

**An investigation of the motives and initial collaboration in the
formation of a university-sponsored multi-academy trust; a
case of altruism and/or survival**

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Abstract

The Academisation of schools in England has been fashioned by the policies of different governments resulting in the formation of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) which are now prolific and a common model of provision. MATs continue to be created, grow, and merge in some cases. Academisation typically involves some form of public or private sponsorship. The reasons why some universities choose to sponsor MATs are unclear and the motives of the individuals involved is under-researched. Eight participants who were involved in the creation of a university-sponsored MAT were interviewed. These were people within the school, the MAT and the university, where their different roles influenced perceptions of the advantages of sponsorship. Participants' accounts expose complex and intertwined individual and organisational drivers which are conceptualised as economic, social and political motives. This framework provides a lens to explore the apparent tensions between participants' perspectives reconciling motives as being altruistic and/or about survival. This research contributes to a better understanding of the implications for universities considering MAT sponsorship.

Introduction

This article reports on the motives, vision and values of key individuals in three organisations who were involved in the creation and development of the university-sponsored Multi-Academy Trust (MAT); the original secondary academy school, the sponsor University and the MAT itself. Motives can be understood in this context as the rationale for and impetus behind individual actions, decisions and behaviours. Initially, the secondary school, a Single-Academy Trust (SAT), took the university's

name into its title. Then, over two subsequent years the university, as sponsor of this SAT was approached by the Department for Education (DfE) to consider supporting primary schools in the same county by adding them to its sponsorship. The mechanism now existed to form a MAT and the change embarked upon (Capper, 2021). In order to contextualise this arrangement, it is important to first consider the policies in education which facilitated this change.

Since 2000 the education system in England has undergone substantial and significant structural reform with the academisation of schools impacting the composition and governance of the sector (Gibson and Outhwaite, 2022; Gunter 2011; Simkins et al., 2019). Despite changes in government and Secretaries of State, MATs remain a very significant part of the Education landscape in England and they continue to be created, grow and merge. Academies were originally created by the New Labour government (1997-2010) to engender diversity of provision within a marketised comprehensive education system, facilitate greater parental choice and remove local authority (LA) bureaucracy and control (Forrester and Garratt, 2016). Academies replaced underperforming schools in England, with sponsorship to halt the spiral of decline in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and improve the lives of young people (Blunkett, 2000, cited in Chitty 2014: 111). External sponsorship included businesses, charities and universities, for example, and was capped at £2million per school. Sponsorship by universities, it was thought, would provide resourcing in the form of academic expertise and mentoring, strategic direction and governance. When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition came to government in 2010, the academy name was retained but significant changes were made to the direction of policy including a limiting the influence of LAs (Male 2022). Academy conversion rates accelerated across England (Leo et al., 2010); a trend which continued under

Conservative governments from 2015 although had plateaued out by the time of a Labour government in 2024 due to the removal of the conversion grant. Under the Academies Act 2010, it became easier for universities to sponsor academies and be formally involved in the schools in their local communities. Policy change meant there was now no requirement for a sponsor to provide any funding to the arrangement as the sponsor contribution had been a barrier to expanding the programme (Ball, 2007). What is not apparent is the extent to which this removal of a sponsor contribution changed the nature of sponsorship and the consideration given to the forming and development of a MAT. The 2010 Academies Act created 'converter academies' and gave Ofsted outstanding schools, including primary schools, the freedom to remove themselves from LA control and convert to academies (Male, 2022). As Simkins et al. (2019) and Crawford et al (2022) suggest, the diminished role of LAs has created a void in the middle-tier of education and where MATs potentially create new structures. Despite several Secretaries of State for Education having been in post during the last five years, universal academisation and school-led improvement remain significant features of government policy. MATs are thus influential players in the education system in England, with a small number of universities acting as a sponsor.

The university in this study first embarked on sponsorship of a single academy trust in 2011, the creation of a MAT in 2014 and significant subsequent growth to more than 20 schools by 2025. While academisation and MAT development have been fashioned by the policies of different governments, and thus their expansion somewhat haphazard (Male, 2022), MATs are now numerous and a common model of school provision (Wilkins, 2017). Most (82.4%) of English secondary schools are now academies (DfE, 2024) compared to 11% in 2010 (National Audit Office, 2018). A

small number of universities openly sponsor MATs, some with their name evident in the MAT title (DfE, 2024), others without. Universities, like schools, continue to experience ongoing change and a shift from traditional activities, diversifying their business and civic involvement (Edmond, 2019; Deem and Eggins, 2017). The reasons why some universities choose to sponsor MATs are unclear and remain under-researched (Edmond, 2019). This study sought to unveil the reasons for such sponsorship of schools by a university, using the lens of a conceptual framework comprising economic, political and social motives. The tension between these motives as being a case of altruism and/or survival is explored

Universities and MAT sponsorship: The policy background and context

The higher education (HE) landscape in England, like that of schools, has been subject to perpetual reform and restructuring (Marginson, 2016; Maisuria and Cole, 2017). Taking the Dearing Report (1997) as a starting point, this was a review of UK HE commissioned to influence its future development and improve aspiration levels in lower socio-economic groups (Greenbank, 2006). The report resulted in series of recommendations and subsequent social, economic and political imperatives to engender policy reform. Dearing advocated, for example, the expansion of HE and widening participation to increase social equality and diversity (Deem and Eggins, 2017; David et al., 2010). Such recommendations were harnessed by the New Labour government to increase underrepresented groups notably, women, ethnic minorities and students with disabilities through the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2010. Dearing also recommended a mixed funding model to include the introduction of tuition fees for undergraduate students with income contingent

loans and a repayment plan based on a graduate's income. This was coupled with a more marketised and competitive system via the subsequent Teaching and Higher Education Act of 1998. Consequently, new managerial approaches were adopted (Deem et al., 2007) with the focus on income, income generation and enterprise (Ball, 2007). Constraints in funding for teaching and research activities, as Edmond (2019) argues, has impacted many universities. As such, income-raising activity in the form of increasing potential recruitment pipelines and links to local economic and community projects have become more attractive. University sponsorship of academies is arguably emblematic of these new avenues of financial resource activity in a more competitive landscape.

Similarities could be drawn between universities and schools in relation to their place in society, their governance, the external pressures they are experiencing, and the impact of neoliberal policies and managerial practices (Deem et al., 2007; Ball et al., 2012; Wilkins, 2016; Ball, 2021). There are many challenges for universities within a globalised context, with expectations that universities should deliver on a role as a force for the public good and social justice, but at a time when the context of what this means is shifting (Marginson, 2016, 2022; Maisuria and Cole, 2017). Bartram (2021:2), for example, deliberates how "change and churn in HE may just be constant symptoms of a system in perpetual flux, driven by competing and evolving philosophies, expectations and demands." Deem and Eggins (2017) contemplate whether universities can survive as critical organisations at the current time when digital mechanisms for accessing and accumulating knowledge are abundant. For example, Massive Online Open Courses could negate the necessity of a physical university campus in the future and universities are under pressure to explore avenues for future recruitment. Edmond (2019) alludes to universities broadening their

activities from teaching and research into other areas to diversify their income, recruitment bases and business operations in response to tuition fee policy and resultant funding changes.

Universities have been encouraged by government to work more closely with schools and academies, mooting a broader role for HE in raising aspirations, providing school improvement expertise, widening access to HE and sponsoring disadvantaged schools (DfE, 2018; UUK, 2024). University sponsorship of schools, although not aggressively promoted by government was one option for partnerships between HE institutions and schools. Although some universities have suggested that, for them, sponsorship is a means of creating aspirations for young people, many others (notably, Oxford and Cambridge included) have not entered into sponsorship. Universities sponsoring academies for widening participation reasons may be at odds with performative measures such as league table positions, which, in part, rely on the entry tariff of students (Leo et al., 2017). Indeed, evidence from the American Charter Schools, which have many similarities to England's Academies, suggests that HE sponsorship was limited there due to reputational, financial and mission reasons (Edmond, 2019).

Edmond (2019) contends Education departments within English universities have had for many years strong relationships with schools of all phases for purposes of teacher training, recruitment and community engagement. Few have been involved in the running of schools. Gibson (2016a) proposes university involvement could be motivated by self-protection and the opportunity to advertise their courses and other services to a captive market. University sponsorship of Academies and MATs has remained modest in number however, perhaps reflecting the lack of policy and clear

government direction for this specific HE support of schools. It was within this context that the university embarked on the creation and development of a MAT.

Methodology

Approval for this doctoral study (Capper, 2021) was granted by the university's Ethics Committee, and the research adhered to the British Educational Research Association's (2024) ethical guidelines. The research investigated economic motives, political motives and social motives in the formation of a university-sponsored MAT. The study focussed on the motives and early collaboration in the formation of the MAT.

A qualitative approach was adopted, and the method of semi-structured interviews utilised with 8 participants who held different positions and performed different roles within the three partner organisations. The interviews were conducted over a twelve-month period during the early creation of the MAT. Various documents such as meeting minutes and plans relating to the sponsorship were available to the researcher and were sometimes referred to by participants during their interviews. These were useful in providing context for some decisions that were taken and when giving consideration to the extent of strategic planning involved.

Sampling was via a mix of purposive and convenience approaches (Blaikie and Priest, 2019). The sample of participants whose data feature in this article comprised eight key individuals (see Table 1) from the university, the Academy and the MAT to gain insight from different perspectives and vantage points (Dahlberg and McCaig, 2010). Table 1 indicates the spread of roles and also signifies how roles overlapped for some individuals and these intersecting roles had implications for the power dynamics of an

emerging MAT. This study did not utilise all available participants, rather representatives of different groups. Although exact roles were not equivalent across the university, the MAT and the Academy, the research sought to represent different levels of seniority and decision-making within each organisation. During the individual interviews, participants explained their key functions, responsibilities and personal motivations, what they perceived the reasons of their respective organisation to be involved, along with their own perceptions of the potential benefits of the MAT. Data analysis was in two phases (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The first was to become familiar with the interview transcripts, get an overall sense of the content plus the common themes and subsequently a first coding of the data, using a deductive thematic approach. Issues and themes raised from the literature formed the basis of a second inductive coding framework which focussed on educational policy, and educational and organisation context.

Data analysis exposed significant varying motives of those people in each organisation for forming the MAT relationship. Some motives were reflective of the interests and nature of the organisation for whom they worked and thus strategic. Some were very personal linked to beliefs, values and background and, importantly, varying levels of autonomy in the decision-making in relation to the external political environment were identified. The motives were categorised thematically as economic social and political and to describe, understand and explain individual and perceived organisational goals. Firstly, economic imperatives affect, for example, perceived opportunities and policies devised to improve stability or growth. Here, economic motives relate to branding, reputation, recruitment, sustainability and protection of teacher training provision. Second, a political lens illuminates, for example, the driving force behind decisions including strategic priorities and recognised constraints. Here political motives

encompass centralised control to compensate for a diminishing role for the LA. Finally, social dynamics reflect, for example, responses to change, decision-making, values and interactions. Here, social motives include the notion of public good, civic responsibility, widening participation, local regeneration and raising attainment.

Participant	Stakeholder Role	Abbreviation
University Senior Leader 1	MAT Chair, Academy Chair /Decision-Maker – as a member of the University Executive	USL1
University Senior Leader 2	MAT Chair /Decision-Maker - as a member of the University Executive	USL2
University Policy Leader	University Strategic Planner - Enactor in relationship	UPL
University Middle Leader	University Department Lead	UML
University Lecturer	Lecturer	ULEC
MAT Chief Executive Officer	Leader	MAT CEO
Academy Senior Leader 1	Academy Senior Leadership Team member/ Decision-Maker	ASL1
Academy Senior leader 2	Academy Senior Leadership Team member – Enactor in relationship	ASL2

Table 1: Participants: abbreviations and roles

Findings and Discussion

This research sought to determine the motives of the individuals within the University to sponsor a MAT. The findings reflect organisational goals and individual motives and reveal a range of dispositions.

Economic motives

University participants' explanations regarding motives to sponsor schools differed, depending on their role and level. Notably, university leaders' focus was largely concerned with commercial aspects. Just as it can be argued that businesses have commercial motives for being involved in academies and leading MATs (Ball, 2021), some of the participants suggested that universities may also be engaged for reputational and commercial opportunities to support future recruitment through student recruitment and the reach of a brand. For example:

With our logo for the academy, we have got potentially now, 2,000 students, who all are carrying book bags and things with the university name on it. (USL1)

Hetherington and Forrester (2023: 2) note the significance of 'brand' as a mechanism 'to differentiate schools and establish a credible 'brand image.'" Themes of 'reputation and reach' supports the work of Courtney (2015), who suggests that changes in structure towards a more diverse landscape of schools enables responsibility for schooling and assets, such as school estates, to be transferred from public to private or corporatised (or religious) organisations. This applies, we argue, when a university sponsors a MAT as the university assumes, through governance arrangements, a level of responsibility and decision-making for a school or groups of schools' education

provision, estates and assets.

University participant responses suggest there were business-orientated motivating factors beyond system change and better outcomes for young people that could benefit the university economically in terms of its status and ultimately perhaps ability to attract income. As USL2 stated, “strategically it just shows we are the key educators in the county.” From a university-participant perspective, the findings show differences between motives identified for the university to sponsor a MAT, which included, on the one hand, the potential impact on the ability to ‘sell’ the university with the aim of recruiting students and, on the other, the potential to positively impact the region and its community. The reputational and branding opportunities that sponsoring a MAT could realise, were central to the decision of the university to sponsor a MAT and support the university’s future economic position. There were potential recruitment, transition and reputational benefits in relation to branding and including more schools within the MAT. This is also reflective of the competitive environment in education generated by neoliberal policies and marketisation. University participants who were key decision makers were able to perceive benefits for both the university and the Academy. Academy-based participants who had little power over decision-making, however, could only identify significant benefits for the sponsor university and only marginal for their Academy. This typical response emphasises potential perceived benefits:

Operationally, we each have our own finance teams, we each buy equipment, there would be some ways that you could potentially make savings through procurement. From an educational perspective [...]

there would need to be more university students visiting more regularly and meeting the youngsters here and more young people from here going out to the university and being exposed to the university perhaps from a younger age [...] so you have financial, and you have aspirational [...] may be that it is to prop up the School of Education financially with initial teacher training moving into schools and schools direct programmes. (ASL1)

The Conservative government promoted school-led teacher training, which has been regarded as a threat to university-led teacher training and its related income (Mansell, 2013; Fazackerely, 2022). Strategically, a MAT gave a structured mechanism to secure the maintenance or growth of teacher training places and funding. Combined with this business-orientated motivation is the retention of budget surplus for schools converting to academies. Thus, the role of the university in the MAT was seen to be an opportunity to help secure future income.

Political motives

University participants typically supported government policy on academisation and the move away from LA control. This was partly because of the opportunity it provided as a sponsor and because of a recognition that where LAs were struggling to fully support the running and governance of schools, sponsors had a role to play to meet the 'leadership challenge' (USL2). Thus, being involved in a MAT enabled the university to better connect and engage with its local community. There has been

much written on the premise that LAs have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system (e.g. Hatcher, 2011; Riddle and Apple, 2019; Crawford et al., 2022). However, senior university participants had strong views regarding the contemporary role of LAs in school governance. For example:

As LAs become increasingly short of cash, they aren't able to offer the level of service they were able to offer to maintain schools [...] They probably never were or certainly weren't in recent times, able to offer the governance arrangements and the encouragement of innovation and creativity in leadership and management in particular, that a school which is more autonomous through the academisation process either on its own or with a Multi-Academy Trust is able to do. (USL1)

There was broad consensus among the five university participants that a university-sponsored MAT could be well and even better placed than LAs to manage schools, their estates and governance. This heralded the altruistic view that, against a backdrop of an already diminished role for LAs, academies funded centrally by the DfE could provide a more local community-focussed education experience. Academies, MATs, and the shift from central government power towards localised autonomy with headteachers performing a role as system leaders, signals a move to devolved control for schooling. Conversely, this less transparent system results in greater government control achieved through a network of more transient middle-tier organisations than a previously elected and democratically accountable LA-controlled system (Cousin, 2019; Kulz, 2020).

University participants believed that, in the current landscape where LA resources were stretched, a MAT was a viable option for local schools. In contrast, no positive responses from academy participants were found regarding the long-term aspirations of the MAT, perhaps a reflection of the difference in the power and position with regards to the decision-making process. Responses were typically vague, such as “I don’t [know] because I haven’t been told” (ASL2). MATs clearly have implications for leadership and management in schools, not least because they are more compact in size. In essence they can be more engaged in the running of schools than a LA could be.

Nonetheless, at the time of data collection, there was tension between university participants’ views regarding whether the MAT was able to deliver on this potential to be a viable alternative to a LA. Academy leaders did not perceive there were advantages in being part of a MAT, compared to being a LA school. In the initial stages of the creation of the MAT, governance was perceived as weak and lacking in transparency which, combined with limited communication thwarted some Academy participants to see the potential benefits of the MAT. For instance, “I would say there was no communication [...] about the MAT and rather a lot of confusion” (ASL1).

Social motives

The general view from university leaders was that academies offer a tangible outcome through the improvement and maintenance of high standards of education for young people, and that local people could benefit from a good education which benefitted

those same communities. What is not evident in the data was how this was to be achieved:

The MAT has to be about helping the communities we work in so those people can have a choice, and I would like to think choice in many cases will allow those people to stay [...] and develop the community. (USL2)

The extract illustrates the common altruistic view of the university participants who believed they were involved in a MAT project that was potentially benefitting the local community and which offered choices and opportunities which would not be possible without the university's sponsorship. However, this assumes that choice is straightforward and acts as an enabler; an assumption problematised by Gibbons et al. (2008) who contemplate a difference between choice and rational decisions. This emphasis on locality, civic responsibility, local community engagement and transformation by sponsors is evident in the university-based participants' data. These excerpts exemplify shared motives:

It's that sort of transformative thing. If you are in a university like this one which is all about widening participation and local regeneration, and you know really tries to position itself as the university that opens opportunities for the local area. (UML)

This university has always regarded it as being very important that it is present in its community [...] so, to be connected with one and then a growing number of schools across the county and to have its name kind of at a local level in the community, it was important [...] Offering all sorts of development opportunities for students at school to

understand what university is about, to some extent to put at their disposal some of the expertise and facilities and opportunities that the university provide [...] also as aspiration-raising to show that the university is part of their experience really, and so there's a sort of reason why I thought it's good for the university to be involved. (USL1)

These responses, which resonate with Gibson's (2016a; 2016b) research, could be a result of a drive for survival, policy focus and government discourse that increasingly concerned the role of universities supporting their local schools (DfE, 2018). In contrast, the MAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO) regarded the sponsorship as being significantly motivated by altruistic reasons:

It's [the university] a multi hundred-million-pound business, why would you build an empire of little primary schools? It's pointless. So, the motivation can't be questioned. It has to be purely what's best for kids in the county. You can't say well, 'that's a bunch of businessmen based in London, like one or two of the Trusts.' You don't have that suspicion with a Uni. There's nothing in it for the Uni. (MAT CEO)

The general feeling of university participants was of MATs being able to have a positive impact in enabling schools to work together pragmatically, as exemplified below:

Our first priority should be there to provide support to those schools in order to help them to help themselves, and in doing so to work in a collaborative way. (ULEC)

The consensus of university participants was that they regarded MATs, a new addition to the middle-tier of education, as a solution to the decreasing

resources and capability of LAs to support and challenge schools (whether they agree with the policy or not). The findings reveal motivating factors were intertwined in nature and that the concept of 'system change' through the clustering of schools and sharing of resources along with community and reputational drivers was both altruistic and financially driven. University-employed participants cited both factors as key motivating factor for the university to create the MAT. While widening participation was declared as a motivation by University participants, it appeared there was no strategic plan to achieve this, for example:

What is our community's current understanding of higher education and engagement with it? What would we want it to be? How do we get it there? How does the MAT fit into that? So those fundamental questions were never asked. When we decided to sponsor one failing secondary school that nobody else wanted in the county, those questions were not on the agenda. (UML)

These comments suggest the creation and development of this MAT happened without a collective and shared vision and process. It also points potentially towards the power dynamics and hierarchy of participants; some were in control of decisions and others were recipients of decision outcomes. This significantly impacted on communication regarding the role and purpose of the MAT. As exemplified in this Academy perspective:

I believe we need some consultation on what meetings we need to have, should have or should be seen to have [...] I just feel, at the moment, that we are making it up as we go along. (ASL2)

In effect, this created the situation where the MAT existed but was not functioning in a way that would create the environment for system change (Fullan, 2016). Thus, there was a sense from university leaders that there was a gap for the university to fill but that a lack of strategic planning and perhaps policy direction meant that progress was slow in terms of embedding the MAT into the university and getting the support of its governors:

We still have some work to do to convince our governors that sponsoring a MAT is a good idea. (USL1)

There was perceived tension between the hesitancy of governor views and that of the strategic planner and policy advisor for the university, who stated the benefits as they saw them:

Strategically I think it's a huge benefit, which we never seem to be able to articulate very well, [...] in terms of strategy [...] to maintain our presence in the county, what better way than through schools. (UPL)

In the view of university leaders, university governors were not fully convinced about the role of the creation and development of the MAT in benefitting the university. The university strategy lead (UPL), in contrast, was clear regarding the potential benefits

to both the university and the Academy. The inconsistent picture regarding clear planning suggests that government policy regarding the role of HE in this middle tier was not fully established or articulated.

Conclusion

The research set out to better understand the reasons for a university to sponsor a MAT and fulfil a role in the middle tier of the education system in England. The use of an economic, political and social conceptualisation enabled an insightful lens to unveil key motives reconciling these as a combination of altruism and survival. The findings illuminate the imperatives for a university to consider sponsoring a MAT which are a complex mix of organisational reasons and personal motivations. In terms of altruism, such motives encompass the desire to enhance the role of the university in its local community, and which may be conceived as a mission for public good and civic responsibility. However, this could be combined simultaneously with the strategic prospect of reputational gain and thus linked to survival. Primary motives for senior university leaders were economic self-interest, relating to the protection of teacher training provision which was at risk from government policies promoting school-led training, securing future recruitment income, county-wide brand and reputation. This also aligns with the neoliberal policies and managerial practices which affect universities (and schools). Social, altruistic imperatives were, a desire to maintain and create close community relationships and widen participation in HE. Political drivers such as harnessing the control of education and financial incentives, were also evident. However, these could also be construed as shaping and enhancing institutional legitimacy. Thus, there is some interplay between the motives; they are

intertwined and not mutually exclusive

Arguably, the county's schools needed a mechanism to bring about improvement and drive change. The development and sponsorship of a MAT was supported by university participants although not evident in Academy participant data. Central control and incentives concerning the retention of budget surplus for those that convert to academies fuelled the motivations of the organisations and individuals involved in the MAT, resulting in an intertwined set of reasons why these organisations are working together.

Education departments within universities typically have strong links with schools, and academies were, and are, a key development in the local education landscape. Power shifts from LA control to a MAT system of education enabling increased central government control were noted in participant responses a finding resonating with Crawford et al's (2022) research. There was a strong view from university participants that the university was well-placed to manage the void created by an under-resourced LA and that the university-sponsored MAT could provide the structure (and services) such as teaching and learning, finance and estates support needed to local schools. Data from Academy participants did not consolidate this view and at least in the early stages of the creation and development of the MAT they were unable to contemplate the benefits of being part of a university-sponsored MAT. This research found that the way the university MAT operated initially with a lack of clear communication or shared vision and values impacted on the view of Academy participants and resulted in a situation where the MAT existed but without a positive impact on its academies. The success of a MAT therefore is contingent on just altruistic intentions. Indeed, within

the sponsor university, it seems governors were not fully convinced as to the purpose and role of the MAT, which reflects the formation and operation of the MAT initially. The findings suggest that universities' role in this middle-tier of education, although encouraged by government, was not necessarily supported with clear policy or strategic planning. However, a university as a sponsor arguably adds a robust education viewpoint that other MATs would not necessarily have and indeed most MATs operate without sponsor involvement.

More recent changes to the political and economic landscape for universities may impact on future sponsorship decisions by those in leadership and management. Indeed, the current economic pressures on universities potentially have the effect of reducing the prospect of further university sponsorship of MATs. There is a responsibility as sponsor to support its schools and a 'failing' school may have implications for reputation. Equally the opposite may be true since as universities strive to justify their place in communities, diversify their provision through apprenticeships and other qualifications, they need greater connection to the entire education system phases. A link to children from nursery age through to primary and secondary phases, potentially connects learning pathways and opens up HE to communities that would not have ordinarily accessed it. This research provides insight and an important contribution to understanding the motives of universities to sponsor a MAT. In the current era of severe financial strain in HE, future research might investigate the plausibility and nature of university sponsorship alongside how partnership organisations can navigate the tensions exposed in this research.

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