

# IS THE IDEA OF PUBLICLY FUNDED HIGHER EDUCATION DEAD AND BURIED?

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CDBU/HEPI  
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# Research base



**SRHE** Society for Research into Higher Education  
Advancing knowledge. Informing policy. Enhancing practice.



Jones, Steven and Diane Harris. 2024. *University Governance: Views From the Inside*. Campaign for the Defence of the British University. <https://cdbu.org.uk/university-governance-views-from-the-inside/>

Jones, Steven. 2024. "Governance of the Marketized University in Precarious Times". In Fitzgerald, Tanya, Helen M. Gunter, and Jon Nixon. *Intellectual Leadership, Higher Education and Precarious Times*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.

Jones, Steven, Rita Hordósy, Jenna Mittelmeier, Aunam Quyoum, Tamsin Mccaldin. 2021. "'Possible Selves' in practice: how students at Further Education Colleges in England conceptualise university." *Research Papers in Education*.

Jones, Steven, Katy Vigurs and Diane Harris. 2020. "Discursive framings of market-based education policy and their negotiation by students: the case of 'value for money' in English universities". *Oxford Review of Education*.

Harris, Diane, Katy Vigurs and Steven Jones. 2020. "Student Loans as Symbolic Violence". *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*.

Jones, Steven. 2017. "Expectation vs experience: might transition gaps predict undergraduate students' outcome gaps?" *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 42(7), 908-921.

Jones, Steven. 2016. "Expressions of student debt aversion and tolerance among academically able young people in low-participation English schools". *British Educational Research Journal*. 42(2), 277-293.

# Cost of abolishing fees

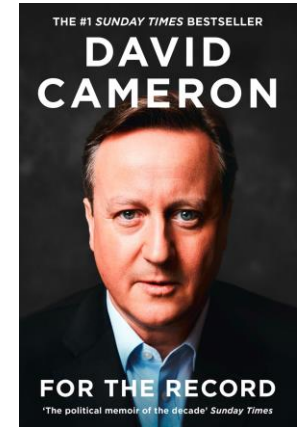
“The removal of undergraduate tuition fees would increase the total Exchequer cost per cohort of UK domiciled students by approximately **£11.2 billion**.

This represents an almost **four-fold increase**.”



*London Economics, 2024*

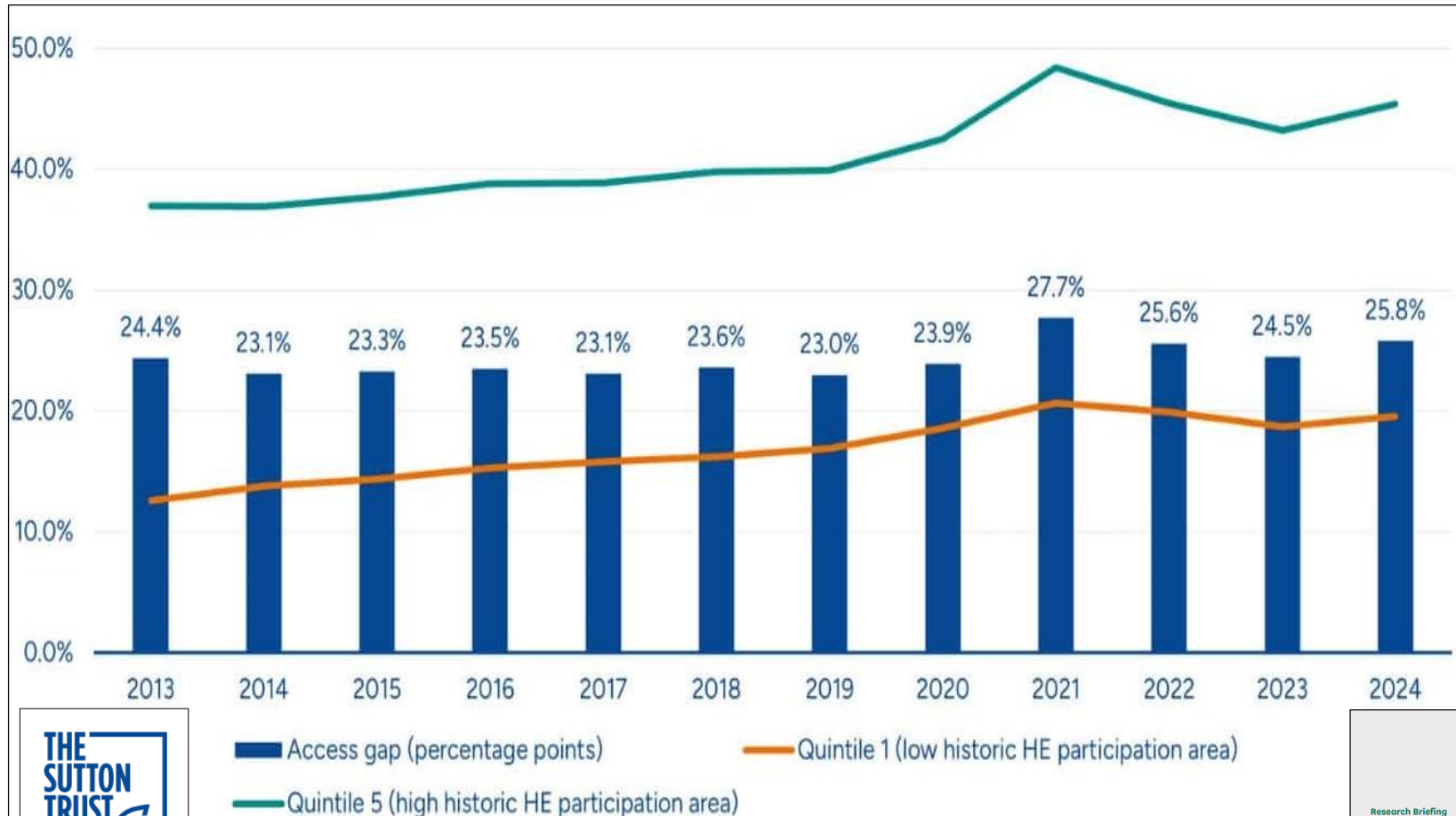
<https://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/assessing-the-costs-of-removing-undergraduate-tuition-fees-across-the-uk/>



“There is surely no fairness in asking someone working in a checkout who left school at eighteen to subsidise a future lawyer?”

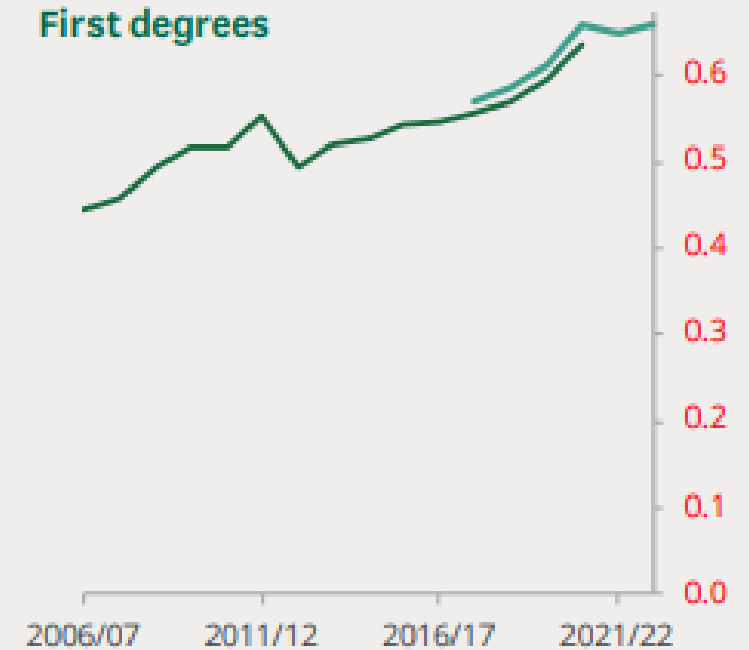
David Cameron, *For The Record*, 2019, p.224

# Gains in expansion

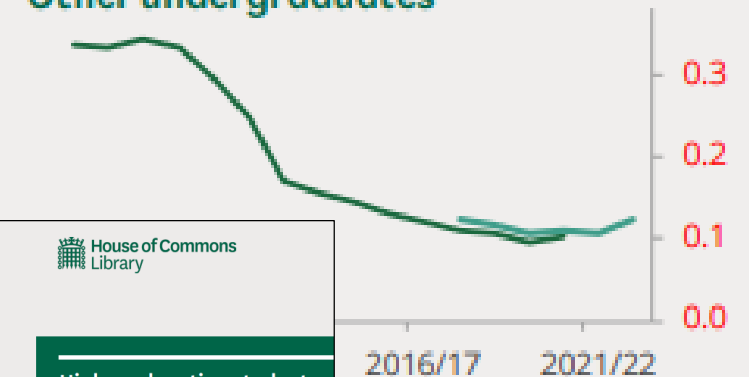


## 1<sup>st</sup> year students in the UK (millions)

### First degrees



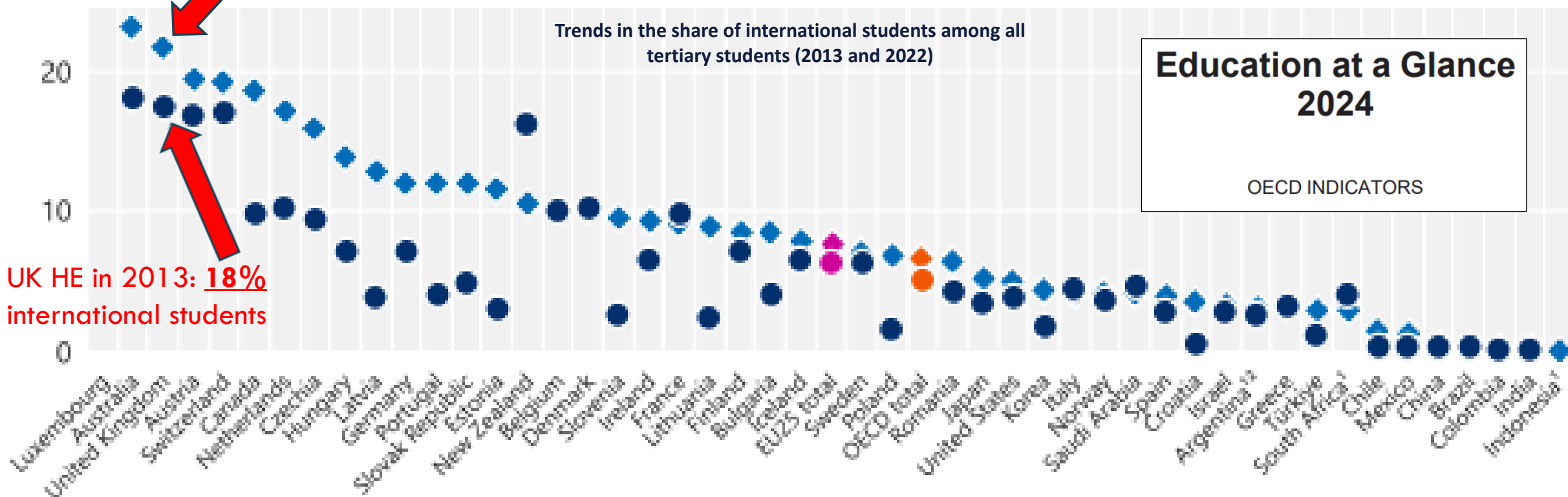
### Other undergraduates



# Gains in international students

UK HE in 2022: **23%** international students

UK HE in 2013: **18%** international students





# Logic of the market



“The TEF will increase students’ understanding of what they are getting for their money and improve the value they derive from their investment.

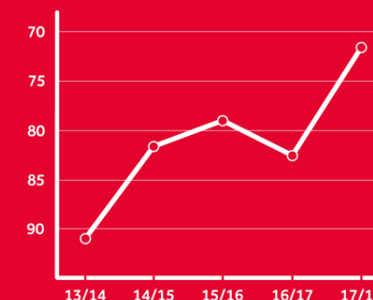
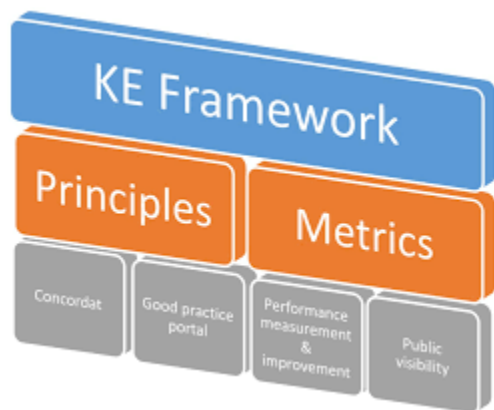
Those providers that do well will attract more students ...

... and will be able to raise fees in line with inflation.

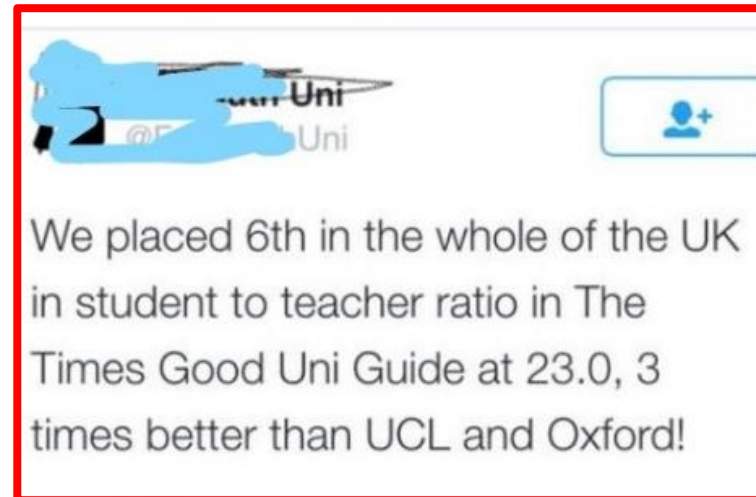
The additional income can be reinvested in the quality of teaching and allow providers to expand so that they can teach more students.”

# Impact of the market

**REF** Research  
2021 Excellence  
Framework

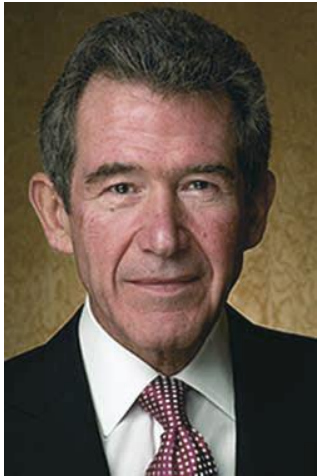


**72<sup>ND</sup>** IN THE  
WORLD  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
OUTLOOK



# Logic of borrowing

“For all students, studying for a degree will be a **risk-free activity**. The return to graduates will be on average around 400%.”



(Lord Browne, 2010, p. 3)



Debt levels: “irrelevant to most people - they'll just keep paying the same proportion each month.”

Fees: “a psychological deterrent”

(Lewis, 2012b, via Student Funding Taskforce)



# Logic of borrowing

“I reckon I’d probably borrow about thirty [thousand pounds] and end up paying back about forty [to] forty-five. I know you don’t have to pay it back for ages, and it’s only a bit at a time, but [that’s] still more than going’s worth [to me].”

High-achieving, low-SES 15-year-old pupil at low-participation urban school

Jones, Steven. 2016. “Expressions of student debt aversion and tolerance among academically able young people in low-participation English schools”. *British Educational Research Journal*. 42(2), 277-293.



"We have got a progressive graduate tax. It isn't about fees, and there's no fixed debt, because you don't have to pay it.

[The problem is] a failure of presentation."

(Vince Cable, 2012)



# Psychological costs

“I’m scared that I might not be able to earn enough to actually enjoy my life. Like, just to get me through. Like will I have enough to like fund a house? Fund a car? It’s just normal life stuff.”

Post-92 university graduand, studying Photography, state school educated, 2016

“I know people who have already left uni and are still living with their parents because they can’t afford to move out. The thought of that really scares me.”

Post-92 university graduant, studying Geography, state school educated, 2016

“When I came to university, I was expecting that the loan that you were given was enough, but it really isn’t.”

Russell Group university graduant, studying Cardiac Physiology, state school educated, 2016

## Stressed students unhappier than other youngsters



News > Education > Education News

## Fewer university students say they are happy and believe lives to be worthwhile, survey finds



Many students feel anxious about their workload and the expense of their tuition  
PAUL ROGERS/THE TIMES

Uni  
ave

## Graduates experience ‘psychological disturbance’ over student loan debt – report

One graduate said he felt ‘sick’ due to the accruing interest on his student debt



## Student fees set to rise but at what cost to graduates’ mental health? New research

Published: November 7, 2024 6:00pm GMT Updated: November 8, 2024 10:20am GMT



# Differential costs

Jones, Steven, Katy Vigurs and Diane Harris. 2020. “Discursive framings of market-based education policy and their negotiation by students: the case of ‘value for money’ in English universities”. *Oxford Review of Education*.

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“I haven’t [been working part time], no. My parents are very good in that they felt that uni should just be for uni. I’ve been able to do plays and choirs all that kind of thing, which I just wouldn’t have been able to do if I’d had to have a job. I wouldn’t mind paying whatever the fee if I could have that experience. I’ve got some contacts now and I feel I’m ready to take the next step.”

Post-92 university student, Drama and Theatre Studies, independent school education, 2015

“Like, I’m not particularly from an affluent background so ... one of the main reasons why I’m going into the career I am, even though I’m not particularly romanticised by the accounting career, it is because there is good economic prospects.”

Russell Group university, Accounting, Widening Participation student, 2016

“It’s okay if you’re a lawyer or an accountant or whatever {pointing to upper end of income graph} but how many of us lot get up there?”

High-achieving, low-SES 14-year-old pupil at low-participation urban school, 2015



# Costs to public trust

GOV.UK

Home > Education, training and skills > Further and higher education, skills and vocational training

Press release

## Crackdown on rip-off university degrees

University courses that fail to deliver good outcomes, with high drop-out rates and poor employment prospects will be subject to strict controls.

The Telegraph

News World Cup Business Sport Opinion Ukraine Money Life Style Travel Cul

Royals UK news Politics World Health Defence Science Education Environment Investigat

COMMENT

## Failing universities have become dependent on foreign students – fueling immigration

If third tier institutions can't recruit locally, they should be allowed to go bust

The Telegraph

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Education

## Students getting less value for money at university despite rise in fees, figures show

MailOnline



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## PETER HITCHENS: Did you ever need an arts graduate in a hurry? So why so many universities?



Fraser Nelson

## Kemi Badenoch: The problem with critical race theory

From magazine issue: 24 October 2020





# Costs to public trust - governance

“It’s a business, and I totally get why. When you think about what’s involved, I mean, yes of course you need all the clever money people in there. But the problem is, the ways it’s *not* a business get forgotten, if that makes sense?”

Student governor, female, post-92 university

“The emphasis is on the financial stability of the organisation. *Should it be?* is another question, and I’m not convinced. I think there is an over-emphasis - to the extent that ethics, integrity, sense of purpose are lost.”

Academic governor, male, multiple institutions

“It’s funny, you’re not brought in because you *know* universities. You’re brought in because you *don’t know* universities.”

Lay governor, male, post-92 university

Jones, S., & Harris, D. (2024). *University Governance: Views From the Inside*. Campaign for the Defence of the British University.  
<https://cdbu.org.uk/university-governance-views-from-the-inside/>



# And yet...?

11% of the British public want opportunities to go to university reduced; **43%** want opportunities increased.

*NatCen's British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, 2017*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/attitudes-to-education-and-childrens-services>

**97%** of new mothers want their children to receive higher education.

<https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/millennium-mothers-want-university-education-for-their-children/#:~:text=No%20less%20than%2097%20per,University%20of%20London%2C%20have%20found>

HEFCE  
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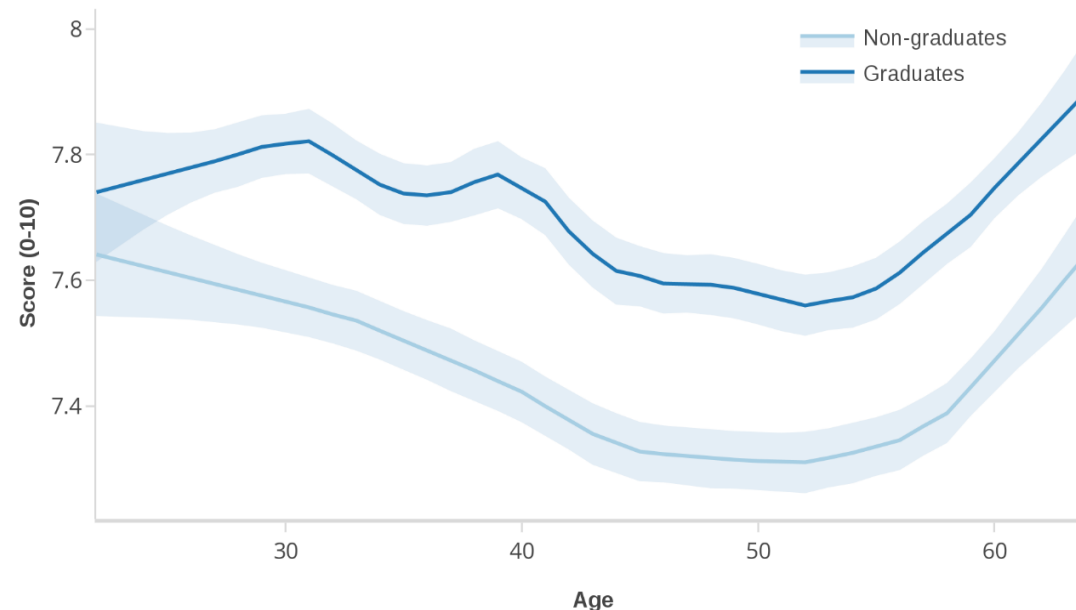
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29 November 2017

## Wellbeing stronger in higher education graduates

HEFCE has published a report that shows graduates in the UK have a greater sense of personal wellbeing and life satisfaction than those without a higher education qualification.



So, should (can?) the sector reclaim the idea of university as a public good?

