Stern's recommendation to recognise the impact of research on public engagement and understanding is relevant because some academics tend to struggle to decipher whether their public engagement work is either a channel for future impact or a form of impact (Watermeyer, 2016).

Source: Compiled by Author

Conclusively, Wilsdon (2016) applauded Lord Stern and his panel for doing an excellent job with the review of the REF2014 exercise and his proffered recommendations. He believes the report was balanced rather than one-sided, in that it highlights both the positives and the issues with the current REF, and suggests that the proposals are mostly incremental, rather than revolutionary. He further states that "many of the problems associated with the REF derive less from the exercise itself than from its blunt, insensitive use as a scapegoat for weak leadership, absent strategy and poor management practices" (p. 4).

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82 These are disruptive and damaging to what Watermeyer (2016) ultimately described as a small and highly interlinked professional community. Plus, they drastically reduce the returns on investment for HEIs, since they sometimes invest heavily in staff training and development, only to lose them to another HEI on the account of REF (Wilsdon, 2016).

We will now look at some of the decisions for the next REF2021 exercise in the following section.

3.8 Some Decisions for REF2021 Exercise

The table below outlines some of the key decisions approved by the REF 2021 Steering Group for the next REF exercise. Again, the current study is within the context of the REF2014 exercise. Participants were asked to briefly discuss related experiences given the timing of the research project – it had not been long since the result of the REF2014 exercise was published. However, it seemed preparations around the REF2021 exercise were already underway in most UK HEIs, though with a considerable degree of uncertainty as identified at the interview stage of the study. Therefore, Table 25[83] is not an exhaustive list of the requirements for the imminent REF2021 exercise. They are taken predominantly from the document prepared by the REF2021 Steering Group entitled *Key decisions*[84]. Those interested in further details on the next research assessment can find relevant documents related to this via the main webpage[85] of the REF.

Table 25: Some Requirements for REF2021 Exercise

<u>*Staff - All research-active staff to be returned:*</u> HEIs must identify staff with significant responsibility for research, though this is not to be confused with the selection of staff to be returned, as that was one of the reasons the REF2014 exercise was said to be divisive. Some of the tips offered by the REF executive to support HEIs in meeting this requirement are presented below: *Establish the research independence of staff on T&R (teaching and research) contracts.* It has been suggested that HEIs identify non-independent researchers that are on T&R contracts via the procedures they have in place for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research. *Variation by UoA.* Acknowledging that employment practices may vary across disciplines, it has been recommended that HEIs vary their processes and criteria for establishing staff with significant responsibility for research by UoA to allow for disciplinary differences. The intention is not, however, to cover irregularities that exist at the departmental level (e.g. those related to historic staffing policies). *Non-academic contract Staff.* Like the REF2014 exercise, only staff that are on 'research only' or T&R contracts should be returned. Their counterparts (including senior managers) are ineligible for REF2021 submission. The approved policy allows funding bodies to capture the research of staff employed to take on independent research. *Staff whose research responsibility has changed during the REF cycle.* Staff previously under a Category A eligible contract who moved to a non-eligible contract (by taking on a senior management or an administrative role) are regarded eligible as a former member of staff by the REF. The outputs that they first published in the public domain (i.e. journal outlets) while employed under the former eligible contract are deemed eligible for submission. A staff member that remains on the Category A eligible contract but who has less research responsibility on the census date is not regarded as a former staff member but is seen as still being part of the eligible staff pool. *Overseas-based staff.* For the REF2014 exercise, the return of staff in overseas-based units was allowed. However, HEIs were required to evidence the close connection of their research activity and the submitting unit in the UK on the census date. Only a few HEIs used the facility, and few such staff were submitted. For the REF2021 exercise,

[83] Readers are advised to refer to the comments made around Stern's recommendations when considering this section in order to appreciate possible implications for RME and associated academics.

[84] https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/key-decisions/

[85] https://www.ref.ac.uk/

it has been decided that only the academics employed by a participating UK HEI and who are based in a discrete department/unit outside the UK will be eligible. However, their research activity primary focus must be clear and linked directly to the submitting unit situated in the UK on the census date. A consideration of the recommended indicators for evidencing a significant link to the submitting UK HEI should guide HEIs on this matter.

Staff - Independent Researcher: The REF defines independent researchers as people who are employed by an institution to take on self-led research, as opposed to running another person's research programme. The definition does not cover research that people carry out beside contracted responsibilities. It implies that most of the postdoctoral research assistants who are employed to work on a project/programme grants are ineligible to be submitted, except when they have a significant contribution to the research design or lead a considerable/specialised work package.

Staff - Making known the names of staff to be returned: The standard analyses provided to panels have been restricted to only show data on the distribution of outputs between 1 and 5 outputs (instead of including 0). The list of the staff returned at the end of the exercise will also not be published. Further to protecting the identity of staff with exceptional circumstances, the decision resonates with Lord Stern's recommendation for the REF not to focus on the individual researchers but the submitting unit.

Outputs – Non-portability: After several consultations, it was decided by the funding bodies to allow the return of the outputs of former employees made redundant by an institution due to the considerable unintended consequences that doing otherwise may have had on the individuals. For instance, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) on research fellowship are often made redundant when their contract elapses, and their service extends beyond two years. Not allowing their outputs may discourage HEIs from hiring them, as will sharing information about their employment to people tasked to select outputs for the upcoming REF2021 exercise.

However, making an exception for fixed-term contracts can also cause HEIs to move staff to this type of contract. In doing so, it could exacerbate further the perceived instability, which has permeated academic employment. The decision to return the outputs of such staff may also have unintended consequences on them; therefore, schools are urged to tread carefully on this front. They should consider if such outputs are compatible with the non-portability policy – the purpose here is to appreciate the significant investment on the part of HEIs in the preparation of the outputs, and to curb game-playing. The strategy for the selection of which outputs to return (including that of former employees) lies with HEIs. It should feature in institutions codes of practice, which should demonstrate fairness to staff by adhering to the four principles[86] recommended by the REF (transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity). The selection strategy should also feature in the UoA environment statements. The subject of non-portability is one that funding bodies will consider in their post-REF2021 analysis.

Outputs - Co-authored Outputs: Funding bodies acknowledge that there are ample disciplinary differences to warrant variations in the proposed policy to submit co-authored works just once in the same submission[87]. Therefore, the REF executive favours the decision of Main Panel D (Arts and Humanities) to permit the inclusion of the same co-authored work/output twice for a REF2021-related submission. A possible effect of the exception on the Panel is the need for a higher restriction on output pool size. The Panel has set this restriction at 5% (of their overall submission), enabling them to showcase their research breadth.

Outputs - Open Access: Units to submit a maximum of 5% non-compliant in-scope[88] outputs or 1 in-scope output that is noncompliant, whichever is higher per submission to a Unit of Assessment (UoA). The tolerance band will remain at UoA submission level (not at HEI level) in order to prevent any unfair advantage to some HEI types, since discipline profiles vary across HEIs.

Outputs – Interdisciplinary research: All output and research types will be fairly and equally assessed, including collaborative and interdisciplinary research. The latter for REF purposes is defined as research designed to realise outcomes like new approaches that could not be realised within the context of a single discipline. It is one that is characterised by a significant exchange between two or more disciplines and/or goes beyond established disciplinary building blocks in its application or integration of research approaches from some of the other disciplines[89]. RME could play an instrumental role on this front since it is multidisciplinary in terms of its three primary components – ERS.

Impact

The submission of impacts on teaching broadened to include impacts within, as well as beyond, the submitting HEI. Also consistent with REF 2014 exercise is the decision for HEIs to submit impacts that emerged from research

[86] Further details on this can be accessed via this link: https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1086/ref-2019_03-guidance-on-codes-of-practice.pdf

[87] It takes away the focus of the REF on individual researchers and positions it on the unit instead.

[88] A) Journal article type outputs with an ISSN or conference contribution type outputs in conference proceedings with an ISSN, and B) Acceptance date (the date stated in the acceptance letter/email issued by the publisher to the author as the 'firm' date the output is accepted for publication) of the output for publication is after 1st of April 2016.

[89] Click this link for more details: https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1080/key-decisions-by-the-ref-steering-group.pdf

they conducted and/or are associated with. "Impact" will continue to be underpinned by excellent research (a minimum equivalent to 2*). Excellent research reinforcing impact case studies must be those generated from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 across all UoAs. It applies to all case studies (continued or developed from REF 2014).

Impact weighting is now 25% compared to the 20% weighting in REF2014, which leaves output and environment at 60% and 15%, respectively.

In summary, this chapter provided an in-depth review of existing literature around the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It includes the REF2014 exercise as well as the upcoming REF2021 exercise, though the discussion of the former is more elaborate than the latter since it is the central focus of the current study. The questions that were directed to the study participants revolved around experiences related to the REF2014 exercise considering the timing of the study.

The next chapter will now present the theoretical framework underpinning the current study, including institutional theory and the six principles of PRME. In doing so, it is informed by the comprehensive literature review carried out in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Chapter Introduction

The relevance of theory in a qualitative study is one that various authors recognise and have written about, albeit it seems to be a matter of debate. For example, Saldaña (2015), on the one hand, urges researchers to use the frameworks of notable theorists as a guide for their qualitative studies. Merriam (2009), on the other hand, contends that no research is devoid of a theoretical framework, suggesting that each study has got one that is either explicit or implicit.

However, the theory to apply in the investigation of a phenomenon is often a challenge for researchers (inclusive of doctoral students), according to Collins and Stockton (2018). Ibid (2018), in a qualitative research context, outlined three primary applications of theory, including: "theory of research paradigm and method (Glesne, 2011), theory building from data collection (Jaccard and Jacoby, 2010) and theory as a framework to direct the study (Anfara and Mertz, 2015)" (p. 4). All three applications were utilised in the current study, including the research philosophy and methodological framework outlined in Chapter 5. PRME's six principles and institutional theory facilitated both the sense-making of the study findings and the theory that can be developed from the data gathered. The claim of the latter is supported by Maxwell (2013), who argues that qualitative studies mostly result in theory construction regardless of the methodological choice utilised.

In terms of understanding the role of theory in qualitative research, Anfara and Mertz (2015) identified three main understandings: 1) It is not essential; 2) It mostly informs epistemologies and methodologies; 3) It is more "pervasive and influential" (p. 11) than methodology alone, and therefore, should guide researchers' choices. The last-two understandings apply to the current study, as institutional theory and the six principles of PRME, informed the interpretation of the findings the current study yielded. The rigour, criticality and richness of the interpretation rendered by the researcher would not have been possible solely through methodology alone. Thus, theory and framework informed the interpretation of the study findings.

From in-depth exploration of relevant literature around the responsible management education agenda (see Chapter 2) and the research excellence framework (Chapter 3), institutional theory and the six principles of PRME were identified as being appropriate for this study. Again, while they did not inform the data collection stage of this study, they enabled the researcher to interpret the study findings, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in view. Exactly how they were applied and at what stage are discussed in the latter section of this chapter.

We will first discuss institutional theory.

4.2 Institutional Theory

The current study utilised institutional theory as an overview theory. This section discusses the concept of institutions and their three main pillars (i.e. regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars). This is followed by a discussion of the dimensions of institutional theory, the rationale for the utilisation of the theory in this study.

4.2.1 The concept of institutions and their three main elements

According to Scott (2014), institutions comprise of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements/pillars. These, together with related social activities and material resources, provide stability and meaning to social systems. Consequently, institutions are defined as multifaceted social structures that function to provide order, stability and meaning to social systems.

The ***regulative pillar*** of institutions serves as a stabiliser by prescribing actions (Hanson, 2001) aimed at constricting behaviours, demanding conformity to these through rules, laws, and associated sanctions (Scott, 2014). The regulatory process is said to revolve around the capacity to create rules, monitor how others conform to them, and where necessary, manipulate sanctions (via punishments or rewards) to influence future behaviours. Coercion is the mechanism of control (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and congruence to prescribed rules is how organisations secure and/or gain legitimacy (Palthe, 2014). Hence the idea that organisations live and die by the extent to which they conform to wider rules (Meyer et al., 2005). The explicit prescription of rules/directives, alignment of incentives, and surveillance is underscored (Scott, 2010). Instrumentality[90] is the underlying institutional logic - people are likely to create rules/laws they think would progress their self-interests[91], and conform to gain access to rewards and evade sanctions, respectively (Scott, 2014). However, Mohamed (2017) has argued that "no major actors attempt to compel organisations to adopt a given structure, either through law or through withholding critical resources" (pp. 155-156).

Drawing on Hanson (2001), this pillar is illustrated in the current study context as thus: university rules (inclusive of business schools); professional bodies and accreditation bodies; the REF and funding bodies; and the even the UK government; all govern to a greater or lesser extent the actions of academics. The instrumentality logic resonates with various aspects covered in 3's literature review related to the REF. While there are normative aspects within the REF and for why it was established, the instrumentality logic is apparent. Aside from the need for HEIs to demonstrate value for the public funds received for research, the REF executives and the UK government are believed to be using HEIs to push their agenda even if they are beneficial to various actors within the society. On the one hand, the assessment framework keeps changing in response to issues experienced by those that took part in the exercise as a collective, as identified in the previous exercise, and which then informs the next exercise. On the other hand, there is a perceived self-interest focus; how it will serve the cause of the powerful actors involved in the REF. They are influential because of what they can offer to HEIs and their academics if they comply and conform to prescribed rules; they in turn seem to be heavily reliant on these offerings. Non-conformance through poor performance and even non-participation results in sanction/punishment, which is not necessarily legally enforced in this case, but comes instead in the form of no funds received for research, or a minimal share of the billion+ pounds earmarked for the funding of research across the UK higher education sector.

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[90] Actors are viewed as rational calculators (Scott, 2010) – they make strategic decisions that will advance their interests.

[91] This is somewhat supportive of the idea that dominant models reflect/mirror the interests and powers of strongest actors in an institutional environment (Meyer et al., 2005). For example, PRME as a dominant model in the RME field seem to be reflective of the self-interest of the United Nations as a powerful actor. The same could be said about the REF in terms of it being reflective of the self-interest of the UK government and funding bodies, thus, the amendments made to the framework probably have some instrumental benefits to their course.

At the organisational level – individual HEIs – the instrumentality logic is also present. While HEIs have prescribed rules and requirements provided by the REF in partnership with other relevant bodies, there is a degree of flexibility which they can apply in terms of organisations related to the REF and actual submissions made, as evidenced in Chapter 3. This then opens avenues for discriminatory practices, inequality, the modification of behaviours, and game-playing. Some institutions are hinted to be relatively fair and honest, others not so much, given that the need to publish quality research papers and generate impacts are central to institutions' research and REF strategy or they risk losing out through being non-compliant in REF terms. The term winners and losers have been used to describe REF-related outcomes. What seems to be an era of austerity exacerbates the pressures faced by HEIs to compete for funds through academics securing attractive research grants. The publication of research papers in lower-ranked journals is implicitly and explicitly, discouraged with sanctions such as less or no research time awarded to those that do not comply. This is mostly because related outputs are argued not to serve the interests of HEIs, the REF and arguably the public and that of the REF and arguably the public. Hence, the argument that universities live and die by the extent to which they comply to wider rules and expectations from powerful actors and/or institutions such as the REF and even the public (lack of societal legitimacy can have detrimental consequences). The same can be said about any organisation/business operating within a given society or environment. Some of these requirements and expectations are from a standpoint of appropriateness which is linked to the next pillar.

The ***normative pillar*** underscores the values and norms[92] required for the legitimate pursuit of valued ends by specific actors (e.g. academics) or all member of a collective group – e.g. HEIs (Higgins and Larrinaga, 2014; Hanson, 2001). For this normative pillar, responses and behaviours are shaped by the appropriateness logic, not by self-interest (March and Olsen, 2006). People follow expectations because they think it is the *right thing to do*, even if they do not perceive there being an apparent justification for it, or sometimes even if they believe it will not be successful. Here, change is driven by a sense of moral obligation and duty among organisational members

[92] *Values* are the ideas of the desirable or the preferred against which existing institutional structures or behaviours can be evaluated and benchmarked. *Norms,* in contrast, stipulate how things should be done and they define the legitimate means via which valued ends can be pursued (Scott, 2014). These normative systems (norms and values) define organisational goals or objectives and specify legitimate means of pursuing them (Blake and Davis, 1964).

(Palthe, 2014). For example, let us assume that socially responsible practices (e.g. ERS/RME related) do not make business sense. The normative pillar argues that organisations would implement it, but because it is the right action, and not for the revenue they could generate. Legitimacy is gained through moral and ethical systems (Higgins and Larrinaga, 2014). However, it is maintained through values and norms that are diffused through professional development, formal education, and accreditation systems (Scott, 2014; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Looking at Chapter 2, this pillar resonates with the actors that are committed to RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools and universities, and beyond. The logic at play relates to the idea that *it is the right thing to do* (appropriateness), as opposed to *what they can gain from related work on that front* (instrumentality logic). The same applies to societies' demand (including businesses) for business schools to equip students with the skills necessary for the addressing of complex day-to-day challenges relating to sustainability issues. The PRME initiative appears to sit within this pillar as well in terms of their commitment to support business schools in particular, and HEIs worldwide to transform their management education in order to facilitate the training and educating of future responsible leaders – individuals who will not be driven by the profit maximisation mentality but by the desire to make positive contributions to business and society, practicing system thinking, and allowing the ERS principles to inform their decision-making.

This pillar is also evident in Chapter 3. The requirement for UK HEIs to engage in quality research and demonstrate the impact generated from those (including those related to public engagements) is the REF's way of ensuring accountability for the public money received for research purposes. It is the right thing to do – the public demands that, as well as the funding bodies that are in partnership with the REF.

In contrast, the ***cultural-cognitive pillar*** is concerned with the symbols and assumptions taken for granted that shape the filter through which individuals view reality and to which they attribute meaning from their worldviews (Hanson, 2001, Scott, 1995). For example, the statement "I love to teach but dislike my job" is interpreted as an academic's cognition of a complex work environment that is influenced by rigid institutional pressures (Hanson, 2001, citing Jepperson, 1991, p. 45). These assumptions and symbols under taken-for-grantedness in Table 26 are more predominant among seasoned scholars than ECRs (including doctoral students) in academia. Doctoral students are more likely to question them or offer alternative perspectives because they possess diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, lacking vigorous enculturation or training in disciplinary ethos (Prasad, 2013).

According to Scott (2010), the cultural aspect of the pillar is informed by symbolic representations that are socially constructed. The cognitive aspect, in contrast, then provides the templates for defining the perceptions and decisions of individuals (p. 7).

Elements of this pillar also feature in the literature review chapters covered. For instance, the *publish-or-perish* expression used to describe the REF and related pressures is somewhat reflective of some academics' cognitions and perceptions of what seems to be the precarity of the academic career. One's career is predicated on the extent to which they are able to prolifically publish research papers, and not just in any kind of journals outlets since their relevance seems to be judged by the number of 3* or 4* publications they have (see Tourish and Willmott, 2015; Martín, 2014). In this case, another may use the expression *publish and still perish* in that it is not enough to be a prolific researcher with a track record of churning out papers; if the quality of the journals in which those papers are published is not 3* or 4*, they can be inconsequential to an HEI's REF strategy. The amount of research grants won and a track record for doing this on a regular basis is another determinant of how well one's academic career will process.

The legitimacy of an HEI and their reputation are equally linked to these expressions, in that they perhaps paint a picture of what seems to be a highly pressurised work environment that academics operate from. If they fail to meet the quality threshold and submit research outputs and impact case studies that are perceived as being inadequate, that is likely to raise some concerns with a chance that their relevance be will questioned. So, by failing to churn out quality research outputs, engage with a wide range of stakeholders and generate impact from related activities, they risk losing their legitimacy on various fronts, e.g. societal legitimacy. In other words, the language and symbols used by actors within an institution can provide useful insight about the institution and that includes their formal structures and practices.

The box ticking exercises referred to within Chapter 2 in relation to RME and PRME tell us that the adoption of the initiative can be simply something that some business schools do to secure perceived benefits, whilst failing to implement those in any meaningful way; they may have one or two add-ons and stop at that.

We will now discuss the two main dimensions of institutional theory (isomorphism and decoupling) in the section below.

4.2.2 Dimensions of institutional theory

Institutional theory assumes that a wide range of common institutional mechanisms exert pressure on organisations within a given established field, resulting in them becoming similar; the concept of Isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). ***Isomorphism*** is the homogenisation of organisational practices and structures. It occurs as organisations respond to institutional demands that help to ensure their survival and enhance their possibility of achieving success in a specific environment (Higgins and Larrinaga, 2014). It is a constraining process; the more significant the constraining pressures exerted on organisations by institutions, the fewer the degrees of freedom for change – educational change, for instance (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

There are three mechanisms by which institutional pressures can result in isomorphism/homogenisation. They include coercive, normative and mimetic Isomorphism. ***Coercive Isomorphism*** is brought about through coercion - institutional pressures for compliance (formal and informal). Like the regulative pillar of institutional theory, coercive pressures are exerted through formal, visible and forceful rules that organisations[93] are required to develop (Hansons, 2001). Coercive pressures often involve the influence of external institutions that are more powerful than the individual organisation that experience these pressures (Lammers and Garcia, 2017). They can also be due to legitimacy problems (Lawrence, 1999).

For business schools, these pressures can be exerted by accreditation bodies such as the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), the Association to MBAs (AMBA) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

[93] E.g. HEIs informed by the REF as can be inferred from the literature review.

(AACSB). The latter recognises the need for RME and demands the implementation of related contents (e.g. CSR) are demonstrated by institutions that seek their accreditation (Rasche et al., 2020; Doherty et al., 2015).

Ranking providers are another source of institutional pressures for the implementation of RME in business schools. For example, the Financial Times recently included ethics and sustainability as part of their criteria for the ranking of renowned MBAs (Rasche et al., 2020). A table of initiatives that seem to be committed to RME was provided in Chapter 2 and some of them award rankings to schools, while some are even driven by students, like the net impact. The latter can exert coercive like pressures on HEIs who rely on students to remain relevant to some extent. Engagement in sustainability related issues and/or ERS related commitment on HEIs' part could be a key advantage or what sets them apart from others in terms of securing a greater share of the market – student numbers, which in turn translate to funds. We are told in the literature reviewed (Chapter 2) that some students decide where to study based on an institution's commitment to ERS/RME-related causes or their provision of related contents.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is another example of a ranking provider. They assess the quality of HEIs' research and awards funds/grants based on the outcomes, and have been identified as exerting coercive pressures with detrimental consequences for RME-related implementation in a few UK business schools (Doherty et al., 2015). RME can be advanced through research, but business schools and their academics are hinted to be struggling on this front, partly because it is regarded as pedagogical research. Historically, (from RSE to RAE and now REF) this type of research is perceived as having a lower quality status compared to core disciplinary research or applied organisational research (Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton et al., 2018). This was covered in Chapter 3 in the context of the REF. The coercive pressures exerted on UK business schools and HEIs in general can result in schools becoming similar if most of them feel they have no choice but to participate in the REF or lose a significant portion of their income. We are told that research is the main income generation source for HEIs, of which business schools are part of, and in turn the main determinant of how smoothly and how quickly one can progress their academic career. So, the linking of recruitment and promotion practices closely to the REF and its related outcomes is one way that HEIs and senior executives can exert coercive pressure on academics to do what they can to be compliant in REF terms, which can result in homogenisation, this time at the individual level.

Normative Isomorphism is founded in professionalism where codes, standards and values are imposed by organisations such as HEIs, accreditation and professional bodies. They act as gatekeepers to the profession since they decide who will get in and who will not (Lammers and Garcia, 2017; Hanson, 2001). It might explain why Lawrence (1999) associates rules of membership with normative institutional pressures. The more they are prescribed by these gatekeepers, and in turn subscribed to by institutions, the more they become institutionalised and cause organisations within the same institutional fields to become similar. RME is increasingly perceived to be indicative of a proper course of action by business schools' organisational environment. Hence, they face normative pressures for the implementation and advancement of RME via initiatives such as PRME, discussed in depth in Chapter 2. The 2008 world financial crisis further exacerbates the normative pressures that business schools face in relation to the uptake of RME. They have been partly blamed for failing to properly educate the leaders associated with the event through the propagation of theories that are devoid of moral grounding (Ghosal, 2005). This theoretical deficiency seems to be linked to Parker's (2018) insinuation that a business school model that promoting profit maximisation needs radical reform for business schools to remain relevant or be perceived as such by the wider society (Rasche et al., 2020).

Mimetic Isomorphism stems from an organisation's response to uncertainty or ambiguity triggered by pressures exerted on them by powerful institutions on whom they are reliant to some extent. Mimetic isomorphism can result from the pursuit of standardisation by an organisation when they imitate competitors whom they think have attained greater success owing to conformance to similar institutional demands (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Tolbert and Zucker, 1983). Similarly, a business school may likely pattern their commitments to the RME field[94] (or related degree courses)

[94] This is covered in Chapter 2 in much more depth.

to what other influential or more successful business schools than themselves are doing on this front (Rasche et al., 2020).

Mimetic pressures are associated with shared practices (Lawrence, 1999). These pressures are reinforced through academic conferences[95] and are encouraged by educational consultants[96], administrators and academics[97] (Hanson, 2001). This varied means of seeking legitimacy can result in mimetic Isomorphism. This point is elucidated by Hanson (2001) who comments that as schools begin to pursue legitimacy, the replication/imitation process begins, in that they tend to seek guidance from what other schools they regard highly are doing on that front, resulting in homogenisation. Consequently, the unintended outcome of the quest for legitimacy is often the reward and preservation of educational organisations for being conformant to "correct" processes, structures and programs, and not for the actual quality of their product (Hanson, 2001, p. 650, citing Rowan and Miskel, 1999, p. 364; and Scott, 1981, p. 126). This also lends insight into the discussion around RME and the REF. The uncertainty associated with REF-related pressures could cause an institution or a business school to imitate other business schools that seem to be more successful on the REF front, especially if it is their first time participating in the REF since the impact component was introduced.

The other central dimension of institutional theory is ***Decoupling*.** We are told that organisations are relatively resistant to change (Jepperson, 1991), so it is perhaps naïve to then think of them as mere docile receptors of ideas, even the legitimate ones. (Greenwood et al., 2017). No institutional context is entirely devoid of *shades of rogueness*, which increasingly has become an accepted part and fabric of institutions (Quirke, 2013). The concept relates to the notion that organisations may in response to external institutional pressures may make symbolic disclosures that are detached from their actual formal structures (activities, practices and/or processes). In doing so, they appear conformant, securing or maintaining related rewards such as grants and/or legitimacy[98] (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Decoupling

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[95] Where new ideas are promoted/marketed.
[96] Who disseminate the latest news about exciting things happening 'on the other side of the fence'.
[97] Who move from one institution to another.
[98]Which is predicated on one's comprehension of and conformance to institutionalised standards and rules (Lawrence, 1999). To operate, organisations need legitimacy or societal mandate which is secured through conformance to societal expectations (Greenwood et al., 2017).

is mostly triggered by coercive pressures exerted on organisations and actors by powerful institutions through the regulative system, increasing the likelihood of those who were influenced attempting to 'game' the system. They do so by decoupling their behaviours from established rules and formal structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Decoupling is likely to occur when the pressures exerted by the organisational environment are perceived as contradicting a business schools' internal needs for efficiency (Rasche et al., 2020; Greenwood et al., 2017), for instance. In terms of RME, business schools decouple related implementation practices (such as curriculum development) from formal structures (like policies) in order to secure and preserve their efficiency (Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008). This implies that decoupling has a *protectionist* dimension. Four main factors can cause business schools to decouple RME from their formal structures, including the availability of limited resources, powerful actors' resistance to RME due to competing multiple pressures/demands, and if RME is perceived to be ambiguous or vague (Rasche et al., 2020; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015). These four conditions were covered in Chapter 2. So, decoupling can help us understand and interpret findings related to this study, which sought to explore if and how the REF might be influencing RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools. Decoupling can hinder both if schools symbolically adopt PRME with no intention of exploring ways they can operationalise its six guiding principles towards the development of future responsible leaders.

Table 26 below encapsulates what has been covered thus far. While the columns represent the three pillars supporting institutions, the rows define the main dimensions through which assumptions vary, and debates arise among theorists emphasising any of the elements.

Table 26: Three (Pillars) Elements of Institutions

	Regulative	**Normative**	**Cultural-Cognitive**
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-grantedness, Shared understanding
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms of pressure	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness (Right thing to do)	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Laws, Rules, Sanctions	Accreditations, certifications	Shared beliefs, common logics of action, Isomorphism

Affect	Fear, Guilt/Innocence	Honor/Shame	Confusion/Certainty
Basis for legitimacy	Legally enforced	Morally governed	Comprehensible, recognisable, culturally supported

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from Scott, 2014, p. 60).

e can infer that institutional theory is characterised by structure, stability, shared value, reward, sanctions, legitimacy and control. A close consideration of these show that they are evident in the literature reviews carried out in Chapter 2 and 3.

We will now discuss institutional theory and the rationale for its adoption as part of the theoretical framework for the study.

4.2.3 Institutional theory and its relevance to the current study

Institutional theory is concerned with how groups and organisations interact with social systems, including how they secure legitimacy through conformity to rule-like legislation/laws, government policies, regulatory structures, and varied societal and cultural practices associated with their institutional environment (Glover et al., 2014; Scott, 2008; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The theory assumes that organisations' strategies are influenced by external pressures (of social, economic, and political dimensions) that inform their decision to adopt and legitimise activities that favour stakeholders' viewpoints (Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995). Consequently, institutional theory was regarded a useful interpretative lens for the current study.

Institutional theory is useful for researchers who seek to understand why organisations implement certain practices even when those have no economic benefits (Berrone et al., 2010; DiaMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The financial benefit of the RME agenda remains mostly unknown (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) compared to the REF, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Nonetheless, several business schools and indeed other HEIs within and beyond the UK are committed to implementing RME in their institutions, and institutional theory can help explain why that seems to be the case.

Institutional theory is also useful for providing explanations relating to how certain initiatives adopted by some organisations could contribute to sustainability (Jennings and Zanbergen, 1995). Sustainability is a core facet of the RME agenda (see Chapter 2), hence the relevance of the theory to the current study.

Furthermore, institutional theory views organisations as being involved in the pursuit for legitimacy, and assumes that this pursuit shapes individuals, organisations, institutions, and nations looking to conform to a legitimate version of themselves (Meyer et al., 2005). This probably explains why Deegan (2014) regards institutional theory as a useful complement to legitimacy theory and stakeholder theory. Both theories, like institutional theory, are beneficial to researchers seeking to understand how organisations comprehend and react to changing social and institutional demands and expectations (Bebbington et al., 2014). However, institutional theory provides all the insight that legitimacy theory can offer and much more (Ji, 2013), hence it was utilised in this study rather than legitimacy theory or stakeholder theory.

Stakeholder theory could explain why some business schools adopt PRME and participate in the REF in order to enable them to implement RME and improve the quality of their research, respectively. This is because an organisation is considered successful if it adds value and satisfies the diverse needs of its stakeholders, as well as the needs of shareholders (Benn et al., 2009). However, stakeholder theory is limited in terms of informing governance systems and seems to lack the ability to offer a governance system for non-human stakeholders such as the natural environment (Benn et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2003). RME has social and environmental dimensions and is concerned about the addressing of those through responsible leadership, which makes stakeholder theory limited in scope in terms of its application in this study (Benn et al., 2009).

Institutional theory is useful for identifying, emphasising, and exploring the forces that inhibit organisations from changing (Hanson, 2001). RME and the REF seek to drive change, and yet despite some business schools' adoption of PRME to facilitate change through RME, its implementation is said to remain an unfulfilled promise in some such institutions (Doherty et al., 2015). This is another reason why institutional theory was deemed useful for the study; it enabled the understanding of how the REF could constrain and drive change towards the implementation and advancement of RME in business schools.

The application of institutional theory in existing literature has yielded insights into some of the drivers for RME implementation in UK business schools (see Chapter 2), including how HEIs' (including business schools) interaction with external forces/pressures (e.g. REF) can influence organisational strategies (see Chapter 3). Hence its additional relevance to the study context.

4.3 Six Principles of PRME as an Interpretative Framework

Central to the usefulness of any theory is sense-making. Institutional theory fulfilled that function in this study. So, too did the six principles of PRME by the PRME task force – consisted of 60 Deans, university presidents and formal representatives of renowned business schools and HEIs, under the coordination of the United Nations Global Compact. The researcher utilised the principles to develop an interpretative framework, as shown in Figure 12 below.

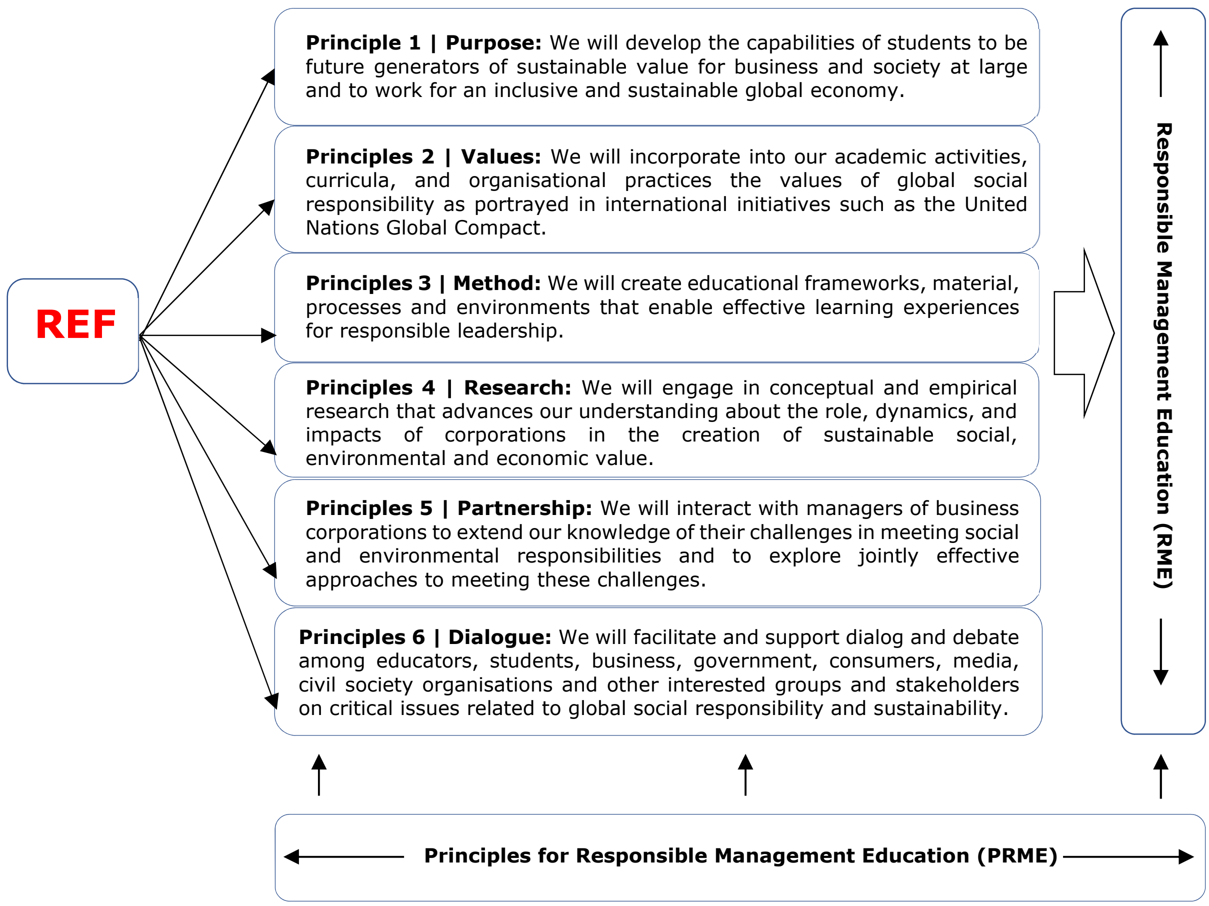

Figure 12: Interpretive Framework for the Evaluation of the possible influence of the REF on RME

Source: Author (based on the Six Principles by PRME)

The above framework shows the REF to the left with arrows pointing towards each of the principles which depict possible influence/impact the REF (and/or related practices/activities) might have on any of the principles and the implications for RME implementation/advancement in UK business schools (including universities). PRME is found below the principles, signalling it is the foundation supporting those, hence the arrows going upwards. As evident, the middle section shows the six principles of PRME with a big arrow pointing to the right, depicting the outcome of the influence/impact of the REF on the principles and therefore on RME implementations/advancement via the six principles. So, Figure 12 conceptualises how signatories are implementing RME (taking PRME as a lens, which all the participants in this study were familiar with) and the REF's possible influence on RME's implementation via the six principles.

The rationale for the selection of the framework is down to the significant role that PRME plays as a global champion that is committed to supporting HEIs worldwide (specifically business and management schools) to transform their education towards the development of responsible future leaders. PRME signatories pledged to commit to the six principles, adopting those to facilitate RME implementation and institutionalisation in their schools. Part of that commitment aside from the development of the RME curriculum, includes the provision of skills needed for the balancing of economic and sustainability goals for students, raising students' awareness of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and how their realisation is tied to the development of a sustainable future for all. The PRME initiative was unpacked as part of Chapter 2.

PRME is a recognised top player, champion and advocate for the adoption and institutionalisation of RME by HEIs towards the training and development of future responsible leaders and professionals who would impact business and society positively and add sustainable value to them. By embracing and promoting ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability (ERS) in all its forms they would make it the golden thread in their practices and their dealings with firms and the broader society.

PRME's legitimacy is also reinforced by the fact that it is a United Nations-backed initiative established for over a decade, with over 800 signatories across the world (809 was the exact figure as of early December 2019). Furthermore, it has affiliations with accreditation bodies such as AMBA, AACSB, EQUIS, EFMD etc. Its six guiding principles serve as a useful guide for HEIs across the globe seeking to integrate RME into their curriculum and practices. PRME stipulates what institutions ought to do and have in place to say they are for a fact practising RME and have it normalised, and that includes instilling its three fundamental values (ERS) into students.

Therefore, Figure 12 is an encompassing framework of a business school's type of activities in relation to RME implementation that has been used for quite some time by PRME. Part of the SIP report policy discussed earlier in Chapter 2 requires that PRME signatories report the progress achieved across any of the six principles. Again, they are not mandated to achieve progress across all six but are required to evidence progress relating to at least one of them; this is mainly because participation in the initiative is voluntary.

Other frameworks identified in Chapter 2 were considered but rejected. For example, the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) was considered because of the history and strong ties it has and continues to maintain with PRME, the initiative. The UNGC coordinated the PRME task force that developed the six principles which to this date is the foundation upon which the global platform for RME rests. However, the researcher discounted it because the framework focuses on societal goals. PRME, however, focuses on how business schools and other HEIs can contribute to achieving those societal goals via RME. So, the UNGC framework/principles were not relevant.

The three laws of Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI) was also considered but rejected because of how broad they are – they touch on environment, interconnectedness, and engagement. The initiative is targeted at leaders, organisational practices, and societies to catalyse global responsibility across all three arms in their day-to-day practices.

Conclusively, institutional theory and the PRME adapted framework both supported the sense-making of the findings that emerged from the study. They enabled the researcher to provide the accounts of the study participants (i.e. perceptions and experiences) related to the phenomenon in a manner that will not be "dismissed as travelogues or personal diaries" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 184). This is a salient role that theories, models and frameworks play in qualitative studies such as this one (Collins and Stockton, 2018). Both are however not without limitations/criticisms, as discussed briefly below.

4.4 Application of Theoretical Framework

While institutional theory mostly underpins the study, it was not applied from the start, nor did it inform the formulation of the research questions. The in-depth review of existing literature supported the framing of those, with Doherty et al.'s (2015) study central to that. The limited knowledge about the explored phenomenon and the fact that it is mostly under-researched informed the decision to not let it drive the data collection in terms of the questions asked to the study participants. The researcher did not want to restrict the findings that could emerge from the study by utilising a prescribed lens at that stage. The way institutional theory was applied to this study (i.e. as an overview theory) is a practice that is accepted in the qualitative realm of research. Collins and Stockton (2018) state that the "overreliance on theory can stop the salience and importance of a data set from coming through" (p. 9).

Thematic analysis was first carried out using Braun and Clarke's six recommended steps. This was followed by discussion of the emerged themes with PRME's six principles as an interpretative framework, and a consideration of how key findings compared to the previous studies discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Next was the use of institutional theory, which offered additional comprehension and interpretation of the study findings. Some of the sections of the analysis that presented with PRME's adapted framework were read over, enabling the researcher to identify areas that needed further interpretation and resonated with institutional theory.

While institutional theory is presented first before the adapted PRME framework, the latter was applied first at the data analysis and discussion stage of this study, as shown in Figure 13 below.

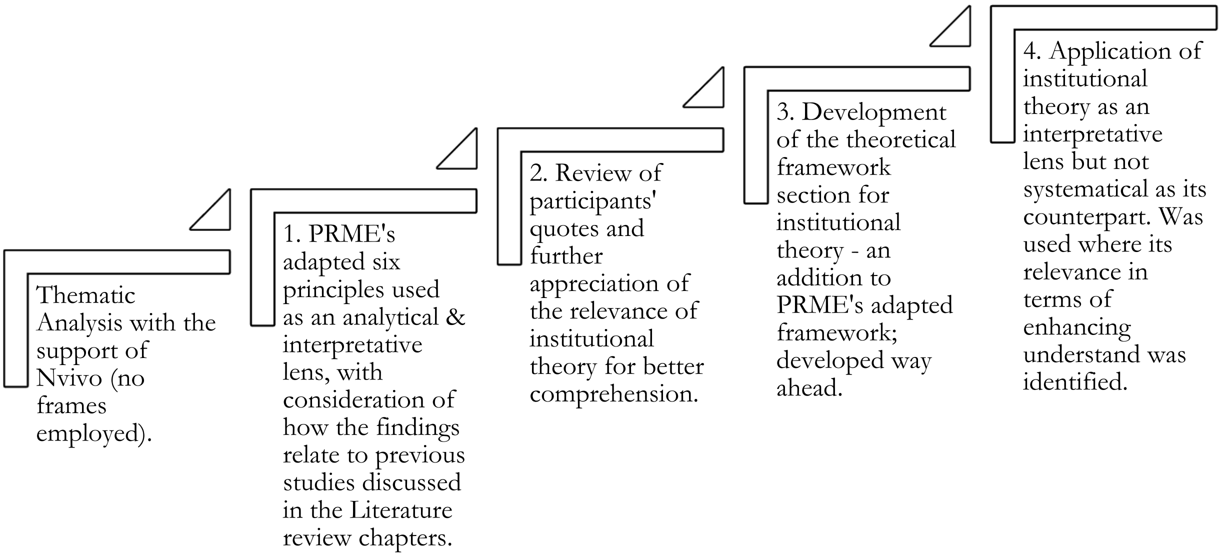

Figure 13: Theoretical Framework Application Timeline (relates mostly to the data analysis and discussion stage)

Source: Compiled by Author

The weaknesses related to the theory and framework are discussed below.

4.5 Weaknesses of the theoretical framework

The weaknesses identified from existing literature in terms of institutional theory and the six principles of PRME largely revolve around ambiguity and scope.

Institutional theory seems to be plagued by conceptual ambiguities in relation to its key concepts, including institutions, institutionalism, and institutionalisation. There are also debates surrounding its versions - old institutionalism and neo-institutionalism, which is more relevant? In addition to this, there is a lack of a clear distinction between their boundaries (Mohamed, 2017; Greenwood et al., 2014; Cai and Mehari, 2015). The issue of generalising organisations as all being similar, and with a tendency to ignore the apparent heterogeneity of organisations is another weakness of institutional theory. It is mostly used to describe how powerful actors can force or influence change in a given context, but does not necessarily go beyond this (Greenwood et al., 2014).

Despite criticisms of ambiguities and pluralism, many researchers in diverse disciplines view institutional theory as being relevant (Mohamed, 2017), as evident in Chapter 2. Hence it was utilised in this study, but in an overview manner mostly because the phenomenon investigated is under-researched. It is to the best of the researcher's knowledge the first. It therefore required an exploratory stance which entailed not allowing the theory to inform the manner in which the data was collected, nor the interview questions that were posed to study participants. The issues with institutional theory outlined were not closely considered[99], there was no attempt to distinguish old institutionalism and new institutionalism, and there was no unpacking of related key concepts for the sake of clarity and the avoidance of ambiguities. Moreover, institutional theory was not the only theoretical underpinning; the study is also supported by the six principles of PRME which too has a weakness.

The main issue with the PRME's six principles revolves around scope. These principles have been criticised for being too broad and therefore are open to various interpretations, which could result in ambiguities (Win, 2012); hence the need for a further reading/unpacking of these principles (Louw, 2015). The relevance of the principles and their close link to one of the main strands of the study, RME, outweighed this limitation. No other existing RME-related scheme would have enabled the level of interpretation provided in this study the way PRME's framework did. The rationale is well-covered in section 4.3.

We will now progress to the next chapter, which discusses the methodology adopted for this study.

[99] Those interested in exploring the issues outlined briefly are encouraged to refer to the original publications of the authors cited in this section of the thesis.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The choice of research methodology has long been problematic for researchers (Walker and Myrick, 2006). Extant literature was explored for ideas on how other researchers explored topics related to RME (e.g. Fukukawa et al., 2013; Burchell, 2014; Doherty et al., 2015; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Nonet et al., 2016; Warin and Beddewela, 2016; etc.) and the REF (e.g. Harley, 2002; Murphy and Sage, 2014; Watermeyer, 2014; Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton et al., 2018; Webb and Tierney, 2019). That enabled the researcher to choose the most appropriate methodology for the study. Other peer-reviewed publications such as textbooks were also consulted (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2015; Tight, 2017; Reiter, 2017).

This chapter presents the steps the researcher took to study and analyse the issue of interest and the related rationales (Jonker and Pennink, 2010; Thomas, 2010).

5.2 Research Type

In the Social Sciences or the Business and Management field, research can be classified according to its investigation type - exploratory or confirmatory study (Thornhill et al., 2009). For this research project, an exploratory study was selected

An exploratory study may first formulate hypotheses like a confirmatory study (see Table 27) since it is impossible to have a pure exploration that starts from zero[100] (Reiter, 2017). However, unveiling what lies beneath a phenomenon for the sake of understanding is the main goal of exploratory studies, not hypothesis testing, whereas the central objective of confirmatory studies is hypothesis testing (Darabi, 2017). That said, in an exploratory study, researchers are encouraged to explain their positionalities and interest in a project knowing the limitations those may impose to the study, with a strategy for tackling them.

[100] There is no perception of the world that has no theoretical basis, that is, atheoretical (Reiter, 2017).

Table 27: Alternative Research Investigation Type – Confirmatory Study

Confirmatory research begins with a priori (deductive) hypotheses, and is followed by the development of the research design for the testing of hypotheses, data collection and analyses, and concludes with researchers' inductive inferences relating to study findings/results (Jaegar and Halliday, 1998). A major strength is that it provides a mental map (standardised procedures) of how an inquiry can proceed and aims to test hypotheses/theories (Reiter, 2017).
However, critics have outlined some of the weaknesses of this type of research. For instance, Popper (2002) maintains that theories can only be corroborated (refuted or not refuted), rather than verified (proven to be true) because our assumptions, models and interpretations of reality will remain tentative. In essence, it is not a given that our mind works the same way as reality behaves. Within this weakness lies the strength of exploratory research (Reiter, 2017).
Another weakness is that the discussion of this type of research tends to be on the methodological instruments applied - mostly among experts, losing sight of its significance to, and application by, the broader audience. The abundant inaccessible and unintelligible findings it can produce offer minimal understanding and/or learning to a broader audience. It does not necessarily provide useful, reliable information about a social world or phenomenon (Reiter, 2017, citing Feyerabend, 2010), primarily where very little is known about it as in the case of this study.
While confirmatory researchers have responded to some of the critiques by developing more reliable methods, how their findings relate to reality remains an issue. The knock-on effect of the improvement of their methods in this regard is a decrease in the validity of their results. That is, the more reliable scientific methods become, the less valid their findings – a paradox as asserted by Reiter (2017).

Source: Compiled by Author

Exploratory research assumes that all research is provisional, as the explanation of reality is maybe partial, incomplete, and subject to revision should other researchers continue focusing on a similar topic. Social Sciences and Business and Management researchers are not independent of their research subjects, whose world they access in order to acquire knowledge related to a subject matter. Their minds and perceptions, like those of all people, are at play in the analysis of a given data and the interpretation of related findings, making it impossible for them to establish an absolute truth about a phenomenon. Hence, it is unlikely for there not to be competing/alternative interpretations relating to a phenomenon, even within the same sphere of existence. It implies that what makes sense to one may not to another since our philosophies and assumptions about the world vary, at least to an extent, for each of us (Reiter, 2017; Popper, 2002; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Consequently, the study is **exploratory**. It began not with any hypothesis but with an outline of the researcher's position and interest in the study, supported by an in-depth literature review from which the research questions underpinning the study were framed.

Again, Doherty et al. (2015) identified the REF as a barrier to the implementation of RME in six UK business schools, but a full/complete study was not dedicated to this; it was one of many findings within their wider work.

So, the related realities explained are partial, incomplete, and subject to revision; this would arguably be the same even if that were the central focus of their study (Reiter, 2017). The researcher did not approach the current study focusing on the outcomes of behaviours, perceptions and/or experiences related to the subject matter, as confirmatory research would have done had it been utilised. Instead, she concerned herself with understanding and learning the "what" and "how" of the inquired (social phenomenon) through the lens of 17 academics that were involved in the implementation of RME in 15 UK business schools.

The philosophical assumptions (see section 5.3) allowed for sense making of the knowledge obtained about academics' perceptions of the REF's possible influence on RME implementation in UK business schools. The explanation rendered (see Chapters 6 and 7) may likely vary if other people were to interpret/explain the study findings since positionality determines what one regards as significant. Even where a similar methodological framework is applied, interpretation of reality would vary owing to variables such as our mental, social, and cultural conditions (Hirschman, 1985; Reiter, 2017). While every effort was made to remain neutral, it is recognised that complete neutrality for the researcher is difficult to achieve fully. These variables were filtered through the language, social class, gender, race, and ethnicity of the researcher and are therefore fragments of what can be known about the inquired (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Presumably, the same applies to the accounts which the participants gave concerning the inquired.

The explained realities rendered by the researcher stemmed from the philosophical framework, research questions and methods utilised; hence they are not absolute (Popper, 2002) and have a limited degree of generalisability (Reiter, 2017).

5.3 Research philosophy

At every stage of the study, the researcher made certain assumptions about human knowledge informed by her preconceived opinions and previous experiences (Saunders et al., 2015; Crotty, 1998). These assumptions are related to philosophy, which Creswell (2013) defines as the utilisation of abstract ideas and beliefs that informs one's study. It shaped how the research problem and questions were formulated, and the information that addressed the questions that were sought (Huff, 2009). The conscious acknowledgement of and adherence to the philosophical aspects of the study helped the researcher avoid potential adverse effects on the entire research process (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991).

There are four philosophical assumptions that researchers make when they conduct a study of a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed nature. They include ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. These are discussed successively, mostly in the context of the research philosophy (interpretivism), which the researcher adopted for the current qualitative study.

Ontology deals with the nature of existence - how people conceptualise/view reality at the individual, group, society, or world level (Moses and Knutsen 2007). Reality can either be single or multiple. In qualitative terms, researchers fundamentally assume that what constitutes acceptable reality is socially constructed based on experiences and perceptions that may differ across individuals and change with time and context. There is no absolute reality; it is subjective (Ponterotto, 2005; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016).

Epistemology deals with what constitutes acceptable knowledge about the world and how it can be known. It is the study of reliable knowledge surrounding a phenomenon which in qualitative terms is created and known through the subjective lens of those with related lived experience; hence knowledge is subjective (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Axiology is concerned with ethical values and how they inform the decisions that researchers make about research and how they perceive the world (Killam, 2013; Bourne et al., 2017). Researchers who employ qualitative methods in their research cannot disassociate their values and experiences from the research process. Instead, Ponterotto (2005) recommends they make those known and bracket them, which is what the researcher did in the context of this study.

Methodology, in contrast, is a coherent framework and strategy that underpins and guides the exploration of a phenomenon or an investigation (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It is the study of methods geared at identifying and developing a framework that most likely would enable researchers to produce reliable knowledge about a phenomenon (Ponterotto 2005; Moses and Knutsen, 2012).

Table 28 below is a snapshot of the four assumptions in the context of interpretivism research philosophy which resonates with the researcher's stance for this study.

Table 28: Qualitative Research with Interpretivist Philosophical Stance

Assumption	Questions	Characteristics	Implications for practice
Ontology: *Relativist*	What is the nature of reality/being?	Reality is multiple – seen through various viewpoints.	Researchers report various perspectives/viewpoints as themes are developed from study findings.
Epistemology: *subjectivist*	What counts as legitimate knowledge? How can valid knowledge claims be substantiated? What is the relationship between the researcher and what/who is being researched?	Subjective evidence from respondents/participants. Researchers try to reduce the distance between themselves and that which is being studied.	Researchers use quotes as evidence from the respondents/participants, and spend time with them to gain an insider view of a phenomenon.
Axiology: *biased*	What is the role of value in research?	Researchers appreciate that research is value-laden and not devoid of biases.	Researchers discuss (openly) values that shape the narrative and include their interpretation in combination with participants' interpretations.
Methodology: *qualitative*	What does the process of research entail? What is the language of research?	Researchers utilise inductive logic, study the phenomenon in its context, and use emerging design.	Researchers work from details to generalisations, describe in-depth the study context, and continue to revise questions from field-related experiences.

Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2013) and Creswell (2013)

The research philosophy underpinning this study, then, is **interpretivism[101],** which argues that a social phenomenon is unique to the people/individuals/groups that create reality in varied contexts where the phenomenon can be observed. It is useful for exploring peoples' understanding and interpretations of events, including their social settings. It refutes the notion that findings related to a phenomenon can be presented as mere rules and formulae (Rowlands, 2005; Crotty, 1998). A phenomenon exists in the minds of the social actors participating in generating them – its "reality" most probably varies for each one of these actors and the "truth" of the phenomenon can be accessed by collecting and analysing a combination of each one of these actors' perceptions (Ragab and Arisha, 2018; Cresewell, 2014; Pickard,

[101] Also known as social constructivism.

2013; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Interpretivism is conceptualised as having a *relativist ontology*[102] and *subjectivist epistemology*[103] (Levers, 2013).

With the intent to explore, understand and interpret the different realities that UK business school academics hold about the inquired (the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation in their institutions), the researcher attempted to lessen the distance between herself and the participants, enabling her an insider view of the inquired. Evidence of these multiple realities includes the actual words (excerpts from the interview transcripts) of participants that best represent the themes developed from the findings that emerged and of the different perspectives presented as seen in the latter part of the thesis (Ragab and Arisha, 2018; Creswell, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Hirschman, 1985).

Conversely, positivism would have presupposed a simple/clear-cut relationship between reality and how it is perceived. It supports mostly quantitative methods (Holden and Lynch, 2004; Howe, 1988). Positivism is rooted in *realist ontology* – the belief that reality is absolute/single, with *objectivist epistemology* – the idea that knowledge related to a phenomenon is objective and obtained via scientific methods[104]. Researchers investigate a phenomenon with the intent to generate accurate and replicable generalisable results. They are external to the research process and independent of the participants (Ragab and Arisha, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

Table 29 discusses the rationale for the choice of the interpretivist philosophy for the study.

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[102] Reality is multiple.
[103] Knowledge is created and known through social interactions, informed by experiences.
[104] Enables the control of variables and the elimination of bias or contamination.

Table 29: Rationale for the choice of interpretivist philosophy

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that knowledge and experiences relating to a given phenomenon are finite, value-laden and continuously filtered through lenses such as language, social class, gender, race, and ethnicity. It further justifies the chosen philosophical framework (i.e. ontology – relativist, epistemology – subjectivist). While the outlined variables were not of utmost importance in this study, they varied slightly across the board. For instance, gender was almost balanced (Male – 9, vs Female – 8). All were of the Caucasian race, but a few were not originally from the UK. Their language (i.e. general use of words altogether) also varied, at least from the observation made by the researcher during the interview stage of the study. Not much is known about their social class; the researcher did not enquire about that; it most likely would have varied. The 17 academics were selected from 15 UK business schools – 13 were from 13 different institutions and two pairs (4) from the remaining two (i.e. two academics in a similar institution x 2). Therefore, they mostly belonged to different organisations and had various roles (albeit the task to institutionalise RME was similar across the board) which is an additional variable.
The above variables, including those related to their institutions of employment at the time (and associated processes, visions and missions, leadership, etc.) also informed the philosophical framework adopted for the study. Moreover, RME and the REF have diverse interpretations and are understood differently. Likewise, their related processes, organisations, implementation and leadership vary across individuals, institutions and even nations. RME is a worldwide agenda/initiative, unlike the REF, which is specific to UK HEIs (although a few countries, such as Australia, have a similar research excellence framework). It was important for the researcher to understand the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation/advancement from the perspectives of social actors – academics (Saunders et al., 2016). Thus, it would have been naïve to assume that they all would have a single reality about the inquired given the variables.
Crotty (2003) tells us that to understand people is to comprehend the meaning of their actions and to comprehend this meaning is to understand them in their words. Business school academics are unique beings with multiple perspectives of the inquired (Cohen et al., 2000), which is under-researched; again, it was inconceivable that academics would altogether have a single reality regarding that.

Source: Compiled by Author

Positivism was considered but rejected, as discussed in Table 30 below.

Table 30: Rationale for the rejection of Positivism

Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) recommend that researchers consider the appropriateness of alternative philosophical stances before choosing one for their study. Ontologically, positivism, as the predominant lens used in natural sciences, was a wrong fit for the study. The researcher, research subjects and the inquired all fall under social sciences. Had it been applied, it would have implied that the researcher believes that social phenomenon exists external to the social actors, which is not the case (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Ethics is a crucial aspect of research which the researcher followed to the letter, including making her beliefs and assumptions known.
Epistemologically, positivism was discarded because it provides an outsider view of a given phenomenon (Thomas, 2010) – it works under the premise that reality and social facts exist independent of people creating it and human interactions, respectively (Pickard, 2013). The subject matter to the best of the researcher's knowledge is under-researched, albeit the REF as a barrier to RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools was mentioned in passing by Doherty et al. (2015). So, the study necessitated an insider view through social interaction between the researcher and relevant academics, which positivism does not allow. Academics are very much part of their institution, and so are the people associated with organisations, processes, procedures and assessments related to the REF. Its adoption would have meant an attempt to reduce the phenomenon to a content-free generalisation which would not suffice since it is under-researched
Positivism entails the use of highly structured methods to enable the replication and production of law-like generalisations (Saunders et al., 2018), which was a misfit for the study context, including the research questions. The fact that very little was known about the inquired necessitated an exploratory study that would allow the researcher to gain in-depth insight about it in order to interpret and explain the mechanism of the "how" of the inquired. These characteristics are not akin to positivism which deals with numbers and statistics. The aim of positivism is not to bring out the essence of phenomena (Pivcevic, 1970), neither is it to allow researchers to understand them from within before rendering relevant explanations/descriptions (Moran, 2000).

Source: Compiled by Author

5.4 Research Approach

Induction and deduction are two approaches that researchers can employ in the description of the role that theory plays in the collection of data. The study adopted **induction**, requiring no prior formulation of a hypothesis as not much was known about the inquired. Hence, the researcher needed to explore the perceptions of academics to understand the under-researched phenomenon (Rudestam and Newton, 2001).

The study commenced with the gathering of primary data from 17 academics based at 15 UK business schools. From the data gathered, the phenomenon was explored in-depth through thematic analysis – themes and patterns were identified, categorised, and refined. That supported the creation of relevant conceptual frameworks, and the generation and development of theory around RME and the REF (Saunders at al., 2018). Gaining in-depth insight about the inquired and reporting the findings in order to hopefully encourage a broader debate within business schools, across HEIs and even beyond academia (e.g. the role of UK government) took precedence over theory generation. Furthermore, most qualitative studies use induction (Bryman and Bell, 2011) which also fits the study context.

Deduction was not chosen because it commences with the development of hypotheses, followed by the gathering of data and their analysis to confirm, or refute the theories (Blaikie, 2010). It is mostly applied in studies with a primary intention to test theoretical propositions and then describe causal associations between variables (Saunders et al., 2018), which was not the aim of the study. Furthermore, it is better suited for confirmatory research, not exploratory research as per the current study. Deduction also requires researchers to state what they expect to occur in their study (Gill and Johnson, 2010), which is a challenge since the outcome of social interaction yields multiple perspectives (Thomas, 2010). Hence the approach was discarded, and induction employed instead.

5.5 Methodological choice

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are three methodological choices available to researchers for the investigation of a phenomenon. An understanding of the three helped the researcher select the most appropriate for the study.

The use of numbers either in the form of measurements or counts to study a phenomenon to provide precision characterises quantitative methods, while the use of words to describe/explain individuals, situations or circumstances around a phenomenon is mostly associated with qualitative methods (Remenyi et al., 1998). Justification is central to quantitative research, whilst discovery is central for qualitative research (Cochran and Dolan, 1984). Both methodological types are discussed briefly in the following sub-sections starting with quantitative method – the alternative the qualitative method which the study utilised.

5.5.1 Quantitative method

This method entails the collection of a large dataset for statistical analysis so that emerging results are applied to a target population. It requires precision in measurement and analysis, so statistical tools are often used to prevent bias/contamination to the results, presented in the form of charts, tables, or graphs. Quantitative method is useful for the testing of hypotheses and theories, including when a researcher seeks to establish relationships between concepts or variables. Its typical approaches to data collection and philosophical alignment are deduction and positivism, respectively. Instruments for primary data collection include but are not limited to questionnaires and structured experiments; these are influenced by time, the precision level required, finance, the experience and knowledge level of researchers (Saunders et al., 2012; Neuman, 1997).

A benefit of this method had it been applied is that it supports the use of yes/no questionnaires as data collection instrument, in turn helping researchers save time and survey more people (Brennen, 2017). Nevertheless, "a yes/no questionnaire" would not have yielded the rich textual data that semi-structured in-depth interviews provided; this was more vital than the time the researcher would have saved.

5.5.2 Qualitative methods

Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is primarily associated with relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, with induction as the primary data collection approach (Saunders et al., 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Again, interpretivist philosophy argues that there is no one way of interpreting/knowing the world - knowledge is socially constructed, contextual and value-laden. The method aligns with the philosophical stance of the researcher (see section 5.2) which enabled the researcher to access the realities of the academics through one-on-one social interaction, facilitated by semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately an hour on average (Whiting, 2008; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Myers, 2002).

We are told that "perception" is intrinsic, intangible, and a result of one's experience(s). So, the qualitative method facilitated the elicitation of the perceptions related to the inquired from the study participants in their words and natural environment (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Tolhurst, 2007; Malterud, 2001). Additionally, the method is recognised to be useful for studying educational settings and processes (Thomas, 2010), so it allowed for the participants (academics) to be studied in their natural setting, and RME and the REF both being grounded in educational processes.

The phenomenon was under-researched, necessitating an insider view which a **qualitative** method best provides compared to a quantitative method (Domegan and Fleming, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1991); hence it was adopted. Previous studies around RME and the REF equally employed a qualitative method (e.g. Harley, 2002; Murphy et al., 2014; Doherty et al., 2015). The method also prevented the loss of textual data which provided useful insight into the inquired; this would not have been possible had a quantitative method been applied (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). The research questions (reiterated in Table 31) that guided the study rendered a quantitative method even more unsuitable. Its adoption would not have effectively and efficiently addressed those.

Table 31: The research questions underpinning the study

#	Questions
1	What are the main features of RME, and what factors are impeding on its implementation/advancement in UK business schools?
2	What are the main characteristics of the REF process?
3	How is the REF possibly influencing the implementation/advancement of RME in UK business schools?
4	What are the areas of tension and complementarity between the REF and RME?
5	How can the complementarity of both agendas be strengthened in the context of business schools within the UK?

Source: Compiled by Author

The differences between qualitative and quantitative methods are outlined in Table 32 below – the middle column mostly aligns with the current study[105].

Table 32: Differences Between Qualitative and Qualitative Methods

Attributes	Qualitative	Quantitative
Theory purpose	Theory generation (induction)	Theory testing (deduction)
Philosophy	Interpretivist	Positivist
Ontology	Relativist	Realist
Epistemology	Subjectivist	Objectivist
Axiology	Biased – value-bound	Unbiased (Value-free)
Framework	Exploration of a phenomenon. Style is flexible. Data collection instruments and strategies included interviews and review of relevant documents, including existing literature around the subject matter.	Confirmation of hypotheses on a phenomenon. Style is rigid. Data collection instruments are structured, including, questionnaires, surveys, experiments.
Aims and objectives	Explore, understand, and interpret/explain	Measure, quantify, count, predict and describe casual relationships and variation
Questions and Data	Open-ended, verbal, textual, non-statistical	Close-ended, statistical
Sample Size	Small	Large
Analysis method	Thematic analysis	Statistical analysis
Measures of the usefulness of findings	Transferability[106]	Generalisability[107]

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from, Marshall, 1996; Creswell et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2016).

5.6 Research Strategy

Saunders et al. (2016) recommend researchers choose a research strategy that will support them to achieve a satisfactory level of coherence all through their research design, in order to ensure that the posed research questions and the study objectives are answered and met, respectively.

The study utilised **Phenomenology** as a research strategy. It is concerned with studying a phenomenon from the viewpoints of those that operate within the social

[105] Note, there are other methods for the analysis of qualitative data other than thematic analysis (e.g. narrative analysis).

[106] *Transferability* is the degree to which study findings can be applied to contexts outside a given study scope. In essence, it is the usefulness and relevance of the study findings (Marshall, 1996; Burchett et al., 2013; Sundler et al., 2019). For instance, can the findings be applied to say academics in engineering schools in the UK or those in the health sciences, outside the selected business school academics? Alternatively, can it be transferable to business school academics in Australian (not UK) universities – i.e. RME versus the REF equivalent (ERA - Excellence in Research for Australia)? The transferability of the research findings is more assured than the generalisability.

[107] *Generalisability,* conversely, is the extent to which study findings/results from a given sample – i.e. 17 academics from 15 UK business schools, can be generalised to an entire population – i.e. all academics situated in all UK business schools. That in this sense was not the end goal of this study, and is in any case arguably impossible as not all UK business school academics are knowledgeable about RME/PRME even if they have basic knowledge about the REF. Furthermore, the study utilised a small sample size; generalisability is best assured with a large sample size.

context in which it is experienced (Sundler et al., 2019; Tight, 2017; Titchen and Hobson, 2005). It assumes that individuals' experience of social reality offers the basis for understanding its meaning – reality is not absolute but filtered through the lens of those that experience it, which aligns with a relativist ontology. Hence, the researcher attempted to make sense of accounts (related to the phenomenon) rendered by the study participants in order to understand it from their social world (Gray, 2013). The strategy necessitated the researcher gained access to academics involved in RME implementation and who also had a good understanding of the REF, in order to obtain an insider knowledge of how the REF might be influencing that; related understanding was explored through an in-depth semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2005). Details about the data collection are discussed in depth later in this chapter.

Phenomenology involves human consciousness (Titchen and Hobson, 2005), as opposed to alternative strategies such as surveys. The latter is mostly used for quantitative methods, allowing little or no interaction between the researcher and the participants, and yielding an outsider view of the inquired. Hence it was rejected.

A case study research approach was also considered. While it would have been a better fit for the study compared to a survey, it was also rejected given how under-researched the subject of inquiry was at the time. The difficulty associated with managing more than a single case study as a student (Saunders et al., 2016), never mind 15 cases (i.e. the business schools from where the 17 interviewees were selected), made it less attractive. That would have been more resource-intensive than the strategy adopted. The researcher had limited resources at her disposal to effectively execute a multiple case study consisting of 15 cases.

Phenomenology enabled the researcher to bring into view the previously invisible aspects of study participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Sundler et al., 2019), through the questioning of her understanding of the data (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2003).

5.7 Time Horizon

The research was a ***cross-sectional*** study that focused on a phenomenon (REF's possible influence on RME implementation in UK business schools) at a given time. It was constrained by time in that the study and related findings are but a snapshot of what can be known about the phenomenon; the same possibly applies to the accounts the participants rendered about it. This exploratory study in the researcher's view was timely as interviews were conducted in the year 2017, which was roughly three years after the REF2014 exercise and a few years to the looming REF2021 exercise. It implies that the participants were well-informed about the REF2014 exercise and had some time to reflect on related processes and outcomes. Nonetheless, the researcher made sure they had a good understanding of both RME and the REF before interviews were carried out.

The cross-sectional design also allowed for the comparison of the perceptions of 17 academics from 15 UK business schools in a given time. Possibly, some of the perceptions might have changed since the study concluded as the REF is a rapidly changing and dynamic agenda, and the same goes for assessment frameworks like PRME (its six principles were used as an analytical and interpretative lens in this study). The pace of RME-related changes is probably slower than the REF as inferred from this study; nonetheless, PRME as a United Nations-backed initiative continues to evolve.

5.8 Data Collection, Management and Analysis

This section presents a detailed account of how the data underpinning the study was collected, managed, and analysed. It covers the sampling technique used for the selection of study participants, a brief discussion of the sample size, an outline of the characteristics of the participants, how access was negotiated, and how data was collected (in both the pilot and main phase). It also covers the management and analysis of gathered data, contains a brief outline of the limitations of the methodological framework, and concludes with the discussion of ethical considerations.

5.8.1 Sampling technique

Sampling deals with the technique that researchers use in the selection of prospective study participants for their studies (Djebarni et al., 2014). Quantitative sampling (probability sampling) aims to have a representative sample from a given population in order to enable the results that emerge to be generalised. The sample size is often more extensive than a study that employs a qualitative sampling technique – i.e., non-probability sampling (Marshall, 1996). For a qualitative sampling technique, all members of a given population (i.e. UK business school academics) do not have an equal chance of being selected as with a quantitative sampling technique (Gary, 1990).

Study participants were selected **purposively** with an element of convenience[108] (Marshall, 1996; Etikan et al., 2016). The study aimed to explore an under-researched phenomenon in order to provide illumination and understanding. The researcher believed that not all UK business school academics could provide relevant information for the addressing of the underpinning research questions related to RME; possibly even some of those employed in UK business schools and universities that were signatories to the PRME initiative[109].

The REF/RAE, as the primary determinant of the funds that the government, in conjunction with funding bodies, awards to HEIs for research, has amassed tremendous attention from HEIs and their academics over the years. As a significant funding stream, the researcher assumed that more academics would have basic knowledge of the REF and its processes compared to RME. Therein lies the rationale for the use of a purposive sampling technique for the selection of academics who were knowledgeable about the REF and RME. The subjective judgement of the researcher ensured that the prospective participants who were approached to take part in the study voluntarily were informed regarding both, enabling the answering of the research questions and the meeting of the study objectives (Saunders et al., 2016). Table 33 justifies why probability sampling was not utilised for the study.

Table 33: Rationale for not selecting probability sampling

Firstly, the technique is often used for studies that adopt quantitative methods whose end goal is mainly to generate generalisable (not necessarily transferable) findings/results. As already discussed, generalisability was not the study's end goal as it requires a large sample size for it to be feasible. Most qualitative authors, like the researcher, pay more attention to the transferability of their research findings because they mostly deal with smaller samples which make generalisability difficult (Marshall, 1996).
Secondly, the sample size (see the sub-section below) is another reason why purposive (not probability) sampling technique was adopted.

[108] Mostly in relations to the data collection medium, which is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

[109] The researcher's personal experience validates this claim. A casual conversation about the study (long before the data collection phase) with some lecturers that were employed at UK institutions that were PRME signatories revealed limited knowledge about RME. Some were oblivious of the membership, partly due to senior management having no consultation with the majority of academics prior the institution signing up to the initiative.

Thirdly, as gathered from the in-depth literature review carried out in Chapter 2, the phenomenon is under-researched, with the RME field yet to garner the critical mass that is needed in order to move the agenda and field forward. Thus, the participants needed to be judgmentally (not randomly) selected in terms of how knowledgeable they are about both RME and the REF as only a productive sample will answer the research questions and meet the study objectives.
The last, though not the least, reason was the limited resources that were available to the researcher at the time. The study was time-bound and had to meet a set academic goal with limited funds; hence, productivity and efficiency were vital. According to Marshall (1996), to randomly choose someone to address a qualitative question would be comparable to randomly asking a passer-by how a broken car can be repaired, instead of asking a garage mechanic. Doing the latter would likely yield a far more productive outcome than the former, who may only give a good guess; the limited time and funds did not give room for guessing. The academic either possessed the knowledge or not, were employed in PRME signatory institutions or not, and were involved in RME/PRME implementation or not.

Source: Compiled by Author

There was no discrimination about the membership type the participants' schools held with PRME at the time (i.e. basic, advanced or PRME Champions). The main selection criteria regarding RME were their commitment to, and involvement in, the implementation of RME/PRME in their institutions. As previously noted, an understanding of the REF – a framework that affects almost all UK HEIs and their academics – was also very important. Less consideration was given to the characteristics of their institution, except they had to be employed by business schools that are PRME signatories.

The diversity of the sample is outlined in the section that discusses the overview of the study participants. It was not planned as already hinted because the main concern was to get a productive and informative sample for the addressing of the research questions.

With the help of desktop research, conferences, seminars and workshops, the researcher compiled a list of academics that were (are) aligned to the study context (see section 5.8.4). This allowed the researcher to identify a set of potential interviewees who were active in the RME, which was a good indicator of their familiarity with the topic (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). They could provide relevant information about the subject matter (Sekaran and Bougie 2013); doing otherwise (the use of random sampling) would have resulted in the wastage of limited resources.

5.8.2 Sample Size

The researcher approached 25 academics in total to request participation in the study, but only 17 agreed to take part. A pilot study was conducted with one of the academics before the main study; nonetheless, the findings that emerged were included in the main study. So, technically speaking, 17 interviews altogether were conducted with 17 academics from 15 UK business schools. Saunders et al. (2016) recommend 5-25 minimum sample for a study that employs semi-structured/in-depth interviews, so the sample size 17 was adequate for the study. The rationale for contacting only 25 academics given the total number of UK business schools that are signatories to PRME was mostly down to limited resources was available to the researcher at the time of the study, including time; the research project was time bound. There was a chance that had more prospective participants been contacted several of them would have agreed to participate in the study, requiring more resources than what was available to the researcher. To then not acknowledge their acceptance to participate by scheduling and holding an interview would have been unprofessional and a waste of time resources, for both the researcher and the prospective respondents. The associated limitation and general limitation relating to the methodology are covered in more depth in section 5.9.

Four of the study participants were employed in two business schools (two from one business school and two from another). However, it was not a deliberate move on the researcher's part to have two pairs of academics from the same institutions. They met the selection criteria and so were approached to consider participating in the study. It was not a given that they would agree to be part of the study. In both cases, the academics were particularly active in the RME field. They were therefore interviewed to find out their opinions (not the viewpoints of their institutions) regarding the subject matter. Table 34 is a presentation of how the researcher negotiated access for this study.

Table 34: Negotiation of Access to the Study Participants

The negotiation for access to study participants was not complicated compared to the experiences of other researchers. The researcher made conscious efforts to ascertain prospective participants at the onset of the research project. She reviewed extant literature around RME/PRME and the REF and strategically identified and attended relevant conferences, seminars, and workshops. Consequently, she compiled a list of potential study participants and established preliminary contact and rapport with them. Two events notably helped in the negotiation of access to participants. First, was a British Academy of Management (BAM) Responsible Leadership Collaboratory Workshop at Henley Business School at the University of Reading. It consisted of a joint initiative between BAM Leadership and two of its Special Interest Groups (SIGs) - *Leadership Development and Sustainable and Responsible Business*. Attending the workshop in the year 2015 helped the researcher meet some potential contributors (i.e. UK business school academics working within the RME field) for the first time. The second event was the 4th Annual Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) UK & Ireland Chapter Conference held from 26th - 27th June 2017 at the Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University. An internal gatekeeper helped by way of notifying the researcher's principal supervisor about the

conference and encouraging them to consider submitting an abstract to that effect, they did and were accepted for presentation. Attending and presenting at the conference offered the researcher an excellent platform to discuss her research with the right audience, some of whom included the potential contributors she already had on her list. It also aided the researcher in building rapport with some of them ahead of a potential interview (McGrath et al., 2018) thereby reducing the risk of not securing such respondents' trust during the time-limited interviews (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). An hour and thirty minutes was perhaps a limited time to build trust; however, the researcher, in addition to the rapport already established in advance, made a reasonable effort on this front. A lack of trust would likely have prevented respondents from providing a rich and detailed account of their RME and REF-related experiences – the heart of the study (McGrath et al., 2018). The researcher also secured verbal consent from a few of the academics she met at the conference. Following the initial contacts in person (at the second event), electronic mails were sent to those potential contributors who verbally accepted to take part in the study in order to secure a formal acceptance. Other potential contributors who did not attend both events were equally contacted via email to request participation in the study. Copies of an informed consent form and detailed information sheet accompanied all electronic mails that were sent out to enable potential contributors to make informed decisions on whether or not to participate in the study (see the Appendices section for a sample of both documents).

Source: Compiled by Author

The following sub-section is an in-depth overview of the study participants.

5.8.3 Overview of participants

The study participants were purposefully selected by the researcher to enable her to answer the research questions and meet the study aim. They all were working for UK business schools that were signatories to PRME since the initiative's mission[110] ("to inspire and champion RME, research and thought leadership in business and management-related institutions across the globe") was and still is very much aligned to the values underpinning the RME agenda.

The non-selection of participants from non-PRME signatories does not suggest academics based at such institutions were (and are) not committed to the implementation/institutionalisation of RME. Neither does it suggest their institutions are necessarily not committed to the agenda as well. It was a case of the researcher being cautious to avoid any misinterpretation of crucial concepts underpinning RME hence she deemed academics at signatory institutions most appropriate for the study. It was logical for the participants to be from institutions with an explicit commitment to the furtherance of RME as opposed to those implicitly committed to the agenda. The most obvious way to identify this commitment was through

[110]Note that PRME is a dynamic initiative and as such has since restructured its mission to capture a new vision – commitment to support the advancement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). It is an additional responsibility to the initial mandate that signatories are required to achieve – to instil the ideas of Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability (ERS) into business and management school students towards their development to become future responsible leaders and professionals. As a result, PRME's current mission and vision are "to transform business and management education and develop the responsible leaders of tomorrow" and "to realise the Sustainable Development Goals through responsible management education" respectively.

membership of PRME, even if it is acknowledged that the rhetoric about commitment may not align with what is operational at some institutions (i.e. decoupling – see sections 2.5.1, 2.5.2 and 4.2.2).

Again, PRME is considered a proxy to RME because it is a renowned global champion that is committed to supporting business schools and other HEIs worldwide in transforming their management education through its six principles. That is, it endeavours to get them to switch from traditional management education (TME) to responsible management education (RME), developing future responsible leaders and professionals that will be committed to building a sustainable future (see Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). PRME has evolved when compared to previous initiatives that have become less active (e.g. Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative – GRLI, the Academy of Business in Society - ABIS, the Global Business School Network – GBSN, the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges – EUAC, and Aim2Flourish). It is also highly connected to more recent initiatives (e.g. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs), and it is committed to supporting and promoting the wider agendas of the United Nations as a UN-backed initiative.

The participants met Creswell's (2013) criteria: the necessary experience, knowledge and facts regarding the subject of inquiry. Their direct involvement in the implementation/institutionalisation of RME, including teaching and researching within the RME field and familiarity with the PRME initiative, as well as with the REF and its process, make them experts. Of the 17 interviews conducted with 17 business school academics situated in 15 UK HEIs: 11 were done via Skype, two face-to-face, another two via telephone, one was a combination of Skype and telephone, and one via Google Hangout. Six academic titles were associated with the 17 participants ranging from professors - 3, associate professors - 2, senior lecturers - 6, assistant professor - 1, lecturers – 4, to a reader – 1 (see Tables 35 and 36).

Table 35: Participants' Title/Position[111] in organisation

#	Code	Description
3	P	Professor
2	AP	Associate Professor

[111] The titles might have changed since the study, possibly due to a promotion or a move to another institution.

6	SL	Senior Lecturer
1	AsP	Assistant Professor
4	L	Lecturer
1	R	Reader

Source: Compiled by Author

Aside from the informed consent form, confidentiality and anonymity were assured further through the generation of codes that concealed the identity of the study participants (Layder, 2013). It was a two-level process; the first level entailed the use of pseudonyms - allocation followed the interview sequence (e.g. "Liam" in Table 36 below represents the first respondent, and "Bell" the last).

Table 36: Initial Code Assigned to Research Participants

#	Initial code	Job title (Position)	Discipline/Research area	R (Russell)	NR (Non-Russell)
1	Liam	P	Strategy and Leadership		x
2	Nick	SL	Business Ethics		x
3	Lee	SL	Management (Strategy)		x
4	Mark	SL	HRM (Responsible Business and Management Education)		x
5	Louis	P	Business Ethics and CSR	x	
6	Amy	AP	HRM and Organisational Behavior (Sustainable Business)	x	
7	Lisa	SL	Business and Management (Ethics)		x
8	Bill	P	Financial Ethics		x
9	Guy	AP	Critical management, sustainability, and CSR		x
10	Rita	R	Business Ethics and Social Enterprise		x
11	Sue	L	Strategic Management	x	
12	Zoe	L	Management (Strategy and Sustainability)		x
13	Pete	L	Management (Sustainability)		x
14	Gale	SL	HRM (Responsible Leadership)		x
15	Rose	SL	Marketing and Ethics		x
16	Theo	L	Business and Management		x
17	Bell	AsP	Operations Management	x	

Source: Compiled by Author

Table 36 also shows the participants according to their job titles/positions and the status of their universities in terms of Russell Group and Non-Russell Group members. The sub-fields within their various business schools are also shown which should provide additional context to their responses in Chapters 6 and 7. The inclusion of the status - Russell (R) and non-Russell (NR) group membership further helped to give context to their responses, experiences and perceptions concerning the inquiry. There is indeed a traditional assumption that Russell Group members would be more REF focused since they claim to be the leading UK universities in terms of excellent research, teaching and student experience, with unmatched links with business and the public sector[112].

Hence it was touched on in some of the discussions, enabling the understanding of the findings. The direct and conscious comparison of both groups was not part of the study scope, though elements of the status feature briefly in the discussion of the study findings. It is an area that further studies can attempt to investigate further. To reiterate, understanding and revealing a severely under-researched phenomenon was the primary purpose of this exploratory study, in order to lay the foundation for future studies to build on.

Also, it is interesting to point to the fact that more than 80% of the participants were leading/coordinating their institutions' PRME/RME projects. They were key respondents with insider views and lived experiences related to the phenomenon explored. Thus, they had an excellent awareness of PRME, RME-related activities in their schools, and the behaviour of the senior executives of their business schools/universities, all of which reinforced the reliability of their answers for the study.

For the second level of coding, participants were assigned a final code generated by merging the initial codes with the title/position and the Russell Group (R) and non-Russell Group (NR) membership elements. For example, instead of using "Liam" and "Bell" to denote the first and last participant in Table 37 below, "Liam-PNR" and "Bell-AsPR" was used, respectively. By means of illustration, participant Liam at the time of the study was a professor situated at a non-Russell Group university.

The respondents' seniority level, then, is referred to as part of the coding of the data collected during their interviews. The researcher, at times, included this aspect as part of the discussion within this thesis. However, given how close-knit the PRME UK community is, the researcher could not discuss this aspect in further depth at times

[112] Click on the link for more details. https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/

as she felt it might have made the respondents recognisable. With the RME community of active academics hopefully growing further in the future, studies discussing in more significant depth respondents' answers in light of their academic experience could become easier to achieve while respecting anonymity.

To see how the responses may differ based on gender would be interesting, but it was not the principal aim of the study. It was therefore, not considered at the sampling stage. The information was, however, recorded in the coding. Knowledge of RME, and involvement in and commitment to its implementation took precedence over gender. Nonetheless, the final numbers for both genders were closely balanced.

Table 37: Participants' Final Code, REF2014 Status and Gender

#	Participants	RE2014 Status		Gender	
	Final Code	*Returned*	*Not returned*	*Male*	*Female*
1	Liam-PNR		x	x	
2	Nick-SLNR	x		x	
3	Lee-SLNR		x	x	
4	Mark-SLNR		x	x	
5	Louis-PR	x		x	
6	Amy-APR		x		x
7	Lisa-SLNR		x		x
8	Bill-PNR	x		x	
9	Guy-APNR		x	x	
10	Rita-RNR	x			x
11	Sue-LR		x		x
12	Zoe-LNR		x		x
13	Pete-LNR		x	x	
14	Gale-SLNR		x		x
15	Rose-SLNR		x		x
16	Theo-LNR		x	x	
17	Bell-AsPR		x		x
Total		4	13	9	8

Source: Compiled by Author

The participants' familiarity with the REF process was double-checked before undertaking the interviews. Table 37 above also shows the number of participants that were returned by their institutions in the REF2014 exercise.

There is a wide consensus in the literature that the REF2014 exercise was divisive (see MacDonald, 2017; Stern, 2016; Watermeyer and Olssen, 2016; EDAP, 2015; Hubble, 2015; Murphy and Sage, 2014). As a consequence, little attention was paid to the REF2014 status (returned or not) at the sampling and selection stage of prospective study participants. Whether participants were returned as part of the REF was recorded merely as potentially interesting information. Non-submission to REF2014 does not mean that the participants in that category have no relevant experience of the REF within the scope of this study.

As can be seen, many of the participants were not returned in REF2014. Only 4 out of the 17 participants were submitted for the REF2014 by 4 of the 15 UK business schools. Again, the REF2014 exercise was overtly selective because many institutions only submitted academic staff who they felt had quality papers in higher-ranked journals, with four per submission as the minimum (except where there were extenuating circumstances). Nonetheless, all participants proved to be knowledgeable about the REF process during their interviews with the researcher. Table 37, therefore, in a way, reinforces the argument that the REF2014 exercise was highly selective.

The next variant that represents the sample is participants' institutions' signatory status at PRME (i.e. the membership status at the time of the interview – although it might have changed since then) as presented in Table 38 below.

Table 38: Participants' Signatory Status at PRME and Interview Method

Participants		Interview method	PRME Signatory Status		
			Basic	Advanced	PRME Champion
1	Liam-PNR	Face-to-face		x	
2	Nick-SLNR	Skype		x	
3	Lee-SLNR	Skype		x	
4	Mark-SLNR	Skype		x	
5	Louis-PR	Skype		x	
6	Amy-APR	Telephone	x		
7	Lisa-SLNR	Google Hangout		x	
8	Bill-PNR	Skype		x	
9	Guy-APNR	Face-to-Face		x	
10	Rita-RNR	Skype	x		
11	Sue-LR	Skype		x	
12	Zoe-LNR	Telephone	x		
13	Pete-LNR	Skype	x		
14	Gale-SLNR	Skype			x
15	Rose-SLNR	Skype		x	
16	Theo-LNR	Skype		x	
17	Bell-AsPR	Skype			x
Total			4	11[113]	2

Source: Compiled by Author

The composition of the signatory status of the institutions where the study participants were situated includes 4 basic and 9 advanced signatories, and 2 PRME Champions. Table 38 above also shows the interview methods employed at the data collection stage, and that included face-to-face, Skype calls (audio and video primarily the latter), telephone calls, and a Google hangout audio call.

The mediums used for the interviews are valid based on various studies (see Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Krouwel et al., 2019). Additionally, given our increasing reliance on technology, Sullivan (2012) argues that there is not much of a difference between our internet interactions and our in-person interactions. She also asserts that researchers should not question the truth in the interactions we have with research participants/subjects. This is irrespective of the medium (be it face-to-face,

[113] Four participants where situated in two business schools at the time of the interview – i.e. two each in one (x2) – hence reference within the main text to 9 advanced signatories, instead of 11.

telephone, writing or computer), as we can never be 100% certain that the "self" presented at such times is the genuine self.

The next sub-sections discuss both the pilot and the main phases of the data collection for the study. However, before we do that, it is important to point out that a **semi-structured** method of interview questioning was employed. It was deemed appropriate because it helped facilitate the flexibility required by the researcher's exploratory stance, given the phenomenon is one that is severely under-researched. Open-ended questions were asked which encouraged the study participants to respond with few restrictions in terms of scope. The researcher was able to ask further questions and seek clarity where needed, with new lines of enquiries identified and pursued as appropriate. The technique adopted enabled the generation of rich data for the study (Yin, 2003).

We will now start with the pilot phase of data gathering, followed by the main phase.

5.8.4 Data gathering - Pilot phase

A pilot study was conducted with a participant from one UK business school before the main study – this was deemed crucial to the success of the main study (Lancaster, 2015). The gathered data was incorporated into the main study and analysed together because of its relevance to the study. The researcher did not underestimate the importance of preparation at this stage of the research project (Brinkmann, 2014), which helped in the minimisation of risks and prevention of resource wastage (Sampson, 2004). Because of the pilot study, the appropriateness of the research instruments (information sheet for participants, informed consent form, interview schedule and audio recorder), the sampling technique (purposive sampling), transcription method and the data analysis method (thematic analysis) were assessed.

The researcher did the transcription of the audio recording verbatim (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015) with no support of any software to produce an interview transcript. It was time-consuming and onerous, which motivated the researcher to explore a possible and acceptable way that she could save time without compromising the quality of the work. It led to the discovery of the Trint software which has good reviews from academics and researchers from various HEI institutions across the world, including the UK. Approval was sought from relevant parties within the school after a trial run with one of the audio recordings produced from the main data collection phase proved to be a more effective approach compared to how the transcription of the pilot interview was completed.

The analysis carried out at this phase was not in-depth, it mostly covered the first-two stages (familiarisation with the data and generation of initial codes) of Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommended six stages for carrying out a thematic analysis. Very little was done to search for themes as there was no comparable data with which to do so – the pilot study consisted of just one interview with a relevant academic in a UK business school. The collected data primarily enabled the researcher to learn how to use NVivo data analysis software as a data management tool. The data generated were collectively analysed with the data that the 16 other interviews yielded at the main data collection phase (i.e. 1 interview – Pilot phase + 16 interviews – Main phase). So, in-depth data analysis commenced once the data collection (phase 1 – pilot, and phase 2 – main) was concluded.

A few issues with some of the interview questions were identified, such as duplication of questions, syntax/flow, alignment, and arrangement of interview questions (wrong order). Consequently, the interview questions were refined, a few new ones framed (Ball, 1993) and the research instruments developed further (Gillham, 2000).

Additionally, the pilot study facilitated reflection and reflexivity. The researcher was able to acknowledge and bracket a few biases that surfaced – she managed her biases as recommended by Chenail (2011). Examples of bias thus identified included second-guessing the participant's response to a question even before an actual response was given and the use of leading questions due to anecdotal evidence; these were not apparent to the researcher during the interview session. Some downtime was allowed after the interview, which enabled the researcher to reflect and identify flaws, then address them before the main phase of data collection. Had that not been the case, the identified issues would have been missed, which may have influenced the study and associated findings negatively (Hammersley, 1993; Sampson, 2004). The pilot study not only aided the testing of the feasibility of the main study but also enhanced its reliability and validity (Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne, 2010).

The interviewing skills of the researcher were also enhanced further. For instance, knowing when to probe and the appropriate words to use, and allowing/using silence to facilitate on-going reflection and possibly reflexivity on the part of respondents, thereby increasing the chance of the main study yielding rich and quality data (McGrath et al., 2018). However, while the generation of useful data was not the primary reason for the pilot study, the researcher realised that the data collected appeared to be interesting and relevant. As a result, a decision was made to integrate the data that emerged into the main study. The pilot interview lasted for an hour and twenty-five minutes (1:25hr) - 25 minutes more than what was initially planned. That, too, was considered at the main data collection phase, and reasonable adjustments were made for later interviews where necessary.

The medium of interview for the pilot study was face-to-face (in person) with the respondent, as opposed to face-to-face online video or telephone call, Skype, and Google Hangout call. A combination of these was used for the main study, as presented earlier in Table 38, and expanded upon below.

5.8.5 Data gathering - Main phase

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted during the second data collection phase. Some authors (e.g. Ando et al., 2014; Guest et al., 2006) known to utilise thematic analysis for their qualitative work believe that saturation[114] can be attained "in as few as 6-12 interviews" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 851). Saturation was not necessarily the primary determinant of the sample size for this study; it was the availability of the academics that were contacted and their willingness to participate in the study, from the larger pool of 25 academics approached (which was in turn limited by the factors identified in section 5.8.2 on sample size).

However, saturation further assures the quality and validity of this qualitative study, which probably would have been at risk had the sense of saturation not been attained (Fusch and Ness, 2015). The researcher engaged in reflection during and after each interview. This enabled her to immerse herself in the data, identifying leads that

[114] Braun et al. (2019) define as information redundancy as the point when an additional informational interview would likely not generate any data that would shed further light on the inquired (Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010); there is enough information for other researchers to replicate the study (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013; Walker, 2012).

needed pursuing, judging the quality of each interview in terms of their strengths and weaknesses and identifying ways to improve those with each successive interview (Moser and Korstjens, 2018).

The reflection carried out at the 16th interview (including the pilot phase interview) triggered a sense of closure that new data after that may yield the point of information redundancy - that is, when saturation might have been attained. However, one more interview was completed for verification purposes, given that it was already scheduled. This 17^{th} interview confirmed the initial feeling the researcher had, which made her confident that the cumulative information generated from the seventeen interviews were enough for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Moser and Korstjens, 2018), at least within the confines of the resources that she had at the time.

Table 39 is an outline of the research questions mapped against the interview questions.

Table 39: Research questions vs Interview Questions

<table>
<tr><th>#</th><th>Research Questions</th><th>Approach</th><th>Interview Questions</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>What are the main features of RME, and what factors are impeding on its implementation/advancement in UK business schools?</td><td>Literature Review
(Chapter 2)</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>What are the main characteristics of the REF process?</td><td>Literature Review
(Chapter 3)</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>How is the REF possibly influencing the implementation/advancement of RME in UK business schools?</td><td rowspan="3">Semi-structured Interviews</td><td>Could you kindly tell me about your experience of the REF exercise?
How might have the REF influenced your commitment towards the institutionalisation of the RME agenda in your institution?
What perceived influence do you think the REF has had (or may still have) on senior management (the likes of Vice-Chancellors and Deans) in relation to the institutionalisation of the RME agenda in your institution?</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>What are the areas of tension and complementarity between the REF and RME?</td><td rowspan="2">Do you think the REF is an important agenda for UK Business Schools?
What role do you envisage the next REF exercise (2021) would play in the institutionalisation of the RME agenda?
In what ways do you think both agendas are similar?</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>How can the complementarity of both agendas be strengthened in the context of business schools within the UK?</td></tr>
</table>

			How do you think RME can potentially assist in achieving research excellence in relation to the next REF (2021)? How do you think the REF can assist in the institutionalisation of RME in UK business schools? How can the REF possibly facilitate RME-related research? To what extent do you think both agendas are compatible in the UK business school context?

Source: Compiled by Author

All the participants were well-informed about the study aim and objectives; a detailed information sheet accompanied the emails that were separately sent to them, even though some of them had earlier given verbal consents.

There were instances where some of the participants' depth of discussion differed significantly from that of others, and most importantly, the initial time planned - 1 hour. It caused the researcher to make reasonable adjustments. For example, limited time was a challenge for one of the interviews conducted. The participant met the selection criteria but only agreed to be interviewed for 15-minutes, which the researcher accepted given the lack of critical mass in the RME field. The participant ended up allowing an extra 10 minutes, making it a total of 25 minutes. Selective questioning was therefore employed as it was impossible to cover all questions satisfactorily within that timeframe.

Another example, in contrast, was an interview session that lasted for 2+ hours. The researcher allowed the participant to exhaust his views, perception and lived experience relating to the inquiry with little or no attempt to interject/stop the respondent in his tracks. The rationale rested on the perceived vast knowledge, passion and enthusiasm evidenced around the subject of inquiry, albeit the transcription of the audio recording was onerous, coupled with background noise from an on-going construction project[115] at the time. Nonetheless, all the questions were covered – no significant amount of data was lost, as discussed in the limitation section.

[115] The respondent mentioned it in passing – it was difficult to request that the interview be rescheduled because the study was constrained by time and the researcher felt doing so would have resulted in non-participation given the perceived busy schedule of the respondent.

The next sections discuss how the cumulative data that was generated from both the pilot and main phase of the data collection stage of the study were managed and analysed. We commence with the management of the data, followed by analysis.

5.8.6 Data management

While the audio recording generated from the pilot phase was transcribed verbatim after the interview was concluded, the transcription of the audio recordings produced from the main phase was done concurrently with the interviews. The researcher did not wait to conclude all interviews before she commenced transcribing the recordings from the completed interviews.

An automated transcription software, Trint, was useful for this part of the research process. The researcher fed the audio recording into the platform, and the software came up with a draft transcript, with approximately 40% accuracy overall. It was followed by a careful review of each transcript to ensure alignment with the actual audio recording. The software saved the researcher some time, but the traditional approach of listening and typing up verbatim were still necessarily employed. This allowed for in-depth engagement and familiarisation with participants' responses.

Adjustments were made when preparing the transcripts for them to be imported into the NVivo interface. The semi-structured interviews did not all conform to the interview schedule, particularly in terms of the sequence of the questions. While the researcher drove the interview, the participants, to some extent, controlled the line of discussion; hence flexibility was needed. A good example is the 2+ hour interview that was discussed briefly in section 5.8.5, where the researcher did little to stop the respondent, who seemed to have a vast knowledge about RME and the REF. The Completed transcripts were then downloaded in MS Word format and imported into the NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software (NQDAS). The software mostly supported the efficient management of the large dataset gathered (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). However, it played a minimal role in the actual analysis, which relied heavily on the analytical skills of the researcher, honed further through the course of the doctoral study.

The following sub-section discusses the technique used for analysing the data imported into the NVivo software interface.

5.8.7 Data analysis

The data gathered from the pilot phase and the main phase were merged and analysed as a collective set of data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for completing a thematic analysis, including data familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, revision of themes, the definition of themes, and write-up. The six steps in the context of the study are discussed in greater detail in Table 40.

Table 40: Six Phases of Thematic Analysis Adopted for the Research

Phase	Description
Data familiarisation	Step 1 mostly was about the researcher getting familiar with the data gathered from all 17 participants. The audio recordings were painstakingly transcribed verbatim to allow for the classification and organisation of data into central themes, concepts, and emerging categories. This provided useful insight into the study participants' perceptions of the key themes identified. Here, transcripts were read, and re-read, and useful notes and early impressions jotted down.
Generation of initial codes	Step 2 entailed the generation of initial codes once the researcher was accustomed to the data. The vast data set was meaningfully and systematically organised into small chunks of meaning through top-down coding because the research questions drove the analysis. Open coding was used as there were no pre(set)conceived codes - codes were developed and modified as the researcher worked through the coding stage (see Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).
Search for themes	Step 3 was about searching for themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) tell us that there is no one rule regarding what makes a theme; it is about significance, more than anything. The initial codes were examined, and those that fitted together were collated into initial themes. By the end of this stage, the researcher had reorganised the codes into broader themes that had something important to say about the research questions. They were housed in parent nodes – containers for key themes, and child nodes – containers for sub-themes.
Revision of themes	Step 4 involved the review, modification and development of the preliminary themes identified in the previous step. All relevant data related to each theme were collated together. They were read and considered to ensure alignment – that they supported the themes and sub-themes, coherent and distinct. NVivo software made it quicker compared to the time it would have taken had it been done manually.
Definition of themes	Step 5 focused on the final refinement of the developed themes. It included the identification of their essence – what they conveyed and their interaction with one another (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Overall, the themes generated were driven by the data – underpinned by the data and the varied experiences of the study participants (Sundler et al., 2019).
Write-up	Step 6 focused on writing up the thesis. Excerpts that were compelling examples and that aligned with and/or addressed the research questions were used to support the critical and rigorous discussion of the study findings. A good attempt was made to tie key findings back to previous studies covered in the literature review chapters. The application of the theoretical frameworks generally come under this section.

Source: Compiled by Author (based on Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The six principles of PRME were used for the effective grouping of the themes/subthemes related to the study findings (see Chapter 6), instead of the alternatives (frameworks/principles) that were considered and rejected (see Chapter 4). The use of the six principles of PRME as an interpretative framework allowed the researcher to evaluate if any of the responses the participants gave suggest that the REF has a negative or positive influence on the realisation of any of the six principles and, therefore, on UK business schools' RME agendas. For instance, are there suggestions that the REF has a negative or positive influence on academics' efforts to develop the capabilities of students to become future professionals/leaders - individuals who can generate sustainable value for both business and society and work for an inclusive and sustainable economy (i.e. Principle 1)?

All the study participants were familiar with PRME and have probably integrated the principles as a guide for how RME is implemented in their institution, which was another central reason it was utilised (see section 4.3).

Institutional theory was also used to make sense of part of the study findings, though not in an extensive and structured manner as the framework adapted from the six principles of PRME. The details relating to how it was applied, and when, are covered in section 4.4 of this thesis.

We will now discuss some of the limitations associated with the methodological framework of this study.

5.9 Limitations

A few challenges were encountered at the data collection and analysis phases of this study with potential adverse consequences but which were significantly mitigated. This section focuses on the aspects of the research that could be considered a limitation. However, as established all through Chapter 5 on Research Methodology, the researcher took steps to mitigate their impacts in line with the recommendations of other authors. Those were utilised to enhance the quality of the interview schedules and some of the questions. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2010), meanwhile, argue that data collection and analysis in qualitative research is mostly progressive; the subsequent interview in a series tends to be better than the previous one as the researcher would have gained useful insights in the process. Most importantly, both aspects support the decisions made and the procedures/techniques employed.

Table 41 offers a summary of these limitations and the main solutions provided in order to reduce their impacts. Based on some of these limitations, the researcher cannot guarantee/claim that the responses provided by the participants are absolute statements.

Table 41: Challenges and Limitations Related to Data Collection and Analysis

The depth of the discussions relating to the questions posed during the interviews varied. Not much could be done about this as participation was entirely voluntary - to force participants to provide in-depth information would be against the ethics surrounding the study. Of course, they were asked to clarify certain points made, which most did as they deemed it appropriate. Possibly, new information would have surfaced had the participant that granted 25 minutes interview been interviewed for an hour – the initial time planned for each interview. This shortcoming does not compromise the validity of the study findings albeit some of the findings were not based on all 17 interviews. Again, understanding an under-researched phenomenon took precedence over generalisability; the study findings are in any case transferable as already established. Another challenge was the possible loss of relevant data because of the background noise encountered in one of the interviews as briefly discussed. Its impact on the overall study findings is negligible because the researcher painstakingly transcribed the audio recording; she played and replayed it many times to make sense of what was said as much as possible. Another limitation was merging the data that was gathered at the pilot and main phase. A few questions were not posed to the academic interviewed at the pilot stage but were framed after the pilot study. Its impact on the overall study was minimal. The practice of including the pilot interview as part of the main study is not out of order as asserted by Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2010), who note that data contamination is not a significant concern for qualitative studies – i.e., in this context the use of the pilot data in the main study. The interview mediums varied as already pointed out. A combination of telephone and Skype call was used for one of the interview sessions because of poor internet connection. Some time was lost from trying to sort out the issue, but the challenge experienced did not affect the quality of the data gathered. The number of academics interviewed, and the number of corresponding business schools from where they were selected, is another potential limitation. Perhaps, an additional number on both fronts would have yielded additional useful data that might have given a greater insight into the investigated phenomenon. It is however believed that the impact (if any) on the study findings is negligible because the number of 17 interviews held was adequate for a qualitative study of this nature. Saunders et al. (2016) recommend 5-25 as the minimum, and 17 is above the median of this range. Moreover, the saturation concept was applied effectively to the best of the researcher's knowledge. An additional interview was held for confirmatory purposes, and that affirmed the sense of confidence and satisfaction the researcher felt regarding the quality of the data collected from the interviews in providing a comprehensive understanding of the inquired. Another potential limitation of the study is that the number of the participants that were situated at Russell Group Universities (4) was much less than those at Non-Russell Group Universities (13). The potential impact on the study is perhaps more support for RME relative to REF for the non-Russell Group university-based respondents (Russell Group Universities are commonly believed to pay more attention to research compared to their counterparts, at least at the institutional level, and this may in turn feed into respondents at these Universities putting a greater focus on REF compared with RME). While institutions shape individuals to an extent, the researcher thinks the impact of not having an equal ratio or a homogenous sample of either of the two was minimal. All the participants were involved in both teaching and research activities. They seemed very much committed to RME and the underpinning ERS principles as their disciplinary/research/teaching area shows, including articles/publications and even in some cases attendance to relevant PRME conferences. Bias for the REF for either of the two categories cannot be entirely ruled out because of the subjective nature of the qualitative method utilised; this is where quantitative methods can be useful. Future studies can adopt a homogeneous sample (Russell or Non-Russell Group University) or have a balanced ratio for both and then intentionally evaluate how responses compare across those quantitatively or qualitatively. Similarly, the fact that only a few participants were returned for the last REF2014 exercise (4 out of 17) could have impacted on the study. It is possible that those whose outputs were not submitted were biased about the REF and therefore view it as a barrier to RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools. That did not quite come through from the interviews held with the participants, though, but the researcher cannot rule out implicit bias, that being more challenging to detect. Again, this is where quantitative methods may be helpful, but it is not guaranteed that it will detect implicit bias if held by some study participants. It is possible that participants' understanding of the RME concept varied, which could have influenced how they responded to some of the questions asked during the interview. Further research on this and the impact of their answers could be of interest. Institutional theory is broadly classed into old institutionalism and neo-institutionalism. While the constructs utilised in this study relates mostly to neo-institutionalism, both are not explored in-depth, nor is there any attempt to distinguish them. It is possible that elements of old institutionalism feature in this thesis, but the manner in which the theory was applied, and the reasoning behind this, justifies any perceived limitations there might be in this regard. The study scope and context necessitated the stance taken on this front. Readers that are keen on delving into this theory are referred to relevant materials.

The time horizon employed for the study is a cross-sectional, as opposed to longitudinal, approach, which is a potential limitation insofar as the REF2021 exercise will likely have a significant impact on the influence of the REF process for Universities. Participants were interviewed when the related requirements and guidelines had not been published. The outcome of the Stern review recommendations was also unknown at the time. As a result, the gathered data in terms of relevant perceptions and experiences might vary to some extent from those that would have been generated had a longitudinal approach been utilised. However, the research project was constrained by time amongst other resources such as finance; hence a cross-sectional approach was deemed most appropriate.

Finally, the preparation of the transcripts for the analysis phase was somewhat onerous because not all the interviews followed the interview schedule. Some of the responses they gave to a given question answered a different question. The researcher coded according to relevance/significance in such situations.

Source: Compiled by Author

We will now conclude this chapter with a discussion of the ethics surrounding this study.

5.10 Ethical Considerations

It is not unusual for researchers to encounter several ethical issues at the data collection, analysis and write up stages of their qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). According to Smith et al. (2009), avoidance of harm is a vital starting point for any research project – researchers have no entitlement whatsoever to violate this principle regardless of the methodological approach applied. Some issues encountered by researchers include assuring and maintaining participants and/or sponsors' confidentiality and anonymity. It is also crucial to deal with the informed consent procedures and participants' requests, ensuring that the benefits of the research to participants outweigh any risks, that deception is avoided and that the integrity of the interview transcripts is respected (Gibbs, 2007; Creswell, 2013, citing Lipton, 2004).

An informed consent form and a detailed information sheet accompanied the electronic mails that were sent to participants for both data collection phases. The informed consent detailed how the information they were willing to share regarding the subject matter would be used while protecting their identity and that of their institution. They were assured that those would remain confidential throughout the study and beyond, with data presented anonymously. Also, their right to withdraw at any time during the interview without any explanation was made clear. Participants freely gave their consent by signing and returning the forms to the researcher confirming their willingness to take part in the study. A copy of the form is attached in the appendices section. The information sheet, in contrast, provided the research participants with useful information regarding the purpose of the research, including what participation would entail, how the data would be used, and again the assurance that the data generated would be anonymously reported so that it cannot be traced back to them or their institution. The researcher, in adherence to Creswell (2013), avoided the use of any form of deception by clearly stating the aim of the study and how obtained data would be used. Participants were given ample time to consider the interview request in order to enable them to make an informed judgement as to whether to participate in the study or not - no form of coercion was employed.

Trint software was used for the transcription of audio recordings. The work was carried out by the researcher to adhere to the confidentiality agreement. Interview transcripts generated were downloaded in Word format and all uploaded recordings deleted from Trint after further review and checks were completed. Again, very careful consideration went into the decision to use Trint, which was approved by a nominated representative of the researcher's university ethics committee.

Unique codes were assigned to the participants and their institutions to anonymise their identities on the interview transcripts and thesis. No excerpts from interview transcripts referred to their real names or that of their institutions. Pseudonyms unrelated to any of the participants' names (to the best of the researcher's knowledge) were used instead.

Thus, a high level of ethics was maintained throughout the study.

5.11 Chapter summary

This chapter unpacked the methodology that supported the investigation of the current study, summarised in Figure 14 below.

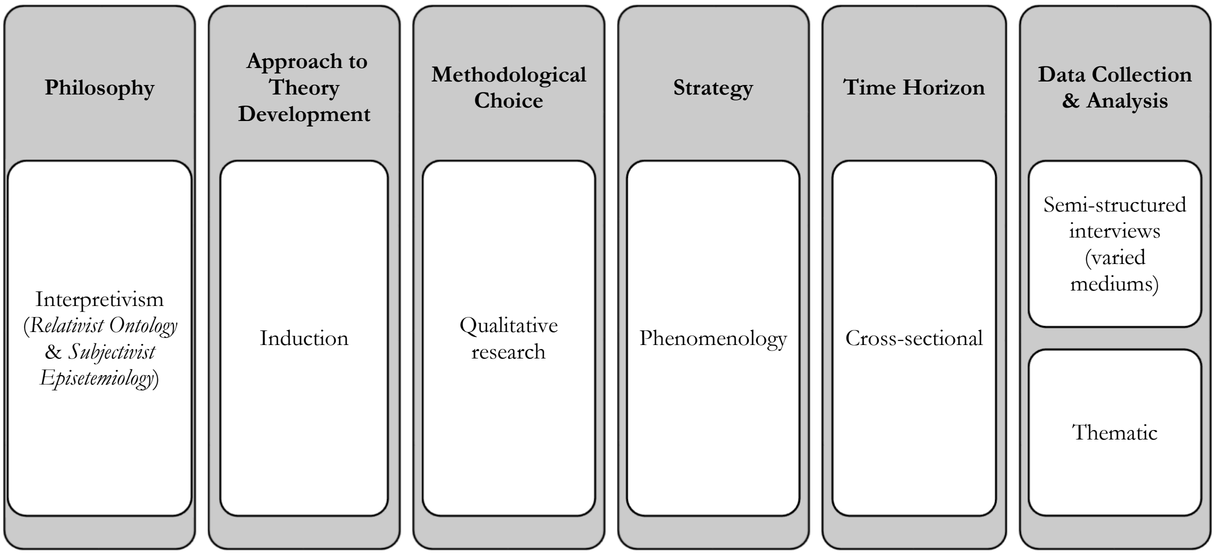

Figure 14: Methodological Framework for the Study

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from Saunders et al., 2015)

Chapter 6 will focus on the presentation and discussion of the findings that emerged concerning study participants' perceptions about the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation. This is followed by Chapter 7, which concerns itself with the presentation and discussion of findings related to how the RME and the REF might be compatible in the UK business school context.

CHAPTER 6: PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO REF'S POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON RME IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Chapter Introduction

Chapter 6 presents and discusses the findings that emerged from the participants' perceptions of the possible influence of the REF on the implementation/advancement of RME within UK business schools. As mentioned earlier, the study participants consisted of 17 UK business school academics that at the time were involved in and/or committed directly to progressing responsible management education (RME) in their respective institutions. The presentation and discussion of the first part of the study findings are looked at in two parts. Part 1 (6.2) looks at the perceived influence of the REF on participants' effort to implement/advance RME in their respective business schools. In contrast, Part 2 (6.3) looks at participants' perceived influences of the REF on UK business school senior executives' commitment to adopt and implement RME and as well provide the necessary support to that effect.

It is important to reiterate that this study is the first in the UK context and arguably across other contexts, at least to the best of the researcher's knowledge. While Doherty et al.'s (2015) study sought to identify the key barriers hindering the implementation of RME in UK business schools, their central focus was not the REF. It was one of the factors identified, and no study had attempted to explore it further. So, it needed unpacking to gain in-depth insight into the mechanisms through which the REF might be influencing RME implementation in UK business schools.

The use of "might" is deliberate. To assume the REF does have an influence on RME implementation in UK business schools based on a partial finding is a bit premature. Hence the relevance of the current study exploring the perspectives of academics tasked to institutionalise RME in their respective institutions. Understanding how the REF has influenced (and may still be influencing) their ability to realise this audacious but essential task – to adopt, implement and institutionalise RME (i.e. make it the norm), was the subject of inquiry.

6.2 Perceived Influence of the REF on the Commitment to Institutionalise RME in UK Business Schools

This section focuses on the findings and discussions related to participants' response to the question - how might have the REF influenced your commitment to implement/advance the RME agenda in your institution. Figure 15 shows how the overview of the findings looked in NVivo software interface and how this was used to present the results in Table 42.

Influence of REF on institutionalization of RME	0	0
Barrier to RME	2	4
Encouraged more investment in research	1	1
Influence of employment of staff	1	1
Legitimised RME	2	2
Limiting to RME-related publication	2	4
Little or No influence	10	13

Figure 15: Findings related to REF's possible influence on participants' commitment to institutionalise RME in their schools

Source: Author (based on raw interview data analysed on NVivo)

The first node in Figure 15 is known as the parent node, while the remaining six nodes underneath that are the sub-nodes. A node, as mentioned earlier in Table 40, is a container that houses relevant data. They can represent topics, themes, concepts or even questions. Most of the parent nodes in the context of the findings related to this study had nothing coded into them directly, which is why their sources[116] (middle column) and references[117] (the last column to the right) read zero (0) in numbers. So, they are more like topics – a collective heading for the themes underneath them (i.e. sub-nodes). These sub-nodes/themes are the ones that contain the coded parts of the data (small chunks of meaning that support the themes). It means that in these instances all the data has been sorted within the sub-nodes, and none were left to the main nodes, which instead depict key interview questions (see Table 39) related to the research questions (see section 1.4).

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[116] Research materials related to the study – i.e. the 17 transcripts for the 17 participants (pilot + main). In effect, they represent the number of participants whose responses make up a theme.

[117] The total number of times the researcher coded relevant sections of the sources (participants' interview transcripts).

For instance, from Figure 15 above, we have "Barrier to RME" as a sub-node/theme with two sources and four references. It shows that two participants responded that the REF is a barrier to RME, when asked of its possible influence on their ability to implement/advance RME in their institutions, and that the distribution of the four references is 3 to 1 – Bill-PNR (3) and Nick-SLNR (1), as per Figure 16 below.

<Internals\\Respondent Bill-PNR> - § 3 references coded [1.56% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.65% Coverage

I'm trying to go through the enablers' route but based on what I said earlier, REF could be a barrier at certain places. Because responsible management education research is not seen as sufficiently high-status and therefore we don't want to research it. And therefore, you end up with a faculty who because they prefer to teach what they research are interested in what they are skilled in and therefore they will tend to do less responsible management education than the other likes do. But I think that we are the only would tend to work at the elite level.

Reference 2 - 0.49% Coverage

The other way the REF might act as a practical barrier is that staff are just under so much pressure now to perform. But new teaching is a nuisance, you've got so many changes coming upon you to develop a new module or to change your existing module to incorporate a whole piece. If it were you feel unskilled that if you review something but prior to that we might develop a few seminars, there's just more stuff to do.

Reference 3 - 0.42% Coverage

I think that, you know, in an environment where certain staff feel under pressure for one publications, then probably even though they might be committed to teaching and they may be very good in the classroom, they might be a little bit disinclined to an awful lot of new teaching preparation. I mean, having said all that, look at the nature of business schools.

<Internals\\Respondent Nick-SLNR> - § 1 reference coded [2.31% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.31% Coverage

Yeah, again, it's a barrier unfortunately. And the reason being the pressure on us as academics to publish now is intense. It's just, you know, publish or die, you've heard all these words before, these mentalities, and that's what it's like. And, if your role is to embed RME or you want to act or work on your curriculum or work on your teaching, that's taking you away from your research. It's taking you away from research, it's taking you away from your career. Despite the rhetoric, we do not as academics, advance our career through teaching, we advance our career through research. And so, people have to make a decision. Do you want to leave the RME and the institutionalisation and the curriculum to on one side and publish and see your career soar? Or do you want to put that on the back-burner and work on RME and do that? Doing both is very difficult, although those of us who are interested we are trying that. So, I think it is a barrier in that it really pushes us towards working on our research and not on our curricula, our management, our RME institutionalisation. It takes us away from that.

Figure 16: A sample of how references related to a theme are distributed.

Source: Author (based on raw interview data analysed on NVivo)

The primary purpose of Figure 16 and the previous explanations in this section is better understanding of the series of information – findings and discussions - that follow in this chapter and the subsequent chapter.

Table 42: REF's Possible Influence on Participants Commitment to Support RME Institutionalisation in their Schools

Themes	**Responses**
Barrier to RME	*REF could be a barrier at certain places. Because responsible management education research is not seen as sufficiently high-status, and therefore, we don't want to research it (Bill-PNR).* *Again, it's a barrier, unfortunately. And the reason being the pressure on us as academics to publish now is intense. It's just, you know, publish or die, you've heard all these words before, these mentalities, and that's what it's like (Nick-SLNR).*
Increased investment for RME-related research	*I suppose the REF has encouraged this university to invest more in research and in the case of business school that happens to be within responsibility areas* (Bill-PNR).
Influence on staff recruitment	*…it could, if anything, harm it. Because going to what I was saying earlier that the absolutely top-rated journals are not in this area, and so, you might be encouraging staff or reluctant to employ staff who are primarily in this area. So, that might be so slightly negative* (Bill-PNR).
Validated RME	*… we looked at particularly our sustainability research, which is probably good research…The fact that we have research in this area, and we thought it was good research... my colleagues in that area have developed teaching material. So, I think that is the connection; it's not the REF itself that is leading to the material…well in a sense I suppose the REF has validated that* (Bill-PNR). *My hope had been for the business school was that by exposing more people to the work that X and Y were doing with the support of the supervisory teams, and then maybe drawing in others, we would have raised [RME's] profile…people to see the opportunities to perhaps get new angles* (Liam-PNR).
Limiting to RME-related publication	*So, how the REF has an impact…we have to be published in particular journals. And so, if those journals aren't open to or don't have a conversation about responsible management education within them, then obviously the REF will have a negative impact* (Lisa-SLNR). *…the only time the REF comes into it is through the publications, you know, where we go when we want to publish an article really. So, not to a great deal* (Rita-RNR).
Little or no influence	*I think it's an interesting question, I don't know if it has a toll. I think with or without the REF I would be keen to have responsible management education principles embedded in my teaching* (Bell-AsPR). *I wouldn't say the REF is, no…I conduct my research on responsible leadership…would conduct my research in responsible leadership if the REF were there or weren't there. I don't really feel that the REF has influenced my decision making or my research, or my practice to be honest with you* (Rita-RNR). *Well…what you have to understand is that my research has always been about sustainability and social responsibility…I wouldn't be in academia if it wasn't for responsible management education. So, it's not been a case of coming into academia and then being changed by any REF agenda or RME* (Guy-APNR). *I do believe that our historical commitment as a university to PRME coupled with the fact that PRME's agenda from last year added the sustainable development goals. The fact that these things happened, had an influence or strongly influenced the university's move to connect its research strategy with the SDGs which happens to be the PRME agenda* (Lee-SLNR).

	No. I just think no impact at all or influence (Louis-PR).
	No, I don't think it has played any part really. I think what's driven our RME agenda are two things. One of which is our role within the community; our impact within the community…REF really hasn't played a role there. We don't have enough researchers in the RME area for that to be a big part of our local conversation. Because like many business schools, as I referred to earlier, RME work is led by those who are principally involved in teaching and Learning (Mark-SLNR).
	The answer is not at all. I do have some colleagues who are very instrumental in the way they think. I couldn't care less; I don't think instrumentally and my time on earth is too short to worry about these things (Pete-LNR).
	I think very little. You know, my research has always revolved around business ethics, responsible consumption. That's just always something as a student I became interested in (Rita-RNR).
	None. As I said, I never actually collated the REF to PRME (Rose-SLNR).
	I would say it has not much influence and if I would have to say I would say it would have a negative influence…Well, I personally do try to advance RME regardless of what happens around me in terms of REF [both laughs]. So, again I would say it doesn't have much more of an influence (Zoe-LNR).

Source: Compiled by Author (based on raw interview data from NVivo)

Looking at Figure 15 and Table 42, five participants (from 5 different business schools) felt the REF had a negative influence on RME implementation. Two out of the five participants that said it had a negative influence on RME implementation felt it was a barrier to good research (RME-related and more broadly). Another two shared similar views but because they thought it was limiting to RME-related publications. It is almost like a case of how can the RME field be advanced if senior executives push academics to publish in specific journals that are not accepting of related outputs, which is indicative of the regulative pillar of institutions, with coercion as the mechanism for exerting pressure (Scott, 2014).

One of the participants mentioned that the REF could have a negative influence on RME implementation via unfair recruitment strategies. Academics aligned to this area may not be regarded as highly as those in subject/research areas which senior management deem more relevant, primarily because of the publication issue. Consistent with institutional theory, organisations gain legitimacy from powerful institutions such as the REF and related associations/partners by conforming to rules/laws that they prescribe (Glover et al., 2014; Palthe, 2014). The REF has explicitly and implicitly communicated to HEIs and their academics that its research assessment exercise is aimed at recognising excellence in research, and part of that is judged by the quality of the outputs that HEIs submit for evaluation. Research outputs awarded 3* or 4* grade by the assessing panels received funding and others did not, at least for the REF2014 exercise (see Hubble, 2015; McNay, 2015; Watermeyer, 2016; Wilsdon, 2016). This signals the regulative power of the REF, in that it has the ability to regulate behaviour across the UK higher education sector through punishment and reward (Scott, 2014). This probably explains why most HEIs' senior executives explicitly (or implicitly) encourage[118] academics to target 3* or 4* journals since the other tiers make no business sense to them and thus are counterproductive to institutions that are looking to secure and/or maintain their legitimacy on the research front. This decision by some senior executives seems to have been driven by how the assessment panel judged quality outputs in the REF2014 exercise.

[118] Some are subtle and others are forceful, as identified in the in-depth literature review carried out in Chapters 2 and 3, particularly the latter.

All five participants (above) were situated in non-Russell group Universities at the time. This might have had an impact on their answers since the teaching strength and quality of schools in this category are said to be stronger and better than those of the Russell Group Universities[119]. RME is believed to be a more teaching-related/focused agenda and initiative. The REF, in contrast, is predominantly focused on research. So, the participants might have felt the over-prioritisation of the REF in their schools (owing to the funding attached to it) hindered them from developing their RME curriculum. Less time was spent on that compared to research and related publications, which required a quick processing to be considered for the current REF cycle with detrimental consequences for long-term research; it encouraged short-termism.

Two of the participants[120] (Bill-PNR – a former business school Dean, and Liam-PNR) from 2 business schools felt the REF had a positive influence on RME implementation. If anything, they felt it had validated RME as a field in their opinion. An RME-related impact case study that was submitted for the REF2014 exercise was rated highly by one of the REF panels. Hence it was seen as a positive influence on RME implementation in Bill-PNR's school, with a chance to influence other business schools and their academics. It may encourage academics in the RME field to engage more with research within the field, instead of other fields or subject areas, in ensuring that as academics they are REFable/impactful.

An important implication of the recognition of RME-related outputs by the REF is that it can gradually help develop the critical mass needed to legitimise the field further and have it rooted like other research areas/themes. Bill-PNR additionally said the REF had helped them access additional funds for RME-related research, hence it was a positive influence on the advancement of RME in their school. Securing additional funds for related research ordinarily may have been difficult had they not evidenced the impact potential of RME in REF2014. Doherty et al. (2015) did hint that RME's profile will be raised in business schools if the impact element of the REF is increased from 20% to 25%. The prediction has been actualised - 25% weighting has been

[119] They are renowned for the high-quality of research they produce compared to their teaching-related activities. Albeit, they claim to be excellent on both fronts, including engagement with relevant stakeholders.

[120] Note that some of the participants had something to say across the three main categories. For example, Bill-PNR contributed to the first and second category – negative and positive influence, respectively.

apportioned to impact for the upcoming REF2021 exercise, increasing RME's chance of strengthening the impact profile of schools that exploit its potential.

For the 10[121] out of 17 participants that said the REF had little or no influence on their commitment to progress RME implementation in their schools, three main explanations seemed to be behind their response. First, some of them may have meant that they generally at the time were managing to balance pressures associated with RME implementation and the REF. Hence, they felt the REF had little or no influence on the commitment to advance RME. Second, some of them may have meant it in a positive way, which will then suggest that commitment on that front was driven mostly by the interest they have in the area - they were progressing RME prior to the REF2014 exercise, so it contributed nothing to that and should not be accorded any relevance. Third, some of them may have meant it negatively. They could have perceived RME as too essential to let REF associated pressures take them away from it or diminish their commitment; they resolve that RME implementation remains a prioritised commitment even if they may be penalised in the REF process as a result. This seemed to be the case for several of them, including those returned in the REF2014 exercise and otherwise. It could also mean that while they think it has little influence on themselves given their passion for the RME topic, they do observe that it has an influence on the overall implementation of RME in their business schools.

Figure 12 (the framework adapted from the six principles of PRME) was used as a lens for further understanding of the findings outlined in Table 42. Yes, the REF predominantly was said to have little or no influence on the academics' pledge to help facilitate the implementation of RME in their schools via the six principles of PRME. However, a closer look at some of the statements added a much richer analysis of the influence of the REF on RME. While respondents started with an overall statement on whether the REF was generally having a significant impact on the implementation of RME, the continuation of the discussions during interviews actually added much more granularity to these overall first answers. We will review each of PRME's six principles one after the other in the following subsections.

[121] From 9 different business schools.

Table 43 below serves as a reminder of what these principles are about, as they have been outlined previously.

Table 43: Recap of PRME's Six Principles

Principles	Description
1	Purpose: We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.
2	Values: We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.
3	Method: We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes, and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.
4	Research: We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding of the roles, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental, and economic value.
5	Partnership: We will interact with managers of corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to jointly explore effective approaches to meeting these challenges.
6	Dialogue: We will facilitate and support dialogue and debate among educators, students, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organisations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global responsibility and sustainability.

Source: PRME (2020)

The main results from the data collected were on the impacts on principles 2, 3, 4 and 6. These are presented and discussed below, starting with principle 2, values.

6.2.1 The Negative Effects of the REF on Principle 2 – Values

The REF reportedly is a barrier to RME implementation and advancement via PRME's Principles 2 – Values. Due to REF-related pressures, academics seem not to have the ample time needed to integrate the values of global social responsibility into their academic activities and curricular. Example of these values are ones portrayed by global initiatives such as the UNGC, and they include respect for diversity, professionalism, and integrity. One could argue that respect for diversity[122] may be at risk of being adhered to by some academics and their HEIs due to the enormous strain the REF seems to have on them. There is also the fact that the promotion practices of HEIs appear to be significantly affected by the REF, putting a further divide between research and teaching.

> *Nick-SLNR: "The pressure on us as academics to publish now is intense. It's just publish or die; that's what it's like. If your role is to embed RME or you want to act/work on your*

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[122] Paying an overly disproportionate level of attention to the development of research and related activities at the detriment of scholarship and curriculum development is probably not consistent with respect for diversity in its true sense. The same perhaps applies to favouring a minute percentage of journal outlets and directing most research-active academics (if not all) only to target those for their publications.

curriculum or your teaching, that's taking you away from your research and your career. Despite the rhetoric, we do not as academics advance our career through teaching. We advance our career through research, and so people have to make a decision do you want to leave RME institutionalisation and the curriculum to one side, publish and see your career soar? Or do you want to put that on the back burner and work on RME and do that? Doing both is very difficult although those of us who are interested, we are trying that. So, I think it is a barrier in that it really pushes us towards working on our research and not on our curricula and our RME institutionalisation. It takes us away from that.

Drawing on the above statement, just like organisations faced with competing institutional pressures, individuals are at a higher risk of decoupling formal practices and/or behaviours from formal organisational structures (Rasche et al., 2020; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015, citing Gentile and Samuelson, 2005). The "publish or die" section of Nick-SLNR's statement mirrors Hanson's (2001, citing Jepperson, 1991, p. 45) interpretation of an academic's cognition of a complex work environment influenced heavily by strict institutional pressures with the remark "I love to teach but dislike my job." This aligns mostly with the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutional theory and reinforces Meyer et al.'s (2005) assertion that organisations live and die by the extent to which they conform to wider rules. The interesting finding here is that it also applies at the individual level (i.e. academics); they thrive or die in academia by the extent of their willingness to comply with organisational rules that are in turn informed by powerful exogenous institutions such as the REF.

Part of the statement also signals tension between the regulative and normative pillars of institutions - between allowing the instrumentality logic of the REF and associated activities to take precedence (regulative) or the appropriateness of RME and related activities/practices (normative) ultimately take centre stage, or indeed attempting to achieve a balance, dealing with associated consequences. Neither element is entirely independent of the cultural-cognitive element as the latter enables individuals to define and classify, argue, negotiate and fight through social interests (Scott, 2014, citing Douglas, 1982, p. 12). Career progression through research and not teaching seem like a prevailing cultural belief in the academic community (Warin and Beddewela, 2016; Watermeyer, 2016; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015) and actors who are aligned with this belief are likely to feel competent and connected, compared to those who are at odds – they risk being viewed as clueless or crazy (Scott, 2014, p. 70). The researcher argues that the competence point is probably one projected on academics by others instead of their actual mental belief. The point about feeling less connected is clearer, as non-conformance could pose a threat to academics' identity (Clegg, 2008) and heighten the ingroup and outgroup feeling. It may, however, give rise to the creation or affirmation of new identity instead (Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch, 2016) to take back the freedom eroded by the Performative University (Jones et al., 2020), but need not necessarily translate into a partial or complete disconnection from one's organisation (Kenny et al., 2019).

> *Sue-LR: "There's still been a big push in the university, it's all about publications…if somebody could tell me do this, and you will get published, then I will do it in a heartbeat…I know that some colleagues will work all weekend and things…I mean I don't feel I should have to do that. That's not to say that I don't answer emails or anything...But I don't want that to become my norm whereas for some colleagues it is, and I guess that's always going to put me at a slight disadvantage on that. But I'm reconciled to that…"*

A propensity among ECRs to not "conform to dominant paradigms or pervasive ways of understanding organisational phenomena" (Prasad, 2013) is inferred in Sue-LR's above statement. She somewhat questions this 'labour of love' work culture used to excuse or numb a normalised practise, which is detrimental to academics' mental health and well-being[123]. Dehumanising effects of quantification are challenging enough for academics (Zawadzki and Jensen, 2020); to also contend with an ever-increasing blurred line between personal life and academic career work is psychologically damaging per the recently developed ISO 45003[124]. The latter enjoins organisations (including HEIs) to reprioritise a human-centred approach to work, albeit developed in recognition of the psychological health and safety issues exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a salient development for the REF administrators to consider.

Considering also Sue-LR's statement in relation to the regulative element of institutional theory, Scott (2010) argues that the need for clear directives/rules, alignment of incentives and surveillance is stressed. However, the participant's remark suggests that while there might be directive/rules prescribed on needing to publish in higher-ranked journals, how clear they are is questioned in relation to the "how". From an ECR perspective, it perhaps signals the need for HEIs (including business schools) to invest more in this area, and some appear to be doing just that

[123] Except maybe where weekend working is part of their employment contract and contracted working hours.
[124] Click this link for more details - https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/iso-45003/

from the summary report of the REF2014 for UoA 19. The extent to which such training is an indoctrination into the 'Performative University', characterised by quantification among other terms (Ball, 2003) or the nuanced version, 'Targets & Terror' coined by Jones et al. (2020), is a line of inquiry that could be pursued by future studies.

> *Theo-LNR: "I might feel a bit better if [the REF] comes out as a slightly fairer system in the sense, as I said, early career people shouldn't be judged by the same criteria as people that have been in academia for 25, 30 years."*

The REF stressed the need for mentorship for academics within this category, but the pressure it appears to exert on HEIs through its requirements and associated rewards and punishments seem paradoxical. It is almost expected that ECRs come into academia running as the academics who are ahead of them (e.g. Senior lecturers and Professors) in this "sacrificial labour of love" (Clarke et al., 2012) journey filled with thorns of various sorts (see Jones et al., 2020). Can they play the same game on the same field without losing themselves (Prasad, 2013)?[125]

> *Sue-LR: "…If you're not careful, you can allow that to affect your own feelings about your work…But with maturity becomes a certain degree of distance, you can see what games are being played, and you can understand it. And you can decide whether you want to engage in those games or not as the case may be."*

The research stars seem to lack ample time due to the REF and other competing tasks, and the ECRs have significant teaching loads to cope with in most HEIs, as pointed out in the environment section of the REF2014's UoA 19 summary report. Hence an area worth considering by the REF is flexibility in terms of outputs to be returned by all research-active staff.

> *Liam-PNR: "…you have a set of responsibilities of which [RME curriculum development] may constitute a very small proportion of your time."*

> *Rose-SLNR: "…it [the REF] just makes you engage in just particular research activities, write journal publications, nothing else."*

Does the above imply that the curricula and organisational practices of some business schools are devoid of or lack the global social responsibility values stipulated in PRME's principle 2 partly due to the REF? It seems in-depth engagement in RME teaching-related values are deemed unimportant compared to research and the

[125] See Prasad (2013) who offered a detailed account of the trials and tribulations experienced due to institutional pressures for research output as a doctoral student at a North American business school.

publication of outputs in top-tier journals. The latter appears to mean everything for an academic looking to progress their career in the current climate. This finding is consistent with Doherty et al.'s (2015) study, which found the REF to be a significant institutional barrier to academics' effort to develop RME curriculum. Nick-SLNR's earlier statement also corroborates the finding that academics who spend significant time developing RME modules and curriculum did so at the expense of their career progression as the latter is mostly via research[126] (Warin and Beddewela, 2016; Rasche and Gilbert, 2015).

The problem is not peculiar to non-Russell Group University members as Bell-AsPR worked for a Russell Group University at the time of the study. The challenge is exacerbated by the fact that academics' worth is now judged by their REFable deliverables – i.e. 3* or 4* papers in top-ranked journals[127] and/or 4* impact case studies, which have significant financial rewards.

> *Theo-LNR: "…it [REF] has a big influence because…universities are looking at who is on a research contract, and are they going to make a good REF return? As I said, you being kind of successful or unsuccessful in research is very much dependent on, well, is this person REFable? Now, there are other elements in the REF, you know, research projecting, impact case studies, and these kinds of things. But still publications, I think, is still the predominant kind of way of making sense of how people are getting on. I don't think it's good, but it's just how it works."*

Drawing on Social Identity Theory (SIT), academics social identity with regards to REF-related performance is affirmed through social comparison between the in-groups - REFable researchers, and out-groups – non-REFable researchers (see Lamont and Nordberg, 2014; Kenny et al., 2011; Abrams and Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1982). We are told that identity influences an individual's sense of competence, responsibility, and purpose, including motivation and job satisfaction levels (Day et al., 2006). The decision to disassociate research-active staff from the output component of the REF for the subsequent REF exercise may help bridge the perceived divide, including not publishing the details of academics that HEIs submit. However, the senior leaders and those involved in REF-related organisations are likely to know

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[126] What we might say has become a common, and therefore, institutionalised practice in academia. It somewhat aligns with the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutional theory – the idea and language used, drawing on Nick-SLNR's earlier statement.
[127] The Chartered Association of Business Schools (ABS) journal guide is a useful resource for the ranking and rating of journals in the business and management field, including the papers that are published on those platforms.

the REFable and non-REFable academics. How the information will be used is another thing.

Consistent with Rasche and Gilbert (2015), conformity to institutional pressures like the REF may upset a business school's structural frameworks which then puts initiatives such as RME at the risk of being decoupled – i.e. the adherence to institutional pressures through the symbolic adoption of related initiatives/structure without them being fully embedded within the organisation. If RME is deemed contradictory to specific internal requirements, the adoption of PRME risks becoming a mere symbolic function in business schools. The voluntary nature of RME and the less obvious or immediate financial value it can offer to HEIs makes it more susceptible to decoupling (Doherty et al., 2015), unlike the REF. The monetary and reputation capital the REF can offer to institutions that participate in its assessment exercise possibly explains why paper publication takes precedence in schools at the expense of other essential agendas such as RME – instilling the ideas of ERS into students.

> *Bell-AsPR: "…if you think about REF in terms of pushing people toward being output driven, there is a constant pressure to publish, publish, publish. And publish in high ranked journals, and that takes time. So, we all have a certain amount of time each day that we can dedicate to work. And you'd have to make compromises in terms of how much time you dedicate to your publications to meet the REF agenda in school..."*
>
> *Gale-SLNR: "I think it leads to gaming the system if I'm honest. So, it sorts of distorts the culture in a way."*
>
> *Bill-PNR: "I think the gaming and these fine judgements in the REF should come in presentation and not in what we set out to do. I think we should set out to do good research, excellent research and publish it."*
>
> *Sue-LR: "And I understand from colleagues that other schools took a much more strategic approach and a limited approach to whom they submitted, and, therefore, ranked differently."*

Gale-SLNR's statement (above) supports Meyer and Rowan's (1977) assertion that actors would be more inclined to 'game' systems created by rational designers, resulting in the decoupling of behaviour from prescribed rules and formal structures. The behaviour hinted here is one that is perhaps not akin to the ERS principles, and therefore assumed to be detrimental (Karlsoon, 2017) to RME implementation and advancement (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015). See section 3.5.6.4 for more details.

Gaming the system does not necessarily align with the principles surrounding ERS – ethics, responsibility, and sustainability. It brings us back to the discussion about hidden curriculum message sites which HEIs and their academics need to be aware of and utilise positively. Are REF-related gaming practices (under the Business School Governance message site – see Figure 2) reflective of the global social responsibility value that PRME signatories, including business schools and their academics, pledged to incorporate in their organisational practices?

> *Gale-SLNR: "What academics seem to be most concerned about often is, publications, whether it's 4*, 3*, or 2*, whether you can get your name. I was talking to someone about this the other day; people just seem to be only interested as to whether they can get their name on the paper or not."*
>
> *Nick-SLNR: "…the emphasis is on to get published at all costs."*

A central theme around institutional theory is the notion that environments define and establish the blueprints and building blocks of local structures (Meyer et al., 2005) such as business schools and universities. At the individual level, one's career is heavily patterned around external models and definitions (Meyer et al., 2005, citing Meyer 1977; and Meyer and Jepperson, 2000) prescribed by the likes of REF, professional bodies, journals etc. Lacking 4*, 3* or 2* papers published by and in credible journals is very significant hindrance to a research-active academic in current times, for instance. Hence what seems to be a struggle to show and maintain relevance through quality papers. This argument is drawn from Meyer et al.'s (2005) attempt to illustrate how an individual's life course or career is patterned around exogenous models and definitions. He mentioned that in present times, it is of little gain for a graduate to claim to have graduate skills without a certificate from an approved university as proof. This seems to resonate with many academics in the higher education sector, with star-studded papers in higher-ranked journals rapidly becoming the benchmark for what constitutes a successful academic, and with impact and attraction of grant added to that (Torrance, 2020).

The "get published at all cost" aspect of Nick-SLNR's statement could be unpacked from the cultural cognitive pillar of institutional theory. It conveys what seems to be a high-pressured work environment, targets and terror, the *Performative Business school*, not only University (see Jones et al., 2020).

The effect of the REF on the work-life-balance of academics evidenced by the statements below resonates with Mathieson's study (see Jump, 2015; Rhodes, 2015), and reflective of the Performative University; with far-reaching consequences (see Smith and Ulus, 2019).

> *Bell-AsPR: "…And how much time you spend developing your teaching agenda and meanwhile trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance. And all that is sometimes difficult; it's a difficult thread to walk on[128]."*
>
> *Rose-SLNR: "REF drives everything! The way you engage in work or whether you are actually being depressed about yourself. And in terms of professional life, whatever stopped you from doing research is all conflict. Well, maybe not if you enjoy teaching. I mean, I do enjoy teaching in class but not administration teaching."*
>
> *Sue-LR: "As an early career, I think it's 3* they said I should aim for. That feels like a million years away…I sound very [depressed] probably…But I think everyone is in the same situation. Professorial colleagues, they are also getting kickbacks on different things…In the heart of teaching and assessment, there are days when I'm just exhausted and I think I've got to try and get something written and there is no time…I rather have good mental health and a good balance of life and if that means that I don't get promoted then so be it."*
>
> *Amy-APR: "…everyone's busy trying to jump through hoops and tick boxes and they are constantly changing goalposts. Never quite sure what you're gonna be assessed on, if you're going to be submitted, and general high level of stress…"*
>
> *Pete-LNR: "...[the REF is] a big deal and I know that we spend a lot of hours worrying about it and preparing for it..."*
>
> *Gale-SLNR: "I think the REF is just a huge pressure on people, particularly myself. I joined late in life…The first few years within the business school was essentially spent trying to sort of survive in terms of getting materials together to teach…It's actually quite difficult to get your network sorted out, really understand the whole research environment, research culture; because I didn't have that type of background at all."*

This study suggests that REF-related pressure contributes to the poor mental health of some academics, which is not surprising given the magnitude of pressure inferred from some of the respondents' statements and the literature review conducted; these, if anything, evoke feelings of empathy and admiration for academics fighting to keep their heads above the water because of their noble resolve to not engage in game-playing behaviours, even if such a move negatively impacts their academic career through a lack of progression. It is by the same token understandable that some academics get caught-up (intentionally or otherwise[129]) in 'game-playing' in

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[128] Signals a sense of frustration.
[129] Per Butler and Spoelstra's research question *"…to what extent are players always aware, when they are in play, that they are playing?"* (2020, p. 419).

order to survive a "*[national]* institutional *Zeitgeist* of the 'Performative University' *[and Business school]*", permeated by 'Targets' and 'Terror' (Jones et al., 2020, p. 365), with the REF seemingly in the driving seat. Ibid (2020), without mincing words, tells us that "this tokenistic 'game-playing' impinges on academics' careers and work experience" (p. 368); a statement that is overwhelmingly supportive of other scholars' assertions as discussed in Chapter 3.

Perhaps, the values espoused by RME (i.e. ERS) position the agenda and its global agent as a 'knight in shining armour' to these academics. Whether PRME will take-up this mantle, and fight to rescue academics and HEIs more broadly from the shackles of performativity, is a different matter. Are they bound by similar shackles, inherent in their voluntary approach and 5th principle, *Partnership, "which is exclusive to corporate (as opposed to other, e.g., worker) interests; thus, for Louw (2015), privileging the same group that caused that recent global financial crisis"* (Hayes et al., 2017, p. 21).

6.2.2 The Negative Effects of the REF on Principle 3 - Method

Principle 3's development of robust educational frameworks, materials, processes, and an environment for the enabling of practical learning experiences for future responsible leaders may not be entirely achieved if academics lack the necessary resources. Ample time is an essential resource needed for RME implementation and advancement (Wersun, 2017; Doherty et al., 2015; Doh and Tasman, 2014). However, is increasingly becoming a luxury that many academics cannot afford partly due to the REF (Doherty et al. 2015; McNay, 2015; Smith et al., 2011; Harley, 2002), in addition to other competing pressures as highlighted in one of Lee-SLNR's earlier comments.

> *Bell-AsPR: "I think that the RME agenda requires a little bit more thoughtful approach to teaching in terms of engagement with the students, you know, and activities to help them reflect and be more engaged. So, that takes more time than just coming into the lecture and delivering material and then going out. So, you've got that time dilemma."*

> *Zoe-LNR: "Being much more practice-oriented, talk about much harder topics. You know, talking about child labour, or talking about mental health issues in class and how that affects things. And that takes up time, you need to prepare more because you need to sort of have at least as a lecturer, course coordinator, and a very good basic understanding of all these different topics so you could tie them together. Talk to your students about it and with all these other pressures you have; I think that makes it much*

harder because there are not a lot of really good textbooks out there. And it changes all the time; what is happening in CSR or whatever scene. So, I think it's all these different things that make it harder."

Bell-AsPR and Zoe-LNR's remarks (above) are supportive of Doherty et al.'s (2015) call to action to eradicate the identified proclivity "to treat RME as just another management topic, instead of something more fundamental about the changing nature and purpose of business schools" (p. 54).

It was also found that academics are somewhat restricted when it comes to the development of RME curriculum and the use of innovative pedagogy[130] methods that can effectively support the teaching and learning of RME and/or ERS related contents or subjects - owing to competing pressures, with those related to the REF principal among these. In this case, the REF may unintentionally be an impediment to the implementation and advancement of RME through PRME's Principle 3.

Theo-LNR: "…I think because of that, if I'm thinking about let's say, oh, how can I develop this particular teaching module to incorporate more student projects, so they are working with local organisations on responsible-related topics such as environmental sustainability or various social issues. I have to trade that off against pressure to make sure that I am publishing or showing that I'm making progress in publishing. I suppose depending on how I'm getting on, I'm going to say, well, I'm not going to do that. I will concentrate to work on these journal articles instead of investing lots of time in trying to set up those kinds of teaching activities."

The viability of RME/ERS related extra-curricular activities, in terms of student projects, for example, is called into question by pressures to publish in Theo-LNR's statement (above). The students surveyed in Beddewela et al.'s (2017) study, when asked about the preferred method of embedding RME into degree courses, mentioned efforts targeted at building ERS skills, including resilience into current content across the entire course, augmented with related extra-curricular activities at the department level.

Bill-PNR: "The other way the REF might act as a practical barrier is that staff are just under so much pressure now to perform...You've got so many changes coming upon you to develop a new module or to change your existing module to incorporate a whole piece...there's just more stuff to do. So, I think that in an environment where certain staff feel under pressure for one publication, then probably even though they might be committed to teaching and they may be very good in the classroom, they might be a little bit disinclined to an awful lot of new teaching preparation."

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[130] Some examples are available via this link. https://primetime.unprme.org/2019/06/27/innovative-pedagogy-for-responsible-business-teaching-prme-uk-and-ireland-chapter

Decoupling as one of the dimensions of institutional theory is mostly used to indicate a disparity between an institution's rhetoric and its reality. Bill-PNR's statement above is reflective of this - organisations' symbolic disclosures that are in fact detached from their formal structures; not functionally adopted but stated simply in order to seem conformant and secure and/or maintain legitimacy (Scott, 2014; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). While mostly used to describe how competing pressures exerted by external forces such as the REF can lead to organisations' rhetoric detaching from behaviour, the respondent's statement indicates that decoupling can occur at the individual level. Even the most motivated/committed academic may be tempted to decouple their behaviour from formal practices to secure and preserve efficiency for REF-related practices (Rasche et al., 2020; Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2008; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). This not only relates to distortion on RME-related commitment but teaching commitment in business schools and universities more broadly.

The lack of time to develop innovative teaching approaches due to competing priorities was pointed out by Theo-LNR mirrors Doh and Tashman's (2014) study. They found that academics are not afforded ample time to connect ERS in their classes, hence a critical pedagogical constraint. For the current study, the problem is not the availability of technical knowhow or the lack thereof on the study participants' part; but, at least in the case of Theo-LNR's statement below, the lack of time. Too much of this is spent on REF-related organising and activities to the detriment of the development of other important agendas like RME.

> *Theo-LNR: "Another of the challenges I think is time. And here we come into perhaps the lack of imagination of people like me (on my part and the part of others). I certainly like to teach this kind of stuff [RME-related] with experiential methods[131]. I like role plays, and I like group presentations…like an informal seminar where they have to present to their fellow students, things like that. Those things take time..."*

Time is crucial for the development of educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that will support and foster the development of the critical and reflective thinking skills of students, which are vital for addressing complex day-to-day organisational issues. To reiterate, several authors (e.g. Colby et al., 2011;

[131] The teaching methods listed by Theo-LNR are consistent with the methods outlined in section 2.3.1 of this thesis.

Morsing and Rovira, 2011) had warned that such student skills were at a deficit, even before the REF2014 exercise (see Chapter 2, section 2.2).

The REF, in general, is believed to be resource intensive for all involved.

> *Zoe-LNR: "Yeah, and also, it's a huge process that just takes up a lot of resources from everyone."*

Yet, many HEIs and their academics participate in the REF (Torrance, 2020, p. 5) because of its punishment and reward mechanism (Scott, 2014), including financial and reputational gains (reward) and losses (punishment). It distorting influence on recruitment practices seems to be distracting research-active academics from focusing on significantly developing their teaching resources, thereby impeding the development of students' skills in relation to responsible management. This finding is also somewhat supportive of Dyllick's (2015) doubt about business students' capacity to function effectively in today's ever-changing work environment. Consequently, the researcher calls for a review of the REF with the hope that it will encourage business schools and other UK HEIs to adapt their recruitment practices to one that is sustainable and inclusive.

6.2.3 The Positive and Negative Effects of the REF on Principle 4 – Research

The REF could facilitate RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools through research. This relates PRME's Principle 4 - the pledge to engage in research (empirical and conceptual) that will further students' understanding of firms' role, dynamics and impact in the generation of lasting social, environmental and financial value. However, senior executives need to reconsider the views they hold about pedagogical research (which RME-related research is largely considered to be) and invest in this as much as they do to disciplinary research (Lingwood et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2018). According to Beddewela et al. (2017, citing Smith et al., 2011; and Waddock, 2006), "the RME topic lends itself quite well towards the creation of 'impactful' research" (p.4). The decision to permit impacts generated through teaching and related activities in the REF is one that business schools and HEIs can leverage through RME, as can be inferred from Bill-PNR's statement below.

> *Bill-PNR: "So, in some institutions, I guess that the REF might give a bit of a break on the development of research expertise in this area, which itself might affect teaching…"*

As hinted by Doherty et al. (2015), RME-related research can help strengthen the impact profile of business schools. This is because of RME's interest in understanding the environmental and social impact of business and how these can be addressed effectively towards a sustainable future, with PRME's 4th principle playing an instrumental role here. So, the recruitment of experts around this area can aid schools in progressing RME and increase their likelihood to perform well in subsequent REF exercises, especially on the impact front. The summary result for UoA 19 in REF2014 in a way supports this claim, in that "Responsibility and sustainability[132]" featured as sub-field and the panel assessors were encouraged by the number of outputs that addressed related themes (Pidd and Broadbent, 2015).

In continuation of the suggestion made about recruiting competent staff/experts, it is essential that a balance is achieved to prevent a decline in the quality of teaching due to a disproportionate focus on research relative to other pertinent activities and agendas in schools. The REF could be a barrier to RME implementation/advancement via research if schools do not appreciate the need to recruit experts within the RME field due to a perception that RME-related research is of lower quality. This type of research is regarded as pedagogical research, which when taking Cotton et al.'s (2018) interpretation and applying it in a context RME, can be described as research into the design, teaching and learning of RME-related contents such as ethics, responsibility and sustainability (ERS), including associated assessments. Unfortunately, pedagogical research is not accorded the same level of importance as disciplinary research (see Cotton et al., 2018; Kneale et al., 2016; Tierney, 2016;). The latter is believed to have a stronger connection with practice, as well as better informing theory, compared to the former, which is mostly carried out with students and/or staff as the primary research participants and focus.

Research (Principle 4), then, is one of the viable ways that PRME seeks to progress RME in schools across the globe and authors such as Warin and Beddewela (2016) have urged business schools to develop this channel and enterprise towards facilitating RME implementation. Progress on this front in the UK context could however be hampered by a lack of experts owing to the impact REF itself has on

[132] See Table 22 in the later part of section 3.4.2.3 for more details. This also outlines a few salient points that HEIs and academics looking to exploit the impact potential of RME may need to consider in order to increase their chances of success.

some schools' recruitment strategies. Cornelius et al. (2008) have covered the role of qualified and experienced staff in instilling ERS principles into students. They stress that business schools ought to be proactive on this front, otherwise ERS (the values that underpin RME) will not become institutionalised.

> *Bill-PNR: "There is a kind of link in the barrier between those things…I'm trying to go through the enablers' route but…REF could be a barrier at certain places. Because RME research is not seen as sufficiently high-status and therefore, we don't want to research it. And therefore, you end up with a faculty who because they prefer to teach what they research are interested in what they are skilled in and therefore they will tend to do less RME than the other likes to do...I don't think the effect of the REF is being very great in that regard on me personally. But I can see how the REF has maybe more generally in a system unintentionally reduced some institutions' focus on teaching and learning."*

Failing to hire qualified academics based on their research interest/theme is not akin to the respectful and inclusive environment Nonet et al. (2016) suggest are vital for empowering individuals (staff and students) and securing their vested interests towards a shared vision to institutionalise RME. Neither does it conform to the accountable and transparent environment which Warin and Beddewela (2016) believe are needed to promote sustainable and ethically sound behaviours and practices among students. So, instead of establishing such an environment by being worthy role models that students can emulate, some schools reportedly may be inclined to do the opposite through unethical/unfair decisions on the recruitment front in order to climb the REF ladder in the upcoming exercise. It is more like talking their walk instead of walking their talk, resulting in variance between their rhetoric and the reality (Cornuel and Hommel, 2015).

> *Bill-PNR: "I think at some universities it could, if anything, harm it [RME] because…the absolutely top-rated journals are not in this area, and so, you might be…reluctant to employ staff who are primarily in this area. So, that might be slightly negative."*

The above would contradict schools that explicitly claim to be inclusive on the recruitment front in their biannual SIP report related to RME implementation. Blasco (2012) tells us that business schools' governance is one of the message sites for hidden curriculum (see Figure 4 in section 2.4). So, they can use their sustainability and diversity practices to endorse positive role modelling, or do the opposite and risk increasing students' scepticism concerning their practices (Waddock et al., 2010; Trevino and McCabe, 1994); i.e. perceived decoupling between their rhetoric and practices. It also confirms Morgeson and Nahgang's (2008) opinion about ranking playing a crucial role in the recruitment strategies of business schools. Engaging in unfair practices to gain an advantage for the REF is something that students could pick up, which can influence their behaviour and future practices negatively. However, one may question if it is indeed an unfair practice if institutions are clear about the fact that they are strategic in their recruitment, given the boost in income that such new hires would give them REFable/Impactful stars.

The REF may have another negative influence on RME advancement via PRME's Principle 4. Even if RME grows its own "research stars[133]" and they become a currency in the transfer market birthed by the REF, they could end up being concentrated within a few business schools and universities that are already strong in the RME field, to the detriment of the larger number of institutions they left which were in greater need of their expertise. This further hinders the development of the critical mass of institutions needed to normalise the values espoused by RME.

Theo-LNR's comments below indicate that the REF dictates the promotion practices of HEIs. The finding agrees with McCulloch's (2017) study, which reported that HEIs' probation and promotion conditions for staff were tied to the scholarly writing of academics.

> *Theo-LNR: "What has happened over recent REF periods with people moving institutions or getting promotions or better salaries, whatever…because of the transfer market that has been created by the REF, there's a value on people having these top publications. We did lose quite a few good people through that REF process. I suppose that was just incidentally in areas of RME. Because that has been where we've, I suppose had interest over the time in recruiting people in those areas. So, in a way, losing those people was detrimental to our pursuing PRME in many ways because we've lost people that were keen under that agenda. Because they've gone to other schools for various reasons, so that has been another REF effect that we've felt, I suppose I guess as other colleagues of mine have done too…Certainly, for like X is not a top-ranked institution, so, you know, if it were Y or Z or T, I mean, it can easily clean out some of our best academics. They can afford to pay more money to them if they've got, you know, a strong REF profile."*

The journals that are receptive to RME-related research papers tend to have lower ratings[134] in comparison to other journals. They are also limited in number, as

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[133] In the narrow sense of RME-inclined academics who could publish related research outputs in 3* and 4* journals as the "prized benchmark for academic success" (McCulloch, 2017, p. 2). This does not suggest that there are no RME-inclined "research stars" in UK business schools and universities, it merely reiterates that top-tier journals (ranked 3* and/or 4*) that are accepting of their research outputs are limited compared to other research areas and fields.

[134] While the sub-panel for Business and Management Studies (19) claim not to have used citation data (it was only used by sub-panel 18 – Economics and Econometrics, in Main Panel C), authors challenge this claim. This challenge is reinforced by anecdotal evidence at some institutions, not only for the REF2014 exercise but arguably the imminent REF2021 exercise.

highlighted in Lisa-SLNR's comment below. To then choose them as outlets for one's outputs would not be regarded as strategic for REF purposes, at least not by top executives in some business schools.

> *Lisa-SLNR: "…I mean, the REF has an impact in that we have to be published in particular journals. And so, if those journals aren't open to or don't have a conversation about RME within them, then obviously the REF will have a negative impact…there are only a limited number of journals that do publish in the area of management education that we can, you know, be submitting to."*

The limited number of journals that cater to RME-related research outputs perhaps explains to some extent Godemann et al.'s (2011) finding. Their study which reviewed 100 SIP reports of signatories (although not all from the UK) revealed that PRME signatories rarely discussed in great depth what they were doing to advance RME through research. If they have limited RME-related research outputs in journal outlets and do minimal research around the area on account of the REF, is then not surprising if they share little information in their SIP report about their research activities. Future research could explore this further to ascertain if the disinterest in RME-related research by several academic journals is peculiar to the UK or similar across the world.

> *Lee-SLNR: "When we go to PRME principle 4, we talk about research, and there has been stuff written, for example by Herzig [Godemann et al]…he analysed the first 100 SIP reports from PRME signatories around the world. And what he found is that if you look at these SIP reports, people don't really talk about the research very much…we focus on the pedagogy and teaching, but we don't really report and capture very much on the research that we're carrying out. And this is a great pity because the strength of academic institutions other than teaching is research. Our research as business schools or universities can and should contribute to companies' understanding of some of these societal problems."*

The lack of interest is probably related to the fact that as previously stated some regard RME research as pedagogic research, which, from a cultural perspective, has been historically undervalued (Cotton, 2017). Even if it were to be entirely true that RME-related research is mostly pedagogic research, should the funding of this type of research not be central to a university's research strategy? This is a point that Lingwood et al. (2018) made, hinting that such funding makes good business sense since it fuels the core business of a university (i.e. teaching and learning). Ibid (2018) then questioned if HEIs in the UK "can afford not to invest in pedagogic research in a TEF era" (p.3).

Considering the engagement, and reach that higher education pedagogic research can facilitate and the impact it can therefore have within and beyond an institution, the onus is on senior executives to nurture and develop a pedagogic research culture in their institutions (Lingwood et al., 2018). Its link between local and sector practices (such as governance, leadership, policy and student engagement) makes it a useful mechanism for understanding the shifting sands in higher education for the academic community. It enhances the collective understanding of teaching and learning scholarship, gives a better and deeper understanding of the impact of policies and practices and how those can be leveraged, and fosters continuous improvement of practice. It acts as a change agent, via which academics can have debates that can inform policies and improve their practice with the wider higher education sector (see Clements et al., 2018). The suggestion for senior executives to develop a pedagogic research culture may increase RME-related research uptake if implemented. It could build the critical mass needed to raise the RME field's profile sufficiently to in turn improve the acceptance rate of related research outputs by some existing journals. It may even give rise to new journals that would be committed to catering to related outputs much more. All these could, in a positive feedback loop, contribute to RME implementation/advancement if it made it easier for RME research to reach more highly-ranked journals, strengthening the impact profiles of business schools in the REF; considering the decision to allow impacts generated through teaching and related activities in the REF2021 exercise.

Furthermore, the added responsibility on PRME signatories to promote the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), is another avenue that is likely to go a long way in bringing RME-related research to the spotlight. The pertinence of the global goals and the agenda itself to the sustenance of humanity is so crucial that any research that attempts to contribute to achieving even just one of these goals should be deemed impactful, and therefore, REFable. Arguably both RME and SDG-related research are laden with impact, though the connections and relationships need to be explicitly established to secure the buy-in of relevant actors towards ensuring progress on both fronts[135]. The fact that RME is laden with impact is positive. It perhaps provides a valuable opportunity for business schools to evidence the quality

[135] RME remains the focus of the current study, not the SDGs, though both are related.

of their management education and thereby address the remark by Thomas (1997) – the need for management education not to continue to be treated/regarded "as an objective and value-free transmission of knowledge" (p. 484).

However, good research requires ample time, just as much as the development of educational frameworks and materials that can provoke critical thinking (and develop related skills) among students.

> *Bell-AsPR: "The REF has a very tight timeframe, and we all know that you know, good research takes time… Apparently, in this year, and I say apparently because, you know, there is never anything set in stone, but this year is like the critical year for the next REF. If you want to be REFable, you have to have all your papers kind of almost ready now or at least under review. So, the time frame is really tight."*

Bell-AsPR's statement (above) is reflective of Goldstone and Douglas's (2003) perception that the RAE (now the REF) triggered uncertainty within the academic community. Uncertainty lends itself well to mimetic isomorphism – a mechanism via which organisations and/or individuals cope with institutional pressures they think are ambiguous/complex by imitating competitors operating in a similar environment who in their view have attained more success than themselves, and in doing so, they become similar (Scott, 2014; Lieberman and Asaba, 2006; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The last sentence in Bell-AsPR's statement typifies expedience in the sense of compliance within the regulative frames of institutional structures (Scott, 2014).

Another participant was of the opinion that there is gradual progress in the acceptance rate of RME-related research outputs by top-ranked journals compared to a few years ago. This would lessen the negative impact the REF currently has on RME implementation and advancement via research – PRME's principle 4.

> *Lisa-SLNR: "I would say they all [journals] are open, you know, they all are interested in contributions in articles about ideas of RME. So, I don't think from that point of view, in that the expectation is that we publish in particular journals, I don't think that REF has necessarily a negative impact. It would have a few years ago. My first paper that I submitted to Management Learning on PRME in 2011 I got it straight back from the reviewers saying we've never heard of PRME and we are not interested. Now Management Learning which is a 3* journal is interested in PRME, and I have a paper in review at the moment which I think will eventually be published because they are now interested in PRME. So, there was a bit of a time-lapse. But I think now most journals would want a contribution from researchers who are doing research in this area."*

One of the participants said the REF had minimal influence on her commitment to moving the RME agenda forward through her research.

Rita-RNR: "I think very little. You know, my research has always revolved around business ethics, responsible consumption. That's just always something as a student I became interested in…So, the only time the REF comes into it is through the publications, you know, where we go when we want to publish an article really. So, not to a great deal."

What we can draw from Rita-RNR's statement (above) is that the REF does impact negatively on RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools, but to a certain degree which varies across different work areas. So, for some academics, the negative effects are mostly felt with teaching. Owing to REF-related pressures, they seem to lack the ample time needed to deploy innovative and thought-provoking teaching approaches to delivering RME-related contents. Others might have felt it strongly when it comes to where to publish their RME-related research outputs. They may have been torn between publishing in relevant outlets that speak to their research or aiming (successfully or otherwise) for star-studded journals, which by every indication are most preferred and encouraged by senior management.

This is similar to a claim one of Cotton et al.'s (2018) respondents made about some of the heads of departments discouraging their staff from pursuing pedagogical research which they deem as being of lower quality status. Drawing on institutional theory, the scenario is perhaps useful for understanding interaction between the regulative and normative pillars of institutions (Haggins and Larrinaga, 2014; Scott, 2014), including how academics navigate through the tensions associated with coercive and normative pressures while attempting to secure and/or maintain legitimacy within their institutions (Hanson, 2001). Mimetic pressures potentially could also be at play in such scenarios, in that the extent to which colleagues appear to be conformant (or are prepared to adhere) to such implicit or explicit rules or prescriptions may help an academic choose which direction to go (Scott, 2014).

That said, there is yet another stage, curriculum development around RME, which is where others seem to experience the negative effect of the REF a lot more. As pointed out by Warin and Beddewela (2016), the curriculum is the widely used means by which schools promote RME. The REF hindering RME curriculum development may contribute to the demise of the agenda in some schools. Possibly, some others experience a combination of all three stages discussed above. Whatever the case, it is apparent that the perceived influence of the REF on RME advancement via PRME's Principle 4 is a mixed bag. It has potential positive effects and negative effects – the study participants seem determined not to let the latter have the upper hand with regards to their commitment to RME.

> *Gale-SLNR: "I conduct my research on X. And I would conduct my research on X if the REF were there or the REF weren't there. I don't really feel that the REF has influenced my decision making or my research, or my practice to be honest with you. You know, I know that we have to tick boxes and I'm very happy to tick boxes, but I won't allow a tick boxing process to particularly influence what I'm going to be researching or teaching to be honest with you. Not to say it hasn't influenced my decisions although actually as I said, my research is in the area of X[136]. So, it would be in that arena anyway."*

A salient question arising from Gale-SLNR's statement is, is the REF a box-ticking exercise, or even a marketing tool home and abroad? If there was no monetary value attached to it, would HEIs' approach to it be any different? Would it be treated in the same manner as the RME agenda is being approached in various schools? Answering these questions will possibly help HEIs understand the primary drivers for their engagement with the REF and objectively determine if those in the grand scheme of things are contributing towards realising a sustainable future for all – current and future generations. It is also worth considering these in the context of the TEF.

One of the participants offered what the researcher deems a useful piece of advice to academics working within the RME field. He said the following:

> *Lee-SLNR: "So, while there is some implied criticism in some of the things I have shared with you, the academic community is open, and I think it's up to other academics who are involved in this area to be a bit more assertive. Not to when they talk about publishing, not to say, oh, you know, CSR is not privileged in these rankings or, you know, in the journals, and they contribute to high scores in REF. And be a bit more flexible in where you are actually going to write. Because it's all about integration, isn't it? You know, we talk about integrating PRME into the curriculum and in the same way we need to integrate it into research, rather than treat it as a standalone area."*

So, instead of being swayed to other research areas because journals that cater to RME-related outputs are lower-ranked than those, Lee-SLNR advises that RME-oriented academics become more strategic in their writing style. The researcher can see a case for creativity in pitching RME research to appear more relevant to top-tier journals, yet with the core of their papers being no less reflective of RME elements and ERS principles (ethics, responsibility, and sustainability). Flexibility, adaptability, and integration are three keywords that could help them overcome the challenge

[136] X is used above to conceal the identity of the academic as the researcher assured participants that their privacy and confidentiality would be maintained throughout and after the study.

faced on this front. A future study could explore the recommendation – i.e. have some academics do as Lee-SLNR advises and then assess the acceptance rate of related outputs by "higher-ranked" journals. Given that time is a luxury that academics can barely afford, it might be challenging for them to participate, especially if it necessarily leads to experimental approaches with more uncertainty over acceptance than academics in other areas might be accustomed to.

6.2.4 The Positive Effect of the REF on Principle 6 – Dialogue

Some participants highlighted that dialogue in the form of wider engagement with diverse stakeholders (beyond their institutions of employment) was core to them, and they were focused on developing those.

> *Guy-APNR: "I've always tried to integrate RME into my teaching. So, there's a key link why I'm in academia. I wouldn't be in academia if it wasn't for RME. So, it's not been a case of coming into academia and then being changed by any REF agenda or RME. I came into academia because I was interested in responsible management education for wanting better words. And then, through my research and my teaching, I've increasingly been interested in whom I can engage with that agenda. As I said, the agenda has moved from engaging academics and students to maybe a wider agenda to change institutions and sectors. So, that's something for the future that I'd like to do."*

The fact that the REF requires academics to connect and debate more with diverse stakeholders and the society at large on relevant research projects can positively influence the RME agenda via PRME Principle 6. Signatories of the initiative have pledged to engage in and support meaningful dialogue related to global social responsibility and sustainability with various parties, including among educators, students, firms, government, customers, media outlets, stakeholders, and other organisations.

Presumably, the dialogue and debate should translate into positive and meaningful impacts on society more broadly, which can constitute the basis for possible impact case studies that could be submitted for REF2021 or subsequent exercises. The connection shows how RME (via PRME) and the REF are similar – through research.

> *Lee-SLNR: "So in that sense, I would say that side of REF is very positive because I think that we need to move to a more (in the academic community) engaged type of scholarship and research which engages communities where people benefit from the research external to the academic community. Rather than producing research for academics to debate which has minimal impact on society generally…I would like to see it go further so that academics stop writing more for themselves rather than for somebody else.*

Rose-SLNR: "If they do any sort of SDG-related research, there will be quite an immediate impact, I think. You know, poverties or things like collaboratively researching with students, you know, sort of community engagement, for example, that could be an impact case. Or, things like, you know, we have that social enterprise presentation and these days some sort of research investigating the processes of that engagement - students' engagement, and students themselves are actually making impacts."

It further reinforces the claim that RME is loaded with potential impact, that it should therefore not be discounted for REF2021 submission by institutions and their academics, and that it should be acknowledged by the panellists responsible for assessing submitted outputs. The renewed interest in "wider engagement" which the REF seems to have stimulated with its impact element in some of the participants in this current study is useful for eradicating/curbing the "silo syndrome" which hinders meaningful connections, engagements, debates and dialogues with broader society (Dyllick, 2015).

In the context of impact, the REF2014 exercise arguably was a trial exercise - impact was (and still is) the main difference between the REF and the previous, framework, RAE, whose last exercise took place in the year 2008. Thus, HEIs and their academics are perhaps now more appreciative of the importance of "partnership", given its relevance to the generation of REFable impact, compared to the level of appreciation they had prior to REF2014. Additionally, various authors have highlighted debate, dialogue and collaboration with diverse actors as key ingredients for impact generation for the REF.

While dialoguing and engaging with diverse actors, especially those external to the university, is an area Guy-APNR (see above) is determined to pursue actively, he unequivocally said that he was not co-opted into researching around RME on account of the REF. Instead, his interest in RME was long established before the REF, and even before the 'RME' term was formalised by the UN, with the accompanied formation of PRME. To reiterate, the REF in the context of the 6^{th} Principle of PRME and the overarching question for the section of this thesis has a considerable potential to facilitate RME implementation and advancement via meaningful and relevant dialogues and debates.

One of the participants who felt the REF had little or no influence on RME implementation said the following (below) which could be perceived as a possible negative for RME implementation via the 6^{th} principle of PRME.

Zoe-LNR: "…if I would have to say, I would say it would have a negative influence. Because…everyone is busy trying to do everything to do with REF, that focusing on RME can take a bit of a back seat in some of the discussions. Because dealing with REF has a higher priority than maybe sometimes talking about what we're doing in RME. So, as I said, I would either say it doesn't have much of an effect or if it has one, a slightly negative one."

The above statement hints that the over-prioritisation of REF-related discussions could impede signatories' ability to foster learning among individuals and institutions via PRME's 6th principle if not much is discussed around RME. Her comment somehow reinforces Perry and Win's (2013) claim that dialogue between peers is one of the ways that PRME seeks to promote its agenda and secure the much-needed commitment among institutions (business schools inclusive) to that effect. Academics' inability to share ideas/practices around RME with fellow academics or diverse stakeholders locally situated within the UK due to the lack of time and REF-related pressures could affect the narrative on the global level.

Amy-APR: "… it [REF] does eat up all the attention; everyone is focused on that, which means there's less focus for anything else...But it doesn't have to be the case."

While Zoe-LNR's earlier statement does not suggest an absolute negative influence, the potential negatives identified contradict Rebora and Turri's (2013) belief that one of the reasons to assess impact was to encourage dialogue in the world of practice.

Conclusively, the responses outlined within this section suggest that the positive effects of the REF on RME implementation via PRME's 6th principle outweighed the negative. To this extent, it is an area that individuals, schools and other institutions committed to RME implementation could exploit towards its progression.

6.2.5 No Influence

Unlike the other four principles (2, 3, 4 and 6), the researcher did not identify in the study participants' responses a direct influence of the REF on RME implementation via PRME's principles 1 and 5. Nonetheless, some of the ways in which the REF impacted on principles 2, 3, 4 and 6 could have indirect implications for either of principles 1 or 5.

For example, in terms of principle 1, the development of students' capabilities may be a "utopian dream" or take a very long time to realise if some schools strategically avoid recruiting qualified educators around the RME field due to their perceived low-quality research and the journals where related outputs are published.

The latter part of principle 1 centres around inclusion and sustainability[137]. Inclusion is also central to the SDGs and expected organisational practice for all establishments, including business schools and other HEIs. A recruitment strategy that is devoid of this key ingredient, inclusion, or distorted on this front, contradicts PRME signatories' pledge to principle 1 so the practice does not quite align with their declaration to progress RME implementation via PRME's principle 1.

The transparency which Warin and Beddewela (2016) spoke about (covered in Bill-PNR's statement[138] and in section 2.3) would not be such an issue if an institution said they would recruit specifically for the REF and does just that in practice. That is, hire an academic with articles in top-rated journals and ignore another qualified RME-oriented academic with articles in lower-ranked journals. At least the institution would have shown consistency between what they say and do, albeit open for debate as far as inclusivity is concerned.

That said, more than half of the respondents (10) said the REF had little or no influence on their commitment to advance RME in their institution. Beddewela et al. (2017, citing Fukukawa et al., 2013) reported motivated academics as being instrumental in the diffusion of RME within business schools' curricula. Two of study participants said the following:

> *Bell-AsPR: "I think with or without the REF, I would be keen to have responsible management education principles embedded in my teaching."*
>
> *Louis-PR: "No. I just think no impact at all or influence."*

Interestingly, Bell-AsPR at the time of the study was working as an Associate Professor in one of the Russell Group Universities that are renowned for their "excellence" in research and are mostly research-driven, as opposed to teaching-driven institutions (albeit teaching is included in that excellence on the corporate webpage[139] of the group, stating "…world-class research and education…"). Thus, we

[137] (…to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy).

[138] Bill-PNR: "I think at some universities it could, if anything, harm it [RME] because…the absolutely top-rated journals are not in this area, and so, you might be…reluctant to employ staff who are primarily in this area. So, that might be slightly negative."

[139] https://russellgroup.ac.uk/about/

cannot conclude that her stance is contradictory to the culture of the organisation she was working for at the time. We can, however, attribute it (including those that share the same view) to long-held normative values. That is, the conviction that the institutionalisation of RME is what should be done regardless of any challenges/pressures. The chosen stance is reflective of the values that underpin RME, which the statement appears to uphold.

Similarly, Louis-PR was situated in a Russell Group University and was a Professor. That said, it could be that his academic freedom is not as curtailed as some other academics less advanced in their career. His institution at the time was also an advanced signatory to PRME at a university level, with a university-wide commitment to PRME. So, it is possible that senior executives are committed to the agenda and therefore, are more accepting and supportive of efforts to progress it within this University compared to others. There may be a stronger integration of RME as core to the strategic focus of this specific University, without decoupling in this specific case.

Another participant questioned if the REF and its related pressures were an adequate reason why an institution should struggle or not to advance its RME agenda.

> *Bill-PNR: "Look at the nature of business school staff, how can the REF be a barrier to many staff? You look at accountancy, lots of the staff are on teaching-only contracts. REF is irrelevant to them…they have not got even research in their contracts. So, you begin to think, well, what of the more research-intensive institutes? The research-intensive institutions tend to make the distinction between research and teaching staff and research-only and teaching-only staff. And there is often quite a lot of teaching-only staff. So, even if you want to have a research component and they feel that they are too busy to be pressured by the REF to teach responsible management, what about those guys who are on teaching-only contracts? So, they are not under pressure by the REF at all. Unless they are trying to get their research profile up, there is some teaching with the view of trying to get their research going so that eventually, they can transfer onto a teaching and research contract. There are people on teaching-only contract. That's all they are going to be on, and that is all they want to be on. REF is not a pressure on them at all."*

It can be inferred from Bill-PNR's statement that the likelihood of the REF being a barrier to RME advancement in a business school/university is somewhat dependent on the type of employment contracts that academics have. Those on teaching-only contracts could not claim that the REF is an obstacle to their commitment or ability to support the progression of RME in their schools, since they do not have to deal with the REF and its related pressures. However, several authors note that many academics have complained that their teaching workloads have increased due to the REF (see Tierney, 2016; Grove, 2017). Academics who are not considered to be research/impact stars are made to take on extra teaching to ease the workload of the latter, who allegedly are more financially and reputationally valuable to HEIs. That way, the stars can have ample time and space to conduct "impactful research", publishing resultant outputs in top-rated journals and preparing relevant impact case studies (4* preferably for the funding reward) for the upcoming REF2021 exercise.

The odds of the REF being a barrier to RME advancement was alluded to being reliant on an institution's research intensity, including the proportion of staff who were returned in the REF2014 exercise and those to be submitted in the REF2021 exercise. The former retrospectively may support or negate some academics' claim that the REF impeded their ability to advance RME. Another study can actively and retrospectively support or negate the same claim for the REF2021 exercise since it is still imminent.

> *Bill-PNR: "At the lower-level rated institutions you have lots of people who aren't under REF pressure because they've never been in the REF. Look at the proportions of staff who submitted from business school, you know, people are putting in 20 or 30 staff and if you look at their website they've got 100 staff. So, only submitting 20% or 30% to the REF, how many are under pressure from the REF? Oh, some of the people who didn't make it are probably 30%. Maybe 10% to 20% thought that they might be in the REF but haven't performed well enough, so, they kind of were under REF pressure. They are still only half of the faculty. Some people knew they would not be in the REF. So, and when you go higher to more elite institutions, there were a higher proportion of people submitted to the REF…So, I'm just a little bit teasing out that your REF pressure thing. Yeah, on individuals, maybe. But does it add up for excuse for institutions? I'm not sure it does. It is an excuse for individuals, but when you look at the numbers and the contracts, I don't think it quite adds up. Obviously, the REF is there, if the REF weren't there, then 100% of staff won't have REF pressure. But I have just shown to you that a lot of them don't even have REF pressure on them even now."*

Although academics on research-only or teaching and research contracts may find it challenging to contribute to progress the implementation of RME due to REF-related pressures, Bill-PNR saw no reason why that should impede the furtherance of the RME agenda. He argued that several academics on teaching-only contracts could assume that task and, on that basis, did not consider the REF a barrier to RME advancement in that scenario.

Arguably, the more research-intensive a business school/university is, the higher the chance the REF would be a barrier to RME advancement in the institution, and vice versa. Those institutions that put forward just a few academics for the REF2014 exercise cannot justify the claim that the REF has been a barrier to their ability to advance RME, the logic being that several academics reportedly did not have REF-related pressures and thus could have contributed to RME advancement if they were keen on doing so.

In general, the participants seemed unwavering in their resolve to support RME implementation despite REF-related pressures. This is a stance that resonates with the normative pillar of institutional theory encapsulated in appropriateness (right thing to do), rather than instrumentality logic within the regulative pillar (Scott, 2014). For some of them, the perceived readiness for the REF2021 exercise may partly explain the assumed stance aside from their passion and interest for RME.

> *Theo-LNR: "I guess if you are ahead and you've got lots of publications, and you are ready to go, then I suppose you are not doing too badly in terms of next REF. Well, you might actually say I've done enough there, I've got the time to do those things. So, certainly, it means that certain types of academic work like working on journal articles, top publications, are seen to be much more valuable uses of your time than, perhaps, putting more time to making more sophisticated or more involved learning experiences for the students. So, yeah. I think it can definitely get in the way of doing more interesting things."*

From the statement above, one could argue that the degree to which participants may have viewed the REF as a barrier to RME implementation partly relied on their readiness for the imminent REF2021 exercise. Those with related 4* or 3* papers/impact case studies ready (or almost ready) may not have perceived it as much of a barrier compared to others. Some academics that are not RME inclined may similarly deem the REF a general barrier to other vital commitments. The initial decisions following the Stern review report were not published at the time, so participants' readiness for REF2021 was not explored.

It is important to point out that a few statements that are related to "no influence" feature in the previous sections, as they support those better than they would have if outlined within this section. So, the statements that feature in this section are not exhaustive on that front. This leads to perhaps one of the criticisms of the six principles of PRME, which inevitably is a limitation of the study. They are too broad

(Win, 2012) and need further reading (unpacking), as Louw (2015) argued. The researcher found it particularly challenging to position the participants' responses (i.e. statements) across the six principles due to the lack of specificity and a clear distinction from the content of one principle to another; "the concepts of the principles are overlapped" (Win, 2012, p. 241).

A challenge the researcher found with the principles is the broadness of principle 1 – it could be more specific on the points of developing students' capabilities as progress made around principles 2, 3, 4 and 6 could also be reported under that. For example, principle 6 reads "*we will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, [students]…on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability*", so dialogue with the underscored is definitely a way that PRME signatories (in this case, HEIs, including business schools - worldwide) can "*develop the capabilities of [students] to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society…*" Furthermore, principle 3 reads "*we will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective experiences for responsible leadership*", so remit on this front will enable HEIs to again "develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society…". Impacts on principle 1 can then alternatively be attributed to, in these examples, principles 3 or 6; hence the ambiguity that the identified broadness and overlapping presents to all who are committed to the RME agenda, and who look to PRME for support and guidance towards implementing and advancing it.

In addition, the researcher identified an overlap between principles 2 and 3, and between 5 and 6. Addressing these overlaps could enhance RME embeddedness and reporting progress on those, limiting trade-off such as under-developing and/or under-reporting progress around those. For example, principle 2 reads "*we will incorporate into our academic, [curricular], and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility…*", then principle 3 reads "*we will create [educational frameworks, materials], processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership*"; the researcher argues that the underlined in relation to principles 2 relates also to the underscored per principle 3, representing an overlap. On that basis, we can say these PRME principles are interrelated, which in itself is a shortcoming that should be explored and unpacked by future studies.

Could one or more of the principles be merged to address the issues raised? Alternatively, should a similar model such as the SDGs be adopted, making the principles more distinctive and specific and developing a comprehensive list of targets to support the principles, enhancing the usability and applicability of the latter?

See sections 2.7 and 4.5 for additional detail on criticisms of the principles. Section 4.3, meanwhile gives the rationale for the utilisation of PRME's six principles in this study.

6.2.6 Summary

The perceived possible influence of the REF on RME implementation was varied among respondents. Some who said that the REF is a barrier to RME also said that it could facilitate its progression in schools. A few were unsure but assumed it would generally have a negative influence on RME if they were to give a firm response. More than half said it had little or no influence on their commitment to contribute on that front.

The framework developed around PRME's six principles supported the discussion of the possible implications of respondents' viewpoints for RME implementation in UK business schools. It was found that the REF can directly influence that negatively via three of PRME's six principles (2, 3 and 4) and positively via principles 4 and 6, with no direct influence via principles 1 and 5. Note that the identified influence via principle 4 (research) was both positive in some regards and negative in others.

Figure 17 is a conceptual framework indicative of the overall finding related to the possible influence of the REF on RME implementation. The broken lines represent indirect influence/effect, while the arrows moving from left (REF) to right (RME) signify direct influence, with symbols signifying whether the influence was positive or negative. The figure in effect reinterprets Figure 12, unpacking the mechanism via which the REF, directly and indirectly, can hinder and/or enable RME advancement in UK business schools.

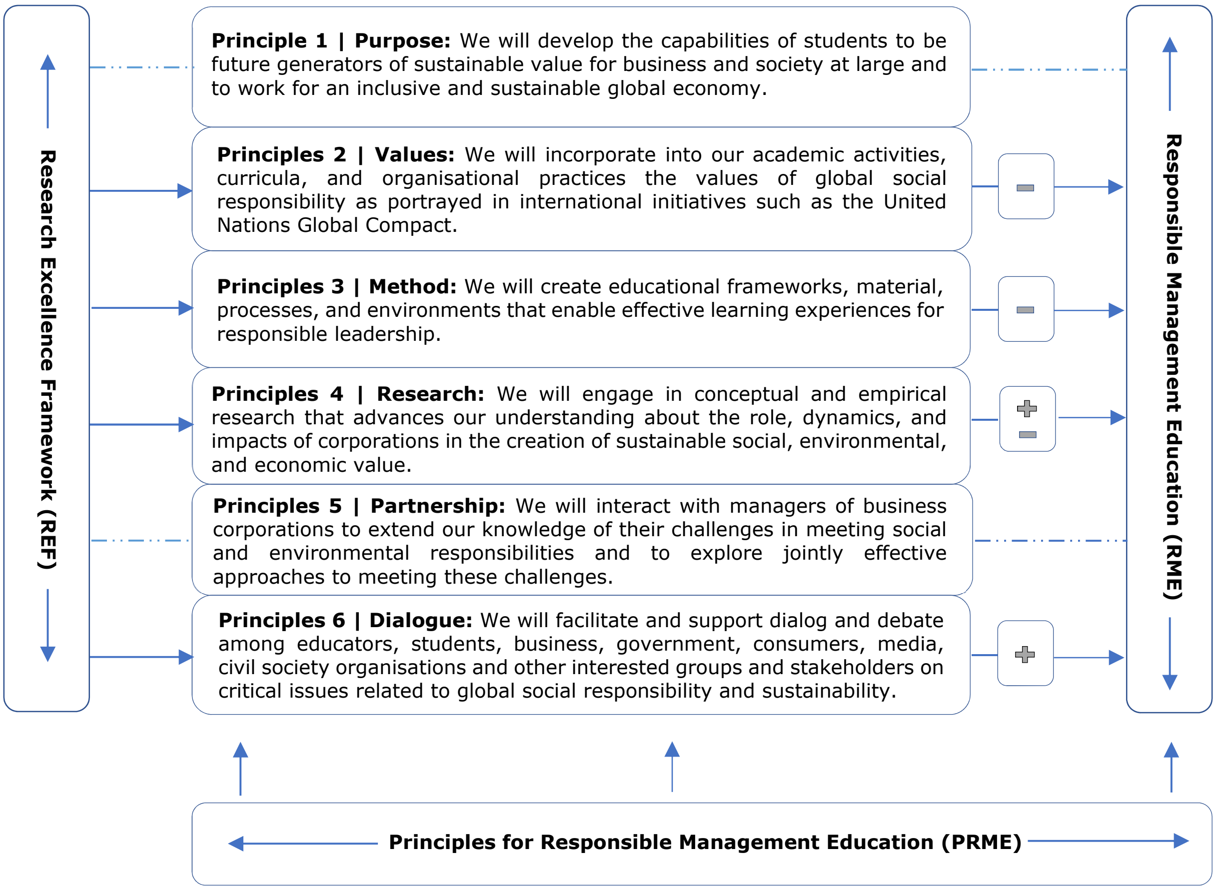

Figure 17: REF's Possible Influence on RME Implementation in UK Business Schools

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from PRME)

Conclusively, all the participants stressed that they were still very much committed to RME implementation and advancement regardless of the REF and its associated challenges. This is not surprising given they are active academics researching within the RME field. Their perception on what is happening within their institution, rather than its impact on themselves is interesting though. One of them asserted that it is difficult to conclude that the REF does have a direct negative influence on RME implementation, as there are factors other than the REF that needs to be considered, implying the REF should not be looked at in isolation.

> *Lee-SLNR: "Errm…I don't think it's [REF] got no role. I just wouldn't overemphasise it. It's part of the overall picture."*

Doherty et al.'s (2015) work in a way provides useful insight around the above comment. The authors identified factors other than the REF in their quest to understand the pressures for and barriers to RME implementation/institutionalisation in six UK business schools. They identified the REF as one of the many barriers, rather than necessarily the principal one. The current study then singled out the REF and explored in-depth if and how it has influenced RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools through the lens of those responsible for making that happen.

The following section presents and discusses the perceived possible influence of the REF on senior executives' commitment to RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools.

6.3 Perceived Influences of the REF on Senior Executives' Support for RME Implementation and Advancement in UK Business Schools

Given the considerable anecdotal and empirical evidence that shows an over-prioritisation of the REF in UK HEIs compared to other agendas (see Doherty et al., 2015), the researcher deemed it necessary to explore how top management is progressing in their pledge to integrate RME in their institutions.

Again, PRME requires a letter of commitment (that pledges to support RME implementation) signed by the highest executive (e.g. Dean, vice-chancellor) in a business school/university to accompany the institution's application to become a signatory. The pledge is then reaffirmed biannually via the SIP report. Since they literally sign up to PRME to demonstrate the commitment to embed RME, the onus is then on senior management to provide the support required to that effect - facilitate the implementation of RME towards the development of future responsible leaders that will add sustainable value to business and society. That should be the central goal before the exploitation of added benefits attached to PRME membership. For example, becoming a PRME signatory can help an institution to gain accreditations like EQUIS, AMBA and BGA[140] since the organisations responsible for those are affiliated to PRME and ask institutions to confirm in their application that they are PRME signatories.

If the REF is a dominant agenda that seems to be over prioritised in a business school/university (Doherty et al., 2015; Godemann et al., 2014), what is its potential

[140] Business Graduate Association.

influence on senior executives' pledge to support RME advancement? The question was explored through participants' lenses, and PRME's six principles were also used to interpret the findings that emerged (see Figure 18) beginning with principle 2 – values. As explained in relation to Table 15 in section 6.2, the first set of numbers, in the second column, show how many sources (individual respondents) responded to that effect, whilst the last column shows how many references were made in total by said source(s) (e.g. 8 respondents said Senior Management had no influence whatsoever, making a total of 13 references to that effect).

Perceived Influence of REF on Senior Management	0	0
Broad influence	1	1
Move to establish internal peer review system	3	9
Advantages of this system	1	2
Disadvantages of this system	1	1
Narrow mindedness - Follow the money type of outlook	1	1
Neutral	1	1
No influence whatsoever	8	13
Not Explicit but Implicit	3	3
Opportunity Cost	1	2
Provision of Training on Impact Generation	1	1
Recruitment of Staff	1	1
Several meetings which takes up time	1	1
They are Obsessed	1	1

Figure 18: Responses related to the REF's possible Influence on Senior Executives' Commitment to RME Implementation in UK Business Schools

Source: Author (based on raw interview data analysed on NVivo)

6.3.1 The Negative Effects of the REF on Senior Executives' Support for RME Implementation via Principle 2 – Values

It was found that the REF could negatively influence senior executives' pledge to support the implementation and advancement of RME via PRME's principle 2. Some respondents argued that the identified disinclination to support the agenda is more implicit than explicit.

> *Nick-SLNR: "I don't think at the moment it's really impacted on the support. I don't think there's any explicit, well, we are not worried about RME, we are strictly devoted to research for REF.' It's not explicit, it's implicit, you know, you have to publish in order to progress, so therefore, you should be spending more time on research and less time on curriculum development."*

Academics are expected to focus squarely on generating impactful research for the forthcoming REF2021 exercise, leaving little room for any meaningful work to be done in terms of developing a robust curriculum and innovative teaching and learning approaches around RME. Hence why Nick-SLNR hinted the REF impedes senior executives' support for RME advancement in his business school, again implicitly. Note that the excerpt above also relates to PRME's principle 4 (research) but positioned here because it best supports principle 2 (values). This utilisation challenge again, reinforces the criticism levied against PRME's six principles by Louw (2015) that the principles can be ambiguous. See section 2.7, 4.5 and the latter part of section 6.2.6 for more details on this.

Hodgson (2007) tells us that organisations (in this case, business schools and HEIs, led by senior management) can limit the capacity of individual agents (in this case, business school academics committed to RME implementation) to effect change. Academics, as individual agents, can influence the direction of change concerning RME and therefore, can act as institutional change agents (Lamberg and Pajunen, 2010; Clemens and Cook, 1999). However, they need the backing of top executives to achieve meaningful change on that front, especially if the desired change is transformational. Unlike incremental change that focuses on individual aspects of a firm to maintain and regain congruence during and after the change process, respectively (Nadler and Tushman, 1989), transformational change necessitates that a firm reforms its strategic trajectory, structure, cultural norms and identity (Hodges and Gill, 2014). As mentioned earlier, some authors (e.g. Buono et al., 2015; Godemann et al., 2011) believe that PRME has a transformational change potential, but most organisations struggle to enact this type of change owing to its complexities (Beer and Eisenstat, 1996). Hence it is imperative to have the full support of senior management in order to institutionalise RME.

Another angle on Nick-SLNR's statement (above) reminds us (see section 6.3) that the REF can potentially facilitate the implementation of RME in UK business schools through research (PRME Principle 4), but only if senior executives explicitly and implicitly allow academics within the RME field to focus on their research interests. For reasons explored in detail within section 6.2.3, this in turn is likely to require both greater acceptance of RME by 3* and 4* journals, and a legitimation and validation of RME by REF executives and panels.

Some top executives are said to have adopted ideologies that are contradictory to the values (PRME Principle 2) that underpin RME, which is counterproductive to the mission of the agenda.

> *Guy-APNR: "Well, I think senior management see REF and the impact agenda of REF in a very narrow sense. You know, you can see it downstream and upstream. The upstream is the idea that maybe you need some money to be able to make an impact. And where do you get that money from? You know, normally you go to business. And so, for me, maybe impact represents for senior management almost a push toward follow-the-money. And that's a real critique of maybe the future of REF."*

Guy-APNR's statement suggests that senior executives do not necessarily mind collaborating with firms on the research front even if their values are not grounded in ERS - ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability; the three pillars of RME. Let us not forget that business schools have been accused of being partly responsible for the 2008 Wall Street financial crisis (Koljatic and Silva, 2015).

Another possible implication of Guy-APNR's statement is the need for the change process relating to RME implementation to be systemic. Beer and Eisenstat's (1996) first principle of effective strategy implementation states that the key components of an organisation (in this case, business school leadership, structure, behavioural features, and strategy) must be aligned for the change strategy to be effective. Those must be considered by a business school/university looking to partner with other organisations on research projects even if most of the funds are to come from them. In other words, does the leadership, structure, behavioural characteristics, and strategy of the funding partners align with the business school or HEI, and are they reflective of the fundamental principles underpinning RME/ERS?

6.3.2 The Negative Effects of the REF on Senior Executives' Support for RME Implementation via PRME's Principle 3 – Method

One of the perceived areas of REF's influence on senior management's support for RME advancement via PRME's Principle 3 (method) was around staff recruitment. Entirely different teaching techniques are required for the exposure of students to RME-related topics to increase their chance of becoming future responsible leaders that will generate sustainable value for business and society and work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy[141].

> *Nick-SLNR: "I think where it has made a very big difference and continues to, is on the recruitment of staff, which I think is a key part of RME institutionalisation. You need good people to teach RME. You maybe have to teach, in my view, responsible management topics slightly differently than maybe traditional topics. They are a little bit more complicated in some ways. You maybe need to have more participatory kinds of techniques to teaching. You need to have educators who can teach across a broader range of topics and subjects rather than a narrower focus. And you have to have educators who can engage students around topics which they may not feel are central to their management learning. So, I think that requires a certain kind of educator."*

Nick-SLNR's statement is useful for institutions looking to develop their RME field. The remark about schools requiring staff who can teach across a broader range of topics/subjects in a way validates Nonet et al.'s (2016) model because it highlights the relevance of adopting a systemic and broad approach for RME implementation in schools, which is mostly process-related. Possibly, the authors developed the relevant aspect of the model from a skill-based standpoint – the relevant skills and outlook students should develop from exposure to RME-related contents. Regardless of the positioning, it is crucial for the knowledge base of the staff that deliver RME content to be vast. Warin and Beddewela's (2016) outline of the features of the three engagement levels of RME suggests that the calibre of educators vary with each level, so the researcher recommends that business schools and universities consider Nick-SLNR's statement closely and work towards having the calibre of educator described here. A starting point in this regard would be to identify training needs for current educators; the gaps would be filled with training where possible, but with recourse to recruitment beyond this as required. Effort on this front would significantly address the treatment of RME as a mere bolt-on kind of agenda, albeit reliant on the availability of resources.

This study and other studies have found that most senior managers in UK HEIs use the REF as a performance management tool. It is an issue that was also pointed out by Technopolis group (2015). Senior management ultimately have the responsibility to pull in funds for their institution, and the REF offers that funding platform – it has a more obvious financial and reputational value to HEIs compared to RME. So, while

[141] This relates to PRME's principle 1 (purpose), but Nick's statement is more reflective of principle 3 (method).

top management may genuinely be committed to honouring their pledge to advance RME through robust educational frameworks, materials, processes and an effective learning environment, there are other competing tasks they are entrusted to fulfil.

> *Bill-PNR: "Only in a slight opportunity cost sense, in that, there is only a limited amount of resources you have. That's just not money, but also when you're senior manager, as I was speaking to you earlier about how maybe I should have done more, there is only so many things you can do, and there is only so many things you can do well or quickly. A few of them are doing many different things at the same time. I guess to the extent that the REF makes people think about research rather than RME, maybe the REF has an impact. Maybe the REF had a very broad impact on universities; they are not just thinking about teaching and learning as they might have done. And if you thought more about teaching and learning, maybe they would also think more about responsible management, and responsible management would gain hold better. That's a very broad influence."*

Bill-PNR's statement reinforces the claim that business school Deans face conflicting priorities when deciding if to adopt RME or not (Shuayto, 2013; Zell, 2005). Building their institutions' REF profile, then, unfortunately often takes precedence over the progression of the RME agenda, the financial value of which to HEIs is arguably unknown and difficult to ascertain; a future study along those lines would be interesting. The reputational value of RME to HEIs may be more pronounced than any potential financial value though still not to the extent the REF is to HEIs on both fronts. This also confirms other authors' (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015; Beusch, 2014) remarks that RME implementation does require other resources (financial and non-financial) aside from time.

The REF provides strong incentives for teaching-intensive institutions and their academics to invest in research. This perhaps signals a disparity in the allocation of research funding to research-intensive and teaching-intensive institutions, supported by Torrance (2020) who alluded to older (research-intensive) universities having possibly received additional research funding above that of their teaching-intensive counterparts. However, it was also hinted that the REF offers newer universities the opportunity to generate new or extra income. University national and international league tables are predominantly based on research performance, and academics' career progressions have depended on the high volumes of high-quality research outputs and citations they produce, rather than teaching (Olive, 2017, p. 17). However, commitment on this front could sway senior executives' attention from progressing RME. We are told that the development of pedagogical research compared to disciplinary research is lacking support from senior executives across HEIs, and RME-related research is largely seen as being within this bracket (Cotton et al., 2018).

> *Bill-PNR: "There is some research intensity even with our research, I would assume. But also, some less intensive universities think about research because they are trying to move up. So, we were in that category, but I think we are still trying to preserve and build on our teaching and learning strands. So, the REF might have affected RME by diverting some universities from not doing much about the teaching and learning agenda which RME is about."*

Bill-PNR's statement implies that the perceived over-prioritization of REF is not peculiar to research-intensive universities. It probably reinforces the claim that the REF offers a more considerable financial and reputational value to HEIs than RME/PRME. Drawing on Galaskiewicz and Wasserman (1989), teaching-intensive institutions may imitate some research-intensive institutions they perceive to have achieved more success and legitimacy than themselves due to having achieved a high/better REF profile. They might also experience more uncertainties than research-intensive institutions while attempting to meet REF-related requirements, since research is not necessarily their forte (Keerasuntonpong and Cordery, 2016). This uncertainty can create mimetic isomorphism (Smith, 2014), thereby exposing the implementation of RME (via PRME's principle 3) to the risk of losing its momentum in those institutions through a disproportionate focus on research compared to teaching. Consistent with Harley's (2002) finding, Bill-PNR hinted that scholarship in some teaching-intensive institutions could be ignored because of REF-related pressures.

Nick-SLNR's statement below suggests that the REF may unintentionally be weakening the nexus between teaching and research

> *Nick-SLNR: "Now, those certain kinds of educators are not the sort of research-heavy-intensive individuals. However, with the REF being a key part of our income…a key part of our esteem…we would employ…you know, very, very, REFable, highly research-active, doctorate qualified, staff. Some of whom may not be able actually to deliver the teaching we would want them to. So, we have this kind of a disconnect. In one hand, I feel like we are quite often employing very good researchers who can't teach the RME subjects we need them to teach. And so then, the burden is on those people who can teach to do that. So, therefore, they are sacrificing their careers in some ways because they are not then researching. I think there's this tension…which the REF brings to bear on schools."*

It can also be inferred from Nick-SLNR's statement that business school educators that can deliver (satisfactorily and efficiently) on both fronts (i.e. process and skill) come from mostly teaching-intensive institutions. The challenge is how they can contribute to boosting the REF profile of the hiring institution, given the difficulty that RME-inclined academics face when attempting to publish in top-tier journals[142]. There is a perception that RME-related research is mostly pedagogical and therefore, of less value or lower status (Cotton et al., 2018). Conversely, staff from research-intensive institutions may not be the right fit when it comes to educating students on RME-related subjects. It then makes it a tough decision for top management since they are committed to both the REF and RME, with the REF likely to take precedence for the apparent benefits it can offer more directly at least. The same may apply to RME-inclined academics. Are they willing to sacrifice their career progression, which is hinted to be "quicker" through research compared to teaching? Or will they remain committed to the cause of producing future responsible leaders and professionals who will positively contribute to both business and society via RME, even if it is unfavorable?

Where the over-prioritisation of the REF is said to hinder the attainment of RME embeddedness via teaching and related activities, there could be a tradeoff but only if the research activities and outputs in question are within the spheres of RME/ERS.

6.3.3 The Negative and Positive Effects of the REF on Senior Executives' Support for RME Implementation via PRME's Principle 4 - Research

It has been implied that the level of support that senior executives provide towards the progression of RME via research is dependent on where their primary research interest lies. They are inclined to offer more significant support if it is around RME and vice versa, which therefore supports Wersun's (2017) argument concerning the support of senior management as a key enabler for RME implementation and institutionalisation in schools.

> *Theo-LNR: "Our current Dean, she's very much involved within PRME in different working groups and themes. So, it's very much in terms of what her research is and how she works. But then, I wouldn't see her focus on the REF thinking about who is going to be REFable really having any relation toward PRME."*

[142] Could become a thing of the past if the REF administrators honor the pledge to be inclusive in the REF2021 exercise. See the 6th frequently asked questions under outputs (available at: https://www.ref.ac.uk/faqs/).

In contrast, the Dean referred to in Lisa-SLNR's statement below does not necessarily mind if academics' research is related to RME or not, provided the resultant papers are REFable (i.e. published in 3* or 4* journals).

> *Lisa-SLNR: "Well, given that senior management is interested in being REFable, then as long as we are publishing in the relevant journals, then they are quite happy. The senior management who are interested in our research output aren't interested in any particular topic or field as long as we have those research outputs, that's my impression. For example, PRME isn't a central focus of our research strategy, so it's fine not because it's RME, but because there are journals available in which we can publish which would make us REFable. So, I would say they're neutral."*

Other Deans and senior management might simply know what is attainable - high-ranked journals are less accepting of PRME/RME related papers at present. Hence, they know that academics that research around RME would not make the list of those that will be put forward for the subsequent REF exercise. Decision to submit all research-active academics for the REF2021 exercise may however prevent that from happening.

There was also a sense that senior executives would support any academic that has proven their ability to produce 4* papers even if they are RME inclined.

> *Mark-SLNR: "Well, except in the broadest sense that REF determines resource allocations. Now in our institution, if you happen to have a 4* publishing researcher and they happen to be in the RME area, they will get support; there would be no problem about that."*

By failing to select 1* and 2* outputs, where most journals that are receptive to RME-related outputs fall, for the forthcoming REF exercise, school executives would be rescinding their pledge to support efforts targeted at implementing/advancing RME through research.

> *Nick-SLNR: "Most universities would say 3* or 4* research is the minimum. Forget about 1*, forget about 2*, which means you are limited to two or three journals where you could put your RME/pedagogical research. Everybody wants to write in that area which means it's almost impossible to get it published."*
>
> *Sue-LR: "…I've got 3 papers at the moment and I've got one at the moment to get out this week as well. And then we will <u>sit and wait for a year and see what happens</u> (giggles)."*

This inadvertently increases top management's risk of not lending much-needed support if efforts toward progressing RME via research do not translate into the coveted 3* and 4* research outputs.

Relative to other schools in universities, business and management schools are in "the front-line of the battles and challenges that arose from the neo-liberal policy doctrines of 'Reinventing Government' and 'New Public Management' (NPM)" (Jones, 2020, p.366). Imposed quantitative financial targets intensify this and often come in the guise of performance management and building accountability, increasing managerialism and marketisation (Jones et al., 2020, citing Deem et al., 2007; and Koris et al., 2017). The fear of not being deemed REFable, therefore, could sway the most committed academic to research in areas other than RME; hence a subtraction to the progression of RME through research.

> *Theo-LNR: "I think it's probably mostly detrimental. And also, because the journals that you can publish sort of responsible and sustainability-related stuff in the business and management field, while they are expanding, it's still a very small group of journals that might publish those things which are high-rated journals. So, you could arguably say that the REF does push people away from those types of topics. I think it has changed, but there are vastly more journals that would be outside this field. What we might see as responsible management studies or education, there are lots of definitions of it. So, again, you could say the REF does actually hold a kind of status quo together a bit, which is much more financial profit-centred business education. So, again, I would say I see them as quite an opposition on the REF being probably detrimental to doing more RME or improving the scope of the work that we are doing."*

UoA 19 stated explicitly that the journal ranking lists were not used in REF2014. If it plays no role in the assessment of outputs submitted as part of the REF exercise, why then are senior executives explicitly and implicitly requiring academics to target top-tier journals (3* and 4*) as worthy outlets for their outputs?

> *Liam-PNR: "…I can't remember where something like the Journal of Cleaner Production comes in their ranking. But its gonna take more journals like that, I think, to move up the ranking for that to be perhaps a prime area for more people to be interested in. I don't know whether you've ever looked at the Association of Business Schools general rankings, but you know, the pressure is on us to go to the top ones and why would you want to even try to go for one that is low? I mean, it's not gonna do you any good. I wish a lot can would depend on your own confidence about whether you will get accepted for a higher-ranked journal and be prepared to get the feedback to work with. And then actually carrying it through, rather than just losing heart…*

Some of the respondents' reflections (like the one above) convey this stance and other studies reinforce this claim about the perceived pressure on academics to publish in "top-tier" journals (Grimes et al., 2018; Sangster, 2015; Tourish and Willmott, 2015; Mingers and Willmott, 2013; Macdonald and Kam, 2011). To what extent might HEIs, inclusive of business schools, have contributed to the institutionalised practice of equating the quality of a paper to the quality of the journal where it is published? If we explore this through the lens of institutional theory, it seems to relate to institutionalisation by increasing objectification. The more the consensus regarding the value of an idea or a structure increases, the higher the impetus for its diffusion via simple imitation shifts to a normative base, hence it becomes an institutionalised practice (Scott, 2014).

Cotton et al. (2018) tell us that the submission rules for the REF2014 exercise stated explicitly that the impact that academics' research had on students, teaching and other activities within the domain of participating institutions were excluded. That could have exacerbated the issue for some of the academics within the RME field in the past. The decision to allow teaching-related impact for the REF2021 exercise. Historically, pedagogical research is perceived as being of lower quality and of less value compared to disciplinary research (Lingwood et al., 2018; Cotton et al., 2018), and the same applies to theoretical and applied research, respectively (Locke, 2014).

There is also the issue of time. REF-related organisations/activities are very demanding and mentally challenging, leaving senior executives little time if any to support other agendas such as RME. It is a finding that mirrors that of Doherty et al.'s (2015) study[143].

> *Zoe-LNR: "Again, more slightly on the negative side, because dealing with REF takes a lot of my space in terms of meetings. There's constant meetings with our Head of school, Dean and, you know, Vice-presidents, Chancellor and all of those people; they are constantly in meetings about REF. They are also in constant meetings about TEF. And that sort of takes it [RME] away a bit, because now that we're in 2017 we're moving closer and closer to submission days and things are becoming more and more clear now. Sort of how REF will look like? What will need to happen? What you can submit, can't submit and so forth? That it does take up quite a lot of headspace with senior management, which then it isn't as easy to get…head space for other topics."*

However, if RME were to have similar obvious monetary and reputational benefits as the REF, would business school executives not channel in similar effort and resources towards its exploitation? Perhaps the benefits that schools gain from PRME in terms of accreditations - the likes of EQUIS, AMBA and AACSB[144], are too easy compared to the REF. Will a step to make it much more stringent and competitive get schools

[143] The authors reported that of the six UK business schools from where participants were drawn for the study only two admitted to having the backing of their topmost executive in matters relating to RME implementation.

[144] This is supported by Windsor (2002) who criticised the flexible curricular approach that AACSB allowed (which seems to still be the case), and demanded compulsory inclusion of RME-related courses.

to value the membership a lot more and put in significant work before they can access those? Aside from being a signatory of PRME, which some of the accrediting bodies ask applying institutions at the point of application, there could be other requirements they need to meet to be awarded the accreditations. A step to make the former a bit more stringent could prove useful in the long term. However, one could argue that they collectively are already stringent, considering that only 90 business schools across the world can boast having a "Triple crown" accreditation as of March 2019 (MBA Today, 2019).

The move by some institutions to set up an internal peer review system to assess research outputs already in the public domain in order to ascertain their quality irrespective of the ratings of the journals where they are published could be beneficial to RME implementation and advancement. As already stated, most journals that are receptive to RME-related outputs are said to be lowly-ranked, making the papers predominantly 1* or 2* quality rated.

> *Zoe-LNR: "I know we are not the only institution, we now have an internal REF system where a paper gets ranked by at least two professors within the school, and they give it a star rating…and then if for some reason their ranking is very different to where one says 4* and the other says 2*, then another person is taken on board to moderate in a sense, to say well, you know, this really is much more 2* or this really is much more 4*…And the whole thing is single-blinded, so, the person whose paper is judged doesn't know who is judging it. That is combined with the star rating from the journals or from the CABS. And then on that basis, they are now starting to build up the repertoire of potential outputs that will be submitted to the REF."*

Thus, the move is an opportunity for those academics that have RME-related papers in lowly-ranked journals to be considered for the upcoming REF2021 exercise, assuming their papers would be amongst those that would be re-assessed and rated higher by internal reviewers. Should those outputs be chosen as part of the REF submission, it would give them and the submitting institutions' RME agenda additional much-needed exposure. That could attract prospective students and other relevant actors (interested in the area) to such institutions.

There was however the notion that the internal peer-review system will be time-consuming and, in that regard and to that extent, detrimental to the furtherance of RME in UK business schools, as it is time not spent on moving the agenda forward.

Bell-AsPR: "In our institution, they are going to institute something called the peer-review system, which means that accepted papers that are already going to be published and that will be REFable for all members of staff will be internally peer-reviewed again to establish whether they will qualify as a 4, 3* or 2* for the REF. Because, obviously, the REF criteria may be different, so adding another procedure, that takes time. And I don't think that necessarily aligns with promoting PRME principles; it's time that's not dedicating to that."*

While the internal peer review system has a clear advantage, one downside identified by Zoe-LNR is the exacerbation of the uncertainty that the REF is already perpetuating in most HEIs (Watermeyer, 2016; McNay, 2015; Murphy and Sage, 2014).

Zoe-LNR: "But there's always this uncertainty if that is going to happen, what happens even though I got into this amazing journal they say well your papers didn't measure up to their standard. You know, internally, they can say this is 3, this is 4*, this is 2*. It is not arbitrary, but to some extent, it is arbitrary how the REF panel is going to rate the whole thing…I mean, you get your reviewers and the panel, and they might make a very different decision to what your school has expected or anticipated. I mean, in the 2014 REF that happened to quite a number of schools."*

The fact that both Zoe-LNR and Bell-AsPR's statements mention recent development in terms of the internal reassessment of research outputs in the public domain indicates this is not a peculiarity for research-intensive universities nor Russell Group universities. Bell-AsPR at the time of the study was working at a business school whose parent institution was part of the Russell Group, and it is unlikely that the school's status has changed since the study. Zoe-LNR's parent institution, in contrast, was not a member of the Russell Group universities.

There are indications to suggest that the REF is a top-most priority for most institutions who are doing whatever they can to move up the ranking ladder and post better performance in the upcoming REF2021 exercise. Godemann et al. (2014), based on an analysis of 100 SIP reports of PRME signatories, reported that only a few universities had made an institutional-level commitment to RME compared to their commitment to the employability and the REF agenda. Again, research is a significant source of income for most UK HEIs and arguably other HEIs beyond the UK. An excellent REF profile is therefore likely to pull in a chunk of the funds required to keep the institutions running, especially in uncertain times. What will become of UK HEIs if Brexit relegates European students to international student status, since they would be expected to pay the associated hefty tuition fees? Will the government cut HEI funding in the financial fallout of Covid-19? Will institutions' REF profiles and the funding these can potentially bring become all the more vital as a result of such challenges?

It is no surprise that competition is fierce and there is a good chance that it will become even fiercer as time progresses.

6.3.4 The Negative and Positive Effects of the REF on Senior Executives Support for RME Implementation via PRME's Principle 6 (Dialogue)

The REF seems to be prompting senior management to encourage and support their academics to partner more and undertake more dialogue, for instance via the provision of impact-related training to their fellow academics.

> *Zoe-LNR: And yes, there's now training our schools; implemented the training of the whole university. But it just feels especially if you're early career that you are just pushed to do so many things at the same time. And even though you have a two-hour session where someone from the parliament comes and talks about how to interact with parliament, I find it not enough to really, at least for myself, to give the confidence to then issue one out to the UK Government and say hey I've got the solution. Especially if you are not from the UK, which a lot of researchers are - they are not UK born and raised. So, then sort of talking to the national government of a country you weren't actually brought up in feels even weirder. And also, with companies, I mean, you're supposed to sort of do almost sort of consulting things, and for all these different things you are supposed to attract the media.*

Aside from the perceived increase in workload, Zoe-LNR's statement highlights that engagement with UK-based organisations towards the possible generation of impact through research may be daunting for non-UK born academics. Such dialogues if moved forward could be the start of meaningful collaborations that are beneficial for the progression of RME in schools. It is then vital for senior executives to devise effective ways of delivering such training. The statement also highlights the benefit of the REF in taking academics out of their comfort zones - increasing their relevance and influence beyond self and peer groups to the broader society. While it can be seen on the whole as seemingly a step in the right direction, aspects such as extensive dialogue and collaboration outside the academic community will be new terrain for some academics, and thus it requires care lest it risks being exploited by senior executives should they use it as a performance management tool.

The said training on impact is perhaps an excellent opportunity for RME-oriented academics to stand up and be counted by baring the impact potential of RME-related research. Armed with Beer and Eisenstat's (1996) second principle for the effective implementation of change, they could put forward a moral and business case for the open discussion of adequate investment and support for related studies for consideration by senior executives. This dialogue part (PRME's principle 6) could result in meaningful partnerships (principle 5) with relevant parties within and outside their schools. It can allow them to explore innovative yet responsible ways of understanding the challenges for meeting social and environmental responsibilities and viable ways of addressing those.

All types of engagements, dialogues and partnerships are relevant in moving the RME agenda forward in UK business schools and beyond. However, one of the participants hinted that the time he spent in organising an RME/PRME related conference was implicitly regarded as a waste of resources (not useful) by a senior executive if that did not translate into 4* papers in top-tier journals for possible submission to the REF.

> *Nick-SLNR: "The conference that I ran last week accounts for nothing! Nothing in terms of career, nothing in terms of career progression. It's a line on my CV "I organised a conference," so what? Where is your 4* papers? That is literally, to be very blunt, I've been on the receiving end of this many times. That is what you will hear. Okay, so you wrote a chapter on RME in an RME book, where is that 4* paper? Okay, you wrote a 2* paper that went into the journal of X, where is that 4* paper? So, you've got to really make that decision, do I want to get ahead of my research and follow that trajectory? Or do I want to follow what I believe in and what I think I enjoy, which for me is RME, and accept that maybe it would take longer or be harder to get that career progression?"*

Nick-SLNR's statement resonates with the education-occupation link analogy, which Meyer et al. (2005) used to explain the idea that institutional environments consist of local structures, stating that at the individual level, one's life course or career is patterned around external models and associated definitions. Albeit the organisational level fits better with the excerpt. Ibid (2005, citing Meyer and Rowan, 1977) contend that the presence and legitimation capacity of rule-like exogenous models are essential for the creation and stability of all kinds of everyday structures. This might have been the standpoint of the senior executive that Nick-SLNR cited. The task to secure a high REF profile seems to require instrumentality logic, coercive pressure (implicit or explicit), expedience and the use of sanction to guide behaviour

(Scott, 2014). In other words, the REF cycle is time and resource bound, hence the need to spend the limited available resource(s) on productive activities such as the production of high-quality papers. Engagement not aligned to this end goal is probably wasteful and counterproductive for the institution's research strategy and a threat to one's career progression. Produce quality papers and increase your chance of progressing (reward), do otherwise and decrease that chance and face the punishment – implicit or explicit (e.g. change of contract, limited career mobility, cut in research time and increased teaching load).

Therefore, the researcher argues that the legitimacy capacity and presence of the REF is much stronger than that of RME via PRME due to its broader range of benefits, including obvious and direct monetary reward, reputation, and kudos (Torrance, 2020). Organisations live and die by the extent to which they conform to wider rules (Meyer et al., 2005). This assertion based on the study finding is partly dependent on the legitimacy capacity of external models, as non-conformance to RME/PRME does not seem to signal the potential end of a business school or university compared to the regulative influence of the REF.

Still drawing on Nick-SLNR's statement, the approach or outlook described is detrimental to RME advancement and therefore something that business schools and senior executives in universities need to address. Especially now that the REF administrators have decided to allow impact produced through teaching and related activities to be submitted for the REF2021 exercise academics and their institutions can certainly leverage relevant conferences around and about RME for the generation of quality outputs and impact case studies for the REF. However, that should not be the sole objective of conferences in this arena or they risk losing focus of what is important, which is the development of future responsible leaders that will make a positive and lasting impact on business and society. The REF, in this sense, can have an indirect negative influence on the progression of RME implementation in business schools via PRME's principle 6 (dialogue). RME implementation and advancement through dialogue should not be heavily reliant on specific individuals, so a much broader level of commitment is required to prevent the loss of momentum on this front should the individuals become unavailable (Burchell and Cook, 2008).

6.3.5 Little or no influence

Similar to section 6.2, the researcher did not identify a direct influence of the REF on senior management's support for RME implementation and advancement in UK business schools via PRME's principles 1 (purpose) and 5 (partnership). However, the effects discussed in the previous sections could have one or more implications for these two principles; readers can draw their inferences, but the earlier outlined criticism of the ambiguity of the principles is partly a contributory factor on this front.

However, 8 participants felt the REF had little or no influence on senior executive's pledge to support RME advancement through PRME. Below are related excerpts:

> *Louis-PR: "Zero"*
>
> *Bill-PNR: "I mean, as you gathered, I was pushing research quite hard as Dean. But in no time, did I say, therefore teaching and learning doesn't matter. I think a few staff thought that is what I was saying, but I wasn't because I would stand up and do a briefing going through our key quality indicators which we have now."*
>
> *Gale-SLNR: "Well, I don't see it myself. But then, you know, I do recognise that my perspective is incredibly limited because I'm not involved in the administration for the REF at all. I think that what all senior management want are points, and they don't really care if research is related to RME or not, to be totally honest with you."*
>
> *Rose-SLNR: "No"*
>
> *Rita-RNR: "No, definitely not. I think, you know, for the senior management team it comes down to their personality, to their personal interests."*
>
> *Pete-LNR: "So we get quite a lot of senior management support in as much as we sign up to PRME. We have a budget for PRME related stuff, things like that."*
>
> *Theo-LNR: "…in the school we have the Dean who has been with us for I guess a couple of years now, and she is a supporter of PRME and very much involved in it and see that as central to what we do."*
>
> *Sue-LR: "Yeah, I couldn't honestly say that I could see any influence on the management on that, connecting the REF and RME. But again, that may be just that I am not closer to senior management sort of discussions. So, it may be that that's just not something that I have an observation of.*

The above excerpts suggest that the senior executives at the institutions of eight participants at the time of the interview were perceived to be mostly supportive of the progression of their institutions' RME agendas regardless of REF-related pressures. It can be inferred that the level of support shown varies according to the subject/research areas of the senior executives, those aligned to the RME field arguably tending to show more commitment and support than others in a different subject area. So, we could argue that the support for RME implementation in UK business schools and probably beyond is spatial and temporal on the leadership front. This implies that a change in leadership could result in a change in the level of support provided to committed academics who have a keen interest in RME and its progression in their schools. The level of pressure and the ability of senior executives to manage this can also influence and determine the level of support to be received from them for RME implementation by committed academics in the RME field.

6.3.6 Summary

Having discussed the respondents' reflections on what they perceive to be the influence of the REF on business schools' senior executives' support for RME implementation in their institutions with the six principles of PRME as a lens, Figure 19 (below) encapsulates the finding.

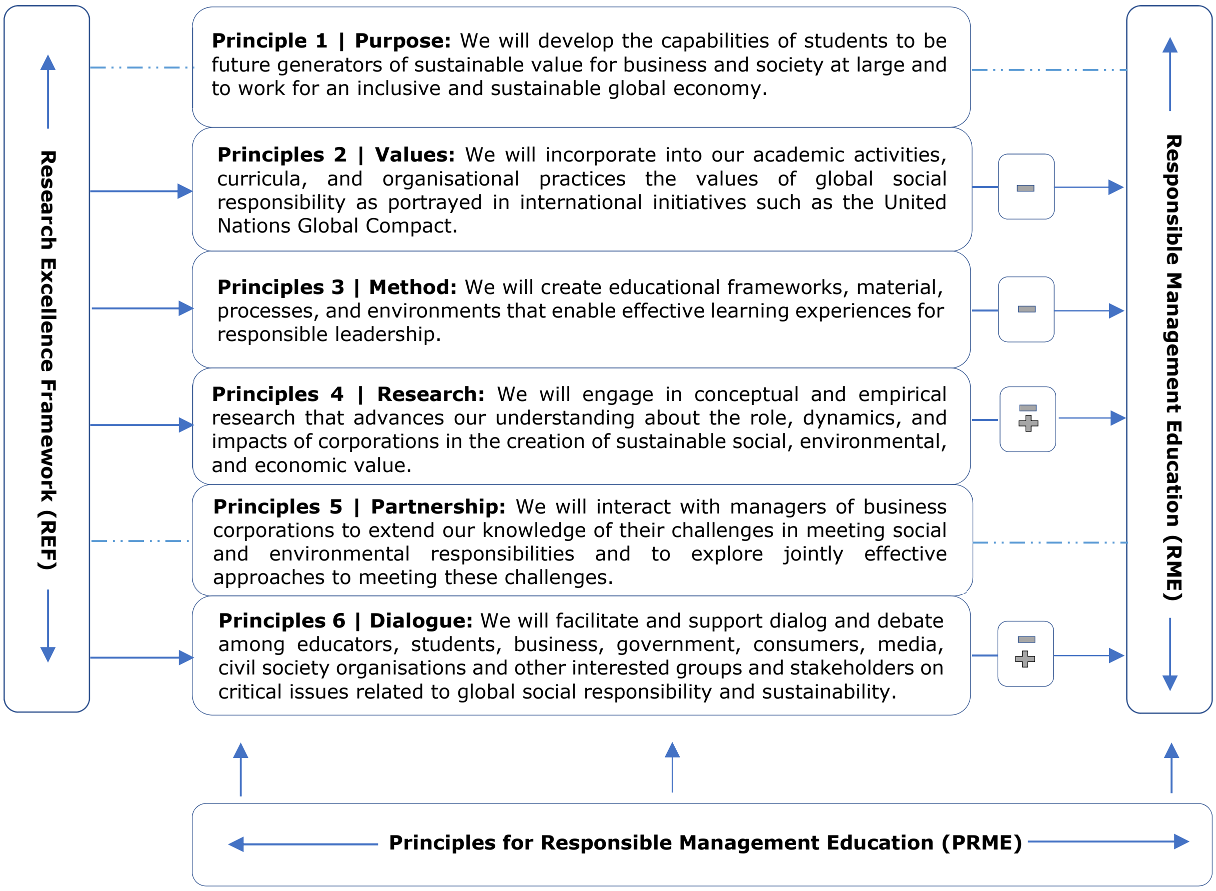

Figure 19: REF's Possible Influence on Senior Executives' Support for RME Implementation in UK Business Schools

Source: Compiled by Author (adapted from PRME)

It unpacks the mechanism via which the REF, directly and indirectly, can hinder and/or enable senior management's commitment and support for RME advancement in business schools and universities

As the figure above shows, it was found that the REF can influence senior executives' commitment to supporting RME implementation and advancement negatively via PRME's principles 2 and 3, negatively and positively via principles 4 and 6, with no direct influence via principles 1 and 5. They are all based on the mapping of the respondents' reflection on what they perceive to be the impact of the REF on business school senior executives support on RME implementation and advancement.

Figure 19 and 18 are similar, which means the identified influence of the REF on RME implementation (section 6.2) and business school senior executives support for its implementation and advancement (section 6.3) are similar. An exception was principle 6 (dialogue); the REF was found to impact on RME implementation in a largely positive manner, whilst its specific impacts on business school senior executive support for RME had a mixture of negative and positive impacts.

6.4 Chapter summary

Conclusively, the participants' perceived influence of the REF on RME implementation were mixed, and the identified influences were mostly unintended both in the positive and negative direction - the REF can be a barrier and also an enabler of RME when evaluated through the lens of PRME's six principles. The influences had more to do with processes, activities, and organisations (i.e. the doing) than actual internal commitment or interest. Specific to the study participants, they all seemed resolved to remain committed to their pledge to support RME implementation and its progression in their business schools regardless of REF-related pressures.

Furthermore, time was a recurring theme regardless of the signatory status of the institutions which goes to suggest that RME implementation is an important albeit a time-consuming activity. The same applies to the REF, although at the university level, not only at the business school level. Warin and Beddewela (2016) remarked about the fact that the time it will take a business school to implement RME depends on the level of RME it seeks to achieve. While this study cannot refute this, what did come out of the interviews was that time is an essential ingredient for all signatory types irrespective of the level of RME embeddedness they seek to attain.

It implies that basic signatories may not go in-depth in their quest to implement RME but still need ample time to achieve whatever level of embeddedness sought. Some may already practice RME in teaching, research and engagement terms, requiring minimal time to make those more visible and develop them further through membership with PRME (while being guided by its six principles). Other basic signatories may need more time than even Advanced signatories and PRME champions to develop related practices if starting from ground zero with no identifiable practice(s) that can be classed under the RME umbrella.

In addition, the annual service fee for advanced signatories and PRME champions may partly explain why there have been relatively high numbers of basic signatories (not limited to this study but rather globally, including the UK), with the possibility that some of these may in fact be operating at levels similar to their Advanced signatory counterparts. This could in turn partially account for the time requirements for RME identified amongst Basic signatory institutions employing some of the respondents in this study.

The next chapter of the thesis will focus on discussing the possible compatibility between the RME and the REF in the UK business school context.

CHAPTER 7: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATED TO THE PERCEIVED COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN RME AND REF

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This section presents the findings that emerged from exploring participants' perceptions concerning the possibility of both the REF and RME agendas being compatible in the UK business school context. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings presented.

First, participants were asked if they thought the REF was an important agenda for UK business schools and why that might be the case, or not. The question was posed to uncover the degree of importance that business school academics (working within the RME field) attached to the REF. Some studies such as Doherty et al.'s (2015) identified the REF as one of the key barriers hindering the progress of RME implementation in UK business schools. Therefore, the findings that emerge from this particular question may shed more light on Doherty et al.'s findings. It would also be useful for comparison purposes and might help business schools taking strategic decisions as far as the REF and RME are both concerned.

7.2 Academics' Perceived Importance of the REF to UK Business Schools

Most UK business schools consider the REF important - but to varying degrees, according to most of the study participants.

> *Bill-PNR: "…it [REF] is important for most, but not all. So, some decided to take part as they should. It shows that we are interested in things like that. So, either some business schools do very research-oriented stuff, not many of those. Or, also business schools which maybe are in universities that have various research, then they will assess it as important. But what happens in most universities and business schools is reasonably important, and you go to some, and it is very, very important, not to sound like it's a matter of life and death."*
>
> *Louis-PR: "For most schools, yeah! Not all. You know, some schools which are largely teaching, learning institutions, they might submit a few people to REF, but it's not a big deal. For places like X it's an absolutely, you know, it's really, really central to what we do."*

Considering the above statement, a business school arguably will be inclined to attach greater importance to the REF if its parent institution is a Russell Group member. It echoes Pfeffer's (1975) assertion, grounded in institutional theory, that organisations' (in this case, business schools) will align their behaviour, values and actions to those of the social system (universities) where they operate. It implies that business schools situated in Russell Group universities will likely pattern their behaviour, actions and values after the values, behaviour and actions of their parent institution. The same applies to business schools in non-Russell Group universities, who similarly do not operate in isolation but are subject to the rules and authority of the leadership at university, department and school levels.

Another factor that could inform/explain the degree of importance a business school or academic is likely to attribute to the REF is how convinced they are that the REF genuinely seeks to improve the quality of research in UK HEIs. The higher the conviction, the more likely they would deem it necessary.

> *Liam-PNR: "I think there has to be a mechanism to ensure that the research that is conducted is of at least of the threshold, high quality and that it does have some impact and, therefore, it's worthwhile doing."*

> *Lee-SLNR: "…if we understand REF as being a way of trying to improve the quality of research produced by business schools, then I would say yes, very much so."*

The degree of importance attached to the REF also depends on the extent it is deemed unavoidable because of the consequence of non-participation for business schools and academics. We are told that schools are made to formally commit to faculty research, even resource-starved universities (Meyer et al., 2005).

> *Mark-SLNR: "It's an unavoidable agenda, yes."*

> *Theo-LNR: "Well, it's not avoidable. I mean, business schools as far as I understand in terms of league tables and research and getting research income and attracting students, and attracting staff, the REF is unavoidable. So, yeah, it's a key agenda I suppose."*

Both statements suggest that the pressure for participation in the REF is mostly coercive. Drawing on Rasche et al. (2020) in the context of institutional theory, participation in the REF and associated activities, and the consequent influence on organisations' practices, are not natural processes, but are the result of existing institutional pressures which compel business schools and universities to behave a certain way in order to appear legitimate. These are coercive pressures.

In essence, business schools (institutional level) and their academics (individual level) seem to be impelled to take part in the REF. The more severe the consequences of non-participation (like losing a primary source of income), the more likely the REF will be deemed essential. As established, the REF via research offers schools more leverage than teaching (Durand and Dameron, 2011). So, the pressure it places on HEIs to compete for research funding can cause some business schools to decouple RME from their formal institutional structures. In that sense, the REF arguably is promoting coercive isomorphism in the operating environment of HEIs, including business schools. Coercive isomorphism is brought about by formal and informal pressures exerted on firms by the government, other organisations such as funding bodies or the environment. The pressures can relate to legal and regulations such as those related to health and safety, for instance (see Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). In this study context, HEIs have to conform to the requirements stipulated by the REF executives for the REF2021 exercise or risk sanctions such as non-participation in the assessment and consequently missing out on earmarked research funds. Participation does not guarantee an institution will be awarded funds for research purposes either, this being dependent on the quality grade attained in terms of stars – how many of their outputs and impact cases are judged to have 3* or 4* quality.

Theo-LNR's reference to league tables echoes Wilson and McKiernan's (2011) argument that business school senior executives use them as a reputational yardstick. Drawing on the literature review and the current study, we could argue that business school and their academics (RME-inclined) are under pressure to significantly contribute to both raising the REF profiles of their institutions and advancing RME implementation (Rasche and Gilbert, 2015), among other things. There are clear benefits related to both, albeit those of the REF seem to be more widely appreciated as more financially significant, and are therefore prioritised over RME in many cases where a choice has to be made. More comprehensive benefits of RME via PRME beyond accreditations need to be unpacked; the SDGs could be useful here.

The extent to which the REF can boost the reputation capital of a HEI and an academic determines the degree of importance it is accorded.

> *Pete-LNR: "Yes. I think because it's [REF] about prestige, it's about funding, absolutely it's very important. Should it be that sort of matter? But it is."*
>
> *Rose-SLNR: "It is important, but it shouldn't be important. That's how we get the fund, and that's how we maintain the reputation at the moment. But I think it's only Britain that is using this kind of system. Australia is having a similar one introduced recently, I*

think. Definitely, America doesn't have one although they do have accreditations. Irish don't have REF. I don't think Germany has, I'm not sure that French, Spanish, have. Japan doesn't have one, yeah."

Pete-LNR and Rose-SLNR's statements suggest that the REF will not be deemed essential but for its reputational value in terms of ranking, which has monetary value to institutions. How well one performs in the REF determines the funds that institutions receive from the REF and other funding bodies, and can help determine career trajectory for individual academics in terms of progression with attractive contracts across HEIs within and even beyond the UK. Undoubtedly, the REF has a reputation dimension to it. However, participation is required to exploit the associated benefit which comes in tiers (e.g. research or impact stars – 4*, 3*, 2* 1*). The reputation dimension is closely related to financial value.

Thus, the REF profile of an institution can either attract or repel[145] prospective doctoral and postgraduate taught students to the school. This argument is to an extent supported by Brankovic et al.'s (2018) comment regarding how universities (on a global scale) increasingly are utilising (inter)national rankings to develop a sense of 'scarcity of reputation' to attract talented individuals, as well as symbolic and material resources. Drawing on institutional theory, we could argue that the REF in many ways is reflective of the regulative pillar, with an instrumental logic (Scott, 2014) for its administrators and the HEIs (and their academics) that partake in its assessment exercise. Hence the importance attached to it.

However, participation in the REF does not automatically guarantee the enjoyment of both benefits – finance and reputation. The values to be derived from the REF can be positive (enhancing reputation) or negative (diminishing), and sometimes a combination of both. A combined value means having some pockets of additions (positive outcomes) and subtractions (adverse outcomes) across different UoAs. Figure 20 explains why participants felt the REF is an essential agenda for UK business schools.

It is believed that a business school that is situated in a Russell Group university will by default view the REF as an important agenda (see section 1 of Figure 20) since

[145] Which translate into income either generated or lost from tuition fees and perhaps other direct services the institution may have to offer (e.g. accommodation and catering).

their parent institution claim to be excellent in research. So, the REF in their view is an opportunity to demonstrate that excellence and accrue whatever benefits that are associated with participation in the REF exercise. The consequence of non-participation in the REF makes it unavoidable (see section 2) two of which includes the financial capital (see section 3) and reputational capital (see section 4) there are to gain or lose.

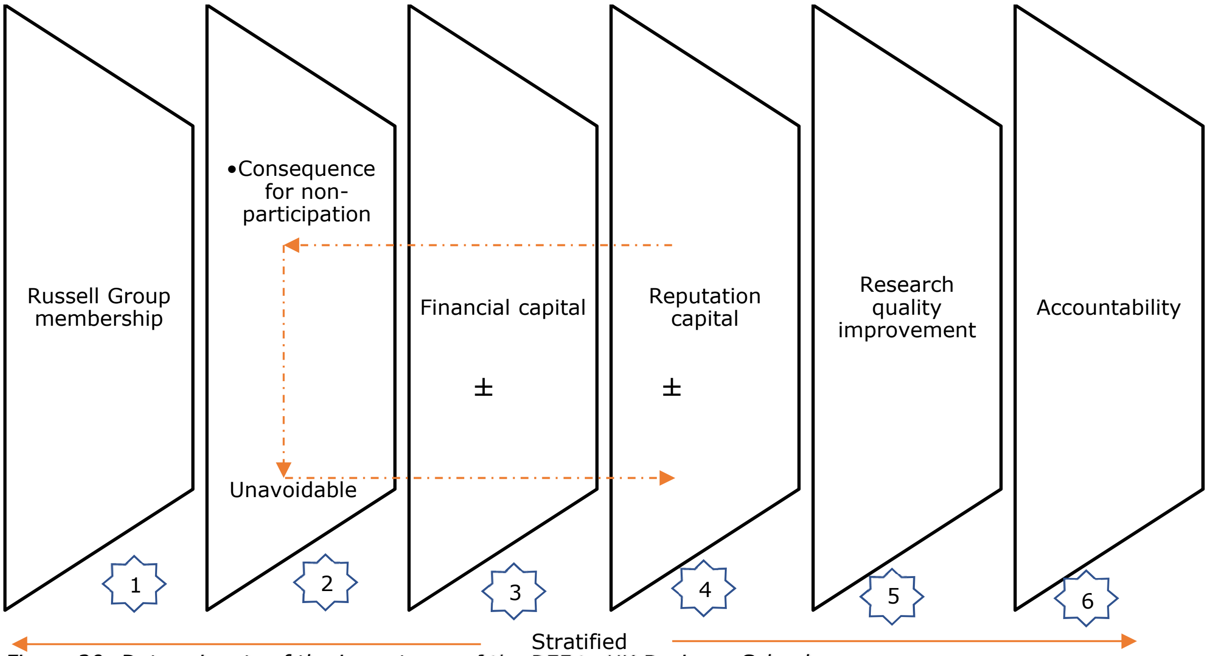

Figure 20: Determinants of the importance of the REF to UK Business Schools

Source: Compiled Author (based on study findings)

Also, a business school that believes that the REF is genuinely committed to improving the quality of their research (see section 5) and appreciates the need to demonstrate accountability for the funds received for research (see section 6) is likely to regard it as an important agenda. There is no hierarchical consideration in the outline of the determinants in Figure 20, and the framework is specific to this study as the determinants of REF's importance could vary across individuals and institutions. Likewise, the degree of importance attached to each of the determinants could vary with both individuals and institutions hence why it is stratified.

The REF result is in the public domain with easy access for all – poor performance can be seen, so can no result and participation. While the reputation and the research quality of non-participating institutions can be questioned, those of participating institutions can be judged outright since there are available data to do so, thus the consequence for poor performance can be harsher than those for non-participation. The financial consequence, while potentially significant in either case, are meanwhile likely to be more severe for non-participation, involving missing out on the entirety of the research funds the government makes available through the REF, rather than just getting a small proportion of said funds through poor performance.

However, REF-related performance and reputation are spatial and temporal – they can change over time, as can the identities of academics, mainly since identity-building occurs in a continuum and identity itself is reliant on the subjective meanings of the actions of individuals, groups or organisations (Lamont and Nordberg, 2014; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). It is not guaranteed that an academic that was REFable in REF2014, will be come the REF2021 exercise.

> *Zoe-L: "Being an academic is not just about REF, but the REF actually drives your career development. You know, whether you get promoted to certain points. For me, wanting to be a researcher doesn't get influenced by the REF, but I would get demoralised by it. And of course, that kind of policymaking does influence us…I started a full-time academic career around 2002/2003. The first probably five years I just published like hell, you know, in general, I wanted to become a rounded researcher. So, I did the editorial of the special issues, I did a book, I did different kinds of conference organising, I did a consultation report. I also took up a senior management role at the institution so that I will have a kind of mentoring where I'm mentoring more for researchers. So, that kind of different engagement does affect the output of my research…"*

The decision to submit all research-active staff and the reduced number of minimum outputs per academic to be submitted increases the chance of more academics partaking in the REF exercise. However, at the time of the study interviews the outcome of the Stern review recommendations was still unknown.

Academics and researchers, like HEIs, can access the monetary value of the REF primarily through the renegotiation of existing contracts in the same institution or negotiation of a new one in another institution. They can also partake in the sharing of research funds gained by their institution through proposals and bids (smaller amounts) to conduct "impactful" research at school or department level. Nonetheless, it appears that the financial value to be gained is dependent on the reputational value that they can muster from the REF, hence the importance of the REF cannot be judged in isolation of both values.

A few of the participants, though, seemed unconvinced of the importance of the REF to UK business schools. Consistent with Sayer (2014), some of the participants said the REF is merely a time-consuming and costly exercise, indicative of the government's mistrust of academics and their work.

> *Rose-SLNR: "…I think it's duplicating effort. I don't know whether you have published before or gone through any reviewing process to publish papers. So, I'm actually working on a revision for AMLE. You know, they do have three reviewers and editors, and they come back with, I don't know, say 7 or 8 pages of horror review, right. And we go through the reviews, you know, with the good journals we go through really rigorous ones. And not trusting this process and duplicating it again, you know, is a sign of distrust, I think. Also, when we apply for funding applications, again, we go through so much process. You know, there are so many steps to go through. I don't know, why do we need to evaluate again in terms of redistributing research money? I mean, auditing is quite important, but at the same time, I do feel like it's just excessive. And now that we have things like high citation index, so we can see how papers are cited. So, I just do feel it's a bit of a costly exercise."*

To others, it is an additional way the government wants to amplify their grip/control on the higher education sector in the UK, which could discourage innovation. The constant pressure to produce high-quality journal articles could prevent academics from engaging in risky/innovative areas of research (McCulloch, 2017; Willmott, 2011).

> *Sue-LR: It is because the university says it is; because the government says it is. I don't think it is a healthy agenda to be that focused on the way the measurements are put forward. But yeah, it's important because we have to take note of it, and because we have to get off and go through it. So, as I said, it is a bit of a big stick behind you, I think, as a framework, rather than it being particularly supportive or particularly accurate about what happens in business schools and universities more generally.*

Hence some questioned the suitability of the REF as the sole instrument for judging research quality in UK HEIs.

> *Bell-AsPR: "It's an important agenda, at least they treat it as such. If I personally think it's important? I think it's great to be able to demonstrate that the research that is done within your school is excellent research, but I don't know if the REF necessarily is and should be the only way to demonstrate that. There are many countries where they don't have the REF, and they do excellent research. And the research they do is not questionable."*

The division the REF seems to have promoted (and may still be encouraging in schools) with detrimental consequences for the academic community is another reason why its relevance to UK business schools may be in doubt.

Liam-PNR: "Well, it [REF] can create a division and people look over their shoulders and say well, that person has got three days a week to do research and I don't see them doing much. A lot of it may be completely unfounded, but it is how people think. And there are people who maybe spend most of their time teaching and you think well, I'm working my socks off to give them the time…to research, but what am I getting out of it? I'm just sort of maybe being a bit of a drama queen there in term of that, but it's that sort of sentiment. That then creates a division, and the division is compounded, I think if you aren't physically co-located. Because you don't see them, so you don't know what they are doing, and you think they are doing nothing (both laugh). But it's kind of human nature.

Liam-PNR's statement resonates with Butler and Spoelstra's (2014) work which explored the erosion of ethos in critical management studies informed by the regime of excellence. This was articulated by Jones et al. (2020) as thus: "[the Performative University] has led to divisions among university staff and also to a concomitant closed, anxious and defensive working climate…" (p. 369).

This seems to exacerbate an existing challenge.

Bell-AsPR: "…it is how it's [REF] being demonstrated at the moment and it's still kind of sort of, you know, creates groups of business schools, and you have the Russell Group university schools, and then the non-Russell Group. And the REF just kind of widens that gap in this sense."

A few others have applauded it for its quest for accountability and relevance via its impact dimension.

Gale-SLNR: "I do think that government has a stake in what research is undertaken in UK Universities. But I do think that they have a right to be able to say, you know, we want to make sure that this research is relevant."

The next section presents and discusses the findings relating to perceptions of the potential relationship between RME and the REF.

7.3 UK Business School Academics' Perceived Relationship between RME and the REF

This section of the thesis presents findings on the perceived potential relationship that exists between RME and the REF within the context of UK business schools that are signatories to the PRME initiative. It is divided into two parts - the first discusses where RME can support the REF and vice-versa, and the second part looks at where the REF does seem to hinder the advancement of RME and why.

The Oxford online dictionary defines complementarity as "a relationship or situation in which two or more different things improve or emphasise each other's qualities." The researcher adopted this definition for this study. The section below looks at the first part.

7.3.1 Ways that RME and the REF are complementary

Participants were asked to state possible ways they think the RME agenda could contribute to the REF. Most of the responses revolved around impact – the study participants felt that RME is concerned about creating tangible positive impacts on society more broadly. Its focus to equip future responsible leaders with the skills needed to address complex day-to-day challenges faced in today's work environments and instil in them ERS principles are reflective of its impact potential. Exposing students to RME-related contents/subjects increases business schools' chances of making tangible positive contributions not only to businesses (some of whom will be led by current and prospective business school students, including recent business school graduates) but also to society through the training and development of responsible leaders, professionals and citizens, vital to the fabric of society. As a global champion of RME, PRME's mission and vision also relate to this impact creation as far as reach and significance are concerned. Its commitment to support the realisation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further elevates RME's impact generation potential.

The REF, as reiterated throughout, is keen to ensure that UK HEIs generate tangible and measurable impacts through their research. More recently, it has decided to consider impacts generated through teaching and related activities.

Table 44 shows some of the ways in which respondents outlined impact as a potential relationship between RME and REF.

Table 44: Excerpts that Evidence Impact as a Potential Relationship between RME and the REF Agendas

Nick-SLNR: "I think it's got to be around research impact, I think that's the only way. I think if we want to be doing research on responsible management topics, then we have to demonstrate to the world if you like, that there's clear impact to be found from this kind of work. It's still a relatively new topic; we are talking about ten years since PRME. Since kind of the RME agenda, it has always been there to some degree - the teaching of ethics and CSR. But the explicit RME? Ten years, research-active for like maybe 5-6. I think going forward, we as management educators who work or research RME, we need to start quantifying how our research impacted our students and therefore, impacted the society beyond that… I think we need to start looking at how we quantify the impact of our research and being able to shout louder and say, actually, RME is a key part of business and management research. It's not a niche, you know, to do with education. It is actually core to what we do as educators, and here we can demonstrate the impact that we are having on society by involving our research and

students and people around that. I don't think we've been able to do that yet. I think maybe in the next 5-10 years we can start doing that. So, maybe not REF2021, but maybe whatever follows that, be able to write these better impact stories and then be able to demonstrate the importance of this topic…we could bring [RME and the REF] together very clearly, but I think it has to be the explicit decision by a business school to have to then go and devise their strategy around that. I think we are too far down the line now to do that for 2021. We are too far into our strategies."

Lee-SLNR: "…our research is organized into three main research themes. One is inclusive societies which resonate with RME. The second one is sustainable communities and cities, which resonates, again, with the SDGs. And the other one is related to, I can't remember the words, but it's related to health and wellbeing. And in the research strategy that was published in the first quarter of this year, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for research explicitly connected the university's research strategy with the SDGs…We have a concentration of something like 34 academics, who look at the connection between microfinance, social business, and health and wellbeing. And we do enter REF with that work. So, although I don't contribute to it, there is a connection there."

Guy-APNR: "So, to almost use the analogy of the fact that REF and RME are all about legitimacy for the business school. Where's our legitimacy if we do not stand up to ignorance and if we don't stand up to racism, harassment, bullying? All of these protectionisms, all of these knee-jerk reactions to uncertainty and complexity in the world? So, for me if anything, sustainability is about how to manage that uncertainty and complexity for our future generations. So, we're not only failing ourselves, we're failing our children and our children's children…But I do think there's an opportunity around impact in that increasing contribution of impact to the overall assessment I think I could leverage a research direction around RME much more."

Zoe-LNR: "…I think they are similar as they push for more…I'm thinking more about how universities are linked to society and what we do in a university is linked to the wider society. We do that in our RME because usually when we teach RME we end up interacting with societal actors much more. You know, you talk to your guest speakers, you might even do consulting for NGOs, all these kinds of things. And I think REF is sort of doing a similar thing with its research impact agenda to say, well, you can't just research in a bubble, and I mean it is in a sense saying you can't just teach in a bubble you have to think of all these other elements and think of how the ways you teach changes the way future managers, future leaders, future entrepreneurs are going about things and work with. And when you're doing your research, you have to think has that helped society to progress in any way? I think they could be compatible, I don't think they are as compatible as they could be at the moment…So, I think there is great potential, combining them and using each to advance the respective other agenda. And I don't think it's happening at the moment; they are like two separate things."

Gale-SLNR: "…I suppose that people do research into the pedagogy of RME and what works and what doesn't work. That could significantly impact teaching practices, and therefore, impact student who will then go out and put their new knowledge into the world. So, I could see how researching RME pedagogy could have an impact... [the REF] is forcing academics to think about who will benefit from their research, and so that forces you to go out into the world and to bring partners in. You know, Stern is all about having a partnership with people on the front line. And so, I think that it does force people to think of the stakeholders in their research which is really what RME is all about, to be honest with you, and how they can impact those stakeholders more effectively. So, I think it's very helpful."

Rita-RNR: "I think it could because ultimately what could happen potentially with the impact is if we are incorporating a greater amount of RME in our teaching, we then track these students, what industries they've gone into, what business roles they've gone into and how much impact they actually helped achieve. I mean, that's how I think, you know, do you want to put a limit on how these impact case studies are created really? Because ultimately, every university creates an educated individual who then goes out into the world, and we could just, you know, stay in touch with them."

Rose-SLNR: "…if they do any sort of SDG-related research, there will be quite an immediate impact, I think. You know, poverty or things like collaboratively researching with students. You know, sort of community engagement for example, that could be an impact case. Or, things like, you know, we have that social enterprise presentation and these days some sort of research investigating the processes of that engagement - students' engagement, and students themselves are actually making impacts. So, education for sustainable social enterprising is making students make the impact itself. That's quite a good impact case, I think. I don't know if X is doing that, but that could be a quite good impact case. Actually, having SDGs as a context of research, I can see a lot of potentials to make impactful research. I just don't do it personally."

Lisa-SLNR: "Well, given the current impact agenda, it's sort of quite concrete, it depends obviously on the nature of the research. But if its research which seeks to sort of identify a relationship between RME and for example sustainable development, and can then chart that relationship, which I would be interested to see. But I mean, that sort of attempt to identify some sort of correlation between what is taught in business schools and what is happening within business practice and economy and the sort of broader economy, then I could say that it could have an influence. Or have an impact in terms of what's understood within the REF."

Bell-AsPR: "…similar…I think there has been a little bit more emphasis put on sustainability research, of people who do sustainability research or RME type research. Because somehow it seems as they are making an impact and so all these people would be interesting to hire for the REF. So, maybe they're all relaxed in that sense currently, I don't know. I think my personal point of view as I said before is like there is definitely alignment between the idea of making impact and RME research. It's just I'm not sure currently the impact agenda of the

REF encompasses that so well…I think there is probably a lot that could be learned from people who already do RME research to inform the impact agenda. And you know, if they want to have a broader definition of impact, that's probably where they could look at already in terms of defining impact more broadly and what they mean by that." *Researcher's remark: RME-related research is not a niche but a core arm of business and management research. RME and the SDGs are, like the REF, concerned about creating lasting and far-reaching impacts across businesses and society. Therefore, UK business schools and universities can leverage both toward strengthening their REF impacts profiles and increasing their legitimacy. However, conscious and systematic documentation of related impacts and an explicit strategy from business school senior executives are needed to make this happen (for REF20201 and/or beyond). The SDGs could add much-needed granularity to the REF's definition of impact creation through research, teaching and related activities and outputs. The SDGs' impact capital could create the next research and impact stars considering their centrality to the survival and quality of life of current and future generations.*
Amy-APR: "…I have not heard it mentioned. Although the focus now on impact if you're deciding you want your research to have an impact upon society, then that I guess is going to encourage maybe certain practices that you could consider coming under the PRME umbrella." *Bill-PNR: "…introduction of impact of course as I suppose, ordinarily, faculty members are concerned with it. It's just another thing to cope with. So, they are similar in that sense..."* *Sue-LR: "But certainly, impact would be the closest thing and I don't think that RME was ever really sort of discussed in that way...I guess you would have to do some work to look at impact on students going forward. And I'm not sure that the way that our students are followed up is quite set up for that at the moment. But certainly, I think a project could be set up to do that. That could potentially feed into the REF, and actually could be a good thing to do. But I think the way the impact cases work as well; you have to show the publications…it's all still about publications."* *Louis-PR: "When I saw your area - you are looking at REF, I thought, I'm not sure that there's much of a link-up there at all. Now, there might be. I mean, one area that obviously would be of interest to REF panels would be an impact case study around ethics and sustainability, not specifically around RME because I don't think that would count. You know, just the fact that you might have done an awful lot in your curriculum wouldn't count as an impact case study. But impact case studies that were based on ethics and responsibility I think probably would be of interest. So, that's where the potential link between the agenda occurs. But you've got to remember that REF is just simply agnostic about what sort of research and where it's done, it's just looking for excellent research. It's not saying it should be in these particular areas.* *Researcher's remark: The current study is the first to explore RME and the REF side-by-side in the UK business schools context, reinforcing its novelty and significance. This claim is also supported by the latter parts of Zoe-LNR and Rose-SLNR's statements above, insofar as it opens the debate for educators in the RME field to consider closely students related impacts generated through RME-related research and teaching and how those contribute to the broader impact requirements of the REF, include related PRME engagement and activities. Though RME could strengthen the REF impact profiles of business schools who are committed to progressing the RME agenda and are signatories to the PRME initiative, the requirement to generate impact through research of any sort is an extra burden that academics must shoulder. Publications and associated metrics are believed to be core parts of the REF assessment considerations for its additional component impact, as highlighted by Sue-LR. This links back to the REF exacerbating an already difficult situation for academics, and the notion of the performative university (Jones et al., 2020). By their profession's nature, academics are conditioned and committed to creating impact through their research and teaching practices, so the big brother monitoring in the guise of REF impact is not needed. Louis-PR's statement is a reminder that the REF did not acknowledge teaching-related impacts in the REF2014 exercise. If it did, it would have been far less compared to research-related impacts that it prioritises. This may not be the case for the REF2021 exercise, so this could be an area for future studies to explore. Furthermore, Louis-PR's statement reinforces the argument that ERS is impact laden, so to this extent REFable, independent of the pedagogical and disciplinary dichotomy.*

Source: Author (based on raw interview data)

Hence, RME and the REF are perceived as complementary in terms of both agendas' commitment to impact creation. Based on the study participants responses, we can argue that UK business schools that are PRME signatories can potentially generate REFable impacts through research around RME (including ERS-related research) and the 17 SDGs. This finding supports Doherty et al.'s (2015) assertion that RME can strengthen the impact profile of business schools in the REF2021 exercise, as it is concerned about the impact of business on the environment and broader society. Research agenda is a viable avenue that should be explored by business schools, universities and their academics who are keen to institutionalise RME, as much as they utilise teaching and related activities for this purpose (Warin and Beddewela, 2016).

RME-related seminar(s) can support the impact agenda of the REF if the resultant outcomes are consciously and carefully documented and quantified, as the statement below suggest.

> *Rita-RNR: "You know, there's so many different ways. Just take, for instance, I mentioned the ethical X project that I was involved in. So, running educational seminars for them about the negative impact of X[146]. You know, so if we can sort of say this is what they were doing before we ran our seminars. After our seminars, you know, what the increase there was in the amount of jewellery that was sourced from responsible sources, you know, that kind of thing. So, my area is about responsible management ethical consumption, so, it's in that area anyway. So, it's not as difficult for me to sort of think about ways of how that could be impactful."*

<u>RME-related conferences and seminars have the potential to support the REF and its quest for impact creation.</u> The senior executive referenced in Nick-SLNR's statement in section 6.3.4 of this thesis seemed to have implied that related conferences are irrelevant if those do not materialise to impact creation. RME-related seminars and conferences could yield REF-able impacts. However, the number of academics willing to organise or attend such conferences may increasingly decline in schools if impact creation becomes their sole purpose and academics feel the related pressure is rather too much. The researcher argues that conferences and seminars are vital avenues that could strengthen the nexus between theory and practice, bridging the perceived divide between academics and practitioners. Hence the tension identified regarding impactful events is deemed another possible way the REF can negatively influence senior executives' support for RME implementation and generally hinder its integration in some business schools, at least as far as wider engagements through events are concerned.

Drawing on Zoe-LNR's comment (see Table 44), <u>RME-related research could help increase the number of papers related to not-for-profit organisations for the REF2021</u>

[146] Relates to the respondents' core research focus, which risks revealing her identity, breaching confidentiality agreement.

exercise or subsequent one. As previously mentioned in Table 22, the REF2014 summary result for the Responsibility and Sustainability sub-field of UoA 19 reported that this area was significantly under-researched.

Students' exposure to and involvement in RME-related contents and activities respectively could support the impact agenda of the REF (see Sue-LR's remark in Table 44). However, it has to be established that related outcomes (e.g. business and/or societal changes/differences) are primarily attributable to the RME-related contents that current students are exposed to, or recent graduates undertook during their study at the business school or university. This finding is supportive of Kneale et al.'s (2016) call for the REF to recognise pedagogic research and associated impacts as being as relevant and valuable as any other research and impact; a positive change here is likely to have a ripple effect on pedagogy in higher education.

There was a sense that the SDGs could enrich the RME agenda, increasing its ability to strengthen the REF impact profiles of UK business schools (see Lee-SLNR and Rose-SLNR's remark – Table 44). These RME-related REFable impact case studies and associated papers can then raise the visibility of RME and progress its integration in these schools since they will be publicly available on REF's online database like other research outputs.

> *Liam-PNR: "Well, I think the more articles that get into top-ranked journals, the more likely it is that they will appear on peoples' radar. That will then stimulate more thinking in the first instance about what stance are we? For example, as an institution, if we are just about a consumer of that research in the first instance? And what might we do differently as a result? So, you see, what I don't know is to what extent."*

Therefore, the REF can legitimise RME as a field and related research outputs (from pedagogical or disciplinary research – see section 7.3.2 below).

> *Bill-PNR: "Absolutely! Absolutely! It would legitimise it as a topic, as subject. And again, at the moment, I still think pedagogical research is seen as a poor relation to Applied Organisational Research. You know, there's fuss about the people who can't go out there and work with companies, work within the business school. Whereas for me it's the most important place. You know, if you don't get your house in order first, then we are churning out 650 business management students a year. If we are not equipping them with skills to go on and be responsible managers and leaders, then what's the point of all the other research we are doing? There's no point to going and looking at CSR in organisations because we know what's gonna happen because we are not producing the right kind of*

managers. So, we will be writing more reports about how CSR is not well embedded in organizations because it's not! If we are not embedding it in our faculties."

While both types of RME-related research (i.e. pedagogic and disciplinary) have been differentiated briefly in this study, it is an area that needs to be unpacked, underscored in section 7.3.2. We cannot attain much progress around the disciplinary arm (in organisational settings) if we ignore the pedagogical aspect due to journal ranking politics, which seems to be fuelled by the REF (intentionally or unintentionally), and perhaps some funding bodies too through their requirements.

Drawing on Bill-PNR's statement above, HEIs, through the calibre of students they develop, inform what goes on in businesses to a large extent. These businesses, in turn, inform society as a vital piece of its fabric, as are prospective and current students, and graduates. We need to get our house in order to get it right outside – i.e. to generate tangible impacts at the societal level is perhaps the message[147] for UK business schools that seek to create REFable impacts via RME, and the REF can facilitate this process. Current selective administration of the REF at business school, university and REF panel levels is detrimental to the impact agenda of the REF through research (see section 7.3.2).

The need to strengthen the teaching-research nexus is also implied in Bill-PNR's statement above and reinforced by the statements below. <u>The REF can foster the integration of RME through the recognition and acceptance of teaching-related impact case studies.</u>

Bell-AsPR: "…if teaching becomes part of the impact agenda and education is recognised as a significant way through which academics make an impact, then yes, it can have a completely positive influence. Otherwise, no. Because teaching will remain seen as a second class activity and that's it…"

Sue-LR: "I think that REF has the potential to do more, but of course REF covers all different subjects, not just business management. And so, I think that the way that business management as a unit of assessment was taken up, I think RME would need to be part of the criteria or simply made more explicit in the guidance to help schools show what they're doing in that way. I think that's something that although it's a research evaluation framework, I think that how we link our research and teaching should be perhaps more in there than it is currently. And again, I think that would help us to legitimize working on these things and connecting them in a bit more than they currently are."

[147] These are the researcher's views relating to the respondent's statement and therefore open to interpretation; not absolute.

Sue-LR (above) suggests precisely how this can be done for the business and management studies unit of assessment (UoA 17 – REF2021, was UoA 19 for REF2014 exercise).

<u>The REF in its attempt to coin a working definition for impact for the next research assessment exercise could look to RME and the SDGs for inspiration, enabling an even more inclusive and comprehensive definition</u> (see Bell-AsPR's remark – Table 44). The terms "influence" and "outcome" differ from impact – neither can replace the latter (Francis, 2010; White, 2010) but they can be developed into it (Duryea et al., 2007). They are precursors of impact, not the last causal chain in research (Khazragui and Hudson, 2015). The idea of a broader definition mirrors some authors' (e.g. Penfield, 2014; Martin, 2011) viewpoints about impact meaning various things to institutions, groups, and individuals. Thus, impact is multifaceted and can be created via different pathways, even if ascertaining the causal routes from research to impact remains a challenge (Phillips et al., 2018).

The relevance of the SDGs to the sustenance of humanity (both current and future generations) is a strong rationale for their consideration in the way suggested (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). Moreover, a more inclusive approach to impact will ensure that the element of surprise that sometimes comes with research is not lost. It could also eliminate or reduce the risk of some academics forcing their research to yield impacts instead of allowing them to happen naturally.

> *Lisa-SLNR: "…I think the impact agenda is a problem…because it's looking for specific effects."*

Therefore, we can argue that <u>RME enriched by the SDGs could cushion the pressure that academics face to generate impact through research, thereby preventing/curbing game-playing behaviours</u> (see Chapter 3). This is predicated on the REF taking advantage of what both could offer as far as its construction of the term impact is concerned – one that is more inclusive and comprehensive, not favourable to a few or narrow. The anticipation of knowledge creation for the common good is one of the fundamental reasons why universities undertake and pursue excellent research (Penfield et al., 2014). Game-playing behaviour, which may be informed by a narrow definition of impact, or the pressure on academics through requirements to explicitly state the impact(s) of their research and related outputs even before those are commissioned can take away the element of surprise generally associated with research. However, RME, supported by the SDGs, could help preserve that. The comprehensive and more inclusive definition of "impact" it could help frame within REF will remove the "specific effects" aspect (factored in Lisa-SLNR's statement above), in turn giving RME greater funding recognition via the REF and so reducing some of the disincentives HEIs have to research in (and embed) RME.

The wider engagement and dialogue which the REF seeks to promote and seems to have encouraged on the research front in HEIs could support RME, since those are elements are central to its agenda (see Gale-SLNR's remark in Table 44). It mirrors Mathieson's (2015) study that found that the REF had increased the attention that HEIs pay to public engagement via its impact element. Stakeholder engagement is also one of the strategies that participants in Marcella et al.'s (2018) study employ to maximise the impact generation capacity of their research. Therefore, RME can facilitate the partnership and dialogue which the REF seeks to promote across HEIs via its impact agenda, thereby bridging the perceived divide between academics and practitioners (Avenier and Cajaiba, 2012; Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2012).

Impact, as the primary relationship between RME and the REF offers RME inclined academics a strong business case that could help them secure relevant resources (from wider sources) they might require to create tangible impacts through their research. Again, research is another viable way of furthering the integration of RME in UK business schools, universities and beyond. However, balance is needed as the sole fixation on impact could result in underperformance in other aspects of their academic jobs.

> *Rita-RNR: "It is probably supporting because I suppose you were able to apply for a lot more resources to actually create a case study. So, in some way that I guess is more of a support than a hindrance. But again, you know, it's another aspect that we have to engage with, that we probably wouldn't otherwise, you know. You have to understand in terms of our daily jobs the more emphasis we put on the case study - the impact and the research, means that probably the other side of other things - our jobs, is suffering as a result of that."*

Rita-RNR's statement if anything reveals the bargaining power of impact. Academics working within the RME field and indeed other areas in business schools and universities can secure the support needed to progress their research practices much further if they can demonstrate the positive influence achieved through a piece of research (Donovan, 2011). The higher the impact capacity of a study, the higher the support/income to be received (Herbst, 2007).

PRME, as a global champion of RME, has since progressed from being mostly an initiative that catered to business and management schools to including universities and other institutions. This means that RME and the SDGs are not peculiar to business schools; they cut across disciplines and are therefore well-positioned to promote interdisciplinary research which the REF is keen to foster. Such collaborations can catalyse the creation of impact through research.

> *Zoe-LNR: "But for me, it is always, again, the perspective on how we can make sure that universities play viable, necessary, and relevant roles in society. And I think in that sense they can be combined. I also think where they could combine their effort or help is to create more interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary research within universities. If they don't sort of push towards working together and not start turning universities into silos that they then call a school, a department, but to, you know, work together on progressing things for society."*

7.3.2 Ways the REF seems to hinder the integration process of RME and why

Despite what seemed to be a huge consensus about impact as the primary potential relationship between the RME and REF, there were a few doubts about the extent to which RME and the REF can complement each other in that manner primarily because RME is widely regarded as pedagogic rather than disciplinary research. The REF supposedly does not value the former as much as it does the latter (see Chapter 3), which may dissuade business school, senior executives, from considering such research as part of their REF submissions.

> *Louis-PR: "I would think it's unlikely to make much contribution, to be honest. Partly because as I've already said a number of times now it's pedagogic research. Now, if I suppose you did some research and you demonstrated that the very best way to teach ERS is like this, with perhaps much more effective learning and so forth, and everybody shifted and said okay we must do this, then that would be a major change. Clearly, you could identify impact. But, you know, I'm not aware of anybody doing that kind of research and likely to submit it as a REF case study…Well, clearly it can if you've got good examples of changing organisational and perhaps societal culture, behaviour and so forth. So, there's no reason why ERS research shouldn't be a part of the impact case studies. Again, I'm afraid I just don't know whether it was in 2014, whether there are any good examples of ERS type research that, you know, weren't reckoned to be a top-rated impact case study."*

Bill-PNR: I think it's a bit of a challenge. However,...I always encouraged colleagues who are never gonna be REFable still to publish, because it shows that they are alive, and it gives them some rounded profile. So, if students look up our profiles and see nothing is going on and think oh, do I want to go there for a masters degree or even my undergrad. I think if you've got colleagues who have developed ideas in RME, there are some great chances for publishing something even if it is in one of the book chapters in a RME book. You can publish something there or in other journals, you know, maybe 1 or something like that. But for reasons said earlier, it's a bit more difficult to get into a high-status journal if you are going down the education route in any subject like that.*

Interestingly, Louis-PR (in respect to the comment directly above) and Bell-AsPR (see Table 44) were in business schools whose parent institutions were (and still are) Russell Group members. While Bell-AsPR pointed out RME-related research's potency to significantly contribute to REF impact, Louis-PR hesitantly agreed to the idea only if the study is ERS-related (three main strands of RME) and yields tangible organisational and/or societal change. Those in his view are more applied than RME-related research which he interpreted as a study into how well ERS-related contents/subjects are developed and taught to students.

Similarly, Bill-PNR (in respect to the above comment), like Louis-PR, is a professor and was returned for the REF2014 exercise. He felt that RME-related outputs would less likely contribute to the impact component of the REF because top-tier journals are accepting them less as they are thought to be pedagogical research. It reinforces the call to question why journal ranking is considered in the selection of research outputs that are submitted to the REF at business school and university levels. Again, most of Panel C's sub-panels (including UoA 19) claimed they did not use journal list in their evaluation of the quality of the outputs received for the REF2014 exercise. As professors, we can say both respondents have been in academia for too long for us to easily dismiss their claim as unfounded. Moreover, there are empirical studies that reinforce the assertion that pedagogical research seems to be undervalued by the REF and is less accepted by top-tier journals (see Webb and Tierney, 2019; Lingwood et al., 2018; McCulloch, 2017; Kneale et al., 2016; Cotton and Kneale, 2014).

Another respondent hinted that theoretical research is probably regarded as less impactful than applied research, and RME-related research could be both.

Gale-SLNR: "...the kind of research that can come under RME is so broad and so massive. It can be very much at the theoretical level (i.e. trying to define what responsible *leadership actually means, or certain terms mean). And so, in that case, it might not be quite so impactful as if you were doing something further down the line which is very applied (i.e. looking at responsible leadership development programs which are being implemented and how you can make them better). So, you know, your research in RME could be very theoretical or it could be very impactful…"*

Does the REF and UK HEIs value empirical research more than theoretical research? If they do, we can infer that RME-related research (whether pedagogical[148] or disciplinary[149]) that is applied probably has a higher chance of being recognised as having a higher impact generation capacity than theoretically based ones, and predict that the pedagogical aspect may feature more prominently in the forthcoming REF2021 and/or subsequent exercises.

Bell-AsPR: "…if teaching and education were to start counting as impact; I think that's where there would be a natural link. You know, being able to evidence that through your teaching and following the RME principles, you've been able to influence hundreds of youngsters in terms of how they think of particular problems or potential career path that they might follow. Or the type of jobs or positions or things they are considering, the type of research projects they do for their summer dissertations or whatever. I think there's just a natural fit! It would just completely make sense, and it has in many classrooms where I've been involved; not just myself but with colleagues. I think it's always amazing when you have a student who says actually I wasn't aware of all these debates, or it's the first time I heard the word sustainability, and actually now I want to go back and do something about it.

As mentioned earlier, teaching-related impact was not allowed in REF2014 but is now permitted for the REF2021 exercise. Hence it is an area that business schools and universities could exploit, and RME can be instrumental here; it could boost the impact profile of such schools in the subsequent REF exercises (Doherty et al., 2015).

<u>The excessive performativity associated with the REF can be counterproductive to its desire to create various forms of impact through research and related activities and outputs.</u> Performativity[150] here are those targets, assessments and performance indicators linked with the evaluation of the quality of teaching and research in higher education. In academics, it takes the guise of increased workload to comply with audit and self-reporting procedures. One detrimental effect of performativity is that

[148] Research into how RME-related contents such as Ethics, Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability (i.e. ERS) are being taught to students, learnt by students and embedded into the curriculum, including associated assessments as well as outcomes/impact on students, organisations and society.
[149] Discipline specific research about or around ERS - ethics, responsibility, and sustainability, within organisational settings.
[150] A concept coined by Ball (2003, p.216) "to designate a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation… [in which] the performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as…displays of "quality" ...As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization" (cited in do Mar Pereira, 2016, p. 104).

it pushes academics and schools to value certain aspects of academic work (e.g. research) more than others which are equally important (e.g. teaching) due to internal and external pressures such as the REF. Thus, it is viewed by many as a source of resentment - an unjustified attack on the professionalism and autonomy of academics; the loss of trust in professionalism (Macfarlane, 2017; Murray, 2012).

The current study has established that RME can support business schools and their academics with raising their REF impact profile just as Doherty et al. (2015) predicted. However, ample time is a key ingredient required for this to happen via RME.

> *Bell-AsPR: "Again, I think it's sort of being mindful of this idea of time, and I think the REF has a time frame that's quite narrowly defined. And the RME agenda in terms of impact, you know, you would have to think about long-term impact. So, in terms of compatibility, yeah, you have to think about those time frames and yeah, I don't think necessarily pushing people down the route of been obsessed with outputs to evidence impact is necessarily compatible with actually delivering impact."*

> *Gale-SLNR: "…So, the REF says process, you've got to submit lots and lots of journal articles, you've got to demonstrate impact; we don't care where you do that. We don't really mind what the content is, it's just numbers essentially in terms of starred journals, amounts of impact…"*

Consequently, academics that are RME-inclined could focus on other research areas they deem relatively easier to create REFable impact in the shortest space of time (see Bell-AsPR's statement above). It could cause them to avoid longitudinal research despite their relevance (Murphy and Sage, 2014); this may hinder the integration of RME. The coercive pressure experienced by Bowring (2008) for the RAE is also reflected in Bell-AsPR's statement above. REF-related pressures in business schools and universities are not distinctive to RME-inclined academics. Their counterparts in other disciplines and research areas seem to be under similar pressure to target 3* and 4* journals as identified from the extensive literature review completed (see Chapter 3). However, the issue seems to be compounded by the fact that RME outputs often have a pedagogic dimension. Not only are there only limited number of journals that are accepting of those outputs; most are not within the 3* or 4* category either.

A question worth asking is, should journals be the core drivers of research, or should the type and are of research and related outputs mainly inform journal choice? A model that encourages academics to pattern their research and/or associated outputs against specific journals that are not necessarily akin to their research areas and interests just because they are 3* and/or 4* is restrictive and likely very counterproductive as far as impact creation is concerned. This is on various levels, including individual, organisational (business schools and universities), and societal levels.

The REF panel may maintain that they did not focus on the ABS journal ranking list for the REF2014 exercise and will not do so for the next one, REF2021. If senior executives and academics in business schools and universities believe these claims are another thing; it appears that trust is a scarce ingredient as far as the administration of the REF (within and outwith HEIs) is concerned (Marcfarlane, 2017; Watermeyer, 2016; Murray, 2012). Why else, if the REF panel claimed they did not use the ABS journal list to evaluate the submissions received for the REF2014 exercise and are not keen on this for the REF2021 exercise, is there the perceived obsession of senior executives with 3* and 4* journals? Pressure to meet technical demands creates a tendency for leaders (even well-intended leaders) to avoid value commitments, resulting in technical imperatives seen as ends in themselves. This causes organisations to drift and be exposed to vagrant pressures, readily influenced by short-run opportunistic trends and compromising their position as vital coherent social institutions even if they survive (Besharov and Khurana, 2015, p. 12, citing Selznick, 1957; 1996).

The research grants awarded are seemingly reflective of the list, which might explain the continued pressure from senior executives on academics to predominantly target top-tier journals predominantly. Bear in mind that most institutions depend on these grants for their survival, even more so with the financial challenges likely to arise from the economic fallout of Covid-19, or the potential loss of a large proportion of fees from prospective students from the EU after Brexit for instance. With these financial pressures compelling institutions to prioritise attaining generous funding via REF, how in turn does an academic in the RME field create impact by forcing their research and related outputs to speak to star-studded journals, when they can attain a wider reach and significance through papers that speak to the right audience though published in “low status” but appropriate journals?

We are told that "…the content and quality of a piece of work is less important for [the REF] than its performance according to purely quantitative criteria, such as the rating of the publication outlet which it appears or the number and frequency of citations it attracts" (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014, p. 538). This is a good reflection of the Performative University, dominated by targets, "enacting aspects of quantification and the ideal of perfect control and fabrication" (Ball, 2003, cited in Jones et al., 2020, p. 363).

Arguably, academics have experienced more coercive pressure on the REF account, mainly due to its impact element, than they did with its precursor, the RAE. This is an area that could be explored by future studies.

Having presented the findings related to what is perceived to be the potential relationship between RME and the REF, the following section summarises the key findings.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the findings relating to participants perceived importance of the REF to UK business schools to better understand the underlying meanings and drivers of some of the activities/behaviours/attitudes related to the REF. It proceeded to present and discuss the findings related to the potential relationship between RME and the REF. That is both where commonalities were identified, which could lead to RME and the REF complementing each other, and where the REF seems to hinder the further integration of RME across business schools.

While the majority of the study participants believed that RME and the REF are complementary as far as impact is concerned and therefore are compatible, a few felt they are incompatible because one is more inclined to teaching (RME) and the other to research (REF). Both are primary aspects of academic work in the higher education sector and historically have been viewed as being at odds with each other. However, compatibility or incompatibility in the context of both agendas is not a fixed/permanent state – it varies with space/location, time, and leadership (people). It means that even if they are found or said to be naturally supportive and compatible, these three factors could render it otherwise. Conversely, fair winds in any of these factors could to an extent help to overcome challenges associated with the REF. Of the three factors, leadership/people is arguably the most crucial factor as it controls/influences the other two greatly. This factor also greatly influences the resources provided to progress both RME and the REF (independently, aside from their compatibility).

Overall, the REF can support the integration of RME across UK business schools. Likewise, RME can support the impact agenda of the REF, and potentially enhance its administration at the REF panel level and at business school and university-wide level. This is to a large extent because of its strong ties to the SDGs. PRME, with the support of the United Nations, is a global champion of RME and the SDGs.

The claim that "no major actors attempt to compel organisations to adopt a given structure, either through law or through withholding critical resources" (Mohamed, 2017, p.155, 156) does not necessarily hold in this study context. The REF as far as UK HEIs' research and related activities are concerned is a major actor. It compels HEIs (implicitly and arguably explicitly), including business schools, to either partake in its assessment exercise or forfeit a critical resource (funding) crucial to their survival. The fact that it is not guaranteed that participating institutions will all receive this vital resource makes it a double whammy for these institutions. The same applies at the individual level. A lot of resources and efforts goes into preparing and organising for the REF. To put in all the work and not get any funding is an issue, when a decision could have instead made simply not to participate but without having to pay the opportunity cost of lost productive time. The current study identified that critical resources such as time and grants could be withheld by powerful actors (senior executives) if academics do not comply with prescribed structures as far as research is concerned. Business schools do not necessarily rely on PRME for critical resources, albeit it is instrumental in the achievement of certain accreditations such as AACSB. RME, then, does not "compel organisations to adopt a given structure", but it is a different matter for the REF at national (UK government), institutional/organisational (business schools and universities), and individual (academics and senior managers/executives) levels.

Consequently, the idea that dominant models are reflective of the interests and powers of the strongest actors in institutional environments (Meyer et al. 2005) appears to hold for this study. The dominant model between the REF, and RME/PRME is the REF, whose outcome is the primary source of income for UK higher education institutions. The UK government, central to its operation, is a powerful institution both nationally and globally, and includes the funding bodies behind REF-related rewards. In additional to its financial rewards, the REF also offers HEIs strong legitimacy and reputational benefits.

RME via PRME too has legitimacy capacity, but that outshines any financial gain that business schools and HEIs can derive from adopting the initiative toward the development of future responsible leaders. In the world of responsible management education, the United Nations via PRME is the strongest actor compared to other initiatives in this field. It did a lot to spur a significant uptake of PRME towards the implementation of RME in business schools (and other HEIs) worldwide. Its influence continues to rise and is likely to be sustained for the foreseeable future owing to the SDGs agenda.

Similarly, the REF will presumably maintain its influence on UK HEIs because of its financial, reputational, and even legitimacy capital. Its impact component arguably makes it challenging to dispute or completely rule it out as a useful assessment framework for judging the quality of HEIs research. Should it like some other organisations commit to promoting and championing the SDGs agenda through relevant policies, that will likely enhance its relevance further within and outside the UK. This presumably will entail its operations and practices move within the boundaries of ERS principles, including the review of its policies, processes, requirements, and guidance to ensure those are not counterproductive to the realisation of the 17 SDGs. For example, they should not directly and/or indirectly encourage inequalities – those should not be associated with the REF and what it is about. Instead, it should promote inclusion, which it can do by debunking the notion that applied research is better than other types of research, or that some journals are better than others, or impact created through RME is perhaps inferior to other impacts. The REF could then bridge the divide between research and teaching; both are relevant and should complement/inform one another.

The researcher recognises that the REF was set up predominantly for the assessment and enhancement of research as opposed to teaching. Nevertheless, it should not prevent its administrators from leveraging opportunities where they are identified, such as bolstering the impact element with RME and the SDGs in the manner described in section 7.3.1; flexibility while maintaining the core mission and values of the REF is required.

We now move onto Chapter 8 – the final chapter, which focuses on conclusions and recommendations drawn from preceding discussions.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides a robust conclusion of what we have learnt from this study and key takeaways based on the study findings. Again, the current study aimed to explore academics' perceptions and experiences of the REF to uncover its possible influence on the implementation/advancement of the RME agenda in their business schools.

Relevant recommendations are proffered to key stakeholders as far as the improvement and advancement of RME integration and the administration of the REF within and beyond the UK business school context are concerned. An outline of the contributions of the research project and a recap of the limitations are provided. The chapter then concludes with suggestions for future research.

8.2 Key Study Takeaway

The main takeaway from this study is that the potential relationship that exists between RME and the REF is impact. Both agendas desire to have impacts of various sorts on business and the broader society via education, research and thought leadership (for RME), and research as well as public engagement (for the REF). Therefore, they both in the context of impact within UK business schools and universities are complementary. Their degree of compatibility and complementarity may vary with leadership, location and resources such as time, critical mass and availability of funds.

The study found that the REF could enable or block the integration of RME, progressing or delaying its institutionalisation in some UK business schools. The excessive performativity it seems to be driving is negative for RME integration via principles 2 (values) and 4 (research). The over-prioritisation and the unintentional discrimination and inequality associated with the administration of the REF at the HEI level, inclusive of business schools is a negative for RME advancement via PRME's principle 3 (methods) and 4 (research). However, the REF can also act as an enabler of RME integration via PRME's principle 4 (research) and 6 (dialogue), with the possibility to convert the identified negative for principle 3 (method) to a positive by honouring its decision to recognise teaching-related impacts and associated activities for REF2021 and hopefully the subsequent exercise.

Similar potential effects of the REF on RME implementation this time in the context of senior executives pledge to support its integration in their institutions were identified. However, it was on both directions (positive and negative) for PRME's principle 6 (dialogue). While the REF seems to be driving dialogue at a much broader level within and beyond business schools and universities, there is a danger that conferences and seminars with no apparent impact agenda will be on the decline. That is if they are not designed to create/generate REFable impacts, albethey relevant.

Interestingly, on journal ranking, the REF seems to claim that a number of the sub-panels did not consider this in their evaluation of the submissions received for REF2014. This was the case for UoA 19 (business and management studies), yet the responses of the study participants suggest otherwise, which is also reflective of existing literature. Why are senior executives particular about where academics publish their research outputs if the REF is not concerned about this? There are an implicit and explicit expectation and pressure on academics to target specific journals that are of 3* or 4* quality. This was the case for REF2014 exercise and seem to continue to be the case.

RME can act as an enabler of the impact agenda of the REF because of its strong ties with the 17 SDGs whose relevance to the sustenance of humanity (current and future generations) cannot be overemphasised. RME-related research outputs have the potential to fill up an identified gap as far research around and about not-for-profit organisations is concerned, and can help strengthen the teaching-research nexus. In combination with the SDGs, RME can support the development of a more inclusive and comprehensive definition of impact for the subsequent REF exercise, as well as its administration across business schools and universities owing to the values it upholds.

PRME as a global champion of RME and the SDGs can play an agency role for its UK signatories on the front of their REF strategies. It also can join forces with the United Nations to collaborate with the REF administrators and funding bodies to progress the impact agenda through the 17 SDGs. While the application of its six guiding principles as interpretative framework added granularity to the discussion of the study findings, the researcher identified two main weaknesses. They are too broad, especially principle 1, and could be more distinct – principles 2 and 3, and principles 5 and 6; these are discussed in great detail in section 6.2.5 of this thesis. This finding reinforces Win's (2012) remark that "the principles and their concepts of PRME are not clear enough and the concepts of the principles overlap, allowing signatories to make a trade-off between activities of two or more principles" (p. 241). Hence an area for further exploration by future studies and improvement for PRME and the United Nations.

This study used institutional theory as a theoretical lens, enabling the analysis and the interpretation of the data that underpins this study at both the individual and organisational levels; this worked well in spite of the criticism that it is often utilised mostly for the description of how powerful actors influence organisational change (Greenwood et al., 2014). The responses were more at the individual level compared to the institutional level, though, relating mainly to the business school academics (respondents) rather than their institutions (business schools and universities). The fact that institutional theory was not directly embedded within the framing of the interview questions has probably influenced this result. This is perhaps an area that could be explored further - its ability to offer useful insight about/around an investigated phenomenon despite its application in an overview, not central manner.

8.3 Recommendations

Below is an outline of a few practical recommendations for the relevant stakeholders and actors, informed by the in-depth literature review carried out in Chapters 2 and 3, the findings of the current study, the reflection of these, and the researchers' lived experiences as a doctoral student.

8.3.1 RME oriented academics

As identified from the study, the complementarity of RME and the REF can be improved if academics that research around RME can get more high-ranked journals to accept their outputs. Therefore, they should consider mainstreaming their research outputs, constructing them to speak to journal outlets other than those with an RME specific focus, while ensuring they are still underpinned by ERS principles. The recommendation may necessitate a more creative style of academic writing that is not too RME centric, preventing them from perhaps being desk-rejected even before they get the chance to be reviewed by relevant top-tier journals.

Another recommendation is the need to have a specified and robust process of documenting student-related outcomes in terms of the impacts they have on business and society as a result from exposure to RME-related contents/subjects. The focus should not only be on current students but also on alumni who since graduating from the business schools have been making a meaningful contribution to business and society on account of RME-related contents/subjects. The challenge here is how well academics can establish that connection – link the impacts created by the said students or alumni to the RME-related sessions or classes or workshops delivered to them.

They should utilise the SDGs as a strong bargaining tool to secure the support needed from colleagues and senior executives at the business school and university levels. Sustainability policy, a vital part of HEIs' marketisation, could be a useful tool for the latter. Colleagues who regard RME as an abstract concept may better appreciate the SDGs agenda, enabling RME-oriented academics to start meaningful conversations that may eventually support the grasping of the concept of RME, as well as result in partnerships that may yield REFable impact(s).

Advantage should be taken of the REF's admission of teaching-related impacts to progress RME integration. That is, academics should review their teaching practices to identify innovative ways of instilling ERS principles into students and exposing them to RME-related contents and subjects, and devise a robust mechanism for capturing related outcomes. The new rule can also be used as a bargaining tool to secure senior executives' support. For example, ample time for the development of innovative and impactful teaching methods and adequate funds are required. The documentation of innovative ways of delivering RME/ERS related contents and subjects informed by the recent global pandemic and consequent lockdown could be an example to consider here. This could be done proactively for the academics whose new remote working pattern is likely to remain the same for the foreseeable future, and retrospectively for the same group and those that have gone back to the normal way of working, but socially distanced. The adaptation of assessment practices and associated materials, and students' responses to those and associated outcomes are also worth looking into, as there are ERS dimensions to those and the opportunity to leverage related research and outputs for the REF2021 and beyond.

8.3.2 Current and Prospective Students

It is recommended that the students who are exposed to RME-related contents/subjects in the course of their studies at business schools and universities identify ways in which they can use the knowledge and skills gained to make positive contributions to business and society. Those situated in institutions that are not committed to the RME agenda or are not signatories to PRME should not shy away from making a case for their institution to consider adopting those or developing related curriculums if they desire exposure to ERS-related contents. Students have been identified as internal drivers and enablers for RME implementation in some schools, as discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. This, however, should be from a normative stance (i.e. appropriateness logic) rather than predominantly from an instrumentality logic centred mainly on self-interest. The latter characterises increasing commercialisation of university teaching and research, catering to 'business' interest in 'commodified' students and research (Wood, 2017, cited in Jones et al., 2020, p. 366).

Students should be open-minded in learning and understanding key issues that in the long-term can have a direct or indirect influence on them. Sustainability, core to the RME agenda, is topical and a big issue for the society, hence the importance of thinking beyond self to societal interest. Instead of accusing RME-oriented academics of being preachy, they could engage more in intellectually stimulating debates around related topics while acknowledging the opinion of others, thereby fostering inclusive and participative learning in an empowering environment.

They should also hold institutions and academics more accountable for the provision of ERS-related contents, especially for those who are in business schools and universities that are signatories to the PRME initiative. The PRME UK chapter and other chapters outside the UK do have student competitions and workshops that they organise, which is all part of the diverse ways these institutions are committed to integrating RME towards developing students to become future responsible leaders and professionals.

The students who are more specifically interested in the RME field or related subjects should consider partnering with academics on the research front – through undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral theses, and the development of relevant papers around those. This may yield additional positive REFable impacts that would be ultimately beneficial to society at large.

Prospective doctoral students as hinted in the recommendation section could pursue one of the suggested areas for further studies if, like the researcher, they are interested in RME and the REF. This thesis and other relevant resources can hopefully serve as a useful guide.

While current doctoral and some postdoctoral students are not eligible to participate/be submitted to the REF, it is worth having a basic knowledge of the REF and how it affects or applies to them and their varied areas of research. It is particularly essential for those of them who want to remain in academia on the completion of their research projects. There is a risk that a few might be discouraged to pursue an academic career should they become overwhelmed by the negative portrayal of the REF in the media, though. But engaging in related conversations with their supervisory team or colleagues or friends who work in the HEI sector with good knowledge around the REF could be useful. Whatever they decide to do on this front, balance can prove useful; they should seek relevant information from those who are against, for, or in between in terms of how they perceive the REF and make an informed decision. If they empathise with some of the REF-related issues raised and their effects on academics, friends, or colleagues, they could lend their voice to debates around those. Like other relevant stakeholders, they can bring about positive change where it is needed, "taking back freedom in academia" that seem to be eroded by the performative university characterised by "targets" and "terror" fuelled partly by the REF as the current study identified (per Jones et al., 2020).

The transfer market which the REF unintentionally created also resulted in the loss of academics who are experts in the RME field and other various fields and contexts, as inferred from this study. Some of those presumably were supervisors to some doctoral students at different stages of their research projects. So, their exit may have been somewhat detrimental to the students. Hence, it is recommended that prospective and current doctoral students make the most of the support their prospective and current supervisors can offer, bearing in mind that change is constant. They should take ownership of their research projects and learn as much as they can. It is not guaranteed that their supervisor will not move to another institution with better contracts owing to the REF, particularly if they are regarded as research stars or impact stars. Excellent academics do also exit to take back the freedom or control lost due to the Performative University (Parker, 2014, cited in Jones et al., 2020). This sort of understanding and outlook, in the researcher's view, will help affected students cope better should such a situation arise[151]. However, the loss of supervisors to other institutions experienced by doctoral students (directly/indirectly or partly/wholly) at a higher rate because of the REF might become a thing of the past or reduce considerably[152] due to some of the revisions made to the assessment framework for the imminent REF2021 exercise.

8.3.3 Business School Senior Executives

Senior executives should honour their pledge to implement and institutionalise RME in their schools. Part of that involves providing adequate support needed by academics on the frontline as far as the integration of RME implementation is concerned, not just at the adoption stage of PRME or the SIP reporting stage; holistic support and commitment are required. Where the support of the topmost executive of the university is lacking, business school Deans and heads should collaboratively work with the academics who are responsible for progressing RME in their institution to build a business case for that buy-in. The institutions that have a university-wide membership are presumed to have better support from the vice-chancellors or principals than those whose membership is merely at business school level. HEIs

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[151] The move to disassociate academics from outputs and possibly impact cases could have a positive influence on this front for doctoral students. This is worth exploring by a future study.

[152] Depending on the number of cases that occurred before REF2014 and since the revisions made in relation to REF2021 too. It would be interesting to explore if the transfer market has come to an end, and the impacts it might have had on students – hence an area for future study.

cannot truly attain RME embeddedness via the PRME initiative without the support of leaders at all levels.

Instead of discouraging academics who research and teach within the RME field from engaging and organising relevant conferences and seminars that can help progress their commitment to RME implementation, they should lend the necessary support while being strategic about it. An open conversation of how related conferences, workshops or seminars can be leveraged for the benefit of both the REF, in terms of impact, and RME, in terms of its implementation and progression, should happen. Ways they can instrumentally help the academics to produce quality research outputs should be explored, appreciating their relevance beyond the REF. A focus on the SDGs can also prove useful here.

It is also worth reviewing their recruitment practice to foster inclusion, being reflexive and aware of any biases that could inevitably put a few candidates at a disadvantage. Where the sole intent is to recruit exceptional candidates that will help their institution boost their REF profile, that should be explicitly communicated to ensure alignment between their rhetoric and reality. It is a salient point for consideration by institutions that explicitly claim to be inclusive in their recruitment strategy and, in the case of PRME signatories, their SIP report.

If the REF and related panels and sub-panels have, as they claim, not used journal ranking lists in assessing research outputs received from participating HEIs, senior management should review if it is necessary to pressure academics to target specific journals because of their perceived high-quality status. It does not at present seem sufficient to have relevant papers published in appropriate journals that speak to the outputs; academics are expected to publish articles in top-tier journals for their outputs to be deemed of acceptable quality. University and business school senior executives need to consider how they may be driving the institutionalisation of a “publish and still perish” practice by increasing objectification as per institutional theory, as covered in section 6.3.3. This is what Dean et al. (2020, cited in Jones et al., 2020) describe as prioritising metrics over substance - where journal rankings take precedence over learning.

8.3.4 UK Business schools and HEIs

UK business schools and universities can improve the visibility of RME-related impact cases that were rated highly in the REF2014 exercise (and will be for REF2021) through appropriate communication channels. This may help raise the profile of RME as a field and attract the critical mass needed in this area. Presumably, other academics that are aligned to this area but research in other fields will be encouraged to return to the field of their interest without fear of not making it to the REF. Willingness to explore the complementarity between RME and the REF may be higher for the business schools and HEIs that more explicitly communicate their commitment to the RME agenda in their vision statements than others. Then again, it is one thing to have rhetoric and another for that to match the reality.

Business school level signatories to PRME should consider making a case for upgrading to a university-wide membership. There was a sense that some business school senior executives who are committed to the furtherance of RME may not have the necessary support from management – the higher university level, Vice-chancellor, or Principal. One way they could make a business case for the upgrade is via the added responsibility to promote the SDGs. The pertinence of the goals to the survival of current and future generations is so essential that it cannot be overstated. A university-wide commitment to RME could encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, increasing an institution's likelihood to contribute meaningfully to one/more of the goals. They could develop a compelling case study around that to demonstrate the impact created; RME can play a vital role in this indeed (see Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). This too may attract the critical mass the RME field needs, and further legitimise it, in turn increasing the acceptance rate of RME-related outputs by various journal outlets[153] and strengthen the overall REF profile of institutions.

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[153] Assuming that prolific researchers or research stars collaborate with RME-inclined academics on relevant papers or they develop those themselves due to a new appreciation of how RME-related content or subject speaks to their discipline/field because of a university-wide commitment to RME. There are some business school academics that are unaware that their school is a PRME signatory, so we might assume that academics in other schools/departments within the same institution as the ones in the business school may not know what RME or PRME is, or their institutions' involvement in those.

8.3.5 PRME UK chapter

The UK PRME chapter should leverage the opportunity that the decision to allow teaching-related impacts in the REF presents for the progression of RME and the SDGs agenda. Part of that is working collaboratively with signatories to design innovative teaching methods for related contents in schools and organisations outside the HEI sector – the development of current leaders to become more responsible is as essential as developing future leaders. The former can catalyse a societal transition towards sustainable development, perhaps much more than current students can do within the current timeframe set for the realisation of the 17 SDGs which RME can facilitate (see Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). Innovative teaching methods with a high impact generation capacity should help raise the profile of RME and further enhance its legitimacy if relevant quality case studies are developed around those, submitted in the REF, and acknowledged accordingly.

More strategic planning and thought could go into the PRME Regional Chapter UK and Ireland Annual Conference with proper documentation of outcomes that can demonstrate impact, with the opportunity to be featured in the REF, further enhancing its complementarity with RME in HEIs. The UK chapter should not shy away from engaging in relevant debates around the issues associated with the REF, especially given the commitment to promote the SDGs in schools and what they represent. Failing on this front would suggest an only symbolic adoption of the agenda on their part as well as on the part of the global PRME community. With the support of the United Nations, they can change the narrative where it is needed.

PRME should also consider and identify ways of partnering with the REF executives, funding bodies and the UK government in their quest to bring out lasting change of various forms and reach via RME (and the SDGs) since they are laden with impact.

Like the global PRME executives, UK chapter executives should hold signatories more accountable and understand the challenges central to the commitment to implement RME in their schools, supporting them in addressing those effectively. They can also engage in reflexive thinking to ensure they are not contributing to any of the challenges in this area and to develop practical ways of addressing any identified. They should also consider championing a re-reading and unpacking of the six principles of PRME and then work with other chapters to agree on a more comprehensive and specific set of principles, limiting the risk of ambiguity and varied interpretations.

The involvement of signatories' students in relevant RME-related activities should also be encouraged. They already have writing competitions, organised workshops, and seminars, but more can be done in this area. They could for instance fund doctoral studies around RME, with the support of relevant funding bodies, the global PRME community and the United Nations.

The ways that this study identified how the REF could progress the RME agenda in UK business schools and universities should be explored in-depth in collaboration with these institutions with intent to leverage the opportunities that those present.

8.3.6 PRME (Global organisation) and United Nations

The executives of the PRME initiative should update their strategies, policies, guides, and communication tools to signal that RME is an all-encompassing initiative and agenda that HEIs across the globe are welcomed to adopt, implement, and institutionalise. One viable way of doing this is through their recent commitment to champion the promotion of the SDGs in schools. The SDGs are not specific to one discipline, field, or institution, though the meaningful contributions that can be made by diverse fields will vary due to contextual factors such as knowledge base, capacity, resources, and how well aligned the goals are to a given discipline. A clear message to signal that PRME is not only a business school or management institution focused initiative may lead to business membership being upgraded to university-wide memberships. This could encourage the buy-in of the topmost executives in HEIs. It may be helpful to commission an independent study that comparatively explores the various impacts created by signatories (worldwide) at the business school and university levels, and let the findings inform how they progress with their governance and membership structure.

It is also worth reviewing the parameters set up for the assessment of the progress achieved in the implementation of RME in signatory schools. Is the initiative still fit for purpose in voluntary terms? Stricter but fair measures may need to be explored to deter institutions that only adopt PRME symbolically with little or no evidence of the rhetoric in their communication channels matching their reality. There is a chance the proposed move may discourage institutions that are not yet members from signing up to PRME or cause some current signatories to withdraw voluntarily. It may however also attract new members who perhaps have chosen not to sign up to the initiative because of the perceived loose governance portrayed by the voluntary nature of the initiative. However, if PRME claims it is committed to contributing meaningfully to educating responsible leaders and achieving a sustainable future for all through the promotion of the SDGs, it needs to ensure that membership is in itself impactful. That includes being prepared to lose some institutions that are not pulling their weight. The relevance of ERS/RME and the SDGs are so salient that they are topical, garnering more and more attention from the wider public and society in general, including businesses. HEIs appreciate the need to gain and maintain societal legitimacy and may have no choice but to comply and remain signatories to an improved version of the PRME initiative, which is a strong case for the proposed review to be duly considered. By not holding signatories' accountable, PRME risks being treated as a tick-boxing exercise with detrimental consequences for its legitimacy and authenticity.

Considering the identification of impact as the core similarity between RME and the REF, the PRME organisation and executives should support RME-oriented academics and their institutions to leverage their current teaching and research practice and improve those further. A clarification of what constitutes RME-research is required. Is it purely research around and about ERS pedagogy, or ERS? They also need to unpack the impact concept. What does impact mean in the context of the RME and SDG agendas? And what does impact look like as far as RME-related teaching and research are concerned? How does their definition of impact compare with the REF's definition? How can they leverage RME and the SDG agenda to improve the working definition of impact according to the REF?

They could also partner with the UK government and relevant funding bodies in their mission to ensure that HEIs are accountable for the money received for RME-related research. There is meanwhile certainly a clear case to be made for the formal recognition of RME as a field and the equal treatment of related outputs and impact cases by the REF executives and panels. They therefore need to work with the UK

PRME chapter to understand why RME-related outputs are perceived to be of low-quality by "top-tier" journals, and thus some senior executives at business schools and universities. Can they work with those current journal outlets that are more accepting of related outputs, in order to identify areas for improvement and practical ways of increasing their quality and their reputation in the REF context? Can they strategically create relevant and impactful new journal outlets that will enable them to further their agenda through research, with the view of those becoming mainstream? Maybe this could consist of something similar to Emerald Open Research, but made more accessible to academics in terms of the related cost of publishing, in order to increase mainstream usage.

The provision of adequate funding to support pockets of relevant research projects at different study levels is another way they can advance the RME and SDG agendas. For instance, fund doctoral projects that are committed to exploring one or more of the suggested areas for future studies that are of specific interest to them. A re-evaluation of its six principles as a useful guide in supporting HEIs worldwide to promote RME is one area worth exploring.

Most of the recommendations outlined above for PRME also apply to an extent to the United Nations. The latter can support the former to effectively leverage their position for the common good (long-term) and explore ways of helping address some of the challenges identified with RME implementation in general (see Chapter 2).

8.3.7 The REF executives, UK government and funding bodies

While the intent for establishing the REF is one that many academics can appreciate, there are unintended consequences that it has brought about. Some of those identified in Chapter 3 and 6 clearly have implications for the mental health of academics[154]. The Stern review highlighted some of these issues, with a couple addressed by the REF administrators/executives for the REF2021 research assessment exercise. For example, the decision for all research-active staff to be submitted, making the exercise less selective and more inclusive. If this problem has been completely addressed is open for debate, as HEIs to some extent still have the final say of who gets (and does not get) submitted. Anecdotal evidence suggests that

[154] This was covered in Chapter 3 and expanded upon by Morrish (2019).

the rules seem to vary across institutions, which may imply that REF's ruling on the matter is open to various interpretations. It is, therefore, an area for future study to explore after the REF2021 result is published. Is participation in the REF exercise now more inclusive in line with its stipulated requirements on this front? To what extent did participating institutions comply with those, or deviate from them?

Suppose the REF and other quality enhancement mechanisms (e.g. TEF for teaching) must remain. In that case, they should not be at the detriment of the overall wellbeing of academics, which also has inevitable consequences for students. The onus is on administrators of the REF, UK government and their associated funding bodies to ensure the initial purpose of establishing these assessment mechanisms (including the previous tiers of REF) is what they continue to serve. Where the benefits associated with those becomes overtly disproportionate to unintended/unforeseen negative consequences, it is worth overhauling the entire system. Feasible and sustainable ways of making the process less resource-intensive, less invasive, and no longer damaging to academics' mental health and well-being are recommended for careful consideration and implementation.

For instance, the five/six-year period could be extended to 10 to give academics and HEIs some respite from the enormous pressure and stress generally associated with the REF. A consultation to explore the opinions of academics on this point should be carried out, as they are in a better position to know what is likely to give them the relief sought (explicitly or implicitly). There should also be a close consideration of empirical pieces of evidence related to the adverse effects of the REF across UK HEIs. How do those identified for REF2014 compare with the REF2021 exercise? It may be naive to think there will be none around the latter.

It is worth looking into the identified ways the REF can complement RME and influence its advancement in UK business schools and universities positively. Given the pertinence of the 17 SDGs (which the UK government claims to be committed to helping achieve) to the survival of present and future generations, it is worth drafting a policy around that (or explicitly stating it) as a vital aspect of the impact component of the REF. This could propel the furtherance of the RME agenda in schools a lot more given the strong influence exerted by the REF on universities.

They should also commission a study to explore the true extent of the influence (direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional) of the REF on students. It has been identified as having a negative effect on academic life based on some of the responses given by the participants at the interview stage of the current study, so we cannot rule out the possibility of knock-on effects on students.

The move to allow teaching-related impact case studies for the REF2021 exercise is a welcome development. However, it is worth reiterating the need to uphold this decision in its entirety, including the objective consideration of RME-related impact case studies and outputs as other counterparts in different fields and research areas. The episodic feel mentioned in relation to the responsibility and sustainability sub-field of the UoA 19 REF2014 summary report should be unpacked to ensure that they did not contribute to this, directly or indirectly. Beer and Eisenstat's (1996) second principle, the open discussion of barriers and challenges to the effective implementation of change, could prove useful here.

They claim that some of the panels set up to judge the submissions received from participating institutions in the REF2014 exercise did not use journal ranking lists. Why then does it seem like some business school and university senior executives doubt this? The pressure to still publish in specific journals and take up (or not) certain research projects does not yet appear to be entirely a thing of the past. How the perceived practice(s) can be deinstitutionalised is a task they have a considerable role in. This could specifically benefit RME to a greater extent than most subject areas due to some of the challenges identified in Chapter 6, such as academics who ordinarily would research around RME choosing not to do so because of the perceived "low quality" of the journals that are accepting of related outputs and the pressure (explicit or implicit) not to target those but ones that are ranked higher.

8.3.8 Journal Outlets (RME-focused and others)

To increase the desirability of RME-related research outputs for the REF2021 exercise or subsequent ones, journal outlets that are more accepting of those should move up the ranking ladder to be regarded as more relevant in terms of 3* or 4* quality. One viable way, for example, is a review of how rigorous their review processes are, including the actual quality of the reviews. It is however vital that care is taken when exploring possible ways of improving the overall quality of the journal ranking, as there is a danger that they may become too strict, which would be counterproductive to addressing the point raised. There is also the risk that they may lose sight of their core values and principles in the pursuit of rankings. If their processes and quality control of the articles they accept for publication are rigorous and in good order, they should stick to their values and be guided by substance, not ranking.

The above task is one that presumably is not all up to the related journals. The number of academics publishing in this area is another factor that could contribute to their attainment of a better ranking, including the quality of the actual papers that they prepare and submit to them for review and consideration for publication.

There is also the number of citations that related papers published in the journal outlets receive. Again, the quality of the papers is likely to play a role in this, as well as the visibility that they receive; their promotion on relevant social media platforms, application in relevant teaching sessions, and presentation at relevant conferences and workshops could help with this as well. Key players with the required resources can provide the much-needed support, including the likes of PRME and the United Nations.

Relevant seminars and workshops with academics looking to publish can be held to discuss how best to support them and what they will be looking for in terms of the evaluation of the tentative papers. Similarly, they should collaborate with other journals that are thought to be "top tier" to understand what supposedly makes them unique in that way. Some of the requirements of these journals in question are publicly available including a number of the papers published. They can review those and compare them against their practices, making changes where appropriate. Independent and external consultations on reviews of their practices may prove useful without compromising their core values and objectives.

Journal outlets that are less accepting of RME-related research outputs, could be more open-minded (flexible) while maintaining rigour and their "high-standard" requirements for the related outputs they receive. The researcher appreciates that several factors are considered before an output is rejected. Nevertheless, a reflexive exercise is encouraged; are RME-related outputs less attractive because they are poorly written with little or no contributions, or the majority of the content is not akin to their overall aim/goal? It is a question worth considering by them and all other stakeholders of the RME field. Can the SDGs which seem to be more mainstreamed facilitate increased acceptance of such outputs if they are strategically reflected in these papers? There was a sense that the SDGs are more relatable than RME to academics outside the field. RME is believed to be a broad field, so it is worth exploring ways to position related papers to speak to top-tier journals (i.e. ERS). RME-inclined academics should not lose their core values and principles to meet an on-going pressure to publish in top-tier journals.

In the wake of the decision to allow teaching-related impacts for the REF2021 exercise, is there an opportunity here for the acceptance of more RME-related outputs? These are questions that are worth pondering by the administrators and reviewers of these journal outlets.

Again, relevant seminars/workshops could be organised in collaboration with the UK PRME chapter or at the global level depending on the reach of the journals, to discuss how to address what seems to be the issue, constructively. Misconceptions can be cleared, and best practice and tools that can better equip academics to produce quality outputs offered where possible.

8.3.9 Accreditation and professional bodies

There is a need to support the progress of RME implementation in HEIs that are signatories to the PRME initiative through stricter measures to prevent its merely symbolic adoption by schools. Some reportedly sign up to PRME to gain specific accreditations only to decouple it afterwards, with little or no contribution made to transform their core practices and curricula for the development of future responsible leaders and professionals.

Therefore, it is recommended that accreditation bodies that are affiliated to PRME do their due diligence to ensure that institutions seeking to gain their accreditations are in fact walking their talk – the rhetoric presented in their applications should align with their day-to-day practice. They should ensure the thorough evaluation of approved courses, programmes or modules before specific accreditations are awarded. They should also ensure RME requirements are thoroughly incorporated into their standards beyond just requiring a tick box exercise. The AACSB should, for instance, be explicit about what they require from business schools in terms of demonstrating that they have ethics-related contents developed in their curricula.

It is also worth considering making the SDGs agenda part of their assessment criteria; they may promote the clarity needed in certain aspects of their requirement that are regarded as either too broad or vague. Those could also serve as an assessment tool to identify areas for improvement and make necessary changes. These should help prevent the mere symbolic adoption of PRME simply for accreditation gains only for the initiative to be decoupled once the accreditation sought is achieved, then recoupled perhaps nearer the time for reaccreditation. This cannot be fully achieved without the PRME executives' input, as discussed in section 8.3.6.

While the curricula of several schools may be indeed crowded, relevant professional bodies should consider working with schools collaboratively to explore ways they can strategically develop RME-related curriculum. Where it is impossible to dedicate a separate course or module specific to RME, a policy or explicit requirement could be drafted that outlines the need for business schools and universities to review their provisions to ensure that the ERS principles underpin them. Ethics, responsibility, and sustainability are three key concepts that are not specific to a given field, course, or programme of study. Their application, however, needs to be fully explored and unpacked with enabling institutions on the proposed review exercise. The same can be said about the SDGs; a number of them are already contributing to this agenda but a mapping exercise is needed to appreciate those and identify areas for improvement while maintaining the core course and/or module contents.

Having outlined the recommendations that apply to the key stakeholders of the current study, the following section will discuss the study limitations.

8.4 Study limitations

This section discusses some of the limitations of the study. The limitations that are more specific to the methodology and data collection and analysis are outlined in section 5.9. A few may also be inferred from the study scope and assumptions outlined in section 1.5 of Chapter 1 (e.g. the rapid pace of development around RME and the REF may influence a few of the study findings). The remainder ae discussed in the sub-sections below.

8.4.1 Generalisability of the study findings

Within the UK context, the researcher does not guarantee the generalisability of the study findings because the study participants were selected from 15 out of more than 100 business schools in the UK. However, certain aspects of the study findings may resonate with other HEIs (including business schools) that were not considered in this study but have PRME membership or integrate RME in their practice.

Moreover, the study did not aim primarily at producing generalisable data. It sought instead to gain an in-depth exploration of an under-researched phenomenon and communicate the findings with the hope of triggering robust and critical debates around it within and outside academia. It is acknowledged that the transferability of the findings is more assured than its generalisability (see Chapter 5).

However, this exploratory study provides a firm footing for future studies to progress further, allowing them to have a specific focus on some of the points raised and recommendations proffered, which in itself is a significant contribution.

8.4.2 Adaptive approach to open coding

The two main strands of the study, RME and the REF are vast and topical. The use of semi-structured interviews and the exploratory nature of the study meant that some topics were only spontaneously covered by respondents but were later identified as significant in the analysis of the data. Therefore, a more systematic approach to ask respondents in future studies to answer on these aspects and how they are at play in their own business schools could now be beneficial.

8.4.3 Theory application

Another limitation worth noting is the difficulty encountered in the identification of an appropriate theoretical lens through which to base the study. This was specifically because no other study had attempted to explore the phenomenon to the best of the researcher's knowledge, at least not in the detail covered in this study.

Doherty et al. (2015) set the groundwork of identifying the REF as a barrier (among others) to RME implementation in UK business schools. They did not however progress to exploring the extent to the influence, nor its mechanism. Again, therein lies the primary contribution of the study.

Also, while previous studies reviewed around the implementation of RME and the challenges encountered on this front tended to rely on institutional theory, the explicit discussion of how the theory was applied tended to be vague and/or not considered.

However, the current study utilised institutional theory as an overview theory and not one systematically informing the framing of the questions asked to the interviewees. The rationale for that has already been discussed, and the actual practice is one that is acceptable in academia. Not using the theory to directly inform the framing of the data collection stage of the current study might have contributed to the individual-level based responses that were less frequently provided by the study participants compared to the institutional-level responses received during the interviews conducted. That said, this could be considered one of the contributions of this study rather than solely a limitation because it shows that institutional theory can be effectively applied at both the individual and organisational levels to critically analyse the phenomenon studied.

The broadness of the six principles of PRME and its use as an analytical and interpretative lens without it necessarily informing the data collection stage of the study is perhaps another limitation as discussed in section 8.2 above.

Therefore, more in-depth use of institutional theory could now be made via adopting a deductive and more systematic approach to collecting the relevant data in order to be able to apply this theory in much greater depth in future studies. Collins and Stockton (2018) argue that studies that over-rely on a specific theory could suppress the importance of the findings that emerge from the data analysis. This is something that such future studies should to bear in mind.

8.4.4 The REF and RME are two rapidly developing and dynamic agendas

Some of the recommendations that would have been proffered to relevant actors, especially the REF executives, became obsolete before the researcher concluded the write up of the thesis, so had to be updated. This is because the REF and associated policies, requirements, guidance, and processes are dynamic – ever-changing as one of the participants pointed out. It was challenging to see that the REF executives had addressed some of the recommendations drafted. It is a positive move but central to some of the core contributions of the study. For example, the recommendation to make the REF2021 exercise more inclusive, specifically acknowledging and permitting teaching-related impact case studies, emerged only recently as part of the REF procedures.

However, the above was more a challenge than a limitation to the results of this study, and one which the author navigated by endeavouring to keep pace with the evolutions of REF2021. The lesson to be learnt by authors that are looking to explore either of the areas is the importance of time. They should attempt to secure the relevant resources needed to complete their study on time in order to avoid excessive updating and revision of commentary or recommendations.

The timely conclusion of future studies is also vital for shaping the direction of RME implementation and institutionalisation. For example, had this thesis been published earlier, it might have encouraged more academics to explore how they can use their RME-related research to generate REFable impacts for the REF2021 exercise. While it may be too late for them to do this for the current REF cycle, it is a finding that is still very much relevant for the subsequent exercise. That said, a few of the respondents in this study may have done so for the imminent REF2021 exercise, due to the inclusion of relevant detail in the in-depth semi-structured interviews they had with the researcher. This is an interesting line of inquiry that may be pursued.

The full relevance of this study may take some time to be leveraged by relevant stakeholders; it may be quick/immediate for others. The limitations and challenges outlined do not undermine the relevance of the current study and overall contributions.

8.5 Suggestions for future study

This section outlines areas that future studies can explore based on the study findings and some of the limitations/challenges considered.

8.5.1 RME-related outputs and impact cases

When some HEIs and academics think that the REF is unfavourable to RME-related outputs, others have taken advantage of the field in boosting their REF profile. They have tried and tested these sorts of outputs and have confirmed that they are valued by the REF, albeit the extent cannot yet be quantified; at least in the current study context. Thus, a future study can explore this area in greater depth to determine the extent to which the REF values RME-related submissions in comparison to other research themes in the context of business and management disciplines submissions.

This study only reviewed the responsibility and sustainability theme, and the management development and management education theme. Another study can review in-depth all the sub-fields for UoA 19 REF summary report for the 2014 exercise alongside the analysis of the actual submissions – outputs and impact cases, to ascertain the extent to which ERS-related contents featured. The above could be beneficial to academics looking to make a business case for RME-related research themes for perhaps the exercise after the looming REF2021 exercise. That way, they could secure the backing of their senior executives and ultimately get the sense of accomplishment and freedom to research in an area/theme where their expertise and passion lies. A similar line of inquiry could be pursued after the result of the REF2021 exercise is published in order to investigate the percentage of submissions that were related to RME, including impact case studies that had ERS dimensions as their primary focus. The findings may spur academics and institutions to develop this area of research without worrying that the outputs and impact case studies produced from those will be deemed not REFable or that RME-related conferences would be considered a waste of resources.

The sub-field summary result for Management development and management education for the REF2014 exercise seems to question the outputs that relied on data generated from surveying managers enrolled in taught courses in some of the participating institutions, as discussed in Table 22. The main reason appeared to be in the context of the generalisability of the findings and the research design. Whether this came from an underlying feeling that associated outputs were perceived as having a semblance of pedagogical research, that this made the data less valuable, is another matter. Applied research, with evidence gathered from public, and private organisations seemed to be preferred. So, the implication of this to RME-related research is something to consider. Will this become less of an issue with the move to allow impact generated through teaching and associated activities? Related matters should become clearer with time.

Longitudinal studies could compare RAE2008, REF2014 and REF2021 within the same study to gauge the extent to which the implementation and advancement of RME via research (PRME's principle 4) are progressing or declining. The submission rate of RME-related outputs and impact case studies and what rating they were awarded should yield insightful data that key stakeholders could leverage for the general development of the RME field. A study like this could boost the confidence of business schools and their academics who are considering delving into RME-related research themes and enhance the morale of those already working in this area, assuming clear progress is identified.

8.5.2 Early Career Researchers related studies

It would be interesting to explore if the reduction in the minimum number of outputs expected from each research-active academic has had any positive impact on the workload of academics on teaching-only contracts or those with less significant responsibility for supporting their institutions' research agenda. That is another line of inquiry that future studies could pursue. Do ECRs feel they have better prospects for full-time employment owing to the reduction of the minimum number of outputs required from research-active staff, especially final-year doctoral students (with no previous employment history in the HEI sector)? While full-time PhD students are not eligible for the REF exercise, some authors reported that some ECRs felt they were disadvantaged. They were required to compete on the same level as experienced academics, which was to have four quality papers in top-tier journals to be REFable. This in turn, informed some schools recruitment strategy.

8.5.3 Exploration of pedagogy development across UK HEIs

To what extent has the REF facilitated innovative teaching as a result of the decision to include teaching-related impact in the REF2021 exercise? More specifically for RME-oriented academics, have they identified or established new innovative ways of teaching RME-related contents to increase their chance of generating REFable impacts through those? To what extent (if at all) have UK PRME signatories leveraged their membership for REF-related submissions? For example, are there submissions to demonstrate impacts from the PRME UK and Ireland conference and/or PRME-related workshops, partnership, or collaborations? This can be pursued following the publication of REF2021-related outcomes.

A similar study but within the context of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is worth exploring; the extent that the TEF might have informed investment in the RME area. This was outside the scope the current study and therefore not pursued.

Another study that attempts to explore the extent to which RME-related research is regarded as mostly pedagogical is worth considering. However, a detailed clarification of what constitutes RME-related research as mentioned earlier is first required.

8.5.4 Exploration of the wider effects of non-participation in the REF

The possibility of losing out on future partnerships with relevant actors due to non-participation in the REF cannot be ruled out. Funding bodies and relevant stakeholders might prefer to collaborate with institutions/academics that have gone through the REF, even if their performance was less than stellar. In essence, they are tried and tested compared to those whose research practices and outputs are yet to go through the fire as it were. A future study could explore if organisations take into consideration the REF profiles of HEIs in determining/deciding which one to partner with on the research front. Has it been particularly challenging for schools that did not participate in the REF2021 exercise or those that did but performed poorly, to secure research grants beyond REF provisions/channels? A study could attempt to explore those in combination, or separate studies could be dedicated to exploring each case.

8.5.5 Decoupling-related studies

It will be interesting to know if any of the business schools that have their commitment to RME spelt out in their vision statement are indeed using RME to develop their REF agenda through the impact component. Where this is not the case in practice, it is worth finding out if they will be more open to using RME to develop their impact profiles for the REF than schools that do not have RME reflected in their vision statement but are committed to institutionalising it. What fraction of those with the rhetoric appear to have decoupled RME (if any) from their formal structures? Is the reason for having done so in any way related to pressures arising from the REF?

For PRME signatories who voluntarily asked to withdraw and at some point, decided to re-join PRME, what are the underlying reasons that prompted both scenarios? What is the story for those that left and neither returned nor have any intention of doing so in the foreseeable future? The researcher also recommends a more comprehensive study that looks beyond the UK context, as this could probably will serve as a litmus test for PRME as an institution and initiative in terms of its legitimacy and perceived relevance.

8.5.6 Exploration of the potential financial value of PRME to UK business schools and universities

The potential monetary value that PRME signatories have managed to accrue or "squeeze out" (if any) from the reputation capital associated with the RME agenda is one that a future study could explore. It would be interesting to know if and how schools can convert RME/PRME-related reputation capital to financial capital, especially with the established connection and complementarity, in the form of impact, between RME and the REF. A future study could explore if there is a financial capital to be gained from adopting PRME towards the facilitation of RME implementation and institutionalisation by HEIs. Related studies could further boost the popularity of the RME field and promote the take-up of PRME by non-signatory institutions with less risk of decoupling or loose coupling occurring once any financial value of PRME is exploited.

8.5.7 PRME as a potential barrier to RME implementation

To what extent might PRME as an organisation be hindering (unintentionally) RME implementation in UK HEIs and beyond owing to the voluntary nature of the initiative? Is its soft approach to encourage HEIs worldwide to take up PRME towards RME implementation via its six guiding principles counterproductive to the realisation of its vision and/or mission statement? Do organisations value PRME signatory status less due to the lack of stringency associated with PRME signatory status? A future study around that should help either strengthen or weaken the argument put forward for a review of the initiative (see section 8.3.6).

8.5.8 Exploration of RME/PRME or the REF as a driver of isomorphic change across HEIs

As discussed earlier, there are institutional drivers for the integration of RME and participation in the REF. Both agendas, in this instance, can be explored through the three mechanisms of isomorphic change (coercive, mimetic, and normative). Isomorphism is a concept that is associated with institutional theory – organisations at the early stages of their life cycle tend to display considerable diversity in approach and form. Once a field becomes established, "there is an inevitable push towards homogenisation" (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 148). Thus, to what extent is RME and the REF separately driving isomorphic change across UK business schools or HEIs more broadly? It is an area that a future study can explore, and while Rasche and Gilbert (2015) have written around it in the context of RME, the area seems under-researched for the REF and for RME. Beyond the UK context, a similar study can be considered for RME/PRME, given its global outlook and presence.

The REF has arguably mostly triggered coercive isomorphism across UK HEIs. The REF is a formal external organisation that is exerting pressures on HEIs, who are in turn dependent on the REF for what it can offer. Organisations may feel coercive pressures as persuasion, force, or invitation to join in collusion. The REF in this study, and in existing literature and media, has been portrayed as exhibiting or associated with all three dimensions of pressure. Hence the claim that it is (intentionally) pushing UK HEIs towards homogenisation on the research front and the dominant mechanism at play is coercive isomorphism.

Unintentionally, the REF might be driving schools towards homogeneity via mimetic isomorphism. This could be manifested in the form of HEIs that did not participate in the REF2014, or who did but performed poorly, REF2021 preparation after other HEIs they deem successful in terms of an overall excellent REF profile achieved in the last exercise. While there are set guidelines and requirements that schools looking to participate in the REF2021 exercise must follow, to assume that they all are confident without any uncertainties would be naive. The level is likely to vary. It may be higher for the first-timers compared to those that performed poorly in the last exercise. Even, the higher fliers of the previous exercise might actually have felt a certain degree of uncertainty in preparation for the imminent REF2021 exercise. Other authors could pursue the suggested implications further.

Business schools and other HEIs situated in nations other than the UK are not precluded from adopting, implementing, and/or institutionalising RME and engaging with PRME. Thus, RME/PRME presumably is driving isomorphic change across business schools at the national and global levels. It is another area that requires further investigation, to what extent is RME/PRME driving isomorphic change across HEIs, and what are the possible implications moving forward? Is the isomorphic change triggered by RME/PRME likely to differ at the national level compared to the global stage, including the mechanisms at play – coercive, mimetic or normative?

8.5.9 Call for studies similar to the current study but in varying contexts

Another study could explore if and how other mechanisms like the REF in other countries might be influencing the integration/implementation of RME within business schools that are PRME signatories. For example, Australia has a similar mechanism called Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA). Is there any suggestion that the ERA might have any form of influence on the progression of RME in Australia-based business schools and/or universities that are part of the global PRME community?

A similar study employing a quantitative method is recommended to further clarify some of the findings in this study and that of the authors Doherty et al. (2015), whose work laid the foundation on which the current study rests. The proposed study could be positioned to be confirmatory, not the exploratory stance which this study took.

Another study should consider utilising a different research strategy such as case study instead of phenomenology, which the current study applied. How the theoretical frameworks underpinning the current study were utilised could be differed.

The transferability of this study in the context of the Teaching Excellence Framework, TEF, is within reach. Future studies could attempt to explore some of the recommendations/suggestions outlined in this thesis in the context of TEF instead of REF. Even, the current study in its entirety could be modelled against the TEF, but with a strong academic rationale. An exploration of the possible influence of the TEF on RME implementation within UK business schools would make an interesting doctoral study. It is a baton which the researcher would gladly pass onto a prospective doctoral student.

8.6 Research contribution

This section outlines the contributions of the study, including theory, policy and practice, and methods. We begin with an outline of the theoretical contributions.

8.6.1 Theoretical contribution

The study somewhat contributes to bridging the identified gap in the literature regarding the limited application of the institutional theory at levels other than the organisational level. It also bridges the gap in existing literature as far as uncovering the mechanism via which the REF may hinder and/or enable RME integration in UK business schools is concerned. While again Doherty et al.'s (2015) study which informed the current study identified the REF as an external barrier to RME implementation in six UK business schools, they did not go in-depth to explore the mechanism of REF's influence on RME implementation in these schools.

The study is the first in the UK to explore RME and the REF specifically in a business school context – i.e. as a comprehensive study/research. It follows up on Doherty et al.'s (2015) prediction of the RME possibly helping institutions to reinforce the impact aspect of their submission to the subsequent REF exercise. Therefore, another contribution of this study is that it explored the relationship between RME and the REF to uncover how they can complement each other, as opposed to prematurely assuming from the start that they are two conflicting agendas in UK business schools. The complementarity between RME and the REF is demonstrable in the impact they are committed to having on business and society through UK HEIs. For RME, the desired impact is inclusive of the education offerings, research and thought leadership of business schools. The impact channel for the REF is predominantly via research and related outputs, but though it claims to now be receptive to teaching-related impact; the outcome of the imminent REF2021 exercise will to an extent confirm or refute this claim.

The thesis is a useful resource that current or prospective students can consult in the preparation of coursework, papers/articles, assignments, and exams that are related to RME (including ethics, responsibility and sustainability – ERS topics/subjects), the REF and even the SDGs. Similarly, it is a useful resource that other parties at both individual and organisational levels can reference in contexts that aligns with this study - partly or wholly. It can inform a few other relevant studies within and outside business schools, the UK or RME aligned academics, as well as at undergraduate, postgraduate and at doctoral level. The current study is also useful on the methodology front.

The suggestions for future studies could be picked up by relevant actors, thereby fostering an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from diverse vantage points. A few other countries have frameworks like the REF as pointed out in the REF-related literature review section. Moreover, RME is not a UK-based agenda; neither is the PRME. Again, PRME is a renowned global champion committed to supporting HEIs and indeed, other organisations and colleges to institutionalise RME and, more recently, promote the seventeen sustainable development goals.

8.6.2 Policy contribution

Through this study, the salient recommendations proffered to relevant actors could be pursued to implementation. They could inform a change in policy, activities, engagements or practices related to the REF and RME (including PRME and the United Nations) with possible positive outcomes for students, academics, business schools, business and society at large.

PRME could further explore and/or leverage relevant findings. Presumably, the United Nations as a key stakeholder with lots of resources, can further support UK business schools and other HEIs (inclusive of PRME signatories) in their quest to institutionalise RME towards the development of future responsible leaders and professionals and the re-education and transformation of current leaders and professionals. Support on both fronts is necessary for the building and development of a sustainable future.

The recommendation by some of the study participants for the definition of impact to be more inclusive, as well as widening participation in the subsequent REF exercise (2021), are two significant policy changes that have already been enacted by the REF administrators and/or executives. While this study did not directly inform those changes given that the researcher had not concluded the write up of this thesis before they were published, they nevertheless are a key contribution of this study[155]. The 17 interviews were conducted before those were enacted formally. Even the outcome of the independent review by Lord Stern was yet to be published at the time. The study participants were questioned about the impact component of the REF at the interviewing stage of this study. The associated findings are not within this study scope, albeit as aforementioned, impact features prominently in this study as the common denominator between RME and the REF. RME and the SDGs can support the REF administrators in further developing their impact agenda, including a more comprehensive stance as to what the definition of impact should be for the REF exercise after REF2021.

The acknowledgement of teaching-related impact progressing RME if allowed in the subsequent REF exercise (i.e. 2021), is another significant contribution of this study. Policy change around it was approved after the finding came out of the interviews but before the publishing of this thesis, and should take effect in REF2021 exercise.

The study contributes to the ongoing debate concerning the effectiveness of the REF as the sole assessment framework for judging the quality of research produced across UK HEIs. It highlights areas for improvement, including those that can be leveraged for social good.

8.6.3 Practice-based contribution

The model (see Figure 17 – developed from Figure 12) is one of the crucial contributions of this study. Business schools can use it to understand how both agendas (RME and the REF) are faring in their organisational context. It may help them ascertain, for example, if the REF is a barrier or an enabler for RME

[155] It again takes us to one of the main limitations of this current study, time. The REF, as previously mentioned, is a rapidly developing agenda and assessment framework. It explains why the researcher recommends that other researchers, groups or organisations that are looking to research around this area to consider timings. Time arguably is a crucial resource needed if any of the suggested areas for further studies are to inform policy change around this arena directly.

implementation in their school? Which of the six principles of PRME is it influencing the most and in what direction? What kind of early interventions are needed to strategically make both compatible and complement one another?

Senior executives can also use the model to self-evaluate how they are performing as far as their pledge to support RME implementation in their institutions through the adoption of the PRME initiative is concerned. That way, they could gauge the effectiveness of the support being provided across the six principles and identify areas for improvement. For instance, do they need to vary the support to avoid only providing say financial support, which is essential but not all that is required to progress RME? Which of the six principles can they leverage their support through the REF? For instance, in what way is the REF possibly influencing (positively or negatively) the support that senior executives pledged to provide on partnership – principle 5?

PRME (a global champion for RME and the SDGs) can use the model to understand how to best support UK signatories, as well as those in other countries who engage with a similar framework to the REF (e.g. Australian based signatories). Given the identified common ground (i.e. impact) between RME/PRME and the REF, PRME executives can put their principle 5 to good use by partnering with the UK government, enhancing the identified compatibility and complementarity of RME and the REF across UK HEIs. In doing so, they will legitimise the RME field further and in turn, secure the critical mass needed to move it forward. All of which will make them even more instrumental in the development of future responsible leaders for the building of a sustainable future in all its forms.

In conclusion, the study found the REF can enable and hinder the integration of RME in UK business schools. It cannot be considered in isolation, as other underlying factors should be taken into consideration. RME and the REF can complement each other in the context of a business school. They can also be competitive, predominantly from the people factor both internally and externally, resulting in a potential conflict.

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APPENDICES

CONSENT FORM

The Influence of the REF on the Advancement of the RME agenda in UK Business Schools:

I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box, I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand by not giving consent for any one element I may be considered ineligible for the study.

PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOXES		
Participating		
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Project Information Sheet dated 17/08/17. have been given ample time to consider the information, as well as the opportunity to as questions about the study and my participation.	☐
2.	I understand that participation is voluntary and know that I can withdraw at any point without giving any reason.	☐
3.	I understand that taking part will include a face-to-face interview, which would be audio-recorded and transcribed.	☐
4.	I understand that there may be an additional follow-up(s) for clarification purposes and to establish if my views have changed owing to government decisions on Stern report consultation (via email or phone call).	☐
The use of the information I provide for this project only		
5.	I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, thesis, web pages and other relevant research outputs.	☐
6.	I understand that my confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained (during and beyond this study) according to the UK Data Protection Act 1998.	☐
The use of the information I provide beyond this project		
7.	I understand that collected data may be shared with the supervisory team without being directly or indirectly identified.	☐

Research Participant

Name .... Date of Consent......................................

Signature...

Job Title...

Time with organization...

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Project Information Sheet for Participants

Dear X,

I am a doctoral researcher in Aberdeen Business School at Robert Gordon University. I am currently conducting interviews for my PhD research project titled - *"The Influence of the REF on the Advancement of the RME agenda in UK Business Schools*

You have been invited to take part in this project because of your direct involvement in the implementation of the PRME initiative (which your school is a signatory to), plus your teaching and research activities within the RME (responsible management education) field.

Taking part is entirely voluntary. I have provided a detailed information to help you understand the purpose of the research and what participation will entail, helping you make an informed decision whether to participate or not. Should you decide to participate, I will appreciate it if you can kindly complete and sign the informed consent form attached to the email you received.

Purpose of Study

The overarching aim of the study being conducted is to explore if and how the research excellence framework (REF) has influenced your advancement of the responsible management education agenda within your institution.

The study will also explore the meaning(s) that you ascribe to RME as a concept and impactful research, the extent to which you think both the RME and the REF agendas are compatible within the context of UK business schools, the current barriers/challenges that might be impeding your efforts towards attaining RME embeddedness, and key viable and sustainable recommendations for addressing these challenges.

Participation

Participation will consist of a face-to-face interview, lasting approximately an hour. This semi-structured, in-depth interview will be audio recorded (notes to be taken as well) to enable me to accurately capture your perceptions and experiences in relation to the issue being investigated in your own words.

There are no risks involved in participating in this study, neither are there any incentives to be given for volunteering to participate.

You have the right to withdraw from the research project at any stage and do not need to provide any reasons for doing so. In such instance, all information provided will not be used but will be destroyed.

Use of Data & Confidentiality

All information provided will be kept confidential, including audio recording which would be kept safe in a locked cabinet and passworded computer. Some interview transcripts may be read by my principal supervisor but in anonymised form - coding and pseudonym will be used to replace identifying information to protect your confidentiality and identity. In short, data will be handled as stipulated in the UK Data Protection Act 1998. Collected data will be used in research outputs such as thesis, journal articles, academic presentations, and seminars. Recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research project; only anonymised transcripts would be securely kept by me.

Research findings and results will be duly communicated to you.

Future Contact

There may be additional follow-ups and clarifications through emails or phone calls. Regarding the yet to be published decisions on the UK government consultation on the Stern report, you may be contacted to establish if your views/responses have changed on this account or not.

This research has been approved by the ethics committee in RGU. Specific questions about the research can be directed to my principal supervisor, Dr. Emmanuelle Rey-Marmonier (see useful contacts below).

Thank you very much for your time.

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