Higher education: sector reports review - September 2019 to January 2020

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Abstract

This paper provides a summary of selected reports and papers ('grey literature') published by key HE sector organisations in England/UK and think tanks between September 2019 and January 2020. These include: Advance HE; The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ); Department for Education (DfE); Education Policy Institute; Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC); Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI); Intergenerational Foundation; Jisc; Leading Routes; LKMoo; National Education Opportunities Network (NEON); National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE); National Union of Students (NUS); Office for Students (OfS); Stonewall; Student Minds; Theos; Unite Students; Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); Universities and Colleges Union (UCU); Universities UK (UUK); Universities UK International (UUKi).

The themes covered in the paper include: students response to the Augar review; university priorities; unconditional offers; outreach; social mobility; care leavers; student engagement; student expectations; sustainability; postgraduate experiences; mental health and wellbeing; initiations; racial harassment; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students; Latinx students; LGBT students; prisoner education; religion; disability; online harassment; digital experiences; copied materials in HE teaching; language learning; employability and transition after graduation; male participation in nursing and allied health HE; casualisation of staff; staff diversity; the 2019 General Election; privilege in HE; and university chaplaincies.

Students' response to Augar

1,078 full-time (FT) undergraduate (UG) students answered the HEPI/YouthSight survey on the Augar review and the cost of living (Hewitt, October 2019).

The post-18 independent review of education and funding in England was chaired by Philip Augar. The report and recommendations were released on 30 May 2019.

The findings showed respondents to be:

o Split between the existing tuition fee model and Augar's recommendation to lower the fee, with 40 per cent preferring the existing system of up to £9,250 p.a. paid back over 30 years, and 41 per cent preferring the Augar approach of £7,500 p.a. paid off over 40 years;
o Supportive of the recommendation to bring back maintenance grants; and
o Mindful that the cost of living presented a greater concern than tuition fees.

Relative to the cost of living, over half (52 per cent) of students' parents contributed to living costs, while 46 per cent of students' parents did not. Students considered living away from home as critical to their university experience, as around half (49 per cent) indicated that they would still choose to live away from home even if it came at great cost.

UUK (October 2019a) issued information, aimed at students, to explain how institutions are funded, how money is spent, and how this spending had added value to the student experience.

University priorities

In results from the NCEE's (October 2019) survey on the changes and challenges facing university leaders, navigating financial uncertainty, driving internal change, and developing a culture of innovation were identified as the top concerns. Further, in relation to new teaching methods, 80 per cent of respondents thought that this required 'complete overhaul' or 'significant change'.

Admissions

The 2019 End of Cycle 'insights report' from UCAS (November 2019) noted the following:

o 97.8 per cent of UK 18 year-olds, applying through the UCAS main scheme received at least one offer – a new high;
o 34,000 UK 18 year-olds had secured a place through clearing, the highest number on record (representing 14 per cent of placed UK 18 year-old applicants); and
o Whilst equality had narrowed, disadvantaged applicants still needed additional support (in particular, raising awareness of contextualised admissions).

Unconditional offers

In January 2019, the OfS published analysis of unconditional offer-making alongside an OfS Insight brief. These publications highlighted the growth of unconditional offer-making and was also a first look at the impact on student success. Using 2018 application cycle data from UCAS (December 2019), the OfS (October 2019a) found, that for 18 year-olds in England applying to higher education (HE) providers registered with the OfS:

o Unconditional offer-making had continued to grow, with a third of applicants receiving at least one offer with an unconditional component in 2018;

o No evidence to suggest that applicants placed through an unconditional offer were either more or less likely to enrol the following autumn; and

o A lower proportion of students entering with unconditional offers continued with their studies after the first year, compared with students who had entered with conditional offers.

Overall, the OfS estimated that the impact of unconditional offer-making, taking into account other factors, reduced the continuation rate by 0.65 percentage points for entrants in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Outreach

The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (**NCOP**) was launched in January 2017 with the aim of increasing progression to HE among certain underrepresented groups. 29 partnerships were funded by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England)/OfS from April 2018 to deliver a 'sustained, progressive and intensive programme of support' to pupils in Years 9 to 13 living in areas with low levels of HE participation and where participation was lower than expected GCSE attainment.

CFE Research (October 2019) presented findings from the national formative and impact evaluations of Phase 1 of NCOP, which ended in July 2019. The stated achievements included:

o A number of 'cold spots' in outreach provision had been tackled with some schools and further education (FE) colleges engaging in outreach for the first time ever, or after a hiatus of a number of years;

o Partnerships were delivering a wide range of activities that combined to form a more sustained and progressive

programme of support for NCOP learners;

o Partnerships were moving away from offering 'fixed menus' of activities providing instead, programmes tailored to age and circumstances of learners, school/college type and the local context;

o NCOP had facilitated access to better information, advice and guidance for target learners; and

o Notable progress had been made in engaging parents as key influencers on young people's decision-making.

Reflecting on the CFE Research findings, OfS (October 2019b) announced plans to commission further work, including research with schools and colleges, and parents and carers, "to help understand how these key influencers perceive higher education outreach and access activity" (p. 15).

NEON (January 2020) published views of 18 of the 29 regional NCOP partnership leaders, highlighting elements of the programme which were working, and how best to avoid past problems in widening access when successful collaborative programmes have ended prematurely.

ICM Unlimited (October 2019), in a study for the OfS, reported on the perceptions and engagement with HE outreach and access activities in two audiences: teachers working at schools and colleges; and parents/carers. Both teachers and parents cited interest to be involved in HE outreach activity however, whilst teachers were already involved in HE outreach activities in schools and FE colleges, parents had little to no awareness of outreach activity. Positioning an outreach programme as 'supporting students to make informed choices' was considered important for both teachers and parents but, rather than

focusing on courses and subjects, grounding the discussions on: what university life would be like; how students could prepare for HE; and what it is like to study away from home or study locally, was considered equally important.

The Education Policy Institute reviewed 92 studies that provided empirical evidence of the impact of outreach interventions (Robinson and Salvestrini, January 2020). The review noted several themes:

o Overall, there is a lack of evidence on the impact of outreach interventions on actual enrolment rates, with much of the evidence focusing on 'intermediate outcomes' (e.g. increased aspirations and awareness) which may not always translate into actual enrolments;
o Most of the studies analysed found positive but modest effects;
o Much of the evidence is concentrated on students in their final years of secondary school and post-16 learners (A-levels in particular), with little evidence on the impact of interventions happening earlier in the student lifecycle;
o Most of initiatives' analyses are 'black box' interventions combining several outreach components;
o Providing financial aid to disadvantaged students is a high-cost widening participation intervention with a small but positive effect on enrolment;
o Interventions in the area of mentoring, counselling and role models has generally positive outcomes; and
o Summer schools are high-cost interventions that appear to be positively correlated with an increase in confidence and aspirations, though evidence on their effects on application to and acceptance by HE institutions shows mixed results.

Social mobility

In a policy note for HEPI, Major and Banerjee (December 2019) acknowledged the 'heavy lifting' that had been undertaken by newer and less selective HE institutions. They challenged the OfS to demand highly-selective universities to expand student numbers to diversify intakes, particularly in relation to introducing degree apprenticeships, foundation study, and courses for part-time (PT) and mature learners. The following recommendations were offered for institutions in England:

o Produce two published offers for degree courses, such as a 'standard entry requirement' and a 'minimum entry requirement';
o Consider using random allocation of places for students over a certain minimum academic threshold;
o Establish social mobility rankings that measure the outcomes for disadvantaged students; and
o Undertake a social mobility audit benchmarking work on outreach access and academic and pastoral support for disadvantaged students.

The 'association between characteristics of students' (**ABCS**) is a set of analyses that seek to understand better how outcomes vary for different groups of students.

The OfS (September 2019) set out the methodology for creating ABCS measures and, though an experimental statistic, highlighted examples where ABCS had shown groups of students with poor outcomes that may have been overlooked when only scrutinising single characteristics.

Care leavers

Responding to government figures which showed that six per cent of 19-21-year-olds who experienced care growing up went on

to university (a percentage that had remained unchanged for over ten years), the CSJ (January 2020) issued a pledge to increase this to 12 per cent by 2024. In analysis of universities' 2018/19 access and participation plans (APPs) (n=102), the CSJ noted:

o 90 per cent of the plans included looked-after children or care leavers in some way;
o 84 per cent of Russell Group universities referenced looked-after children and care leavers in their plans;
o 64 per cent of the plans included a reference to targeted activity for looked-after children before they enter university (these activities included, but were not limited to, pre-university programmes, open days, virtual schools, mentoring, support groups and events on campus);
o 66 per cent of universities provided some form of financial support for care leavers in addition to the HE bursary provided by local authorities (the most common form of support was a bursary of around £1,000 per year);
o 36 per cent of the plans included programmes for younger children in care who were identified as being at high risk of not applying to university without specific support and guidance (these were mainly pre-university programmes designed to demystify university life); and
o 29 per cent of the plans included specific activities to support care leavers while at university.

APPs set out how HE providers in England will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education.

The report authors recommended the OfS to "strongly encourage" all HE institutions

to include looked-after children as a priority group within APPs.

Student expectations
Continuing their 'Reality Check' study which began in 2017, accommodation group Unite Students (September 2019), with YouthSight, investigated young people's transition to university, their expectations and their experiences in the first year, looking at both academic and non-academic aspects. The qualitative phase of the research comprised focus groups in March 2019 with applicants (n=15) and first year students (n=16), followed by interviews with first year students (n=21). Following this phase of the study an online survey was completed by applicants (n=2,535) and first year students (n=2,573) in May 2019, which analysed key areas such as wellbeing and mental health, identity, student life and 'adulting'. Overall, three key themes emerged from the study.

o Future stability was recognised as a dominant motivator for current and prospective students. An undergraduate (UG) degree was perceived as a period of transition between a stable past and a hoped-for stable future.
o Owing to a more diverse student body, in terms not only of traditional demographic but individual identity, an inclusive and flexible HE experience was noted as needed.
o Student friendships were identified as highly significant and was recognised as playing a practical as well as an emotional role in students' lives.

Student engagement
29,784 first and second year UGs across 31 institutions completed the 2019 UK Engagement Survey (UKES): since its inception and full year of operation, in 2015,

engagement peaked in 2017 when nearly 36,000 participants across 42 institutions completed the survey.

UKES is managed by Advance HE in partnership with participating institutions. Developed under licence from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in the United States, UKES provides data to identify areas where students are spending their time and engaging, as well as where they are not spending as much time as expected. There are seven broad engagement sections (five of which are compulsory and two optional), 12 items covering skills development (optional), and sections measuring time spent on academic work (two question items – both optional) and extracurricular activity (five question items – optional).

Neves (October 2019) reported that partnering and interacting with staff was key to helping students develop their skills, and this was linked to high levels of retention. In terms of skills development, there was evidence of a greater focus on the more developmental and softer skills. Development of career skills continued to be relatively low though, it is worth noting that UKES is completed by, largely, first and second year UGs.

Study time was shown to be in decline, with the proportion of students spending 11 hours or more per week declining consistently over the past few years for both taught and independent learning (this had greater resonance in the 2019 UKES as new analysis showed how independent learning, in particular, linked to the development of a wide range of skills).

Students still recognised the importance of a range of extracurricular activities; the 2019 data showed an increase in participation in

sports and societies, as well as a halt in the previous increase in the number of students spending time working for pay. As well as volunteering and – in some aspects – caring, sports and societies were considered to play a major role in rounded skills development as well as potentially having a positive impact on retention.

Relative to ethnicity, the report considered a potentially counterintuitive finding; while black students engaged and participated at high levels, wider-sector records of lower satisfaction and achievement rates were evident.

Postgraduate experiences

71,043 students participated in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) in 2019 (response rate, 32 per cent) across 85 institutions (in the previous year, 85,880 students across 106 institutions had completed the survey) (Neves and Leman, November 2019).

Postgraduate taught (PGT) satisfaction has remained relatively stable over many years and, in 2019, this level was recorded as 82 per cent (the overall satisfaction of UGs in the 2019 National Student Survey [NSS] was 84 per cent). Whilst satisfaction in the categories of teaching, resources and information each scored in excess of 83 per cent, just one sub-category (in the category 'organisation' - "Encouraged to be involved in discussions in how my course is run") recorded a below 70 per cent rate in satisfaction. Satisfaction in subject groups clustered in the 81-84 per cent region, with history and philosophical studies scoring highest (85 per cent) and, by contrast, computing science with 77 per cent satisfaction.

A relatively small proportion (20 per cent) of PGTs considered leaving their course

but, overall, the report noted "relatively good matching of PGT students to their institution or course" (p. 18): four per cent felt they had chosen the wrong course, and three per cent thought they had selected the wrong institution.

In terms of ethnicity, the 2019 PTES results represented a counterpoint to UG satisfaction data. For instance, students of Chinese and black backgrounds reported higher levels of satisfaction compared to white students, thus showing that a clear white/BAME (black, Asian or minority ethnic) difference did not apply in terms of satisfaction. However, relatively lower satisfaction scores were recorded by PGT students of Asian, mixed and 'other' backgrounds.

Williams (November 2019) presented findings of the 2019 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). 50,600 PG researchers (PGRs) across 107 institutions completed PRES, up from a low of 16,817 respondents across 66 institutions in 2018. Whilst a relatively high satisfaction rate was recorded in 2019 (81 per cent), this was lower than the satisfaction rate for the period between 2007 and 2017. The quality of the research culture in a department or research area continued to register lower rates of satisfaction.

The highest satisfaction rates were registered by PGRs in mathematical sciences, whereas the worst performing subject was communication and media studies. Overall, health science PGRs were more satisfied than their peers in the social sciences. In assessment of UK-domicile PGRs (thus removing the impact of overseas students who make up a large bulk of all PGRs), PRES highlighted the "stark differences" between ethnic groups. White PGRs reported having the most satisfactory

experience followed by students from black backgrounds: Asian PGRs were least satisfied with their experience.

Mental health and wellbeing

Student Minds produced a set of principles which were intended to support institutions in making mental health a university-wide priority. These principles formed the basis of the Student Minds Charter Award Scheme (being developed in 2020/21) to recognise and reward HE providers promoting good mental health and demonstrating good practice (Hughes and Spanner, December 2019). Taking a holistic perspective, the University Mental Health Charter focuses on:

o Learning (transition into university, teaching and assessment, and progression);
o Support (including assessing risk, establishing external partnerships and pathways, and information sharing);
o Staff wellbeing and development; and
o Living (including university community-building and the physical environment).

Several enabling themes are identified in the Charter, including: leadership, strategy and policy; the role of student voice and participation; research and dissemination. The Charter stresses inclusivity and "intersectional mental health", with a recommendation that "universities take action to understand their populations and staff and students' differing needs and experiences" (Hughes and Spanner, December 2019: 14).

The OfS (November 2019a) summarised analysis of APP data for students who reported having a mental health condition upon entry to HE, and was used as a basis for an Insight brief (OfS, November 2019b). In addition to noting the greater interaction

taking place between universities and the National Health Service, and more practices on campus to promote a safe, healthy and inclusive experience, many other themes emerged from the APP dataset:

o On the impact of intersectionality, higher rates of poor mental health were evident in those FT students who described their ethnicity as 'mixed', and PT students from the most deprived areas of Britain;

o FT students who reported a mental health condition had lower continuation, attainment and progression rates than FT students overall;

o Among FT students who graduated in 2016/17, 69.2 per cent of those with declared mental health conditions progressed into skilled work or further study compared with 73.1 per cent of all UGs;

o Black FT students who reported a mental health condition had some of the lowest continuation and attainment rates, with only 77.1 per cent continuing to their second year compared with 85 per cent for black FT students overall (since 2013/14, the continuation rates for FT students who reported a mental health condition improved in all ethnic groups, apart from black students for whom the gap had increased); and

o Just 53 per cent of FT black students who reported a mental health condition graduated with a 1st or 2:1, thus highlighting an extremely high degree attainment gap between black and white students with a mental health condition (26.8 percentage points).

In data from the HEPI/YouthSight Monitor (Wave 7), a clear majority of students reported being satisfied with the prospect of their institution using students' data to enhance learning and wellbeing in the university (Hewitt and Natzler,

December 2019). Whilst respondents did not wish personal data and data related to learning to be shared beyond the student-university relationship, they were willing for information to be shared with parents in the event of a health emergency.

In Unite Student's (September 2019) study, 17 per cent of applicants and first year students identified having a mental condition (up from 12 per cent in 2016 when Unite Students first began asking the question): anxiety and depression – and often both – were the most commonly reported conditions. However, respondents did not necessarily view this as a problem and most did not wish to draw on university support or even disclose their condition, leading the study authors to note:

> …*this generation's approach to mental health appears to be largely accepting and pragmatic. From the qualitative research, students and applicants think about their wellbeing regularly and see it as an ongoing day to day process, looking after themselves physically and making sure to socialise and avoid isolation. Those applicants with a pre-existing mental health condition were found to have their own coping mechanisms that they plan to draw on when at university* (p. 22).

A quarter of first year students did not use the university service because of issues around confidence, fear or trust, and Unite Students concluded that, "Peer-led approaches may help to address this [problem]" (p. 22).

Unique to the 2019 edition of PRES, a revised set of questions enabled direct comparison between PGR levels of wellbeing and those of UGs and general population. The analysis revealed that

although the wellbeing levels of PGRs remained low, they are above those of the UG population, with the stark exception of anxiety, where PGRs reported clear concerns (Williams, November 2019).

Initiations at university

Following advice of the coroner in the inquest of the death of a first year student at Newcastle University, a national roundtable was held in June 2019 to discuss initiations at university. Ed Farmer, who was a member of the Agricultural Society, consumed significant quantities of alcohol in a two-hour period: he subsequently died due to a hypoxic brain injury caused by prolonged cardio-respiratory arrest in 2016.

UUK published an overview of the forms of initiations in universities (Haigh and de Pury, September 2019). In particular, the guide highlighted emerging practice designed to minimise initiations and support the wellbeing of students:

o Newcastle University Student Initiation Group – set up in response to the death of Ed Farmer – which established principles, training and development, disciplinary protocols, reporting mechanisms, and greater co-ordinated activities with city council, police and licencing authorities;
o NUS Alcohol Impact – aimed at creating the conditions for a social norm for responsible alcohol consumption;
o The CHANGES (Challenging Hazing and Negative Group Events in Sport) intervention – a framework aimed at promoting positive team-building and welcome events; and
o The Good Lad Initiative – designed to examine power hierarchies in teams, as well as links between initiations and the wider set of issues that affect university students (e.g. the connection between

drinking culture and mental health), and the link between 'black out' culture and sexual harassment.

Racial harassment

The EHRC (October 2019) examined staff and students' experiences of racial harassment and the effect this might have on their education, career and wellbeing. The inquiry also investigated the extent to which universities had available accessible and effective routes to redress for their staff and students if racial harassment was experienced. The inquiry report noted that racial harassment was commonplace. Of those students who had experienced racial harassment, 20 per cent had been physically attacked, whilst 56 per cent had experienced racist name-calling. Institutional ignorance of 'microaggressions', being excluded from conversations or group activities, or being exposed to racist material or displays, were other "common experiences" to emerge from the consultation. Whilst other students were identified as the harasser in most cases, a significant minority also identified tutors or academics as perpetrators. Staff were more likely to report being excluded or ignored, though a quarter of experienced racist name-calling, insults and jokes.

In the EHRC's student survey, two-thirds of the respondents, who reported experiencing racial harassment during the first half of 2018/19, did not report it to their university. Fewer than half of all staff who had been racially harassed did not report their experiences because they: had no confidence that the university would address it; did not know how to report; could not judge whether it was serious enough to report, or; had difficulty proving what occurred. The inquiry report posited, overall, racial harassment was underreported, thus restricting universities' ability to take action.

For instance, across all the 159 publicly funded universities in Britain, 559 complaints from students on racial harassment were recorded over a three-and-a-half year period, or roughly 80 formal complaints every six months.

Further, it was noted that universities tended to be overconfident in the complaint handling process, though a majority did not seek feedback on the process itself. Whilst nearly all universities surveyed felt that they had applied fairness in the complaints received, the majority of students and staff did not get the outcome they desired (fewer than 40 per cent of student complaints and around one in six staff complaints, were upheld and offered some kind of redress).

The inquiry report noted the psychological impact of racial harassment, resulting in a loss of confidence, anxiety and vulnerability: eight per cent of students indicated feeling suicidal. Overall disengagement by students and staff was noted, in order to remain in a safe place or to prevent further erosion of confidence. Five per cent of students who had experienced racial harassment left their studies, whilst three in 20 staff reported leaving their jobs. Other psychological effects related to the anxiety felt in managing incidents of racial harassment, "because of fear of getting it wrong and possibly facing allegations of discrimination… [thus] undermin[ing] fair treatment and the prospect of early resolution" (p. 8).

In response to the EHRC, UUK (October 2019b) drew attention to its 'changing the culture' initiative and to the second round of OfS Catalyst projects that focused on addressing racial and online harassment. UUK announced that it would work with sector leaders, including the NUS, "to establish what an effective operational response looks like for preventing and responding to racial harassment" (p. 5).

Racial inequality

Leading Routes revealed inequalities and bias in HE by examining the link between the BAME attainment gap at UG level and students' experiences when seeking council-funded PGR places (Williams et al., September 2019). Analysing key contributing factors that affect black students' access to research council funding, including inequality and structural racism, Leading Routes noted that sector wide discrimination and bias continue to play a significant role in restricting access to funding and, in consequence, limiting the number of black PhD students and academics in the UK. For instance, over a three year period, just 1.2 per cent of the 19,868 studentships awarded by all UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) research councils went to black or 'black mixed' students and only 30 of those were from a black Caribbean background.

Following the publication of the UUK/ NUS report *Closing the Gap*, HEPI released a collection of essays, from which the following policy recommendations were highlighted (Dale-Rivas, September 2019):

o All HE institutions should participate in the Race Equality Charter;
o Institutions need to facilitate conversations about race;
o There should be recognition and reward for work done by BAME staff and students to tackle racial inequalities;
o The curricula should be examined to address inequalities in a subject;
o Institutions should support diversity practitioners with senior management diversity champions; and

o Targeted implicit bias training should be applied to map out how biases are playing out in institutions.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students

LKMoo, the education and youth development think tank, explored the reasons why Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) are underrepresented in HE (Mulcahy et al., December 2019). The study considered three dimensions of experience:

o Cultural barriers (mobility; language and system knowledge; norms, aspirations and expectations; and cultural identity);
o Material barriers (poverty; inadequate housing and homelessness; and, access to healthcare and special educational needs support); and
o Prejudice and discrimination (discriminatory attitudes and media prejudice; schools' response to discrimination; self-exclusion from mainstream, education as a result of discrimination; and, discrimination in HE).

The study comprised interviews and a roundtable discussion with expert academics and practitioners, plus pupil focus groups (comprising GRT pupils aged between 12 and 16 of Slovakian, Czech and Irish heritage). The report authors identified five key barriers to HE access: a lack of policy attention and supportive initiatives; issues of identity and inclusion; the relevance of HE curricula to GRT cultures; pupils' perceptions of HE; and financial issues and attitudes to debt.

Latinx students

The Centre for Education and Youth examined the representation, engagement and participation of Latinx students in HE (Robertson et al., November 2019).

Latinx are Spanish or Portuguese first language speakers from Central and South America, alongside those from Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands, such as Cuba and Dominican Republic.

The study was prompted by an absence of data on Latinx young people in HE (the 16-25 Latinx population in the UK is growing rapidly, especially in London), and recognition that the Latinx community is overrepresented in low-paid and low-skilled jobs (e.g. in cleaning and hospitality sectors). Further, it was surmised that many parents have limited proficiency in English and may not have secured citizenship or settled status, creating a disconnect between Latinx families and the education system.

The fieldwork, which was based solely in London, comprised face-to-face interviews and focus groups with university Latinx students, secondary-aged pupils, teachers and mothers (part of a Latinx 'mums' group'). The study also comprised interviews with experts with an HE, community organising and local authority perspective. Five main issues, relating specifically to the education system, were noted:

o Lack of knowledge of the UK education system;
o Lack of awareness of how citizenship status can affect eligibility for funding;
o A need for pupils to act as 'linguistic brokers' (i.e. conflicts of interest arise when Latinx pupils have to facilitate interaction between parents and their schools);
o A high reliance on community-based support networks; and
o The slow pace of admissions and schools' reluctance to admit pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Prisoner education

As identified in HEPI's policy note (McFarlane, October 2019), approximately 2,000 prisoners were thought to be engaging in UK HE. A majority of these learners (n=1,750) were completing a PT distance learning degree with The Open University (OU), whilst the remainder were engaged on the non-accredited Prison University Partnership in Learning (PUPiL) programme. Citing analysis from the OU-based Justice Data Lab, lower reoffending rates were recorded for those who had studied for an OU award. The policy note recommended the lifting of restrictions on prisoners to apply for student loans in England and Wales, and to include those prisoners with more than six years to run on their sentence.

Religion

In 2016, a UUK Harassment Taskforce report (*Changing the Culture*) recommended HE providers to put in place measures to address the effective prevention of and response to harassment, sexual violence and hate crime in UK HE in all its forms. Funding was released by the OfS over three rounds, each with a different focus. Round one focused on tackling sexual misconduct and involved 63 projects, whilst the second round supported 45 one-year projects tackling hate crime and online harassment. Advance HE (November 2019) evaluated the third round of OfS Catalyst funding, which commenced in 2018, and 11 projects on addressing hate crime or incidents on the grounds of religion or belief. In interviews and focus groups, participants identified change in four broad areas of development in the interim phase of the programme:

o Visibility of religion and belief on campus – more open discussion by students and staff to talk more openly and positively about religion and belief,

including a greater awareness of the projects among students, staff and senior leaders;
o Revision of policies and procedures – improved reporting mechanisms and embedded new approaches to training;
o Connectivity – stronger links between the provider and religion and belief groups in the community, as well as between projects teams and the students' union, chaplaincy and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) teams;
o Impact on students – increased knowledge of other faiths, opportunities to engage better with others from different backgrounds, and improved employability skills.

Theos, the HE 'religion and society' think tank, released guidance on how best to support faith and belief student societies (Perfect, January 2020). The guidance, based on research undertaken with Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, recognises the challenges and opportunities faced by student societies, including their capacity to build bridges across different groups. Mapping provision for faith and belief societies, equipping staff (i.e. improving religious literacy), supporting and connecting societies, and generating new societies, are featured as good practice in the guide.

Disability

Following announcement of the Disabled Students' Commission, which replaced the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group in 2019, the OfS (October 2019c) published an Insights brief that questioned how well universities and colleges were meeting the needs of disabled students. The OfS noted a widespread acceptance of the social model of disability, which was "not universally applied and remain(ed) aspirational" (p. 2).

The **social model of disability** developed out of an understanding that disability is not something medical to be treated, but rather a failing of society to restructure environments and to shift attitudes.

Relative to teaching and learning, the OfS acknowledged that, whilst universities were becoming more inclusive, developments were uneven across the sector.

Online harassment

Building on a parliamentary white paper, that set out the government's Internet safety strategy and its plans to improve online safety (HM Government, 2019), UUK published guidance on combatting online harassment. As an outcome of UUK's changing the culture programme, the guidance noted that, whilst students' experiences of technology were useful and positive, where online harassment did occur, it could lead to severe and long-term repercussions. UUK also acknowledged that, for many young people, online harassment had been embedded in their digital lives and, to some extent, normalised. Thus, online harassment was emerging as part of a wider dynamic of students' peer group and intimate relationships. The guidance identified practical recommendations for each of the following principles:

o Sustain commitment and accountability from senior leaders;
o Implement a whole-institution approach;
o Engage students in a shared understanding of online harassment and in the development, delivery and evaluation of intervention;
o Develop and evaluate prevention strategies;
o Develop and evaluate response strategies;
o Promote online safety and welfare; and
o Share knowledge and good practice.

UUK conceded that the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions in HE was limited and it urged universities and students' unions "to share practice across the sector and draw on learning from other sectors such as schools and FE colleges" (p. 57).

Digital experiences

14,525 students responded to Jisc's (September 2019) 'insights survey' on the digital experience in their learning. A significant majority (85 per cent) used digital tools to access lecture notes or recorded lectures on a weekly basis, and 72 per cent searched for additional resources not recommended by their lecturers. Timely access to lecture recordings was identified as 'the top issue' but three-quarters of respondents rated the quality of digital teaching and learning on their course only as above average. Over half (53 per cent) were happy with the extent to which technology was used on their course, though 44 per cent preferred more use. Practice questions online (35 per cent), course related videos (23 per cent), and references and readings (20 per cent) were identified as content which students wished to see more of in their studies. Further, one in five students highlighted the importance of assistive technologies in their learning.

Unite Students (September 2019) reported on applicants wanting universities to offer a strong digital option. However, they expected this to be well designed and intuitive, and they confirmed they would be inclined to become frustrated if that was not the case. Further, it was noted that 44 per cent of students used apps independently to help them in their learning.

In Jisc's (November 2019) survey of HE staff (n=3,485) on their use of digital

technologies in their teaching, 48 per cent identified themselves as 'early adopters' "if they could see a clear benefit". In regard to the support for using digital technologies, staff indicated relying mostly on their teaching colleagues (33 per cent), online videos and resources (32 per cent) and support staff (31 per cent). 74 per cent of teaching staff did not teach in a live online environment, and the number who indicated carrying out digital teaching activities on a weekly or more basis was low. For instance, one in four created digital learning materials, one in five gave personalised digital feedback, and one in ten engaged in live polling or quizzing. Whilst 45 per cent of staff searched online for teaching resources 'weekly or more often', engagement with digital development practices was low. For instance, just 11 per cent discussed teaching online with their peers, 13 per cent read up on issues in digital education, and 17 per cent developed digital teaching skills. Despite this, nearly two-thirds of teaching staff wanted digital technologies to be used more than was experienced. Also, just 29 per cent believed that learning spaces were well designed for digital technology use.

Relative to professional development, only nine per cent of teaching staff agreed that they received reward or recognition when they had developed the digital aspects of their practice, and just 13 per cent agreed that they had time and support to innovate. Less than a third of staff felt that they had received guidance about the digital skills they were expected to have as a teacher, and most rated the support they received as 'average'.

Copied materials in HE teaching
UUK, GuildHE and the HE Copyright Negotiation and Advisory Committee (CNAC) commissioned a study to track the use of copied materials in HE teaching, thus

offering clarity around the uses of the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) Licence and the terms of the HE Licence (Secker et al., September 2019).

> The **CLA HE Licence** covers the photocopying, scanning and digital to digital copying of extracts from published content for use in teaching. HE institutions generally use the Licence to copy extracts from books (up to ten per cent or a single chapter), or a journal article and make them available to students from a virtual learning environment or from a reading list system. Purchased annually by every HE institution, the CLA Licence cost the HE sector over £15.5 million (or, in 2018/19, £7.37 + VAT per Full Time Equivalent [FTE] student).

Among the findings, and highlighted in feedback from acquisition librarians, e-book business models were not deemed to be working in HE institutions. The report authors concluded that the CLA Licence had shifted in its purpose as a mechanism to remunerate authors and publishers for photocopying of print books, to a way of providing students with access to books in digital form where primary e-book licences were restrictive or unaffordable.

Patterns of scanning showed that a small number of institutions made extensive use of the Licence, with 51 per cent of all scans undertaken by the top 20 institutions (i.e. mainly, larger well-funded Russell Group universities). 133 institutions reported less than 500 scans per year in 2017/18, indicating that a large number of institutions had made relatively limited use of the Licence.

Sustainability
6,000 students completed a national online survey aimed at tracking experiences and expectations around teaching and learning

for sustainability (NUS, October 2019). A significant majority (86 per cent) thought that universities should actively incorporate or promote sustainable development and over half indicated a desire to learn more about sustainability. 75 per cent considered accepting a salary sacrifice of £1,000 to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record (up from 69 per cent on the previous year). Respondents also wished to see a greater focus on the impact on human activity on the environment in teaching and learning activity.

Language learning

In a report for HEPI, UG student Megan Baker (January 2020) examined the state of language learning in the UK. In acknowledging sharp decline in the uptake of language learning in HE (French had declined 45 per cent between 2010/11 and 2016/17; German by 43 per cent; and Italian by 63 per cent), the report strongly endorsed the school curriculum to feature an ancient or modern language. For the HE sector, the report recommended the inclusion of language teachers on the Shortage Occupations List and the safeguarding (with government funding) of the provision of minority languages plus the facilitation of free additional language learning for students and staff.

Student accommodation

In a report for HEPI that tracked the history of residence in British HE, Whyte (November 2019) surmised that the tendency of students to view mobility as synonymous with university life was likely to endure. Noting the growing number of commuter students, who are more likely to be detached from the university experience, the report advised universities to initiate a

debate about the purpose and function of residence and, in particular, to review:

o The support of students off campus (e.g. re-evaluate timetabling);
o The support of students in private rental accommodation (e.g. the provision and access to sustained pastoral support);
o New designs of accommodation (e.g. considering student wellbeing and encouraging greater communal and shared spaces rather than cellular accommodation);
o The increasingly unsustainable rises in rent; and
o How accommodation policies had affected the local community.

Students and paid work

About one in four FT PGT students were in paid work during their studies (Neves and Leman, November 2019). Most (39 per cent) worked between 11-20 hours per week, though 20 per cent indicated working in excess of 30 hours per week. FT PGTs working alongside their studies were more likely to consider leaving their course.

Employability and transition after graduation

In analysis by ethnicity, Neves and Leman (November 2019) noted significant differences in the motivation to undertake a PGT course. Most PGT students were motivated to undertake further study "to progress in a career path" (61 per cent) and "to improve employment prospects" (58 per cent). However, black students were the most likeliest to consider PG study to enhance career prospects, whilst Chinese students were particularly focused on current career requirements.

Gaskell and Lingwood's (November 2019) discussion paper for UUK focused explicitly

on the notion of a 'third phase' of widening opportunity:

First Phase - Fair access to HE, including narrowing gaps in access between students of different backgrounds.
Second Phase - Successful participation, including the completion of studies and elimination of any attainment gaps between students of different backgrounds.
Third Phase - Graduate success after HE, based on ability and academic achievement and not socio-economic background, thus elimination of any 'post-graduation gaps'.

Drawing on several case studies, five broad themes, meriting further focus and development, were identified.

o *Initiatives to enhance graduate success* – with a focus on: applied and applicable oral and written communication skills; collaboration and networking skills to enable students to develop their own networks, engagement with employers or work with local communities before graduation; critical and creative thinking fostered by cross-disciplinary working; and the development of leadership potential.

o *Inclusive and personalised programmes* – "in recognition of specific aspects of background and intersectionality" (p. 31), and incorporated within the curriculum, rather than as extracurricular activities.

o *Further development of university-employer relationships* "to help the latter refine recruitment practices to avoid conscious or unconscious bias based on socioeconomic background" (p. 32).

o *Sharing information and good practice*, for instance, with the Centre for Transforming Access to Student Outcomes (TASO).

o *Funding of further research* to assess the correlation between socioeconomic

background and graduate success, "defined both in terms of personal reward and societal benefit" (p. 33).

AGCAS Disability Task Group (September 2019) reported on the first destinations of disabled graduates. The Group compared the employment outcomes of disabled and non-disabled university leavers, six months after graduating, drawing on data from the 2016/17 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. Of the 330,080 graduates (first degree, PGT and PGR students) who responded to the survey, 45,175 (13.7 per cent) identified as having either a disability or learning difficulty during their period of study. The report showed that, whilst the likelihood of employment was seen to improve with increasing qualification level for both disabled and non-disabled graduates, the gap in total employment levels (between disabled graduates and those with no known disability) grew by qualification level.

Graduates were asked to consider why they had selected their job: to fit in with a career plan or because it was exactly the type of work wanted, were the common reasons given. However, graduates with a social communication or autistic spectrum disorder were the least likely to have chosen their current role to fit a chosen career plan. Additionally, disabled graduates were more likely to be self-employed.

Male participation in nursing and allied health HE

Research Works Ltd. (January 2020), in a study for the OfS, sought to understand better the barriers to male participation in nursing and allied health HE. Gender stereotypes were the major factor deterring males from considering nursing, whereas low awareness was the most significant barrier for allied health subjects. In

addition, negative perceptions of pay and workload in, and status of, nursing and allied health careers also posed further barriers.

Overseas students

Neves and Leman (November 2019) rationalised that overseas PGT students were more satisfied than their UK counterparts because, with the exception of Australasia, overseas cohorts were less likely to have considered leaving their course. The report authors considered that, as overseas students were less likely to be working during their studies, they were more engaged in their course. To support this, a significantly lower proportion of PGT students from Asia were working and more likely to stay on their course: Australasian students were, amongst overseas students, most likely to be working for pay and most likely to consider leaving.

UK transnational education

UUKi (November 2019), in analysis of HESA data, observed that there were nearly 700,000 students studying through UK transnational education (TNE) in 2017/18, a decrease of two per cent over the previous year. 139 HE providers reported students studying through HE TNE in 2017/18, though three main programme providers of distance, flexible and blended TNE made up 52.1 per cent of the total number of TNE students (and 18 universities made up 75.2 per cent). 'Students studying at an overseas campus' showed the greatest proportional growth between 2016/17 and 2017/18. Further, it was noted that the number of students studying on UK TNE programmes was 1.5 times the number of international students in the UK in the same year.

Overall, UK TNE was delivered in 225 countries and territories in 2017/18, with Asia hosting 49.5 per cent of students,

followed by Africa (21.5 per cent), the EU (11.5 per cent), the Middle East (9.4 per cent), North America (4.4 per cent), non-EU Europe (2.8 per cent), Australasia (0.5 per cent) and South America (0.4 per cent). China hosted the most TNE students (10.9 per cent), followed by Malaysia (10.4 per cent), Singapore (6.5 per cent), Pakistan (5.8 per cent) and Nigeria (4.3 per cent). When the three main providers of distance, flexible and blended TNE are excluded, the EU became the second region with the largest number of students, representing an increase of 11.1 per cent between 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Staff: casualisation

Invisibility, vulnerability, a lack of agency, and an inability to project into the future were the key themes to emerge from Megoran and Mason's (January 2020) study on the effects of casualisation at a range of HE institutions in north-east England. Relative to teaching, the study highlighted several concerns. For instance, in offering ten-month contracts starting in September, teachers felt pressured to produce learning resources in the unpaid summer months in advance of the academic year. The study also noted that teachers on short-term contracts lacked the agency to ask others for help or to challenge modules "of dubious quality" (p. 15).

The 2019 PRES data revealed a slightly growing proportion of PGRs engaged in teaching compared with the previous year. However, 27 per cent believed they had not been given appropriate support or guidance for their teaching (Williams, November 2019).

Staff: equality and diversity

Advance HE (September 2019) presented the twelfth national staff equality data

report. Using data from HESA, the publication presents a snapshot of the age, disability, ethnicity and gender of the HE workforce in the academic year 2017/18, as well as the interplay of these identities. Further, the report presents high-level findings on institutional collection and return rates of staff gender reassignment, religion and belief and sexual orientation data as well as how these data intersects with other identity characteristics.

Staff: health faculties
Baltruks et al. (January 2020) analysed the Council of Deans of Health's 2019 academic staffing census (nursing, midwifery and allied health workforce). Relative to teaching and learning, more than two-thirds of staff had an employment function that was both teaching and research. This was considered to be much higher than in the HE sector as a whole where 47 per cent of academic staff had a teaching and research contract in 2017/18.

Postscript: the 2019 General Election
Following prolonged parliamentary deadlock over Brexit, a snap election was held on 12 December 2019, resulting in a Conservative landslide majority of 80 seats. The main political parties in England each produced manifestoes with aspirations for HE.

For a comparison of the political parties' previous priorities for HE in England, during the **2017 General Election**, see Mistry (2017). For an overview of the OfS's activities in 2019 and its priorities for the future, see OfS (December 2019).

o The Conservative Party pledged to tackle grade inflation and "low quality courses", and to improve the application and offer system for UG students. Further, the party affirmed strengthening academic freedom and free speech as well as universities' civic role. On the latter, the manifesto stated that the OfS would be required to examine universities' success in increasing access to HE of all ages, and "not just young people entering full-time UG degrees" (The Conservative and Unionist Party, November 2019).

o The Labour Party (November 2019) pledged to "end the failed free-market experiment in higher education" by abolishing tuition fees and bringing back maintenance grants. Labour endorsed developing a new funding formula for HE to: widen access; reverse the decline in PT learning; and end the casualisation of staff. The manifesto stressed the necessity for post-qualifications admissions (PQA) and introduction of contextualised admissions "across the system". The party also indicated that it would "transform the OfS from market regulator to a body of the National Education Service, acting in the public interest".

o The Liberal Democrats (November 2019) rationalised that "stopping Brexit" would "reverse the damage to universities". In addition to a pledge on strengthening the OfS, the party stated it would require universities to make mental health services accessible, and introduce a Student Mental Health Charter through legislation. Relative to finance and participation, the Liberal Democrats proposed reinstating maintenance grants for the poorest students, reviewing HE finance, and ensuring that the sector worked to widen participation for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups by prioritising their work with students in schools and colleges whilst being transparent about selection criteria.

o The Green Party (November 2019) pledged to fund every HE student and

Page | 49

remove UG tuition fees. The Greens indicated a desire to see a fully accessible sector, "with courses being offered as learning experiences, not as pre-work training. Education… for education's sake". The party proposed writing off debt for students who had studied under the £9k tuition fee regime.

Addendum: privilege in HE

An Intergenerational Foundation report asserted that around ten per cent of university students in England, i.e. those from wealthier backgrounds, were able to enjoy a "huge financial advantage at the start of their careers" (Ehsan and Kingman, January 2019). These students could afford to pay their fees upfront, thus avoiding the 30-year burden of student debt. The Russell Group universities contained the highest number of self-funded students who were able to escape the average £5,800 of accrued interest upon graduation. The authors posited, "poorer students have no choice but to enter a punitive student finance system"; they recommended scrapping the loan system and returning to fully grant-based HE funding.

Addendum: university chaplaincy

Aune et al. (May 2019) examined the experiences and perspectives of four key constituencies that shape university chaplaincy: chaplains themselves; the students who engage with chaplaincy services; the decision-makers who determine how university chaplaincy is resourced and managed; and religion and belief organisations. The study found that, while around six in ten chaplains are Christian, chaplaincy provision was becoming more diverse, better reflecting the UK's religious diversity. The report authors asserted that whilst chaplaincy is moving to a multi-faith model, it had not yet arrived. As many as two-thirds of chaplains identified as

volunteers, with the average UK university having 10.4 chaplains: 3.8 paid and 6.6 volunteers (the time offered equates to 3.3 FTE roles, with 2.4 FTE of chaplains' time being paid and 0.9 given voluntarily). Christians held the majority of paid chaplaincy roles (these roles being connected to historical arrangements between universities and the Anglican and, sometimes Roman Catholic and Methodist, local authorities). Muslim chaplains were beginning to be paid by universities, and Jewish chaplains were often paid by the organisation, University Jewish Chaplaincy. Beyond the monotheistic faiths, chaplains received virtually no remuneration.

A significant proportion of chaplains considered their role to be pastoral in nature (supporting student wellbeing, addressing challenges and problems). Student data indicated that the chaplaincy was used by a minority of a university's students, but those who engaged with the chaplaincy services tended to use it often. Significantly, the heavy users of the chaplaincy were more likely to be socially marginalised (e.g. international students, lonely postgraduates or ethnic minority students). Students indicated that the presence of the chaplain was important, even for casual conversations. The authors concluded, "Creating a safe space for students to explore life questions, values and spirituality, and giving them time in a non-structured way, are things unique to chaplaincy that students value highly" (p. 122).

Addendum: LGBT student experience

Bachmann and Gooch (April 2018) presented findings from a study by Stonewall and YouGov on the experiences of LGBT students: 522 university students across England, Scotland and Wales completed an online questionnaire which

was distributed between February and April 2017.

I went to a Christian event at university and it was heavily implied that they thought being LGBT+ was sinful and wrong.

Kevin, 20 (North West)

I was playing volleyball with the men's team and was told I was not allowed to play matches unless I played with the girls' team.

Alex, 22 (London)

My pronouns and preferred name are not used by my university tutor, and only by very few students.

Jan, 19 (Wales)

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o 36 per cent of trans students and seven per cent of LGBT students faced negative comments or conduct from university staff;

o 60 per cent of trans students and 22 per cent of LGBT students (and 47 per cent of disabled LGBT students) had been the target of negative comments or conduct from other students;

o Seven per cent of trans students had been physically attacked by another student or a member of university staff because of their trans identity;

o 39 per cent of trans students and 22 per cent of LGBT students reported a lack of confidence in reporting any homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying to university staff;

o 42 per cent of LGBT students hid or disguised their LGBT identity owing to fears of discrimination; and

o One in five trans students had been encouraged by university staff to hide or disguise their identity.

Innovations in Practice is Liverpool John Moores University's peer-reviewed journal on learning, teaching, student engagement and higher education.

Online version available at: http://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/iip

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