Policy Briefing

Black students

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Policy Briefing

April 2022

Higher Education Policy Institute

Welcome to the first edition of HEPI's revamped Policy Briefing paper.

It is produced three times a year exclusively for institutions and organisations that support HEPI's work. The goal is to update readers on recent notable reports on higher education and research – including HEPI's own output.

Many institutions find it helpful to circulate the *Policy Briefing* paper throughout their senior teams and to their governing bodies. We encourage you to do this if you think it would be helpful.

This term, the paper – written as usual by Tony Bruce, a former Director of Policy at Universities UK – covers:

1 the Government's long-awaited response to the Augar report;

2 a study by Unite Students and Halpin on the experiences of Black students living in student accommodation;

3 Richard Brabner's HEPI paper seeking to strengthen the importance of higher education to society;

4 research by HEPI's student intern, Harriet Coombs, on *First-in-Family Students*;

5 a HEPI Debate Paper on illicit drug use among students;

6 a report by Dr Alexis Brown on how the Government treats research with national security implications;

7 a Policy Note looking at who owns the rights to online lecture recordings;

8 a study of the low levels of China literacy in the UK;

9 the latest data on applications to higher education; and

10 research on the mobility of graduates.

HEPI, like every other organisation, has had to tackle the challenges posed by COVID and, for much of the period since 2020, this has meant managing with a smaller staff team. However, we are now back to full strength. Lucy Haire, our Director of Partnerships, now leads our development work with Partners, Dr Alexis Brown is our Director of Policy and works closely with Dr Laura Brassington, who became HEPI's Policy Manager early in 2022; while Emma Ma continues to lead on our events, publications and business operations.

We look forward to further deepening our relationships with all those who engage with our work, given the ever-changing policy landscape laid out in the pages that follow.

Finally, as we thrive on feedback, do please let us know what you think of this refreshed *Policy Briefing* paper, our other output and our events.

Nick Hillman
Director

Response to Augar

In February 2022, the Government concluded its Post-18 Education and Funding Review in England and published a statement setting out policy interventions and proposals for consultation. The review, which had been announced by the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, four years earlier, was informed by independent advice from a panel led by Sir Philip Augar, which reported in May 2019. The Augar report made 53 recommendations, which included reducing tuition fees, extending the loan repayment period, reducing the repayment threshold and reintroducing maintenance grants.

Independent panel report to the

Review of Post-18 Education and Funding

May 2019

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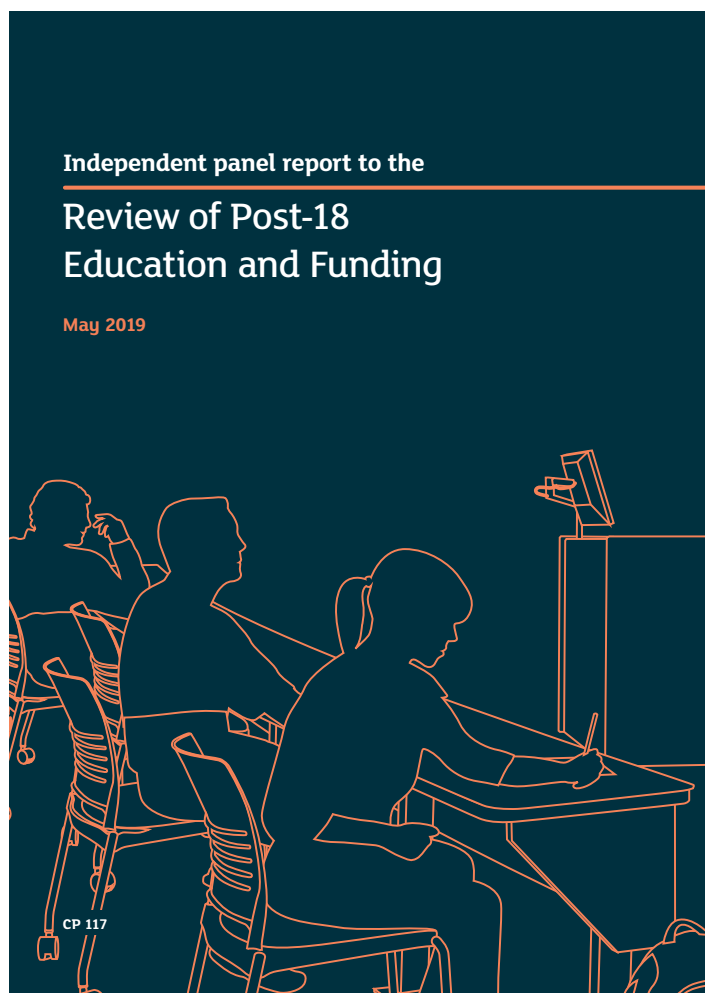
An interim conclusion to the review was published in January 2021 and the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, which was published at the same time, responded to some of the recommendations, which have since been included in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill currently before Parliament.

The Augar report said the existing student finance system resulted in too high a proportion of borrowers repaying too little of their student loans and, in its response, the Government argued that 'contributions are, at present, skewed too far towards the taxpayer and not far enough to the learners who benefit from the system financially'. As a result, the Government is making several changes to the finance system, which it said would address rising costs to the taxpayer while ensuring that student loans remain good value for students.

The changes applying to new students starting in 2023/24 include:

· reducing the annual salary threshold at which loan repayments begin to £25,000 – it will then increase annually from 2027 in line with inflation, as measured by the Retail Prices Index (RPI);

The Government has said that limiting student numbers is one way in which provision that offers the best outcome for students and the economy could be prioritised.

· extending the maximum repayment term from 30 years to 40 years; and

· setting the maximum loan interest at the rate of inflation only, as measured by RPI, rather than RPI plus 3 per cent as at present.

For current (post-2012) borrowers the repayment threshold will be maintained at the level of £27,295 until 2025, when it will rise annually in line with RPI (rather than increasing annually in line with average wages). Under the proposals, the student finance available for Higher Technical Qualifications will be aligned with the support available for degrees. The panel's recommendation to reintroduce maintenance grants for poorer students has not been adopted.

The Augar panel recommended that the tuition fee cap should be reduced to £7,500 a year, with the lost fee income being replaced by increasing the teaching grant. This recommendation has been rejected and the fee cap will be maintained at its current level of £9,250 until 2024/25, which is expected to 'encourage increased efficiency' at universities. It has been capped at this level since 2017/18 and at the current rate of inflation the decision to freeze it will mean a real terms cut to the unit-of-resource for teaching each student well in excess of the reduction recommended by Augar without any compensating increase in the teaching grant.

The response also provides details of the higher education funding settlement from 2022/23, which was omitted from the 2021 Spending Review. Additional funding of £750 million recurrent and capital funding will be provided over the next three years:

· £300 million in strategic priorities grant funding for high-cost subjects, access and specialist providers; and

· £450 million in capital funding, which will support the delivery of high-cost subjects and Level 4 and 5 courses.

The Government is also considering proposals to invest up to £75 million in a new national scholarship scheme for disadvantaged students.

Consultations on several policy proposals, including the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, have been announced, and responses are due by 6 May 2022. In September 2020, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced a Lifetime Skills Guarantee and loans to enable individuals to undertake technical training throughout their lives. This reflected the Augar panel's view that any future post-18 education system should be based on the principle that individuals can access a higher education loan allowance over their lifetime. The entitlement, which will be introduced in 2025, will replace the existing student loan schemes and will be worth the equivalent of four years' post-18 education to be used across Levels 4 to 6.

The entitlement is included in the Skills and Post-16 Bill but it provides little detail on the operation of the new system. The consultation is intended to fill the gap and will lead to further primary legislation setting out how it will work. The new provision will be facilitated through 'lifelong learning accounts' that will show the student's learning 'balance'. Through these accounts, 'learners will be able to see clear signposting of the courses and modules they can get on to propel themselves into learning and further their career aspirations'. The consultation will focus on design principles, including the ambition of the Entitlement, its objectives and coverage.

A second major area for consultation relates to improving student outcomes, an issue that was highlighted in the Augar report when it referred

to courses with 'poor retention, poor graduate employability and poor long-term earnings benefits'. It recommended that, unless universities addressed the issue, a student numbers cap and / or minimum eligibility requirements to access student finance should be imposed. The Government's concern that there are too many graduates who do not benefit from university is reflected in a current Office for Students' consultation on a new approach to regulating student outcomes in order to 'crack down on poor quality courses'.

The Government has said that limiting student numbers is one way in which provision that offers the best outcome for students and the economy could be prioritised. It believes the removal of all number controls (except for areas like Medicine and Dentistry degrees) from 2015 has incentivised universities to expand numbers on courses that are less expensive to teach but which may provide only limited benefits to graduates and the wider economy. The consultation paper does not identify a preferred approach but says that it wants to identify the best way to 'tilt growth towards the provision of post-18 education and training with the best outcomes for students, society and the economy'.

The Government believes that a Minimum Eligibility Requirement would address the problem of students starting degree courses when they are not ready and also reduce the number going to university (as opposed to an alternative education option) when it might not improve their future earning outcomes. The Government's view is that 'a university degree should not be the default choice for everyone'. The requirements being consulted on are grade 4 (previously grade C) at GCSE in English and Mathematics and two E grades at A-Level. The proposals also include possible exemptions for those

for whom 'the minimum eligibility requirement is no longer the best indicator of their potential, due to work and / or further qualifications'. These include mature students, part-time students, students with existing Level 4 and 5 qualifications and other categories.

There is also a consultation on eligibility criteria for the proposed national state scholarship scheme and on capping tuition fees for some foundation years (currently £9,250) so they are aligned with the maximum fees for Access to Higher Education diplomas (currently £5,197).

The Government has also announced the outcome of its consultation on moving to a post-qualification admissions system, confirming that there will be no changes to the present system, but instead it will 'continue to work with UCAS and sector bodies to tackle problems at their root, improving transparency, reducing the use of unconditional offers, and reviewing the personal statement to underpin fairness for applicants of all backgrounds'.

There is also a consultation on Level 4 and 5 provision in England, with the sector being asked to comment on the barriers they face in 'offering and promoting' these courses 'and the role of the fee and funding system in affecting provider and learner behaviour'. Details of further 'upfront investment for providers' to support the expansion of higher technical qualifications up to 2025 are promised.

Commentary

In commenting on the response, HEPI Director Nick Hillman said the Lifelong Earning Entitlement 'could be the most significant education reform of the 2020s', while pointing out there was a risk that it could be watered down from its original conception. In a HEPI news item (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/24/how-to-read-todays-expected-announcements-from-the-westminster-government-on-higher-education-10-points-of-note), he points to the mixed reaction to the Government's announcements, but argues that 'it is a quite carefully balanced package that sends some powerful signals about the Government's priorities – more teaching, more support for poor-and-bright students, more control of costs – while not hitting institutions too hard'. However, some sector representatives have expressed more critical views, with Universities UK commenting: 'Now is not the time to shrink or underfund universities, nor place a cap on aspiration by restricting the number of places for people to study at university'.

Although Augar's proposal to reduce fees to £7,500 has not been adopted, the decision to freeze the full-time undergraduate fee cap at £9,250 until 2024/25 represents a significant financial squeeze on the sector and on the level of funding per student. Since fees were increased to £9,000 in 2012, there has been only one inflationary increase in the fee cap, with the result that by 2024/25 the value of the fee (as calculated by Universities UK) will have fallen to £6,600 at 2012 prices. In the three years from 2022, the freeze will result in a £2.2 billion loss in fee income, which is far greater than the additional £750 million in recurrent and capital funding which has been announced.

The proposed changes to student loan terms represent the most significant reform of the system since 2012, which will mean many borrowers making repayments until their retirement. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that the changes will reduce taxpayer costs by £2.3 billion per cohort. At present, about 25 per cent of graduates can expect to pay their loans in full, but this will increase to half under the new system. The impact of the changes on borrowers varies significantly: the highest earners gain some £25,000 from the lower interest rate, but there will be a strong negative impact on borrowers with below average but not the lowest earnings. They stand to lose £28,000 on average because they will be making repayments for 10 years longer and on a larger proportion of their earnings than under the present system.

Although the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and the creation of a national state scholarship scheme may help to support access to higher education, in other respects the proposed changes are unlikely to be helpful. The introduction of Minimum Eligibility Requirements, increased loan repayments, a cap on student numbers and possible changes to the funding of foundation years represent potential barriers to disadvantaged students seeking to enter higher education.

In a HEPI blog (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/28/whats-not-to-dislike-about-minimum-eligibility-requirements-and-the-rest-of-the-governments-augar-response-package), Sir Peter Scott, Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland, argues that the proposed changes are 'adverse to access'. He focuses on the Minimum Eligibility Requirements and responds to Mary Curnock Cook's calculation (in a HEPI blog available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/24/gcse-thresholds-for-eligibility-for-student-loans-could-transform-access-and-participation) that less than 10 per cent of applicants would be affected by the change. He suggests that the explanation for this relatively small number is that the majority of those falling below the threshold have already been deflected into further education and never get on to any kind of pathway leading to higher education. Peter Scott's conclusion is that secondary school examinations should not be used to divide young people into winners and losers as universities have 'frequently demonstrated through their access and bridging courses that those who have very poor results can nevertheless flourish in higher education'.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1057092/HE_reform_command-paper-print_version.pdf
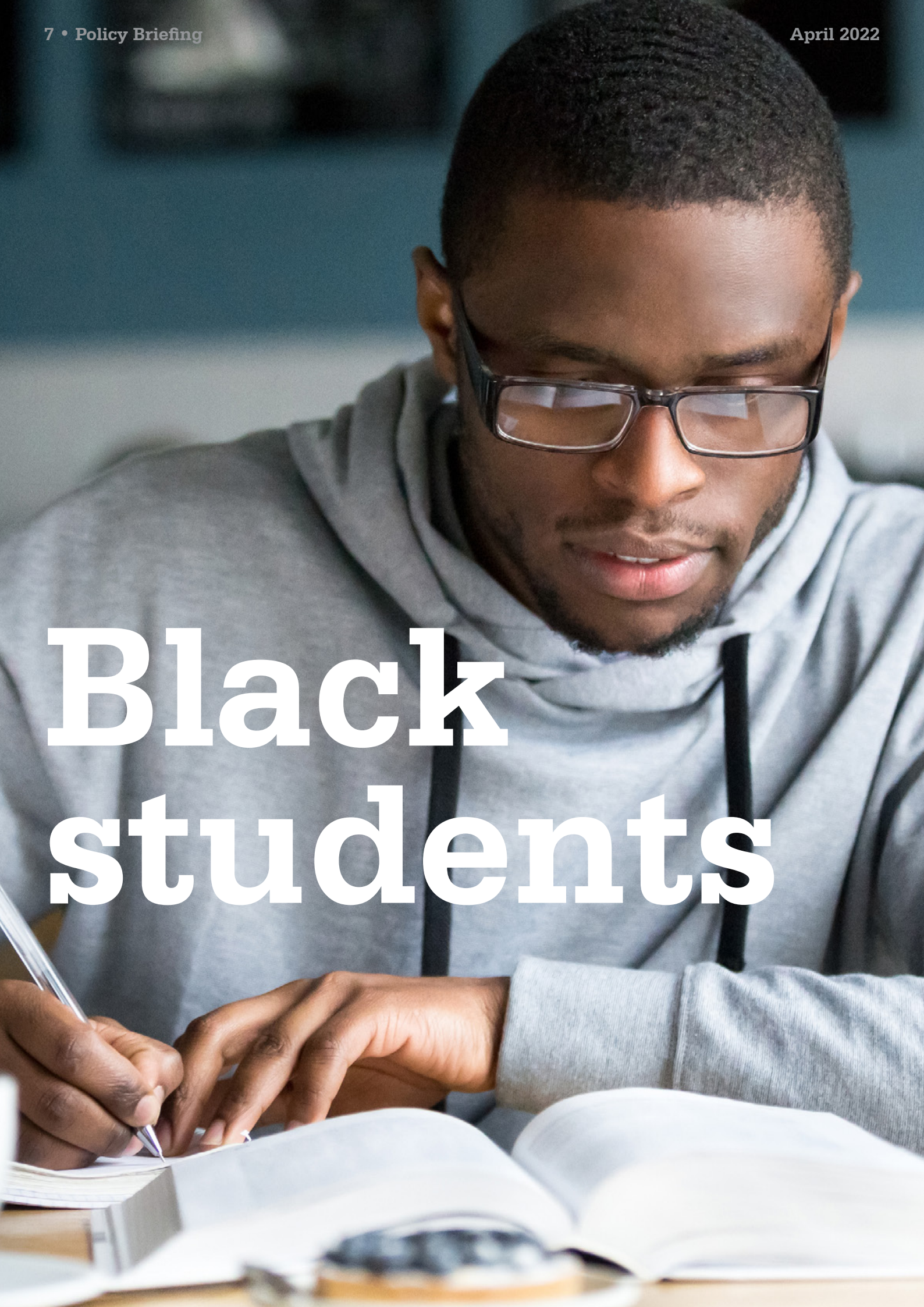
Black students

Black students reported a less positive experience on average compared to White students.

Unite Students has published a report, *Living Black at University* (February 2022), which examines the experiences of Black students living in student accommodation in the UK. The research, the first of its kind, was carried out by the Halpin Partnership and draws on qualitative and quantitative fieldwork with students and accommodation staff in university and private halls of residence. The rationale for the research lies in how the experience students have in their accommodation has an impact on their overall experience and their academic attainment.

In an introduction to the report, HEPI Director Nick Hillman points to recent successes in widening participation among Black pupils: between 2006 and 2020, they had the biggest entry rate increase of all ethnic groups, up from 21.6 per cent to 47.5 per cent. However, these increases are not evenly distributed, with just 5 per cent of Black Caribbean students progressing to high-tariff institutions, which is less than half the national figure. Black students outside those high-tariff providers have the lowest continuation rates of any ethnic group. There is a long-standing 'attainment gap', which, in 2019, stood at just over 23 percentage points between the proportion of White and Black students achieving a first or upper second-class degree.

The research was conducted in 2021 and the main survey drew on the YouthSight panel to collect data from home and international students studying at UK higher education institutions. There were 1,055 responses, of whom 72 per cent lived in university halls of residence and 28 per cent in private purpose-built student accommodation. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 47 self-selecting Black students and graduates.

In response to questions about belonging, comfort, safety and security in accommodation, Black students reported a less positive experience on average compared to White students. Only 43 per cent of Black respondents (compared to 61 per cent of White students) felt a sense of belonging in their accommodation, which is an aspect of the student experience that has an impact on retention and success. Black students spoke about feeling that they are seen as out of place and that their presence raised suspicions and discomfort, while their White peers appeared to have a right to speak and act however they chose, including in ways that were racially discriminatory.

White students felt more comfortable than Black students in participating in activities in their accommodation, with 21 per cent of Black respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement 'I feel comfortable participating in the formal and informal activities within my accommodation'. Sometimes feelings of discomfort arose directly from the actions of other students, who said or did things that made Black students feel uncomfortable. With regard to feelings of safety and security in their accommodation, 80 per cent of White students felt safe compared to 67 per cent of Black respondents, and 12

per cent of Black respondents felt unsafe compare to 5 per cent of White students.

Black students feel that there is little support available to them when they feel distressed about these issues, and they describe the long-term impact on their mental health and wellbeing from feeling this way. Incidents reported include racial slurs and name-calling, being excluded in social situations by White flatmates and being disproportionately challenged by security on-site. Cumulatively, these incidents can have a significant impact on the everyday experiences of Black students.

When asked about the environment around their accommodation, over a quarter of Black respondents (28 per cent) indicated that they cannot access culturally relevant services close to where they live. Examples given included a lack of availability of culturally relevant food. While half of all students believed that there were positive images of other cultures in their accommodation, Black students in particular were more likely to have expected to see more people who look like them in their accommodation. If staff diversity does not reflect student diversity, this can lead to Black students not coming forward for help or support. In some cases, Black students felt that their accommodation had been purposely segregated by race or nationality.

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Black students disagreed with the statement 'There are clear and accessible policies promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in student accommodation' compared to just one-in-ten (11 per cent) White students. Most Black students said they would not report racism and some reported a poor response, in which incidents were not taken seriously or dealt with. In some cases, this was attributed to staff being predominantly White. Some students were concerned about reporting incidents, fearing that they would not be believed.

More than half (54 per cent) of Black students surveyed reported having been the victim of racism in their accommodation and 64 per cent of all respondents reported having witnessed acts of racism. Not all of these incidents were from fellow students; some were from staff. Experiences discussed in the focus groups included the use of racial slurs and racist language and microaggressions, such as touching hair. Casual racial discrimination was more common than more premeditated racism but all of these incidents had a serious impact on students. More positively, there are instances in which racism is being confronted. Half (49 per cent) of all respondents and 40 per cent of Black respondents have witnessed staff confronting racist attitudes. Two-thirds of all respondents (67 per cent) and 57 per cent of Black students have witnessed other students confronting racist attitudes.

The impact of racism is contributing to poorer mental health among non-White students, with 75 per cent of Black students reporting some level of impact and some feeling distressed in their accommodation. This is compounded by a lack of support and difficulties in finding counsellors with an understanding of the impact of racism on mental health. As a result, students are turning to family and Black peers for support, including going home at the weekend rather than using support structures within their accommodation. Many students rely on the Afro-Caribbean Society or similar ethnicity-based networks for support even when they are not formal support organisations.

Commentary

In a HEPI blog, which is available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/03/living-black-at-university-a-call-to-action, Jenny Shaw, Higher Education Engagement Director at Unite Students, calls 'for sector-wide action on this sector-wide issue [of disadvantage and racism] to address this wrong and to gain further traction on two known issues: namely, the Black awarding gap, which sees Black students being awarded the highest grades at lower levels than White students, and the lower continuation rates for Black students with a mental health condition'.

The report recommends that universities and private accommodation providers should collaborate to eliminate racism from all areas of the student experience, including student accommodation. Accommodation providers should demonstrate a commitment to tackling racism, both in their internal policies and in their student behavioural agreement or charter. They should have in place specific policies and procedures that directly target racist behaviour, which should be developed with input from Black students and staff.

Specific recommendations discussed in the report include the need for explicit race training for staff and students and better representation of Black people as employees in order to reflect the diversity of students. Universities and accommodation providers should be transparent about how they allocate rooms so that the appearance of 'ghettoisation' is avoided. A lack of integration harms inclusion and does not expose students to diverse perspectives.

The student mental health crisis is well documented within the sector and for Black students this is exacerbated because they rarely get the opportunity to be supported by someone who looks like them and understands their experiences first hand. Improving mental health support for all students would positively affect Black students but there is also a case for more targeted interventions.

www.unite-group.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Living-Black-at-University-Report_FINAL.pdf

One Nation University

In a HEPI Debate Paper, *The One Nation University: Spreading Opportunity, Reducing Division and Building Community* (HEPI Debate Paper 28, December 2021), Richard Brabner, Director of the UPP Foundation (writing in a personal capacity), argues for the adoption of the famous political idea of One Nation to reshape the higher education sector in England. The benefits of higher education expansion have not been evenly distributed, a problem that could be overcome by adopting the concept, which is based on spreading opportunity, building community and reducing division.

The One Nation University: Spreading opportunity, reducing division and building community
Richard Brabner

hepi   **Debate Paper 28**
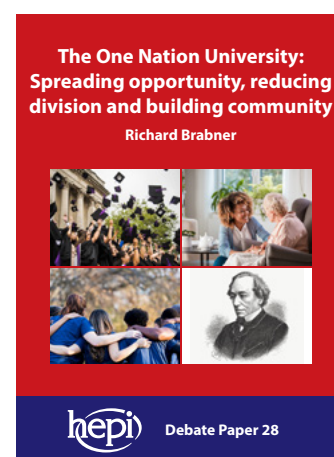
At times, increasing divisions within society have spilled over into the debate about the role of universities. The sector's problems stem from a system that offers greater benefits to the professional classes than to those from less advantaged backgrounds. This has led post-liberal critics – from left and right – to question the sector's worth. While there has been unprecedented growth in higher education access for school leavers, who have the freedom to choose where and what to study, this has been at the expense of others who are rooted in their local communities. Instead of being a bulwark against division, the sector is both a victim of, and has actively participated in, polarising culture wars.

Although the system should continue to be led by the choices that students make, it has key flaws that need to be addressed to ensure that it works well for all learners. The removal of the cap on undergraduate numbers from 2015 has meant more people going to their first-choice university and increased access for disadvantaged people, but there is a significant problem with the costs of the system. To ensure fairness for taxpayers and future students, Richard Brabner argues graduates should pay back more of their loans.

There is also an issue relating to 'place' and the levelling-up agenda. Extending choice for school leavers undertaking the typical residential model has been at the expense of working-class students who may need to study locally. This manifests itself in the failure to respond to the needs of working adult learners, who may need to study in the evenings or at weekends, and in restricted choice for local students

At times, the increasing divisions within society have spilled over into the debate about the role of universities.

A system based on student choice inevitably means that some universities are winners while others lose out.

who want to study unpopular-but-valuable subjects as well as in how financially vulnerable institutions are supported.

As the market has incentivised institutions to focus on easier-to-recruit school leavers, but without equal incentives to develop education which fits around the lives of non-traditional learners, it has left others behind. Although the decline in the overall number of mature learners in universities has stabilised recently, mature students on non-degree courses in higher education continue to fall significantly. Other groups that have been left behind include White working-class boys, care leavers and children in need.

A system based on student choice inevitably means that some universities are winners while others lose out. But institutional closures in the face of financial failure would be catastrophic for local communities as well as for student choice. Rather than imposing restrictions on choice, the options for students who are limited to studying locally should be extended. Their needs could be addressed by establishing an evening university in every region to support working adults and by prioritising the geographic spread of higher education.

In recent years universities have been regularly criticised by post-liberals for what can be broadly described as cultural issues. There is a perception that universities are at the heart of a debate about identity and belonging, which tends to pitch those who work and study in universities against those with more conservative values. Specific criticisms tend to focus on free speech, a perceived lack of diversity of thought

and intolerance, reflecting the claim that universities are dominated by left-of-centre values and opinions. This feature of academic life affects how universities deal with flashpoints on campus, engage with wider society and treat those with minority views.

Universities are inevitably pulled into cultural conflicts but their responses should not be dictated by the prevailing monoculture, which can dangerously pull them in one direction. They should neither prioritise the view of cultural activists on campus, nor over-compensate by only concentrating on the 11 per cent of people who are negative about universities. However, it is important for universities to engage actively with people and communities who have a different demographic profile to those who work and study in universities. The culture wars are the subject of a blog by HEPI Director Nick Hillman, which is available at: www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/12/13/is-the-culture-war-destroying-the-central-purpose-of-universities.

Universities are not immune to the polarisation and general weakening of civic norms, particularly online, which are evident in England and other countries. Hostility towards people with opposing views is clearly a problem across the sector, with staff and students with minority views feeling unable to express them. While legislation on free speech may help, it is what universities as autonomous institutions and what individual students as responsible citizens do that really matters in shaping behaviour and culture on campus.

There is a need for the sector to recognise that there are problems to overcome and to adopt approaches which navigate the culture wars. Universities could develop an ethical framework for how they manage cultural clashes and also take inspiration from citizens' assemblies, which could be asked to make recommendations in relation to these conflicts. Diversity of thought in universities could also be supported by creating a new sector-led organisation similar to the Heterodox Academy, which was established in the United States in 2015. This body could support practice, develop leadership training programmes and consultancy on how thought diversity should be protected within recruitment and progression practices. It could also produce guidance on social media use for academics.

The One Nation university vision aims to strengthen community on and off campus for the benefit of students and wider society. All too often there is a 'two nations' student experience, with those from working-class backgrounds less likely to participate in student societies, work placements and opportunities to study abroad. The reasons for inequitable participation include factors relating to confidence and lifestyle

choices as well as the socio-economic circumstances of students.

Research demonstrates that participation within the wider student experience is the key to belonging, which is critical to student wellbeing (including preventing mental ill-health and loneliness), attainment and graduate success. The immersive community experience is at the heart of fostering belonging, so unequal participation is a problem. The barriers to participation have been exacerbated by the pandemic and there is a real concern that, unless they are tackled, there will be significant long-term effects.

There is much universities can do to rebuild the student experience, such as embedding community engagement and service within the curriculum. This would ensure that all students – regardless of background or mode of study – benefit from the immersive community experience. The author also supports the creation of a community service programme for students, which could either be extra-curricular or integrated into the formal learning programme. There is no UK scheme equivalent in size to the AmeriCorps programme in the United States, which annually places 270,000 volunteers in around 2,000 organisations. A new UK programme could help to revitalise local communities and help bridge town-gown and generational divides in addition to supporting individual students.

Benjamin Disraeli.

Commentary

In his conclusion, Richard Brabner argues that universities and policymakers face a choice between sticking with the status quo, which means that universities will only be valued by part of the population, or embarking on a radical post-liberal departure. He believes the challenges he identifies can be overcome by embracing the One Nation University and adopting an agenda 'which removes the sharper edges of the market, promotes civility, civic engagement and thought diversity and strengthens community, on and off campus'.

The author makes proposals for balancing 'choice and place' at a time when universities face the challenge of delivering high-quality teaching and research as well as actively supporting local and regional communities. He suggests a more active role for government as well as the sector with the creation of an Office for Higher Education and Place, which would fund new provision and intervene when it was adversely affected by market forces beyond universities' control. A new Office could support the sector in establishing new evening universities and subject specialist free schools, which would protect vulnerable subjects, such as Modern Foreign Languages.

In a HEPI blog (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/01/04/the-significance-of-place-and-local-partnerships) Professor Jane Robinson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Place at Newcastle University, welcomes the paper as a 'timely and important challenge about the role universities can play to support a fairer society and stronger communities'. She does, however, wonder whether it underplays the wider significance of 'place' and the importance of local partners to the contribution universities can and do make. Professor Robinson argues that any national policies to address the challenges facing the sector should reflect and support universities working with their local partners to maximise their contribution.

www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-One-Nation-University-Spreading-opportunity-reducing-division-and-building-community.pdf

First-in-Family Students

First-in-Family Students

Harriet Coombs

hepi

Higher Education Policy Institute
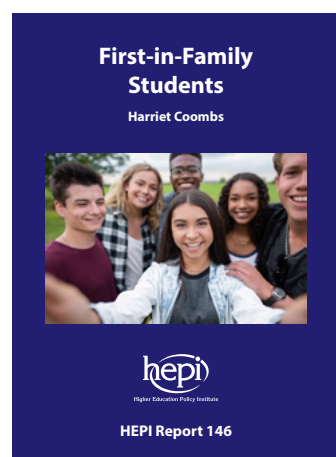
HEPI Report 146

I n *First-in-Family Students* (HEPI Report 146, January 2022), Harriet Coombs, a former HEPI intern, finds that most university students in the UK – just over two-thirds – can be classified as 'first-in-family'. Although these students perform less well on average than others on many measures, the term is not a reliable proxy for low income or a lack of social capital. The report suggests that while it may be an appropriate metric for low-level activity, it is not a sufficiently robust category for higher stakes access activities, such as contextualised admissions. As HEPI Director Nick Hillman points out in a Foreword to the report, 'first-in-family is simultaneously useful and flawed, as with so many other higher education metrics'.

At its most basic, the definition of 'first-in-family' refers to a student who attends higher education but whose parents did not achieve a university degree. The term has been in use in the United States for decades and several different definitions have been adopted. For example, the US Department for Education has defined it in at least three different ways: neither parent had a Bachelor's degree or no education after high school or no degree after high school.

There are clear differences in socio-economic background between first-in-family graduates and those who are not the first in their family to obtain a degree. Graduates in England whose parents did not obtain a degree are less likely than others:

· to have attended an independent school (4 per cent versus 14 per cent);

· to have a parent working in a higher managerial occupation (40 per cent versus 85 per cent); and

· to own their own home (76 per cent versus 92 per cent).

On average they took fewer A-Levels and were more likely to qualify for Free School Meals (10 per cent versus 2 per cent).

The share of first-generation graduates varies by subject, with Education (87 per cent); Business and Administrative Studies (79 per cent); Subjects Allied to Medicine (76 per cent); and Law (75 per cent) attracting the highest numbers. First-generation students tend to choose subjects that offer good labour market prospects rather than those associated with high entrance requirements or low-wage returns. These students are also less likely to enter Russell Group universities compared to those with graduate parents and are 25 per cent more likely to attend a post-1992 university.

Despite differences in socio-economic background, first-generation students are not necessarily low-income students, and low-income students are not always the first in their family to graduate from university. Moreover, a first-generation student may come from a family that is economically poor but culturally rich. The term 'first-in-family' disproportionately applies to those from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, who are actually more likely to access higher education than young White people.

Information about parental education in contextual admissions is typically based on students' own reports, meaning it cannot be independently verified. When they apply through UCAS, prospective students are asked to self-declare their first-in-family status and if their status is likely to be used in making contextual offers there is a clear incentive to misreport. Moreover, some students may be genuinely unaware of their parents' education level. In short, the term first-in-family is complicated to define and difficult to verify and has significant limitations as a measure of disadvantage. Other indicators, like the number of years a child has been eligible for free school meals, capture prospective students' true level of disadvantage more accurately.

Although 15 Russell Group universities include first-in-family status as part of their widening participation criteria, no two universities use the same combination of information in their decision-making. Moreover, it is unclear how much this status really matters for university admissions in the UK. But first-generation status does help prospective students to qualify for a number of outreach programmes run by the Sutton Trust, the Brilliant Club and several individual universities.

Since 2020, the competition for university places, particularly at highly-selective institutions, has increased as a result of inflated A-Level grades for the COVID-19 pandemic generation and it is expected to intensify in future as a result of rising student numbers. In these circumstances, there is a risk that the use of first-generation status as an indicator for contextual admissions could exacerbate educational inequalities. At a time when regulators are pressing for a more ambitious use of contextual admissions, 'it is crucial that narratives about intergenerational educational mobility do not overtake calls to improve provision for the country's most disadvantaged pupils'.

First-generation students are less likely to be on a persistent path towards a degree and are more likely to drop out than continuing generation students. However, for those first-in-family students who obtain their degrees, their early career earnings are only marginally lower than those of other graduates. These findings underline the importance of equipping these students with the tools to navigate the higher education system beyond the point of admission. First-generation students are more likely than their peers to have a challenging transition on arrival at university because they lack the required social capital. The evidence suggests that universities should introduce more robust transition interventions at the point of entry to reduce anxiety and distress in the early weeks.

First-generation students are primarily motivated to go to university in order to get a better job, but they are not necessarily well-equipped to achieve their aim. Research suggests these students need help in developing the core skills required to prepare a realistic career plan by accessing university careers services. But many students do not know enough about them and institutions 'have a responsibility to find different ways to reach those students that need careers services but are not being communicated with effectively'.

Nick Hillman points out that students from disadvantaged families, who are very often first-generation, can face unsurmountable obstacles after they graduate, which explains why policymakers are now placing new emphasis on progress in the labour market. He recommends phasing out unpaid internships and offering more paid ones instead. Unpaid posts give those with the most financial and social capital another boost while shutting out those with less of both.

First-generation students are primarily motivated to go to university in order to get a better job, but they are not necessarily well-equipped to achieve their aim.

Commentary

The author concludes that, while 'first-generation' status may be a useful indicator for widening participation activities, such as eligibility for outreach programmes, it is not a good definition for higher-stakes activities, such as contextualised admissions. Not all of these students are low-income and using the term as a basis for contextual offers could intensify existing educational inequalities. Institutions need to take a broader approach to admissions, using a basket of measures when deciding on contextual offers. There also needs to be greater consistency and transparency in the contextual admissions process in order to provide clarity to prospective students and instil confidence in those who think they may not fit in.

The first-in-family policy problem is about getting more of these students into selective institutions rather than only getting them into higher education. Highly-selective universities need to ensure that they retain these students as well as recuit them, in view of their higher dropout rates. The report makes several recommendations for improving the retention rates of first-generation students, including the provision of a mentoring programme between first-year and continuing undergraduates. Mentors would support mentees during a transitional period and the programme would facilitate the building of strong networks for all students.

Students should also be provided with a regular and familiar point of contact for the duration of their course. Small group meetings, for example, with a personal tutor, would establish regular contact between students and staff, providing continuity in teaching and informal contact. For those who choose to withdraw from their course, the system needs to be more flexible, facilitating easier routes to re-entry and providing base-level qualifications.

In a HEPI blog (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/01/13/accesshe-responds-to-hepis-first-in-family-students-report), Emily Dixon of AccessHE responds to the HEPI report and points to the value of first-generation status in measuring differences in ethnicity, income and prior attainment. She argues that 'if we define our indicators clearly and use them sensitively, first-in-family status can be a powerful measure to identify continuation and progression gaps and address the invisible issue of students not feeling a sense of belonging at university'.

www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/01/06/first-in-family-students

Drug use

In *Illicit drug use in universities: zero tolerance or harm reduction?* (HEPI Debate Paper 29, March 2022), Arda Ozcubukcu and Professor Graham Towl argue that a zero-tolerance approach to illicit drug use may cause more harm than it prevents as those who need help do not come forward for fear of punishment. They discuss an approach based on harm reduction as a better way to deal with students who take illegal drugs. But, as HEPI Director Nick Hillman has pointed out in a blog discussing HEPI's previous work on drug use, adopting such strategies may be problematic at a time when the political pendulum is swinging in a more controlling direction. The blog is available at: www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/03/03/student-drug-use-three-outstanding-questions.

Existing policies in most universities appear to be driven by the criminal justice system and focus on preventing drug use in order to reduce drug-related harm. But these policies have failed to prevent drug harms, as they have unintended consequences which may well negatively impact students' lives more than a drug itself. Moreover, not all drug use can be prevented by punitive practices, which is why even well intended wars on drugs are ill-conceived. Increasing penalties further is not a solution to the ineffectiveness of punitive practices as the severity of punishment and its deterrence effect are not meaningfully correlated.

While health-driven drug policies also exist, such as pointing students to drug treatment services, these are usually designed to reduce harm to students at the point where a student's relationship with a drug has become problematic (such as when it results in serious social, financial or health problems). These policies do not focus on reducing the negative health impacts of all types of drug use, such as experimental use or self-medication, which may well represent the majority of drug use among students. If universities aim to keep students safe from harm, all drug use is perhaps best addressed from a health perspective.

Illicit drug use in universities: zero tolerance or harm reduction?

Arda Ozcubukcu and Graham Towl

hepi   Debate Paper 29

Accurately estimating the proportion of students who use illicit drugs is challenging as use varies both within and across institutions. Surveys of students can show very different results but they all confirm that drug use is widespread among this group. For example, the 2018 poll undertaken by YouthSight for HEPI and the University of Buckingham found that 25 per cent of undergraduates had used an illicit drug in the previous year, with 4 per cent not wishing to respond. (The survey results are available at: www.hepi. ac.uk/2018/06/12/students-think-taking-illegal-drugs-causes-problems-users-well-society-want-universities-take-tougher-stance.) Since 2013, illicit drug use in England and Wales has been on the rise following a downward trend between 1995 and 2013.

Surveys consistently find higher levels of drug use among LGBT+ students and students with disabilities, suggesting that drug-related harms may be concentrated in these groups. However, it should be noted that most drug use is occasional and that everyday use is comparatively rare. But there is still a risk of death from one-time use and universities need to identify those who are most at risk and consider how they can be most effectively supported. This requires a closer assessment of the impact of drug use on students' behaviour and the motivation behind it.

The reasons why students take illicit drugs can be broadly categorised into fun and experimentation, self-medication and performance enhancement. Those students who use drugs do so predominately for social reasons. The social rewards of taking drugs with friends can be high, and some students feel that the health risks are worth it. Self-medication is a term used when individuals use drugs to deal with their mental health challenges and this use has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside a decrease in usage for social purposes. Students with high psychological distress scores are more likely to use drugs regularly.

The majority of students who use drugs do not become addicted but they are at increased risk of developing dependency and being subjected to associated harms. For instance, 30 per cent of students who report using drugs felt dependent on them and 8 per cent felt addicted during the pandemic. These are concerningly high self-reported numbers and may very well reflect a lack of adequate support for drug-related and mental health-related issues. It is therefore vital that universities engage with students who are potentially self-medicating and are at an increased risk of becoming dependent. The use of drugs to enhance academic performance does not seem to be particularly common, with prevalence rates varying between 4 and 6 per cent among students who use drugs.

The social rewards of taking drugs with friends can be high, and some students feel that the health risks are worth it.

Students are at risk of harm to their health when they choose drugs, but some of the existing policies that deal with drug-related issues also result in further harm. The greatest direct harm appears to arise from their unregulated production and supply and students not being informed of ways to say safe while using them. Unregulated supply can lead to drugs having much higher doses than claimed or containing additives that can often be more harmful than the drug itself. Students may also be sold a completely different drug to the one they intended to buy, a situation which may have occurred more frequently due to the impact of the pandemic on supply chains.

The greatest harms relate to how drugs are consumed, such as mixing drugs and taking higher doses than intended, which mainly happen due to a lack of knowledge. In most party environments, students drink alcohol when they consume other substances and almost all drugs become more harmful when mixed with alcohol. The harmful physiological effects on the brain and the rest of the body cannot be ignored, but arguably the most serious consequences of drug use do not directly result from these effects. Many people can use them without experiencing significant short or long-term health effects, but the lives of a subset of people will be affected by such issues as addiction, serious health problems and difficulties with friends and family.

Although a zero-tolerance policy has been mentioned by universities, they are pragmatically beginning to move away from this approach but there is a lack of standard procedures for addressing the challenges of illicit drug use. Even though zero tolerance is not always implemented, students still fear that disclosing drug use could affect their fitness to study or practise, lead to a criminal conviction or result in disciplinary action. Interventions tend to focus on legal aspects and information on how to stay safe does not appear to be routinely provided.

The adoption of harm-reduction practices can be a key first step in reducing or even ceasing drug use. The strategy aims to reduce the adverse consequences of drug use where individuals are unwilling or unable to cease drug taking. It involves working with those who come forward wanting help while ensuring they do not face punitive sanctions. Empowering students to make informed decisions to maximise their health through educational interventions is an important part of harm reduction. The authors argue that 'framing drug use from a health perspective and offering harm reduction is key to creating an environment where students do not need to worry about being stigmatised or facing disproportionate consequences for disclosing drug use'.

The greatest harms relate to how drugs are consumed, such as mixing drugs and taking higher doses than intended, which mainly happen due to a lack of knowledge.

Commentary

The authors recommend that institutions should drop a zero-tolerance approach and frame drug use as a health issue, linking it to their policies on supporting students' mental health and wellbeing. Safeguarding students can be achieved by addressing drug use and drug-related harms that affect the user through health-driven policies, while drug possession, supply and harm to others – such as anti-social behaviour – are approached from a criminal justice perspective. Universities should collaborate with other educational institutions, external organisations and the police to share resources, outsource services and design interventions.

Institutions should develop drug policies that are accessible and incorporated into wider health, wellbeing and student-conduct policies. They should be communicated effectively and combined with the dissemination of information on drugs, through campaigns, workshops and online materials. Information disseminated by universities should be non-judgemental, include practical tips about staying safe, be informed by evidence and honest about the negative effects of drugs.

Concern about the rise in recreational drug use is also evident in Universities UK's recent decision to establish a taskforce to help universities understand and address drug use. It reports that institutions are expressing concern about the impact of student drug use, with associated risks to learning and mental health problems, of damage to future job prospects and of addiction and avoidable deaths. The taskforce, which will produce evidence-led sector guidance, will set out a common approach to reducing harms and more effectively tackling the supply of drugs (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/news/student-drug-use-reducing-harm-and).

www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/03/03/illicit-drug-use-in-universities-zero-tolerance-or-harm-reduction

National security

In *What's next for national security and research?* (HEPI Report 147, February 2022), Dr Alexis Brown, HEPI Director of Policy and Advocacy, reviews what measures are in place to protect UK research from foreign interference, including the new National Security and Investment Act (2021), which came into force early in 2022. The report argues that while universities can do more to raise awareness of security issues, any new legislation must also be carefully designed to avoid a counterproductive increase in administrative burdens. The report includes a Foreword by Professor Sir Anthony Finkelstein CBE, President of City, University of London and former Chief Scientific Adviser on National Security.

Overseas investment in UK research amounted to £5.6 billion in 2019, surpassing its previous peak of £5.5 billion in 2014. In 2019, £1.47 billion of this overseas funding went directly to higher education, amounting to 16 per cent of total research and development funding for the sector. There has also been an increase in the number of collaborative research projects with international partners. In 2019/20, over 59 per cent of UK publications were the result of international collaboration, compared to nearly 40 per cent in 2010/11.

But with the growth in internationalisation comes associated risk. As science and technology have become more central to state power, so too have universities moved from the periphery to the centre – both in terms of their national importance and the need to ensure the security of their research. There has been increased public scrutiny of the risks associated with international research collaboration, with the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee finding, in 2019, mounting evidence of foreign influence in UK universities, including 'alarming evidence' about the extent of Chinese influence on UK campuses.

There are several ways in which the Government – along with non-departmental public bodies such as UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) – can seek to influence or control foreign involvement in UK research. These include controlling who can perform research through the use of Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) certificates; producing guidance on how sensitive research should be performed, stored and disseminated; and restricting how research and development outputs are funded and acquired through export controls and other mechanisms.

The National Security and Investment Act (NSIA) gives the Government new powers to manage the increased security risks associated with research involving international collaborators. But new legislation raises the risk of significantly increasing the administrative burden on the sector precisely at a time when the Government has committed to reducing research bureaucracy. (Universities UK has produced guidance on the NSIA, which is available at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Reports/national-security-and-investment-act-guidance-for-universities.pdf.)

The scope of the NSIA goes significantly beyond its global equivalents and gives the Government new powers to intervene in the acquisition of UK assets and entities by both foreign and domestic investors. It establishes a new hybrid regime of mandatory and voluntary notifications for acquisitions which the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) believes could pose a threat to the

What's next for national security and research?

Alexis Brown

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UK's national security; acquisitions can be of entities or assets (including intellectual property). The mandatory regime involves 17 defined 'sensitive areas' and the acquisition of entities (but not assets) in these areas must be approved by BEIS before the transaction can go ahead. An acquisition that is not covered by mandatory notification may still be reported under the voluntary element of the scheme. The Government anticipates that between 1,000 to 1,830 acquisitions will qualify for voluntary notification annually, with only 70 to 95 being called in for national security assessment.

Universities are broadly supportive of the new legislation and support the aim of increasing national security around investment. However, there are questions as to how some aspects of it will be implemented, particularly the voluntary element, where there is less clarity. It will be difficult for universities to decide whether to submit a voluntary notification in the absence of a working definition of national security or guidance as to what might constitute a security risk and whether specific investors are known to the Government. In the absence of this guidance some institutions have begun developing internal processes to navigate the process of voluntary notification, particularly if they have significant exposure to the new regime through spin outs.

The lack of clarity on voluntary notifications may increase the potential administrative burden for universities. Universities are concerned that the voluntary scheme may generate far more that the maximum 1,830 notifications assumed by the Government. They may be incentivised to submit a variety of voluntary cases in order to get a sense of what will qualify as a national security concern. The lack of any minimum threshold for investment and the inclusion of domestic investors will also make the scheme difficult to manage. The burden would also increase significantly if voluntary notifications were to include non-exclusive royalty-free agreements, which are frequently used as means of sharing intellectual property in international collaboration agreements.

However, the additional administrative burdens that the new regime might create are not universities' greatest concern. They are also worried about researchers transporting and sharing intellectual property that could fall within the scope of export controls and here compliance would be much more reliant on awareness among researchers that they need to seek advice and support. Other informal exchanges – for example, the exchange of information with an international collaborator which goes unrecorded – fall outside the relevant regimes and underline the difficulties of legislating on research security issues. As the author

Universities are broadly supportive of the new legislation and support the aim of increasing national security around investment.

points out, 'legislation is only one tool among many … and efforts are increasing both to share some intelligence with universities in a controlled way and to raise awareness in academic communities about the potential risks of international collaboration'.

In 2021, the Government announced the formation of the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT), based in BEIS, which would be dedicated to protecting researchers' work from hostile activity through improved communication with the sector. RCAT would provide guidance and advice to universities; help universities create 'communities of practice' around security; and convey sector issues back to the Government. The report describes the challenges in implementing RCAT, which include uncertainty about the level of demand for its services and how it will meet the needs of a diverse sector. But RCAT is only one way to respond to these demands and different approaches to enable universities to become better informed about their potential partners are being explored.

Raising and maintaining staff awareness – and especially researcher awareness – of the risks associated with international partnerships is a crucial element of effective mitigation. The report notes that only 10 universities provide easy access to the Trusted Research principles issued by the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure on their webpages, though this is a crude measure of the extent to which the security agenda has permeated institutional practice. Publicly hosting these materials on university webpages is an easy way to reinforce a commitment to Trusted Research principles.

There is currently no training on Trusted Research issues available on a national basis, but the development of an open-source virtual learning tool on export control issues, funded by UKRI, is underway. The aim of the training is to integrate an awareness of export controls at all stages of research activity, including the associated professional service functions.

The success of Trusted Research guidance and similar resources will depend on how well universities are able to embed them within their own institutional cultures. Researchers are unlikely to seek out external resources on their own initiative, and government bodies do not have the resources to train individual researchers.

Commentary

In his Foreword, Anthony Finkelstein comments that the report has messages for government as well as the sector. UK research is an important national asset and government interventions should be carefully measured as 'seemingly small regulatory requirements readily spawn large bureaucratic responses. Partnership with the sector and a willingness to listen are strongly in the UK's national security interests'. To facilitate communication, the report recommends that the Government and the sector should collaborate in the creation of a comprehensive, interactive map, which would show the public and sector bodies with security responsibilities as well as the relationships between them.

The report also emphasises the need for a review of the research security skills that will be required in the future and how they can be developed. The skills needed in this area are complex and in short supply and include: language skills, knowledge of technology transfer issues and an understanding of the research itself. Although the Government has already announced the creation of a College of National Security, universities are well placed to support the development of the skills needed. The knowledge base would also be enhanced, as the report recommends, by making the boundaries between academic and security bodies more porous through secondments, fellowships and networks of chief scientific advisers.
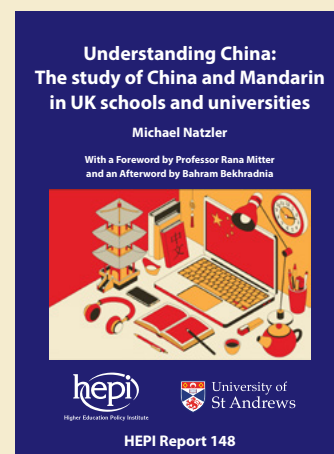
Universities also have an important role in raising awareness of security issues among their own staff. The report recommends that institutions should host easily accessible resources and contact details relating to research security on their public webpages, both to inform their own researchers as well as potential researchers and partners. They may also wish to consider developing and publishing a statement of principles for managing international risks, as one major research university has already done.

In a HEPI blog (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/17/the-russell-group-responds-to-new-hepi-report-whats-next-for-national-security-and-research). Ben Moore, Policy Manager at the Russell Group, responds to the report. He argues that 'the government was absolutely correct to act on this issue and bring forward legislation that will help keep us safe. Now the Act has come into force we need to get implementation right to ensure the new regime fully protects our national interest while ensuring universities ... can continue delivering for the UK'.

www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Whats-next-for-national-security-and-research_HEPI-Report-147.pdf

Understanding China

In *Understanding China: The study of China and Mandarin in UK schools and universities* (HEPI Report 148, March 2022), Michael Natzler, former HEPI Policy Officer, discusses the lack of China competency in the UK and makes a series of recommendations to reinforce the study of China in UK schools and universities. The report includes a Foreword by Rana Mitter, Professor of Chinese History and Politics at the University of Oxford, who comments on the urgent need to assess the growing influence of China across an ever-growing number of parts of British life.

**Understanding China:
The study of China and Mandarin
in UK schools and universities**

Michael Natzler

With a Foreword by Professor Rana Mitter
and an Afterword by Bahram Bekhradnia

hepi
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The ability to understand China was identified as a priority by the Government in its *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (March 2021). This reflects the importance of China in the modern world and the evolution of UK-China relations from a 'Golden Age' to a period where its activities have given rise to deep concern to many in the UK. There are divided views on how the UK should engage with China and, as yet, there is no updated public government strategy. Some argue that an approach of 'strategic ambiguity' is beneficial, while others call for a clear strategy to guide engagement to replace the previous version published in 2009.

Within the broader scrutiny of the UK-China relationship, there has been a focus on key sectors where the two countries are intertwined. The key issues in the higher education sector include: universities' reliance on the fee income of Chinese students; the links between UK scientific research and China; and the risk of state-coordinated interference on UK campuses. But in focusing on these issues there is danger that the benefits of university collaborations with China may be overlooked.

A series of recent policy reports have raised the need for China competency as a pre-requisite for building a positive UK-China relationship, with one expert arguing

that 'any strategy or policies must be underpinned by a deep knowledge of [Chinese Communist Party] aims, what it thinks, its leadership dynamics, institutional set up, the nature of power and more'.

The urgency of the problem is also evident in the knowledge imbalance between the UK and China. While there are tens of millions of speakers and learners of English in China, there are just hundreds of people studying China and Mandarin in UK universities. Moreover, the level of understanding in China about the UK is higher among the Chinese Communist Party elite, many of whom have studied in the UK, the United States or other western countries.

China is an important trading partner and the lack of Mandarin affects UK businesses, which face missed income amounting to billions of pounds due to a dearth of language skills. The lack of understanding of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong also has a social impact, with a recent rise in reports of anti-Asian discrimination since the arrival of COVID-19.

Since 2017, the number of undergraduates and postgraduates studying China has declined, with UCAS data indicating there is a shortage of student demand rather than a high rejection rate. Applications from EU students for Chinese Studies undergraduate courses have halved since Brexit – previously they made up

some 16 per cent of applicants and one-in-eight places. Since 2013, there has been a trend away from single-honours undergraduate degrees towards dual honours.

Many joint honours degrees tend to include only Mandarin learning as the 'Chinese' part of the degree, as opposed to the wider study of Chinese history and culture. Moreover, the language modules on these courses are often taught in language centres which may offer a slower pace of learning in order to accommodate extra-curricular students. The trend towards modular study of China is reflected in the growth of demand for modules from students on other degrees.

Graduate outcomes data show that Chinese Studies graduates are almost identical in their employment outcomes to other Languages and Area Studies graduates, suggesting that this is unlikely to be a reason for low student demand. However, there is evidence that these graduates may have difficulty in finding jobs in the UK where they can use their Chinese. These graduates also face competition for jobs that rely on Mandarin language from native Mandarin speakers with excellent English.

Mandarin learning is offered in university language centres and in Confucius Institutes. University centres offer extracurricular and credited courses to students at no or low cost, while Confucius Institutes, which are sponsored by the Chinese government, teach Mandarin and promote Chinese culture. There are 20 Confucius Institutes on UK campuses but they do not publish data about the number and level of the students they teach. Few language centres employ a full-time Mandarin language teacher while Confucius Institutes employ multiple full-time language teaching staff as a result of the funding provided by China. Despite controversy, Confucius Institutes have played a critical role given the absence of investment in the teaching of Mandarin in UK universities in recent decades.

Prior to 2016, there was limited Mandarin teaching in schools to GCSE and A-Level, with most provision being in the independent sector and for international students wishing to take an A-Level in their native language. Since 2010, the Government has announced plans to train 1,000 new Mandarin teachers and launched a Mandarin Excellence Programme, which aims to have 5,000 students 'on track to fluency', by 2021. In 2022/23, the first cohort of students on the Programme will reach Year 13 and be ready to apply to university. The Programme was renewed in 2021 in order to consolidate the presence of Mandarin teaching in 75 schools and enable them to become self-sufficient. However, the author argues that these Mandarin teaching programmes could be under threat as a result of an A-Level that is not fit for purpose.

UK universities host some of the world's leading research on China and are home to a significant source of expertise on many aspects of China. To ensure expertise on China thrives in universities, it is vital there is a flow of postgraduates entering academia. Although there is funding for study and research on China, there is never enough to meet demand and no certainty that it will persist. The most capable graduates are often hired by professional and financial services, which has a negative impact on the future of China expertise in UK universities.

The author discusses the question of how to protect the academic freedom of university staff working on China. There are challenges arising from monitoring of various groups by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the withholding of visas from academics whose work they dislike and self-censorship. He concludes that the 'bullying tactics of the CCP do influence the study of China within UK universities and it is important this is acknowledged, minimised and mitigated against'.

University centres offer extracurricular and credited courses to students at no or low cost, while Confucius Institutes, which are sponsored by the Chinese government, teach Mandarin and promote Chinese culture.

Commentary

In an Afterword to the report, HEPI President Bahram Bekhradnia comments on the findings: 'It is disappointing and worrying that this important new report by HEPI reveals that there has been little increase in the number of graduates expert in Mandarin [since the last national review of Chinese studies in 1999], and that there remains a large gap in our knowledge and expertise in Chinese affairs'. In order to increase the growth of China capability, the report recommends additional investment in the teaching of Mandarin. This would support schools and universities to teach about China and fulfil the Government's commitment to improving 'China capabilities' as outlined in the *Integrated Review*.

Other recommendations are directed at the Government, which should publish a strategy for improving China capability, and schools, which should review Modern Languages teaching at Levels 2 and 3 and support the training of teachers in modules that cover modern China. It also argues that the Office for Students should reinstate Chinese Studies as a subject of strategic importance, recognising its significance to national policy and the high costs of teaching Mandarin.

The report acknowledges the need for universities to take further action to protect academic freedom in the face of political pressure from China. They should be clear on their policies, speak up in support of them and involve junior staff, including postgraduate students as well as senior staff working in sensitive areas, in conversations about how they can best be supported. There should also be more transparency and consideration over the appropriateness of accepting donations from the CCP or from organisations close to it, including Confucius Institutes.

https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/03/31/understanding-china-the-study-of-china-and-mandarin-in-uk-schools-and-universities/

Online lecture recordings

During a period when universities face continuing action over pay and pensions, a HEPI report, *Who owns online lecture recordings?* (HEPI Policy Note 32, November 2021) by Dr Alexis Brown, HEPI Director of Policy and Advocacy, recommends that universities should examine their intellectual property agreements before reusing recorded lectures. There is confusion over whether lecturers or the universities that employ them own the material and the right to disseminate it. The report draws on the views of four academic experts and a contribution from the University and College Union (UCU), and explores the question of ownership from copyright, licensing, intellectual property and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) perspectives.

Both Jisc and UCU have produced guidance on the topic, with UCU broadly favouring the rights of employees and Jisc falling more on the side of employers. Jisc guidance argues that copyright is generally owned by employers, referring to the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, which states that: 'Where a literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work … is made by an employee in the course of his employment, his employer is the first owner of any copyright in the work subject to any agreement to the contrary'. There is, however, an exception when it comes to sound recordings that are made by a lecturer alone; in these cases, the lecturer will retain the copyright.

Jisc also explores the scope of 'performers rights', which are separate to copyright issues as, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, lectures are also considered 'performances'. Under the legislation, a performer's rights can be infringed if a recording is made, copied or disseminated without consent. However, such consent may not be required if the recording is to be used for the 'specific purpose of illustration for instruction' as long as the use constitutes 'fair dealing, for a non-commercial purpose, carried out by someone giving or receiving instruction and be accompanied by a sufficient acknowledgement'.

By contrast, UCU bases its defence of lecturers' rights on the General Data Protection Regulation. When a lecture is recorded for repeat use an employer is holding a lecturer's personal data and as such it must comply with the Regulation and identify a legal basis for processing the data. An employer can rely on the consent of those involved in the recording to meet its obligations, but that consent must be informed and freely given, and can be withdrawn at any time. While universities may argue that sharing more sensitive personal data (defined as special category data in the regulation) in a lecture has made the information public and therefore no longer protected, UCU argues that lectures are not open to the public and should remain closed in the interests of academic freedom.

In light of the views of the experts she consulted, the author concludes there is still significant ambiguity over how and when online lecture recordings can be used. In part, this is because academic practice has not kept pace with technological changes in pedagogy. Actors, for instance, charge higher fees when they know their performances are being recorded – but what is the equivalent practice for academics?

Legal precedent suggests that, despite the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, it is likely that copyright for lecture materials still rests with the academics who created them. The position is less clear for licensing and may come down to what was agreed in writing. University intellectual property policies often make claims to the ownership of lecture materials, but these can be rebutted on several grounds, for example, if they are too vague or compromise academic freedom. These policies continue to be a point of tension within universities as they struggle to keep pace with the increasing prevalence of online teaching. The provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation are relevant when students participate in a recording, but less so when an academic alone is involved.

The author recommends that university intellectual property policies should be developed in collaboration with staff and students to ensure they reflect the needs of all involved. Because of the increase in the number of online recordings created during the pandemic and the growth of online education, universities without these policies should develop them, while others should revisit their policies to consider whether they are still fit for purpose.

Lecturers who are concerned how their teaching materials might be used could consider relying more explicitly on their own research in their lectures to strengthen their claim over these materials. This reflects the fact that many universities waive intellectual property claims over research produced by staff. Lecturers could also consider removing their materials from virtual learning environments at the end of term to prevent reuse.

www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Who-owns-online-lecture-recordings.pdf

University applications

Statistics on applications to full-time undergraduate courses in 2022, made by the final deadline of 26 January 2022, were published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in February 2022. A total of 610,720 people applied for a full-time undergraduate course in 2022, representing a reduction of 1 per cent compared to the equivalent point last year when 616,360 applied. By the deadline, 499,320 UK-domiciled applicants had applied for university in 2022, compared to 504,740 applicants at the same point in 2021, a reduction of more than 1 per cent. The equivalent figure for 2012, when the £9,000 fee was introduced, was 461,180 applicants, while in 2011 it was 504,980.

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Applicants from the European Union have fallen by 20 per cent from 26,010 to 20,820 in 2022 (the maximum figure was achieved in 2016 when 45,220 EU students applied). The number of non-EU international student applicants has increased by almost 6 per cent (90,590 applicants compared to 85,610 in 2021). Applicants from China have increased by 12.1 per cent this year – rising from 25,810 to 28,930 – and by 11 per cent from India (8,660 applications). Nigeria, a priority country in the *International Education Strategy*, shows significant growth, increasing by 47 per cent to 2,380 applicants (compared with 1,620 in 2021).

Compared with 2021, there has been no increase in applicants from England and Wales and a reduction of 11 per cent in applicants from Scotland and 5 per cent from Northern Ireland. The overall number of UK 18-year olds applying has increased by 5 per cent (from 306,200 in 2021 to 320,420 in 2022), but mature applicants have declined by 17 per cent compared to 2021, when, at the height of the pandemic, they jumped by 24 per cent in one year.

In England, 44.1 per cent of the 18-year old population have applied in 2022, which represents an increase of two percentage points on the application rate (43.2 per cent) in 2021. In Northern Ireland, 52.6 per cent of 18-year olds have applied, while the equivalent figures in Scotland and Wales are 35.4 per cent and 37.5 respectively. The 18-year old application rates for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are the highest on record and for Scotland they are the second highest.

In 2022, the application rate of 18-year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas in England was 28 per cent, which represents a 6.4 per cent increase compared to last year. This compares to an application rate of 59 per cent for those living in the most advantaged areas, which is virtually unchanged compared to 2021. As a result, the gap in application rates between advantaged and disadvantaged applicants has continued to narrow. In Scotland the gap between the two groups has also narrowed, with students from the least deprived areas now being 2.37 times as likely to apply for higher education than those from the most deprived areas.

This year the female application rate has increased by one percentage point to 50.4 per cent, while the male rate (36.7 per cent) increased by three percentage points. This has reduced the difference between male and female rates and means that females were 31 per cent more likely than males to apply to higher education at the age of 18. As well as having different rates of application to higher education, demand from male and female applicants can vary significantly by subject area. The subjects showing the largest increases in demand from female applicants were: Computing (17 per cent); Humanities and Liberal Arts (11 per cent); Communications and Media (11 per cent); General Medicine and Dentistry (7 per cent); and General and Others in Science (7 per cent).

Changes in overall subject demand from UK applicants compared with 2021 range from an increase of 15 per cent for Computing to a decline of 10 per cent in Nursing. Other significant increases include: Medicine and Dentistry (8 per cent); Communications and Media (8 per cent); Psychology (6 per Cent); and Architecture, Building and Planning (6 per cent).

Apart from Nursing, Mathematics (-5 per cent), Subjects Allied to Medicine (-3 per cent), Social Sciences (-3 per cent) and Education and Teaching (-3 per cent) showed the largest reductions. Although UK applications for Nursing have fallen by 10 per cent to 41,220, they are still above pre-pandemic levels. All age groups show a reduction except for 18-year olds where demand for Nursing courses has remained static compared to 2021; there have been large falls among mature students, with those aged 25-29 recording a 26 per cent year-on-year reduction.

www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2022-cycle/2022-cycle-applicant-figures-26-january-deadline

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Geographical mobility

In a recent HEPI blog (available at www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/02/14/what-influences-the-geographical-mobility-behaviour-of-university-graduates), Dr Kostas Kollydas of Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, discusses the factors affecting the geographical mobility of university graduates. Two recent reports by the West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute (WMREDI) explore the inter-regional patterns of graduate retention and attraction according to the personal and university-related characteristics of new graduates.

The studies utilise Graduate Outcomes data for 2018/19 to estimate the retention and attraction rates for the nine English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for those graduates who were in employment 15 months after completing their studies. ('Graduate retention' is defined as the number of new graduates employed in the region where they studied as a proportion of the total number of graduates studying in the region. 'Graduate attraction' represents the number of new graduates coming from other regions as a percentage of the total new graduates employed in the destination region.)

The studies find that London benefits disproportionately from the mobility of recent graduates, as it is the only region in which both the retention (74.4 per cent) and attraction (53.7 per cent) rates are higher than the UK average (58.1 per cent and 41.9 per cent respectively). Of the 2018/19 graduates who migrated to another region, nearly a third chose London, while only 15.9 per cent moved to the north of England. It appears that higher living costs in London are outweighed by several positive factors, including increased opportunities for well-paid jobs and career advancement, transport links, accessibility, amenities and cultural facilities.

The likelihood of staying in the same region after graduation is higher for women than for men. One explanation is that male graduates might be offered better transregional opportunities, especially in the early stages of their careers. Another reason may relate to the fact that a higher proportion of female graduates are employed in the public sector, where employment opportunities are more geographically evenly spread than those in the private sector. Moreover, retention rates are significantly lower for younger graduates (aged 29 years and under) than for those over 30 years (55.3 per cent versus 67 per cent respectively). Although young graduates may be more willing to pursue opportunities across the country, personal ties and commitments of other family members can affect decisions, tipping the balance in favour of remaining in the region where they studied.

There are considerable ethnic differences in the migration decisions of new graduate workers. On average, Bangladeshi (73.5 per cent) and Pakistani (67.6 per cent) graduates exhibit the highest retention rates, while Indian (50.6 per cent) and Chinese (51.6 per cent) graduates are the least likely to stay in their region of study. Members of the Black community demonstrate significant regional variation in their propensity to stay local, with the probability of finding a job in their region of study varying from 23.4 per cent in the North East to 82.9 per cent in London. Furthermore, the movement from London to other regions differs substantially between White graduates and ethnic minorities, as the latter tend to move less far than their White counterparts.

The probability of staying in the same region of study for work varies according to graduate skills and class of degree, with higher performing graduates showing lower retention rates than others. Graduates with degrees in the arts, humanities and education are far more likely than STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and Law, Economics and Management graduates to stay in their region of study. Conversely, regional attraction rates are generally higher among STEM graduates (46.6 per cent) than those with qualifications in other subjects, reflecting the increasing demand for specific high-level skills across regions.

Dr Kollydas argues that it is imperative to align the knowledge universities offer with the need for skills, and to identify the impediments to graduate retention, particularly in regions with skill shortages. The role of universities in increasing the provision of high-level skills is vital if the existing demand and supply imbalance at national level is to be addressed. Universities should utilise the knowledge gained from their collaborations with local firms to enhance their degree programmes and equip their students with required skillsets, thus enhancing graduates' employability.

www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/business/research/wm-redi/wm-redi-project-docs/project-1a/17.12.2021-graduate-pathways-identifying-patterns-of-regional-retention-and-attraction-final.pdf

Of the 2018/19 graduates who migrated to another region, nearly a third chose London, while only 15.9 per cent moved to the north of England.

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