

Beyond the Franchising: Strategic Alignment as the Key to Thriving UK Private Higher Education

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Abstract

This research delves into the evolving landscape of private higher education (PrHE) in the UK, moving beyond the traditional franchising model to explore the critical role of strategic alignment between Public Higher Education Institutions (PuHEIs) and Private Higher Education Institutions (PrHEIs) in fostering thriving institutions. While franchising arrangements have traditionally facilitated the delivery of PuHEIs programmes through PrHEIs, this study emphasises the importance of strategic alignment in achieving long-term success.

The study explores how aligning institutional mission, strategic goals, resources, and practices can enhance academic quality, expand access to education, and foster innovation. Using Oxford Business College (OBC) as a case study, the research highlights OBC's transformation from a follower to a pioneer in research, staff development, and business incubation, driven by direction of strategic alignment with PuHEIs. Key focus areas include widening participation, student support, research enhancement, staff development, and business incubation. The findings underscore that beyond the transactional nature of franchising, strategic alignment is essential for PrHEIs to thrive, setting a new paradigm for sustainable and impactful higher education partnerships in the UK.

Keywords: UK Higher Education (HE) Franchising, Strategic Alignment, Public Higher Education Institutions (PuHEIs), Private Higher Education Institutions (PrHEIs), Oxford Business College (OBC)

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Introduction

The Higher Education (HE) landscape in the United Kingdom has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, driven by a need to expand access, make more choices for students, enhance quality and foster innovation. One notable development has been the rise of franchising arrangements between Public Higher Education Institutions (PuHEIs) and Private Higher Education Institutions (PrHEIs).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are categorised as either public or private (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021), but distinguishing between the two can be complex due to a lack of conceptual clarity (Marginson, 2007). According to UNESCO (2014), a HEI is considered public if it is governed and managed by a public education authority, government agency, or a body appointed by a public authority. In contrast, a private HEI is managed by a non-governmental entity, such as a church, trade union, or business enterprise, with its governing board members not selected by a public body. The ultimate control over an institution's activities and appointing managing officers typically defines its management structure (UNESCO, 2014).

Public and private HEIs can be differentiated based on legal ownership, funding sources, and societal impact (Buckner, 2017). Levy (2012) describes PrHEIs based on national definitions, while Altbach (1999) defines them as institutions operating for profit without government grants, responsible for their own funding. A PrHEI typically has private ownership and funding, whereas a PuHEI has state ownership and funding (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021). Functionally, both types of institutions are similar, differing primarily in ownership and funding (Duczmal, 2007). The most straightforward and simple understanding of a PrHEI is that of an organisation with private ownership and funding, while a PuHEI is an organisation with state ownership and funding (Qureshi & Khawaja, 2021, Qureshi, 2023).

Higher education in the UK is a diverse landscape comprising public and private institutions, each with unique characteristics and contributions, where public institutions tend to be larger and private institutions smaller (Qureshi et al., 2020). PuHEIs in the UK, funded by government grants and tuition fees, are renowned for their research prowess, academic excellence, and societal impact (Altbach, 1999; Altbach et al., 2019). PrHEIs, on the other hand, operate independently and often focus on niche areas or specialised programmes catering to diverse student demographics (Qureshi, 2023).

This article provides a critical analysis of franchising in UK HE focusing franchising between PuHEIs and PrHEIs, examining its benefits and drawbacks and explores the concept of strategic alignment in UK HE franchising. Additionally focusing on widening participation, student support, research, staff development, and business incubation as key areas of strategic alignment. It examines the transformative impact of strategic alignment through a case study of Oxford Business College (OBC), highlighting its journey from follower to pioneer in research, staff development, and business incubation by observing the direction of PuHEIs with the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of franchised higher education provision in the UK?
2. How do PuHEIs and PrHEIs in the UK align their strategic goals in franchising partnerships?
3. How has strategic alignment beyond franchising agreements enabled OBC to excel in research, staff development, and business incubation and contribute to the institution's overall thriving?

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Literature Review

Franchising is a business model in which a company (the franchisor) grants another entity (the franchisee) the right to use its brand name, trademarks, and business model in exchange for a fee (Mackie, 2023, Kukec & Khawaja, 2023). This model has been widely used in various industries, including fast food, retail, and hospitality and in recent years, it has also entered the higher education sector (Kukec & Khawaja, 2023).

Franchising in HE refers to a partnership model where a recognised PuHEI (the franchisor) enters into contractual agreement to allow other provider (the franchisee-PrHEI) to deliver all or part of an educational programme that the franchisor approves and owns (Braisby et. al; 2024). The franchisor grants the franchisee the right to deliver academic programmes using the franchisor's curriculum, learning materials, brand, quality assurance processes and, most important, the right to award a degree. (Altbach, 2023; Braisby et. al; 2024). This allows the franchisee to offer degrees from the established PuHEI without independently developing their own programmes or gaining accreditation, and franchisees are without degree awarding powers.

In the UK, franchising has become increasingly prevalent in recent years and is now an established part of the UK HE (Braisby et. al; 2024). Several universities including private have entered into franchise agreements with further education colleges and private providers, both domestically and internationally. These partnerships allow the franchisor (university) to expand its reach and generate additional revenue while the franchisee (partner) gains access to established academic programmes and the prestige associated with the university's brand.

Table 01: Domestic and International Franchising

Domestic	
Type of Partnership	Example
1. PuHEI and PrHEI	Solent University and Q A Higher Education
2. PuHEI and PuFEC	The Sheffield College and Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. City of Bristol College and the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and the University of Gloucestershire.
3. PrHEI and PrHEI	London School of Business and Finance (LSBF) and the University of Law.
International	
PuHEI and PuHEI	University of Nottingham and the University of Ningbo China (UNNC)
PuHEI and PrHEI	University of Warwick and Monash University Australia
PrHEI and PrHEI	The University of Law and several partners in Africa, Asia, Europe, American and Caribbean regions London School of Commerce (LSC) and Misr University for Science & Technology (MUST)

Source: Author's choice without prejudice

Domestically, UK HEIs engage in diverse partnerships to expand educational opportunities and foster collaboration. As exemplified (Table 01) by Solent University's partnership with QA Higher Education, public and private institutions collaborate. Additionally, partnerships between PuHEIs and Public Further Education Colleges (PuFECs) are prevalent, such as the collaborations between Sheffield College and local universities and the City of Bristol College with both the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and the University of Gloucestershire. PrHEIs also collaborate, as seen in the partnership between the London School of Business and Finance (LSBF) and the University of Law.

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Internationally, UK HEIs form strategic alliances with institutions worldwide, such as the University of Nottingham's joint venture with the University of Ningbo China, creating a unique Sino-foreign university. Collaborations also occur between UK PuHEIs and PuHEIs abroad, like the University of Warwick's alliance with Monash University in Australia. PrHEIs expand globally, exemplified by the University of Law's numerous international partnerships and the London School of Commerce's collaboration with Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST) Egypt.

Proponents of franchising in HE argue that it can expand access to education by allowing students in remote or underserved areas to earn a degree from a reputable institution. It can also increase revenue for both the franchisor and the franchisee (partner) institution and provide the partner institution with access to the franchisor's curriculum, faculty, and resources.

However, critics of franchising in HE have raised concerns about the quality of education delivered through these programmes. They argue that partner institutions may not have the same standards or resources as the franchisor (PuHEI) itself and that students may not receive the same level of instruction or support. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency in these arrangements and the potential for exploitation of both students and faculty.

While franchising offers potential benefits, it also raises concerns regarding quality assurance, student experience, and the financial sustainability of franchise arrangements (Braisby et. al; 2024). It is crucial for regulatory bodies and universities to ensure robust quality control mechanisms are in place to maintain the integrity of academic programs and protect the interests of students and stakeholders involved in franchised provision. As Kukec and Khawaja (2023) highlight, franchising has transcended its conventional role in retail and services, becoming a pivotal instrument in the commercialisation of HE and yielding benefits for all key stakeholders engaged in such national and international academic partnerships.

Traditionally, franchising arrangements have provided franchisees, which lack their own degree-awarding powers, with several significant benefits.

- *offering provision in localities less well-served by higher education;*
- *a transfer of knowledge and expertise from the franchisor, especially in relation to quality and standards;*
- *less burdensome entry into the market facilitated by the established administration and infrastructure of the franchisor; and*
- *access to staff development and the research expertise of the franchisor.*
- *Franchisors also benefit through at least the following:*
- *widening access to their own degrees;*
- *a transfer of knowledge and expertise from the franchisee, especially in relation to delivery models;*
- *helping to raise standards across the sector; and*
- *raising awareness of the franchisor's brand and identity.*

(Braisby et. al; 2024, P.4).

Franchising arrangements in higher education offer several notable advantages for franchisees, particularly those without their own degree-awarding powers:

1. **Provision in Underserved Localities:** Franchising enables educational provision in areas less served by higher education institutions, thereby increasing accessibility for students in remote or underserved regions (Levy, 2012).
2. **Transfer of Knowledge and Expertise:** Franchisees benefit from the franchisor's transfer of knowledge and expertise, particularly regarding quality assurance and academic standards, ensuring that the educational programmes they offer meet high standards (Altbach, 1999).
3. **Easier Market Entry:** Franchisees experience a less burdensome entry into the higher education market, as they can leverage the franchisor's established administrative systems and infrastructure, reducing the initial setup and operational challenges (Levin, 2005).

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4. **Staff Development and Research Access:** Franchisees gain access to the franchisor's staff development programmes and research expertise, which can enhance their academic and research capabilities and foster professional growth among their staff (Marginson, 2007).

Franchisors, in turn, also reap significant benefits from franchising arrangements:

1. **Widening Access to Degrees:** By partnering with franchisees, franchisors can widen access to their degree programs, reaching a broader and more diverse student population (Levy, 2015).
2. **Knowledge and Expertise Transfer:** Franchisors benefit from the knowledge and expertise brought by franchisees, particularly in innovative delivery models and local market insights, which can enhance the overall educational offerings (Altbach, 1999).
3. **Raising Sector Standards:** Through franchising, franchisors can help raise educational standards across the sector by ensuring that franchisees adhere to high-quality standards, contributing to the overall improvement of higher education (Buckner, 2017).
4. **Brand and Identity Awareness:** Franchising helps in raising awareness of the franchisor's brand and identity, enhancing their reputation and presence in different regions and educational markets (Levin, 2005).

Khallaf (2022) identified several benefits derived from university partnerships based on a comprehensive literature review. Some of the benefits include:

- a) **Faster Delivery and Higher Quality:** Partnerships can facilitate quicker student recruitment and offer multiple intakes, thereby accelerating the educational process and potentially enhancing the overall quality of education provided.
- b) **Effective and Efficient Delivery:** Flexible scheduling of programme delivery, including options for weekdays, weekends, and evenings, can cater to diverse student needs and availability, as highlighted by Qureshi (2020).
- c) **Streamlined Processes:** Partnerships often result in more efficient processes and decision-making being handled by third parties rather than university staff, which can reduce administrative burdens on the university.
- d) **Cost Efficiency:** Optimum utilisation of resources, such as offering programme delivery seven days a week, including evenings and weekends, can make education less expensive and more accessible.
- e) **Operational and Maintenance Benefits:** Public institutions can focus on their core educational missions without being concerned with the operation and maintenance of developments, as these responsibilities fall on the developers.
- f) **Market Expansion with Reduced Risks:** Partnerships enable universities to enter new market sectors with minimised risks, allowing for strategic growth and diversification.

By leveraging these mutual benefits, franchising arrangements in higher education create a symbiotic relationship that enhances the capabilities and reach of both franchisors and franchisees, contributing to the broader goals of accessibility, quality, and innovation in the sector.

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Table 02 outlines various partnerships between UK PrHEIs (franchisees) and UK PuHEIs acting as franchisors. These collaborations allow the franchisees to offer degree programmes by the franchisors, ensuring quality and academic standards.

Table 02: List of UK Franchisor and Franchisee

UK Private Provider (Franchisee)	UK HEI (Franchisor)
1. Al-Maktoum College of Higher Education	Abertay University, University of Dundee
2. Applied Business Academy	University of West London, Leeds Trinity University, The University of Buckingham
3. Elizabeth School of London	St Mary's University, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Bolton, Bath Spa University
4. Global Banking School (GBS)	Oxford Brookes University, Pearson, Canterbury Christ Church University, Bath Spa University, University of Suffolk, Leeds Trinity University
5. London School of Commerce (LSC)	University of Bedfordshire, University of Suffolk, New College Durham, Canterbury Christ Church University, Misr University for Science & Technology (MUST)
6. London School of Science and Technology (LSST)	University of West London, Buckinghamshire New University, De Montfort University
7. Magna Carta College	Buckinghamshire New University, Pearson
8. Oxford Business College (OBC)	Buckinghamshire New University, University of West London, New College of Durham, Ravensbourne University London
9. QA Higher Education	University of South Wales, London Metropolitan University, Solent University
10. UK College of Business and Computing (UKCBC)	University of West London, Plymouth MARJON University

Source: Author's selection without prejudice

Table 02 highlights the collaborative efforts between private providers and public universities, showcasing franchising arrangements as a well-established aspect of the UK higher education sector (Braisby et al., 2024).

Several studies have examined the phenomenon of franchising in higher education. For example, a study by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) found that franchised provision can benefit students, as it is often provided locally and especially appealing to first-in-family students. However, the study also raised concerns about the lack of transparency in these arrangements and called for greater sector regulation (HEPI, 2024).

Another study by Wonkhe found that progression beyond the first year and completion is less likely at franchisee providers (Wonkhe, 2023). This raises questions about the quality of education delivered through these programmes, and whether students receive the support they need to succeed.

A report by the National Audit Office (NAO) found that the number of students enrolled at franchised providers more than doubled between 2018 and 2022 and that eight lead providers were responsible for 91% of this growth (NAO, 2024). This raises concerns about the concentration of power in the sector and the potential for a few universities to dominate the market.

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The Office for Students (OfS) has emphasised raising awareness among franchisors about the risks and benefits of franchise provision (Braisby et al., 2024). This includes sharing good practices concerning student recruitment (Office for Students, 2021). One of the primary motivations for this paper is to disseminate the good practices of franchisees and address concerns regarding high student recruitment numbers in franchised programmes. Using the case study of Oxford Business College (OBC), this paper illustrates these practices and examines the broader context of high student recruitment rates. Detailed discussions of these practices will be provided in the latter part of this paper.

One significant factor contributing to the high number of student enrolments is the scheduling flexibility offered by franchised PrHEIs, which allows students to manage other commitments alongside their studies (Šestanović & Siddiqui, 2021; Jeynes, 2023). Consequently, PrHEIs become the first choice for mature students (Zia et al., 2023).

In addition, PrHEIs offer multiple intakes throughout the academic year, with some institutions providing up to six entry points (Jeynes, 2023; Qureshi, 2020). This flexible intake system contrasts with PuHEIs, which traditionally offer only two intakes: one in September/October for undergraduate programmes and another in January/February for postgraduate programmes. However, many PuHEIs are now considering additional intakes, recognising the benefits of increased flexibility, with a few PuHEIs already implementing this change.

Unlike many PuHEIs, which typically do not offer programmes during evenings and weekends, franchised PrHEIs have tailored their offerings to meet the needs of mature students who often work full-time and cannot attend traditional daytime classes (Levy, 2015; Marginson, 2007, 2016). As a result, the availability of evening and weekend classes at franchised PrHEIs has attracted a substantial number of mature students, thereby increasing overall student recruitment (Miller & Shotte, 2010).

Almost all franchised PrHEIs in the UK offer flexible scheduling for studying, consequently attracting many mature students.

Strategic alignment between franchisors and franchisees is essential for the success of HE franchising partnerships. Public HEIs, as franchisors, provide strategic direction and guidance to PrHEIs, directing their efforts towards widening participation, enhancing student support services, fostering research culture, promoting staff development, and facilitating business incubation. This alignment enables PrHEIs to leverage the expertise, resources, and best practices of public HEIs, driving innovation and excellence in their academic programs and support initiatives.

The PuHEI is the custodian of academic standards and quality assurance in a franchising partnership. It provides the franchisee access to its resources, faculty expertise, and infrastructure while maintaining oversight to ensure compliance with regulatory standards. As the franchisee, the PrHEI benefits from the established brand reputation and academic credibility of the franchising university. One critical area of strategic alignment in HE franchising is research collaboration. The franchisor, typically a research-intensive PuHEI, may extend its research capabilities to the franchisee through joint projects, funding opportunities, and access to research facilities. This alignment fosters a culture of innovation and knowledge exchange, enriching the academic experience for students and faculty across both institutions.

Strategic alignment in UK HE franchising extends beyond curriculum and assessment, encompassing the crucial domain of student support services. Ensuring a seamless and consistent student experience across partner institutions necessitates a deliberate alignment of support structures, resources, and approaches. As Yorke and Longden (2008) emphasise, the student experience is shaped not only by the formal curriculum but also by the broader environment in which learning occurs.

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In the context of franchising, this environment includes academic advising, counselling, career services, and other forms of support essential for student success. To achieve strategic alignment in this area, institutions must engage in open dialogue, sharing best practices and co-creating support models that reflect the diverse needs of their student populations. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility for student well-being and academic achievement (Qureshi et al; 2022), aligning with the broader goals of student-centred quality assurance, and promoting trust and transparency through Collaborative Approaches (Tinapay et al., 2024). By prioritising strategic alignment in student support services, institutions can ensure that all learners, regardless of their location or mode of study, have equitable access to the resources and guidance necessary to thrive in their academic journeys.

Effective staff development is integral to maintaining academic standards and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in HE (Abdulkerim et al; 2022). The franchisor plays a pivotal role in providing training, professional development opportunities, and mentorship programmes for faculty and staff at the franchisee institution. The franchisee can enhance teaching quality, curriculum delivery, and student support services by aligning staff development initiatives with the franchisor's strategic objectives.

Strategic alignment extends beyond academic endeavours to encompass business incubation and entrepreneurship initiatives. PuHEIs often have robust networks, resources, and expertise in fostering innovation and supporting startup ventures. Through franchising partnerships, the franchisor can extend its entrepreneurship programmes, mentorship networks, and incubation facilities to the franchisee, creating synergies that promote economic growth and societal impact.

Case Study: Oxford Business College (OBC): Oxford Business College (OBC) is a compelling example of the transformative impact of strategic alignment in HE franchising. Before its partnership with PuHEIs, OBC primarily followed the academic trajectory set by its franchisors. OBC's success extends beyond traditional franchising agreements, highlighting the importance of broader strategic alignment in driving institutional thriving. OBC's focus on research is evident in its Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network (OxBRAIN) and Oxford Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (OxCARE) initiatives, which fosters a research culture among staff and students and aligns with its academic excellence goal. Staff development programmes like Oxford Staff Centre Of Professional Excellence (OxSCOPE) demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and professional growth, aligning with the need for a highly qualified workforce, while OxPASS demonstrates a commitment to excellent service to students. Additionally, the OxBIIC reflects OBC's strategic alignment with industry needs, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation among its students, graduates, staff and local businesses. While not directly tied to franchising, these initiatives complement and enhance OBC's franchised programmes, contributing to the institution's overall reputation and attractiveness to students and faculty alike. This case underscores the importance of a holistic approach to strategic alignment, encompassing multiple facets of institutional activity, to achieve sustainable growth and success in the competitive private higher education landscape.

Oxford Personal and Academic Student Support (OxPASS): Comprehensive Services for OBC Student

OBC is dedicated to fostering an environment where students can thrive academically, personally, and professionally. The Oxford Personal and Academic Student Support (OxPASS) system is a cornerstone of this commitment, which provides comprehensive services designed to support students throughout

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their academic journey. OxPASS aims to ensure that every student has the resources and guidance necessary to achieve their full potential, from enrollment through graduation.

Objectives of OxPASS

The primary objectives of OxPASS are:

- **Enhancing Academic Success:** Offering academic support to help students excel in their studies.
- **Personal Development:** Providing resources and counselling to support students' personal growth and well-being.
- **Professional Readiness:** Preparing students for successful careers through skill development and career services.
- **Entrepreneur Readiness:** Oxford Business Innovation and Incubation Centre (OxBIIC) provides students, local businesses and budding entrepreneurs the platform to start a successful business.

Academic Support

OxPASS provides a robust framework for academic support tailored to meet the diverse needs of OBC students. This includes:

- **Personalised Tutoring:** One-on-one tutoring sessions that address specific academic challenges and help students understand course material more deeply.
- **Study Skills Workshops:** Workshops that teach effective study strategies, time management, and exam preparation techniques.
- **Writing Assistance:** Support for developing strong writing skills, critical for academic success across disciplines. This includes help with structuring essays, developing arguments, and proper referencing.

Personal Development and Counselling

Recognising the importance of personal well-being in academic success, OxPASS offers a range of services aimed at supporting students' mental and emotional health:

- **Counselling Services:** Professional counsellors provide confidential support to students dealing with personal issues, stress, anxiety, or other mental health concerns.
- **Wellness Programmes:** Programmes and workshops focused on promoting physical health, mindfulness, and stress management.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Initiatives encouraging students to support one another, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Professional Readiness and Career Services

OxPASS also places a strong emphasis on preparing students for their future careers. This is achieved through a variety of career services and professional development opportunities:

- **Career Counselling:** One-on-one career advice and planning sessions to help students identify career goals and create actionable plans to achieve them.
- **Internships and Placements:** Assistance in securing internships and placement opportunities that provide practical experience in students' chosen fields.
- **Professional Skills Workshops:** Workshops on resume writing, interview techniques, networking, and other essential professional skills.

Continuous Support Throughout the Academic Journey

OxPASS is designed to support students at every stage of their academic journey. This continuous support includes:

- **Orientation Programmes:** Introductory programs that help new students acclimate to the college environment and understand the resources available to them.

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- **Ongoing Advising:** Regular academic advising sessions to monitor progress, set goals, and address any challenges that arise.
- **Graduation Preparation:** Guidance on transitioning from college to the professional world, including job search strategies and alumni networking opportunities.

Research Excellence

OBC has strategically positioned itself as a leader in research excellence among PrHEIs) through a series of transformative initiatives. Establishing the research department was the foundational step that catalysed OBC's journey towards academic and entrepreneurial prominence. This initiative was soon followed by the creation of the Oxford Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (OxCARE) and the Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network (OxBRAIN).

The inception of OBC's research department marked a pivotal moment in the institution's commitment to fostering a research-intensive environment. This department was envisioned to serve as the nucleus for scholarly activities, driving forward the college's mission to integrate rigorous academic research with practical business applications. By cultivating a robust research culture, OBC aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world business challenges.

OxCARE was established as a dedicated centre focused on applied research and entrepreneurship. Its primary objective is to conduct research that directly addresses contemporary business issues and contributes to developing innovative solutions. The centre emphasises the application of research findings to foster entrepreneurship and support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). OxCARE's initiatives include:

- **Collaborative Research Projects:** Engaging with industry partners to undertake research projects that address real-world business challenges.
- **Entrepreneurial Support:** Providing resources and mentorship to budding entrepreneurs, helping them translate research into viable business ventures.
- **Publication and Dissemination:** To enhance OBC's academic reputation, we encourage the publication of research findings in reputable journals.

Following the success of OxCARE, OBC established the Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network (OxBRAIN). OxBRAIN serves as a platform for fostering collaboration among researchers, industry professionals, and academic institutions. The network's primary goals include:

- **Research Collaboration:** Facilitating interdisciplinary research collaborations that span various fields of business and management.
- **Innovation Ecosystem:** Creating an ecosystem that supports innovation through exchanging ideas, resources, and best practices.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Organising conferences, seminars, and workshops to disseminate research findings and promote stakeholder dialogue.

The combined efforts of the research department, OxCARE, and OxBRAIN have significantly enhanced OBC's research output. The publication of over 70 research papers in reputable peer-reviewed journals stands as a testament to the college's dedication to academic excellence. These publications have not only elevated OBC's academic standing but have also contributed to the broader body of knowledge in business and management. The topics covered in these papers range from innovative business strategies to applied entrepreneurship, reflecting OBC's comprehensive approach to research.

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Through these strategic initiatives, OBC has successfully positioned itself as a pioneer in research among private HEIs. The college's emphasis on applied research, entrepreneurship, and innovation has set it apart from its peers, showcasing its commitment to addressing the evolving needs of the business world. OBC's research endeavours have also attracted attention from industry stakeholders, fostering partnerships that further enhance the institution's impact and reach.

Oxford Staff Centre of Professional Excellence (OxSCOPE)

OBC has consistently demonstrated a commitment to academic and professional excellence not only for its students but also for its faculty and staff. To further this goal, OBC established the Oxford Staff Centre of Professional Excellence (OxSCOPE), an initiative to enhance staff development and foster a culture of continuous learning and professional growth. OxSCOPE serves as a cornerstone for OBC's strategic efforts to ensure that its faculty and staff are equipped with the latest knowledge, skills, and qualifications necessary to excel in their respective fields.

Objectives of OxSCOPE

The primary objectives of OxSCOPE include:

- **Enhancing Professional Development:** Providing faculty and staff access to advanced professional development opportunities.
- **Securing Fellowships:** Facilitating the attainment of prestigious fellowships from recognised bodies such as Advance HE and the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS).
- **Offering Professional Qualifications:** Enabling staff to pursue globally recognised professional qualifications and certifications.

Securing Fellowships from Advance HE

A key initiative of OxSCOPE is to support faculty and staff in securing fellowships from Advance HE, a prominent organisation dedicated to improving higher education through professional recognition and development. By obtaining fellowships, staff members not only enhance their professional credentials but also contribute to OBC's overall academic reputation. These fellowships recognise individuals committed to teaching excellence and academic leadership, aligning with OBC's strategic goals of maintaining high educational standards. OBC staff members have Associate to Principal Fellowships across all four levels.

Professional Qualifications and Certifications

OxSCOPE offers diverse professional qualifications and certifications, empowering staff to advance their careers and expand their expertise. Some of the notable qualifications facilitated by OxSCOPE include:

- **Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA):** A prestigious accounting qualification that equips staff with advanced financial and management accounting skills.
- **Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE):** A professional teaching qualification that prepares staff for educational leadership and pedagogy roles.
- **Doctorate Programmes:** Opportunities for staff to pursue doctoral degrees, contributing to the academic research output and intellectual capital of OBC.
- **LinkedIn Learning:** Access to a vast library of online courses covering various professional skills and industry-specific knowledge.
- **Institute of Analytics (IoA):** Arrange different levels of customised Data Analytics courses for staff and students.

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- **Amazon Web Services (AWS) Provider:** OBC achieved the prestigious AWD Academy status to train staff and students

Short Courses from Prestigious Institutions

To ensure that staff members are at the forefront of academic and professional excellence, OxSCOPE facilitates the completion of short courses from some of the world's most prestigious institutions, including Harvard University, the University of Cambridge, and the University of Oxford. These short courses provide staff with cutting-edge knowledge and insights from leading experts, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation within OBC.

Impact on Staff and Institutional Growth

The establishment of OxSCOPE has had a profound impact on both the personal and professional development of OBC's staff. By participating in these advanced training and qualification programs, staff members are better equipped to deliver high-quality education, engage in meaningful research, and contribute to the strategic goals of the institution. The continuous professional development opportunities provided by OxSCOPE ensure that OBC remains competitive and responsive to the evolving demands of higher education.

Furthermore, staff professional growth translates into tangible benefits for the institution. Enhanced teaching capabilities, advanced research skills, and a commitment to academic excellence contribute to OBC's reputation as a leading private higher education provider. Pursuing fellowships and professional qualifications and completing short courses from elite institutions underscore OBC's dedication to fostering an environment of excellence and innovation.

Oxford Business Innovation and Incubation Centre (OBIIC)

The establishment of the Oxford Business Innovation and Incubation Centre (OBIIC) represents a strategic initiative aimed at nurturing startup ventures and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This centre is designed to foster entrepreneurship and stimulate economic growth within the region of OBC campuses. By providing a supportive environment that includes access to essential resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities, the OBIIC plays a crucial role in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem.

OxBIIC has crafted a transformation strategy that revolves around three critical pillars: People, Technology, and Innovation (PTI). This strategy aims to create a dynamic ecosystem that supports startups and SMEs in achieving sustainable growth and driving regional economic development. The cornerstone of OxBIIC's strategy is its focus on people. Recognising that human capital is the most valuable asset for any organisation and that it is only possible to grow and succeed with the right people with the right skills, knowledge and experience.

Technology is at the heart of OxBIIC's strategy, enabling startups and SMEs to innovate and compete in the digital age. OxBIIC provides access to state-of-the-art technology and tools that startups might otherwise find cost-prohibitive, including advanced software, hardware, and laboratory facilities. The centre offers comprehensive support for digital transformation, helping businesses integrate new technologies into their operations. This includes training in digital marketing, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. OxBIIC has established partnerships with leading tech companies such as the Institute of Analytics (IoA) and achieved the status of Amazon Web Services (AWS) provider and LinkedIn learning. These partnerships provide startups access to the latest technological developments and training facilities.

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Innovation is the driving force behind OxBIIC's strategy, fostering a culture of creativity and continuous improvement. The centre features dedicated innovation labs where entrepreneurs can experiment with new ideas, prototype products, and test solutions. These labs provide a creative space for brainstorming and collaboration. OxBIIC supports R&D activities by offering grants, resources, and expertise. This support helps startups develop innovative products and services that meet market needs and drive growth. The Oxford Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (OxCARE) and the Business Research And Innovation Network (OxBRAIN) play pivotal roles in the OxBIIC. OxBIIC helps startups refine their ideas through its incubation programmes and transform them into viable business models. The centre offers structured support, including business plan development, market research, and funding advice.

Notable Achievement: Rising Star Award from Independent Higher Education (IHE)

In 2023, a distinguished OBC staff member was honoured with the Rising Star Award from Independent Higher Education (IHE). This prestigious accolade recognises individuals who have significantly contributed to their institutions and the broader higher education sector. The recipient's remarkable achievements at OBC, including establishing key departments and initiatives, have significantly advanced the college's mission and impact.

Establishment of the Research Department

The awardee was pivotal in founding OBC's Research Department, a cornerstone for fostering academic inquiry and innovation. Under his leadership, the department has seen substantial growth in research output, contributing to OBC's academic reputation and intellectual rigour. This initiative has not only enhanced the college's research capabilities but also provided a robust platform for both faculty and students to engage in scholarly activities.

Oxford Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (OxCARE)

The creation of the Oxford Centre of Applied Research and Entrepreneurship (OxCARE) is a testament to the awardee's vision for integrating research with practical application. OxCARE has facilitated numerous projects that bridge the gap between academia and industry, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among students and staff. This centre has become a hub for innovation, driving forward-thinking research that addresses real-world challenges and promotes economic development.

Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network (OxBRAIN)

The Oxford Business Research and Innovation Network (OxBRAIN) was another significant initiative spearheaded by the awardee. OxBRAIN has established a collaborative network that connects researchers, industry experts, and policymakers. This network has been instrumental in disseminating research findings and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, leading to the publication of over 70 research papers in reputable peer-reviewed journals. Such achievements have positioned OBC as a leader in research among private higher education institutions.

Oxford Staff Centre of Professional Excellence (OxSCOPE)

To further enhance the professional development of OBC staff, the awardee established the Oxford Staff Centre of Professional Excellence (OxSCOPE). This centre focuses on continuous staff development, securing fellowships from Advance HE for faculty members, and offering professional qualifications such as the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA) and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). OxSCOPE also facilitates access to prestigious short courses from institutions like Harvard, Cambridge, and Oxford, thereby elevating the academic and professional standards at OBC.

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Oxford Personal and Academic Student Support (OxPASS)

The awardee's commitment to student success is evident through establishing the Oxford Personal and Academic Student Support (OxPASS) system. OxPASS provides comprehensive support services to assist students throughout their academic journey, from enrollment to graduation. This initiative has significantly improved student outcomes by offering personalised tutoring, wellness programs, career counselling, and other essential services.

The Rising Star Award from Independent Higher Education (IHE) in 2023 highlights the extraordinary contributions of an OBC staff member who has profoundly impacted the college and the higher education sector. Through the establishment of the Research Department, OxCARE, OxBRAIN, OxSCOPE, and OxPASS, the awardee has driven significant advancements in research, professional development, and student support. These initiatives not only enhance the academic excellence and reputation of OBC but also contribute to the broader goals of innovation and quality in higher education. This recognition underscores the awardee's exceptional dedication, vision, and leadership, which continue to inspire and elevate the OBC community. (<https://ihe.ac.uk/latest/news/ihe-awards-2023-winners>)

Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring franchising within UK private HE has revealed a nuanced landscape marked by significant opportunities and inherent risks. Through a detailed examination of franchising practices, we have identified strategic benefits, including enhanced brand recognition, expanded market reach, and the ability to leverage partner resources for academic and operational excellence. However, these benefits are counterbalanced by potential risks such as loss of control over educational quality, brand dilution, and dependency on partner institutions.

The benefits of franchise provision are clear, but they come with risks that need careful management. The OfS plays a vital role in monitoring these arrangements to ensure that the quality of education and student experience are not compromised (Office for Students, 2021). By sharing good practices and raising awareness about the effective management of franchise provision, the OfS can help both franchisors and franchisees navigate these risks and maximize the benefits for all stakeholders involved.

Franchising in HE is a growing trend that has the potential to expand access to education and raise ethical concerns. Policymakers, educators, and students should carefully consider the benefits and drawbacks of this model and ensure that it is used in a way that benefits all stakeholders.

The strategic alignment between PuHEIs and PrHEIs in franchised higher education programmes is essential for expanding access, maintaining quality, and meeting the needs of diverse student populations. The case study of OBC demonstrates how good practices and flexible scheduling can attract a high number of mature students, thereby addressing some of the key challenges and opportunities in the sector.

The case study underscores the critical importance of strategic alignment in navigating these complexities. OBC's initiatives, including OxPASS, OxCARE, OxBRAIN, OxBIIC, and OxSCOPE, exemplify how a well-aligned strategy can foster innovation, enhance institutional resilience, and drive academic excellence. These demonstrate how strategic alignment not only mitigates the risks associated with franchising but also creates synergies that propel institutions toward their long-term goals.

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Furthermore, Independent Higher Education (IHE) 's recognition of OBC staff through the Rising Star Award 2023 highlights the vital role of individual contributions in achieving strategic objectives. This acknowledgment underscores the significance of fostering a culture that aligns individual efforts with institutional goals, amplifying strategic initiatives' overall impact.

Overall, the study emphasises that while franchising offers a viable pathway for growth and expansion in the competitive landscape of UK private HE, the key to thriving lies in maintaining a strategic alignment that harmonises the goals of franchising partners with the institution's mission and vision. By doing so, private higher education institutions can harness the full potential of franchising, ensuring sustainable growth and academic excellence in an ever-evolving educational environment.

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