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Sector reports review: September 2016 to January 2017

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Abstract

This paper provides a summary of key reports and papers published by UK HE sector organisations between September 2016 and January 2017. The organisations and groups covered are: Department for Education (DfE); Disabled Students' Sector Leadership Group; Higher Education Academy (HEA); Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); Heads of e-Learning Forum (HeLF); Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI); Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR); Jisc; jobs.ac.uk; Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE); New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff; Northern Universities Consortium (NUCCAT); Office for Fair Access (OFFA); Prospects/ Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); Quality Assurance Agency (QAA); Social Market Foundation; Student and Assessment Classification Working Group (SACWG); Social Mobility Advisory Group (SMAG); Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); University and College Union (UCU); Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA); and Universities UK (UUK).

The themes covered in this paper include: HE participation and enrolments; academic teaching qualifications; recruitment of teaching staff; the Higher Education and Research Bill (including the Teaching Excellence Framework); teaching quality; the Bell Review; re-assessment practice; supporting technology-enhanced learning; learning analytics; learning spaces; student satisfaction; equality and diversity; admissions and unconscious bias; supporting transition (in university and after graduation); student wellbeing; university rankings; partnership in universities; civic engagement; internationalisation; and alternate providers of HE.



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Student data

HEFCE (September 2016) released a statistical overview of the sector:

- The number of full-time UK and other EU undergraduate (UG) entrants, to English HE providers, in 2015/16 was estimated to be 404,000 (an increase of about four per cent on the previous year). The total population of UK and other EU undergraduates was almost 1.1 million, but numbers of part-time UG entrants continued to decline.
- The number of UK and other EU entrants to PGT (taught postgraduate) courses was estimated to have fallen slightly, by 0.8 per cent between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Full-time entrants to PG research (PGR) courses were estimated to have increased by 5.1 per cent in 2015/16, almost 50 per cent higher than ten years ago.
- Approximately three-quarters of all UG students were enrolled in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, while almost one in four PG students was enrolled on a business-related subject. Entrants to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses at both UG and PG level were shown to have increased substantially over the past decade, with some subjects experiencing very rapid growth (e.g. entrants to UG courses in Chemistry and Materials Science increased by 66 per cent since 2004/05).

The total number of HE enrolments at UK HE providers stood at 2,280,830 in 2015/16, representing an increase of one per cent from 2014/15 (HESA, January 2017a). HESA's statistical release also noted:

- Full-time first degree enrolments accounted for 80 per cent of all full-time HE enrolments and grew by three per cent; part-time enrolments across all

levels of study showed a year on year decrease over the same period;

- There were a further 187,115 HE enrolments at further education colleges in 2015/16 compared to 189,670 in 2014/15;
- HE providers in England had the greatest proportion of non-EU domiciled students (nine per cent); at HE providers in Wales, there was a large decrease (11 per cent) in the number of non-EU domiciled enrolments between 2014/15 and 2015/16;
- Among first year UG enrolments, there was a large increase in the number enrolling in Science subjects (with the exception of Biological Sciences). Education also saw a large drop in first year UG enrolments, as did History;
- In relation to PG enrolments, Subjects Allied to Medicine increased substantially; Business and Administrative Studies and Education showed the largest absolute decrease in first year PG enrolments. The greatest increase, in percentage terms, was evident in Veterinary Science (130 per cent); correspondingly, the greatest decrease on PG numbers was observed in Agriculture and Related Subjects;
- In relation to cross border flows, across all regions, the majority of students stayed in their home country, although those domiciled from Wales and Northern Ireland were more likely to cross borders than those from England and Scotland. 28 per cent of first year students from Wales and 21 per cent of first year students from Northern Ireland were enrolled at HE providers in England;
- Of those gaining a classified first degree, the proportion that obtained a first or upper second grew to 73 per cent in 2015/16 (from 66 per cent in 2011/12); in 2015/16 24 per cent gained a first class

degree compared to 17 per cent in 2011/12.

The DfE (September 2016a) provided participation rates for HE which, at the time of publication, were provisional. The HEIPR (Higher Education Initial Participation Rate) is an estimate of the likelihood of a young person participating in HE by age 30 and the DfE's analysis revealed:

- The provisional HEIPR for 2014/15 was estimated to be 48 per cent., which represented an increase of 1.7 per cent from the previous year;
- Apart from a fluctuation in 2011/12 and 2012/13, which coincided with the introduction of the £9,000 fees, a steady rise in the HEIPR has been evident since 2006/07;
- Whilst the HEIPR for both males and females increased since the previous year, the gender gap in 2014/15 was shown to have widened and estimated to be 10.2 percentage points, which was up from 9.1 percentage points a year earlier; and
- Individuals were more likely to participate in higher education for the first time at age 18 than at any age. The 2014/15 HEIPR for 18 year olds was shown to be at its highest point since the start of the series in 2006/07. HEIPR for 19 year olds, at 12 per cent, was also at its highest point.

The HE workforce

HEFCE (September 2016) indicated that the number of people employed in universities increased by almost 10,000 in 2014/15 (standing at almost 300,000). However, the data highlighted issues of inequality among academic staff, with significant under-representation of women and BME, especially in senior positions.

HESA (January 2017b) presented a statistical release from the 2015/16 Staff Record, in which it was noted, as of 1 December 2015:

- Of the 201,380 academic staff, 45 per cent were female (the same proportion when compared with the previous year);
- 49 per cent of academic staff were employed on contracts as having a teaching and research function; 26 per cent were described as 'teaching only';
- 19,975 academic staff were employed on a contract level described as a professor, of which 4,775 (24 per cent) were female; and
- Of those academic staff with known nationality, 33,735 (17 per cent) had an EU (excluding the UK) nationality; 12 per cent had a non-EU nationality.

In a HEFCE-commissioned study by HESA and the HEA (December 2016) on issues related to academic teaching qualifications, it was reported that:

- The proportion of staff at HE providers in England with unknown academic teaching qualifications had reduced from around a half in 2012/13 to about a quarter in 2014/15 (the equivalent percentage in Wales remained broadly consistent over the time period; in contrast, Northern Ireland had the highest percentage of unknowns in 2012/13 but this reduced considerably to only six per cent in 2014/15);
- The percentage of staff with no academic teaching qualifications remained consistent between 2012/13 and 2014/15 in England, despite the percentage of staff with unknown teaching qualifications falling by a quarter; 37 per cent in 2012/13 compared with 36 per cent in 2015/16;
- Interestingly, teaching-only staff had both the highest percentage of unknown (35 per cent) and no teaching

- qualifications (44 per cent) compared to those in teaching and research functions;
- Part-time staff were shown to have a higher proportion of unknown (34 per cent) or no academic teaching qualifications (45 per cent) than full-time staff;
- Fixed-term staff had both a higher percentage of unknown teaching qualifications (36 per cent) and no academic teaching qualifications (49 per cent) than open-ended or permanent staff;
- The percentage of staff with unknown teaching qualifications decreased from 33 per cent at less than a year's service to 23 per cent at five years' service;
- Predictably, staff aged 30 and under had both the highest proportion of unknown teaching qualifications and a considerably higher percentage with no academic qualifications; over three-quarters of staff aged 25 and under had no academic teaching qualifications, more than twice the percentage of those aged 31 and over;
- A higher percentage of staff with unknown teaching qualifications was detectable when the member of staff's nationality, ethnicity, highest qualification held or previous employment was marked as 'unknown' in the HESA Staff Record;
- Nursing and Allied Health Professionals were shown to have low percentages of staff with unknown and no teaching qualifications (both 13 per cent); Education also recorded low percentages of both staff with unknown and no teaching qualifications (18 per cent and 12 per cent respectively);
- Continuing Education and Philosophy had the highest percentage of staff with no teaching qualification; 64 per cent and 56 per cent respectively;
- Clinical Medicine was shown to have the third highest percentage of staff with

unknown teaching qualifications (41 per cent) and had the highest percentage of staff with no teaching qualifications (45 per cent); and

- Creative Arts and Design and Physical Sciences had the highest percentage of staff with no teaching qualifications; 49 per cent and 47 per cent respectively.

Overall, the report authors advised the need for further work in the gathering of data, as there was "a significant discrepancy between the HEA and HESA data on teaching qualifications across most of the sector" (p. 24).

In a comprehensive study of job advertisements placed on its site in 2015, jobs.ac.uk (November 2016) reported the following trends in relation to the teaching posts;

- 76 per cent of lecturer roles were offered on a permanent basis compared to the academic average of 40 per cent on jobs.ac.uk;
- Lecturer opportunities made up 20.5 per cent of the academic roles advertised, and senior lecturer, 9.5 per cent (researcher opportunities, at 44 per cent, comprised the largest proportion);
- Lecturer opportunities, whilst largely consistent since 2010, was at their lowest proportion in 2015 (it peaked at 23.4 per cent in 2012). The proportion of senior lecturer opportunities was at their lowest proportion in 2015; and
- Teaching associate or fellow opportunities accounted for 4.1 per cent of all roles advertised. Most of the posts were offered on a temporary (67 per cent) and part-time (68 per cent) basis.

The New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (September 2016) examined gender pay gap data in the HE sector which, it surmised, was the first time this level of analysis had been done. In

terms of teaching, the report noted that the gender pay gap for HE teaching professionals in the sector stood at 6.4 per cent compared with 11.8 per cent outside HE in 2015. In comparison, the gender pay gap for secondary teaching professionals was 3.6 per cent. The report also noted that women were under-represented among HE teaching professionals (35.8 per cent) but over-represented among secondary teaching professionals (60 per cent).

Employment and HE workforce issues were also taken up by the UCU (November 2016) in an update to their April 2016 report, *Precarious Work in Higher Education: A Snapshot of Insecure Work and Institutional Attitudes*. The update advised that the scale of 'precarious work' has not been quantified owing to HESA "only collect[ing] information on the balance of fixed-term contract as against open-ended contracts and on the use of 'atypical' contracts" (p. 3). It was observed that Russell Group and other pre-92 research-intensive universities tended to be the 'worst offenders' in that PhD students were more likely to be undertaking substantial teaching roles.

The Higher Education and Research Bill

The Higher Education and Research Bill (HERB) was set before Parliament at the time of writing. Bill Rammell (October 2016), a university vice-chancellor and former Minister of State for Further and Higher Education in the Labour Government, in a report to HEPI, set out arguments in support of protecting the public interest in HE.

In Rammell's view, the ideological underpinnings of the HERB, evident in a drive towards competition and marketisation, was putting at risk universities' ability to serve the public

interest and deliver public benefit. Amongst his recommendations was that the Office for Students (OfS) be empowered to evaluate the extent to which the sector as a whole was working in the interests of the public and not, simply, individual institutions.

The Bell Review

In February 2016, UUK announced the formation of a working group, chaired by Sir David Bell (Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading) to examine the HE sector agency landscape with a view to providing advice on how the work of the various agencies could continue to effectively support the sector into the future. The Bell Review (UUK, January 2017) made a number of recommendations, including proposing the reduction of the number of core agencies taking subscriptions from institutions, from nine to six over the next two years. Arising from this, and most significantly, a new body was proposed which would bring together the functions of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), HEA and LFHE.

The Review also recommended that the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), HESA, Jisc and UCAS form a 'strategic delivery partnership' with a focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of data-related functions and services.

Teaching excellence

In preparation for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the DfE (September 2016b) published findings from its Technical Consultation (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS], May 2016) on year two of the Framework. 308 responses were sent to the Department and, on the whole, there was broad support for

the proposals set out in the Consultation. The focus on teaching excellence, widening participation and ‘putting students at the heart of the system’ were widely endorsed; there was a recurring message on the need to retain high standards and ensure the reforms protected the value of the UK degree and world class reputation and quality of UK HE.

However, in spite of the broad support, specific suggestions for changes or requested clarifications were incorporated into the Framework. These included changes in relation to: criteria; employment metrics (see Blyth and Cleminson, September 2016); benchmarks; split metrics (incorporating an additional split by gender); provider submission (reinforcing the value of the student voice to a submission); the assessment process; and level awards and descriptors (amending the rating names to Bronze, Silver and Gold).

In an ‘occasional paper’ to HEPI, Blackmore et al. (September 2016) explored notions of research and employment outcomes, and their relationship to the TEF. The first half of the paper, which is authored by Paul Blackmore (Policy Institute, King’s College London), posited that Government proposals to recognise and reward teaching excellence, along the lines of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), were likely to be hindered. To Blackmore, excellence in teaching attracts reputation rather than prestige and improving funding for excellent teaching would, therefore, not change many underlying issues. In the second half of the paper, Richard Blackwell (Southampton Solent University) and Martin Edmondson (Gradcore) explained why employment outcomes, specifically first destination data are important; they argued that these data should be central to the TEF. They supported this proposition by positing that

it would be possible to construct a TEF metric based on employment outcomes by combining new earnings data emerging with reform of existing destination surveys. They conceded that, though it would not be a perfect solution, “it would [nevertheless] provide the basis for the development of a robust and educationally-focused assessment” (p. 43).

In an HEA-commissioned study, Abbas et al. (October 2016) examined the extent to which disciplinary differences (arranged by disciplinary cluster: Arts and Humanities, Health and Social Care, Social Sciences, STEM) remain central to judgements about the quality or excellence of teaching in UK. The project comprised two phases: a literature review, followed by evidence collected from university deans about changing pedagogic practices within their own institutions. The key findings noted:

- Significant differences in the pedagogic approaches of different disciplines. These were found to reflect differences in traditions, in knowledge content and in relationships of disciplines with the wider society;
- Pedagogic approaches differed in terms of factors such as the roles and relationships between teachers and students, the degree of independence and engagement expected of students, the sources of knowledge and their modes of transmission and the balance between a subject-centred or student-centred emphasis;
- In many institutions, there appeared to be a growing tension between disciplinary approaches and the requirements set centrally by the institution (the latter reflecting external regulatory and reputational factors). The authors added, “there may be a danger of compliance in the responses of academic staff to these requirements and an

- undermining of some of the conditions necessary to achieve excellence in the teaching of particular disciplines” (p. 10);
- There was a lack of clarity about causality and, in particular, in distinguishing between the effects of input and process factors, especially in light of the considerable diversity in the HE student population (social and educational backgrounds, aspirations, support networks, nationality, age, race, gender etc.). The study authors questioned the extent to which different students required different pedagogic approaches and, therefore, different measures of ‘teaching excellence’; and
 - In interview data from the deans, several mentioned the uncertainty of students’ futures. The HE experience was viewed to be important preparation in a fast-changing world, but “preparation for what?” was a recurring response (p. 10). There was recognition that HE needed to continue to adapt.

In a literature review on ‘quality teaching and impact’ by RAND Europe to the HEA, Strang et al. (November 2016) noted the lack of robust empirical evidence; in their view the literature was “dominated by opinion pieces based on secondary, documentary analysis rather than rigorous comparison group studies” (p. 5). Three major themes were highlighted in relation to quality teaching: student experience, teacher performance and institutional level perspectives. The review also examined how ‘quality teaching’ was measured in the sector. As tabulated below, the authors set out the indicators found in the literature and how ‘quality teaching’ was demonstrated or operationalised at student, teacher and institutional level, as well as the quality of evidence found for the applicability of these indicators for the purpose of measuring ‘quality teaching’:

Quality teaching level	Indicators in the literature review	Quality of evidence for use of indicator
Student experience	Social experience and development	Weak
	Degree and quality of participation	Weak
	Extent to which students feel challenged	Weak
Teacher performance	Competence and expertise	Medium
	Formal qualifications	Weak
	Ability to inspire and engage	Weak
	Respect and care for students	Medium
	Contribution to their profession (innovation)	Weak
	Teaching methods	Weak
	Self-monitoring	Weak
	Curriculum design	Weak
	Usefulness of subject matter	Weak
Availability to students	Medium	
Institution	Administrative and financial management	Weak
	Funding and facilities	Medium
	Teaching facilities	Medium
	Well adapted learning environments	Weak
	Availability of and equal access to student guidance and support services	Weak
	Equitable treatment of faculties	Weak
	Availability of teacher training	Weak
	Community involvement	Weak
	Employer engagement	Weak
	Communication with staff and students	Medium
	Extra-curricular activities	Medium
Rewards for quality teaching	Weak	

Re-assessment practice

NUCCAT, a forum for HE practitioners with an interest in the design, implementation and regulation of credit-based curricula, and SACWG, a group comprising academics and administrators with interests in assessment, reported on the honours degree outcomes of students progressing after initial failure at Level 4 (Turnbull and Woolf, October 2016). The study classified these students as (p. 7):

- Re-assessed – students who passed all Level 4 modules at a subsequent attempt following initial failure at Level 4;
- Compensated – students whose progression from Level 4 to Level 5 was not contingent on re-assessment following initial failure at Level 4; and
- Trailing – students whose progression from Level 4 to Level 5 comprised a further attempt at assessment during study at Level 5 or 6 following initial failure at Level 4.

Nine universities submitted results for nearly 20,000 students (n=19,828); 2,048 passed all of their modules following re-assessment; 1,534 were identified as compensated; and 577 as trailing. The study authors found, in terms of the award outcomes and timeliness of completion, that:

- ‘First timers’ (i.e. those who passed all Level 4 modules at the first attempt) did better than any other category and were significantly more likely to complete ‘in time’;
- Little difference was found in the outcome between re-assessed and compensated students. Re-assessed students were slightly more likely to graduate with a ‘good degree’ than compensated students, but were also

slightly more likely not to graduate ‘in time’ with honours; and

- Over half of the students trailing credit into Level 5 failed to complete with honours ‘in time’: only one in five trailing students completed ‘in time’ with ‘good honours’ (p. 11).

Technology-enhanced learning

Walker et al. (September 2016a) published results from a comprehensive survey of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) provision in the UK, which was undertaken for UCISA. The survey, which was last administered in 2014, noted the following trends:

- Availability of TEL support staff was identified as the leading factor in encouraging the development of TEL, followed by feedback from students (which topped the list in the 2014 survey);
- Lack of time was rationalised to be the leading barrier to TEL development, whilst culture (both institutional and departmental/school culture) and lack of internal sources of funding were also prominent;
- Whilst institutional strategies continued to influence TEL development, the prominence of the student learning experience or student engagement strategy, was rationalised as the key change, as an influencer, since the 2014 survey;
- Whilst Blackboard and Moodle remained as the most common VLEs in the sector, Canvas was highlighted as an emerging tool in the sector;
- In terms of the range of online services that institutions were optimising for access by mobile devices, the key development since 2014 was in the rise in mobile optimisation of library services

- (development here was more pronounced in Russell Group institutions);
- In spite of the steady investment in lecture capture systems, the percentage of institutions optimising mobile access to lecture recordings was shown to be staying at the same level as 2014;
 - Funding for mobile learning projects reduced in scale across the sector, from 31 institutions supporting this activity in 2014 to 23 institutions in 2016;
 - One of the key developments since 2014 was evident in the increasing institutional engagement in the delivery of fully online courses, with over half of 2016 respondents involved in some form of fully online delivery through their schools or departments. However, notwithstanding the growing adoption of MOOC platforms by institutions, less than half of the respondents indicated any planning in pursuit of open course delivery;
 - Electronic management of assessment (EMA) was highlighted as the area placing the most demand on TEL support teams (see below, Newland and Martin (November 2016), for further elaboration) with lecture capture and mobile technologies also in the ‘top three’. The report noted significant decrease for supporting mobile technologies, perhaps indicating that they were becoming more embedded; and
 - The report indicated probable future demand for lecture capture (and captioning provision for students) to meet growing accessibility demands in the wake of changes made to the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) in England.

The survey was accompanied by a separate collection of case studies (UCISA, September 2016), that highlighted

institutional responses to the TEF and consumer protection law advice for HE students, set out by the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA), as new themes since the 2014 study. Interviewees revealed that, whilst institutions were preparing for the TEF, there was no involvement of TEL services at this stage. Similarly, in relation to the CMA, the case studies revealed that there had not been significant impact on TEL developments.

In a report to HeLF, Newland and Martin (November 2016), analysing the responses of 53 TEL heads towards EMA, noted the following:

- Nearly two-thirds of institutions have an institution-wide policy or code of practice for e-submission, but policies for e-marking (25 per cent), e-feedback (38.5 per cent) and e-return (30.7 per cent) were less prevalent;
- e-feedback was rationalised to be in the early stages of development;
- Turnitin and the institutional VLE were shown to be the most prevalent systems for providing e-feedback in text format to students;
- When taking both positive and neutral responses together, respondents had positive attitudes to e-marking (74 per cent) and e-feedback (86 per cent);
- 60 per cent of students could see their grades and links to e-feedback (57 per cent) on a central dashboard; about a third could see their assignment dates;
- No institutions had an institution-wide approach to summative online examinations, though around three-quarters did have these at either a module or departmental level. 69 per cent were using computer classrooms, whereas no-one was using mobile devices, though 30 per cent were considering doing so; and

- Areas that merited development included improving the functionality of EMA (and related) systems, increasing the adoption of EMA, and analytics and data-informed decision-making.

Learning analytics

In a briefing paper for Jisc, Schlater and Mullan (January 2017) summarised some published evidence on the effectiveness of learning analytics initiatives and, therefore, built on findings of their 2016 report, *Learning Analytics in Higher Education: a Review of UK and International Practice*. The briefing paper includes studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of predictive models used by learning analytics systems and also identifies effective institutional interventions.

Learning spaces

In a report to HeLF on learning spaces, Newland (September 2016) noted the following key findings from a survey, which elicited 53 responses:

- 55 per cent of universities were considering a policy, strategy or comprehensive plan for a university-wide approach to learning spaces, whilst 28 per cent already had one in place. 37 per cent were focusing on developing formal spaces, whilst 46 per cent both formal and informal spaces;
- There were 37 brief descriptions of planned or new designs of learning spaces (the development of library spaces was highlighted in many of the responses); and
- Whilst 56 per cent of TEL heads were satisfied with their level of involvement in the development of learning spaces, 40 per cent yearned for greater involvement.

Student satisfaction

In preparation for the new National Student Survey (NSS), to be administered from

2017, HEFCE (October 2016a) published an update providing further evidence on whether the new question scales worked as expected. The update noted that distance learners answered question scales relating to the 'learning community' and 'student voice' less positively. Further, a question related to the students' union was also problematic ('Students' academic interests on my course are effectively represented by the Students' Union, Association or Guild'). The HEFCE update was drawn from detailed analysis by IFF Research (October 2016).

HEFCE (October 2016b) also examined the retrospective satisfaction of graduates with their higher education choices. Using data from a nationwide survey of former students, there was substantial variation in the levels of satisfaction between different ethnic groups (with some groups indicating they would be likelier to make different choices if they revisited their choice of subject, institution or qualification). For instance, relative to White graduates:

- The proportion of Black African graduates who said they would be likely to choose a different qualification was 18 per cent higher, and 11 per cent higher in the case of choosing something completely different;
- The proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates likely to choose something completely different was 14 per cent higher;
- The proportion of Indian graduates likely to choose a different qualification was ten percentage points higher; and
- The proportion of Chinese graduates likely to choose a different institution was nine percentage points higher.

The study also found that mature graduates were, on average, more satisfied with their choices than young graduates. Female

graduates were less likely to say that they wanted to go to a different institution, but were more likely to choose something completely different. Those graduates who were in receipt of the DSA were more likely to choose a different institution, compared with those who were not in receipt of the Allowance. Graduates from low-participation areas generally expressed the same levels of satisfaction with their HE choices as those from other areas (once degree satisfaction and post-HE employment experiences were taken into account); these graduates were slightly more likely to indicate that they would choose a different qualification.

With specific reference to the satisfaction of doctoral students, the QAA (January 2017) applied caution to HE policy “more focused on undergraduates” (p. 2); their ‘Viewpoint Paper’ highlighted the necessity of ensuring that “doctoral research students are also supported and valued” (p. 2).

Equality and diversity

In a summary report by the LFHE, Modood and Calhoun (December 2016) took a critical look at the changing nature of religion, the controversies this was giving rise to and the challenges it posed to the realities of institutional leadership. In exploring how religion overlapped with issues of immigration and ethnic diversity and intertwining with politics and life choices, the report noted:

- “[HE] has not known how to handle various controversies that have arisen, e.g. female dress, respect for religion versus freedom of speech, gender-segregated seating at the request of visiting preachers, provision of prayer space and hostility between groups of students defined by religion and/or ethnicity, as well as issues of radicalism

and terrorist networks” (p. 3). It was posited that the challenges would grow dramatically over the next few years;

- “It would be helpful for academics and other staff, such as counsellors, librarians, managers of residences and administrators to have better knowledge of religion in Britain (and in the world) today” (p. 3);
- The Prevent duty, and academic responsibilities under it, “raise fears of public complicity in religious intolerance” (p. 4);
- There is a delicate balancing act in creating learning and academic communities that cross religious boundaries and if HE providers “accept too much tacit segregation”, this would undermine the learning on offer and contributions to society; universities, in their pursuit of integration, “should not block attempts by minorities to create their own cohesive groups” (p. 4); and
- Universities need to develop broader learning communities “in which religion is a legitimate and generally not a divisive topic for discussion and enquiry” (p. 4), focusing on, for example, ethics and values.

Admissions

HEFCE (September 2016) showed that, for the first time in 2015/16, those universities that required students to have high UCAS tariffs had more UG entrants than those with low UCAS tariffs. The number of UG entrants to high-tariff universities increased by 7.2 per cent between 2014/15 and 2015/16.

In an evidence-gathering exercise comprising a survey of 120 universities and colleges, and supplemented with focus groups, UCAS (September 2016) published their report on unconscious bias in admissions decision-making. It was found

that the vast majority of HE providers that responded to the survey were well aware of the risks that unconscious bias could pose to fair admissions. Among the recommendations was to trial name-blind admissions (the universities of Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool and Winchester would run name-blind projects to evaluate the benefits for students and the potential for wider implementation).

Supporting transition

HEFCE (September 2016) conceded that, while there had been substantial improvements to widening participation and fair access over the past decade, significant disparities between groups remained. Non-white students were typically more likely to drop out and less likely to achieve a first or upper second class degree. Male and mature students and those with a known disability were also more likely not to complete their course, while students from the 40 per cent of areas with the lowest levels of higher education participation made up only 18 per cent of first degree undergraduates at high-tariff institutions.

Shortly after the HEFCE statement, UUK's (October 2016a) Social Mobility Advisory Group (SMAG) presented its report (*Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education*) to the Minister for Universities and Science. The Group looked at the entire student journey, from aspirations at school, to the process of applying to university, whether or not they complete their degree and the grades achieved, through to career progression once they graduate. The Group also considered options available for people later in life, such as those who needed to develop their skills as their job changed or those who were unable to attend university when they were younger. Twelve recommendations

were made, with a view to producing another report, at the end of 2017, on progress made against the recommendations:

- The establishment of an independent 'Evidence and Impact Exchange' to systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to the role of HE in supporting social mobility and to support the sharing of data from schools through to employers;
- A greater focus on outreach activities by universities, colleges and employers to support attainment in schools;
- Further consideration to developing, strengthening and expanding universities' links with schools;
- A monitoring of admissions, retention, attainment, transition to PG study and graduate employment data to identify where there may be gaps, particularly in relation to race, socio-economic status, gender and disability, and to explore how these gaps can be addressed;
- The expansion of datasets to enable universities to assess their work in social mobility, including the development of a shared basket of indicators in relation to socio-economic disadvantage;
- Greater use of contextual data to inform offer-making, supported by the identification of good practice;
- The development of a directory of charitable third sector organisations across the country to enhance school, college, university and employer collaboration;
- Greater coordination of information and advice across schools, universities and employers, particularly in terms of the impact of subject choice and the qualifications taken at school and graduate careers;
- UUK to work with the Government to develop a more robust approach to

- information, advice and guidance, including greater alignment between government and HE sector communications around social mobility and HE. To include raising awareness of the different routes into and through HE and the promotion of the value of lifelong learning and part-time study;
- UUK to work with employers and other local partners to tackle disadvantage at a regional level; and
 - Universities to work with league table providers to understand the potential impact of league tables on social mobility.

The Disabled Students' Sector Leadership Group (January 2017), a group supported by the DfE, UUK, Guild HE, the Association of Colleges and Independent Higher Education, in light of the SMAG final report, produced guidance that considered the requirement on HE providers to provide 'reasonable adjustments' under the Equality Act 2010.

OFFA (September 2016) presented key statistics from their assessment of access agreements. Of the 198 access agreements approved for 2017/18 it was noted;

- There was an increased focus on improved outcomes for BME students and access for disadvantaged White males;
- There was greater emphasis on progression to employment and further study, with 94.4 per cent of institutions setting a 'student success' target;
- There was progress on long-term outreach and collaborative targets;
- Whilst 62 per cent of institutions set broad targets relating to supporting disabled students, just four per cent explicitly referred to mental health issues,

- specific learning difficulties or the autistic spectrum; and
- In negotiations for the 2017/18 access agreements, OFFA secured improved targets at 94 institutions; increased spend at 37 institutions; and a change in balance of spend at 24 institutions.

It was further underlined that 98.4 per cent of HE institutions with access agreements, and 17.3 per cent of FE colleges with access agreements, were intending to charge a maximum of £9,250 for some or all of their courses in 2017/18.

The Social Market Foundation's (September 2016) *Staying the Course*, examined student retention rates at English universities (2014/15). The report indicated that non-continuation was low (at around six per cent), but included the proviso that there was "no significant progress in improving them" (p. 3). Non-continuation for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR3 [Participation of Local Areas]) was higher than others (at around eight per cent). England had low drop out compared to peer countries, though non-continuation rates varied widely depending on region. For instance, London institutions registered a non-continuation rate of 9.6 per cent at the end of year one, compared with the best-performing region (the North East), of 5.5 per cent. Using 2014/15 *THE* University League Table figures, non-continuation was found to be higher in those institutions outside the top 20 and those with lower UCAS tariff scores (though Oxford Brookes, Lincoln and the Royal Agricultural University, with average entry tariffs below 350 points, recorded non-continuation rates below four per cent).

Overall, the report acknowledged that institutions were making progress on both widening participation and improving

continuation rates - no correlation between improving widening participation and worsening continuation rates was evident. About 50 institutions were deemed to be making no progress or going backwards on continuation rates, whilst “modest progress” was reported at a majority of the institutions, with very few institutions making “radical improvements” (p.13). The report includes case studies that identify strategies for improving student engagement.

Student wellbeing

Citing several sources (sector reports and academic literature), Brown (September 2016), in a HEPI study, provided an overview of mental health concerns in HE. Whilst many universities had effective support services in place (the report includes examples of university practice), the author recommended:

- Allowing students to be registered with a GP at home and at university;
- Increasing funding for university counselling and support services; and
- Encouraging universities to develop their own mental health action plans.

UUK (October 2016b) published a report of its Taskforce, which was established in September 2015, that examined violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students. The report noted that incidents of harassment, hate crime and violence do happen at UK universities, which can impact on student wellbeing. In assessing a range of evidence, the Taskforce concluded that despite some positive activity, university responses were “not as comprehensive, systematic or joined-up as they could be” (p. 4).

The Taskforce identified, from the evidence gathered, a number of recommended

actions for universities. These covered several areas including senior leadership, adopting an institution-wide approach, encouraging positive behaviours, working with the students’ union, having effective governance, data collection and staff training.

Transition to PG study

HEFCE (December 2016) investigated the intentions after graduating of students in the final year of their UG courses, and grouped them based on their intentions to go on to PG study or into work. It considered whether different characteristics had different effects on students’ intentions, and on the factors behind their decision. The study found;

- The proportion of UG students intending to continue immediately on to PG study was 9.7 per cent (the highest ever level);
- Mature students were keener to begin their careers, while young students were more likely to intend to go into further study;
- The ethnic group with the greatest proportion of students who intended to study was Chinese (14.3 per cent).
- A small proportion of students on sandwich courses intended to go on to PG study (6.8 per cent) relative to those on standard courses (9.8 per cent).
- Course fees, the cost of living and fear of debt were the most notable concerns in relation to going on to PG study for UK-domiciled students. Over two-thirds of students reported that they would be likely or very likely to study at PG level with a loan of around £10,000; the proportion was higher amongst Black students.

Employability

In preparation for the TEF, Blyth and Cleminson (September 2016) considered the factors that determine the likelihood of a student finding employment in higher skilled and professional occupations. At TEF's heart would be an assessment, using a set of core performance metrics; the Government decided that one of the core metrics used should relate to the proportion of students who are in highly skilled employment or further study six months after graduation.

Blyth and Cleminson's study for the DfE applied a binomial generalised linear model to test the relationship between the probability of being in highly skilled employment or further study six months after graduating, and a number of potential explanatory variables which were identified within existing literature and available from existing data sources (Destinations of Higher Education [DLHE] survey and HESA's Student Record). The authors found in their analysis:

- The factors used in the benchmarking for HESA's UK performance indicators of employment (gender, age, ethnicity, entry tariff and subject of study) were all statistically associated with the outcome of interest;
- Region of domicile, social disadvantage (as measured by HEFCE data on POLAR), disability and type of degree were statistically significant factors; and
- Variables based on the REF scores and the age of an institution were found to be statistically significant though, as the authors concede, the scope of the analysis did not determine whether the reputational factors were independent of teaching quality.

In an HEA-commissioned study, Artess et al. (January 2017) examined 187 pieces of research on employability published

between 2012 and 2016. In relation to the politics, ideologies and models of employability, whilst some writers articulated a range of criticisms of the employability agenda, much of the literature argued in favour of the value in engaging with employability. Key arguments made in the literature included:

- The size and structure of the graduate market means increasing graduates' employability will not necessarily lead to enhanced employment opportunities, as the number of graduates is not necessarily closely aligned to the number of graduate jobs; and
- In a marketised HE system, employability is likely to be a key motivator for student choice making.

In terms of supporting employability development, the authors noted that some literature was beginning to move away from the discussion of employability as a list of skills and attributes towards a more subtle discussion of 'identity' and, therefore, a framework towards helping students transition from the identity of a student towards that of a graduate worker and citizen. However, in general, the literature tended to emphasise the importance of:

- Embedding employability in the curriculum;
- Providing a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Building links with the labour market and encouraging students to do the same;
- Supporting students to increase their confidence, self-belief and self-efficacy through their studies;
- Encouraging reflection and increasing students' capacity to articulate and communicate their learning to employers;
- Encouraging student mobility and fostering a global perspective;
- Using institutional career guidance services as organising and co-ordinating

- structures for HE institutions' employability strategies; and
- Framing discussion on what graduates should know (knowledge) and be able to do (skills).

The review authors also examined HE providers' responses to employability which included;

- Changing institutional structures to ensure more effective in delivery of employability;
- Changing the programme mix (e.g., incorporating vocational elements, placements etc.); and
- Developing networking to ensure external stakeholders remain engaged and involved in developing student employability.

Prospects and ACGAS (November 2016) produced an analysis of the DLHE survey to provide a comprehensive overview of what graduates did after completing their university degrees; there were 247,835 responses to the 2014/15 survey, or 79.3 per cent of the total cohort. Overall:

- Many sectors reported difficulty in finding enough graduates to employ in 2015. This was especially acute in engineering, construction, IT and computing, health, education and business support;
- Most graduates who were working six months after leaving university were employed on permanent contracts; 15 per cent were on fixed-term contracts lasting at least a year (with junior doctors being a significant proportion of these graduates); and three per cent were on zero-hour contracts, primarily in non-graduate employment;
- Self-employment and freelancing was much more common in the arts and creative industries when compared with other sectors;

- Most graduates found work either near to where they went to university, or they returned home to find work there;
- The graduate jobs market was concentrated in the larger cities, which tended to have the infrastructure and high-skilled employment opportunities to support a wide range of graduates. After London (41,000+ graduates) and the South East (22,500 graduates), Birmingham (4,155 graduates) was the most popular destination. The following cities and regions employed at least 2,000 graduates in 2015: Manchester (3,740 graduates), Leeds (3,430 graduates), Glasgow, Edinburgh, Oxford, Liverpool, Belfast, Bristol, Cardiff, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, Lancashire and Essex; and
- 35 per cent of new graduates were working at companies with fewer than 250 employees and one in five at companies with fewer than 50. In other words, big graduate schemes did not dominate the post-graduation experience.

In a report to HEFCE and the Society for Research into HE, Behle (October 2016) studied graduates in non-graduate occupations. The report compared the early career paths of two graduate cohorts: (1) graduates from 1999 and (2) those who applied for higher education in 2006 and either graduated in 2009, if they were on a three-year course, or 2010, from a four-year course. The report found;

- Employment during the first 15 months after graduation differed between 'Class of 1999' and 'Class of 2009 and 2010'. Many of the 1999 graduates entered non-graduate employment during the first months after graduation, which they subsequently left for graduate employment. Graduates from the 2009 and 2010 cohort, in contrast, were less likely to enter employment in general,

- and were more likely to remain in non-graduate jobs;
 - The characteristics of graduates who remained in non-graduate employment for longer periods were similar in both cohorts. The likelihood of spending time in non-graduate jobs was significantly reduced for: male graduates; those working in London; graduates from Mathematics and Computer Science, Medicine, Engineering and Education programmes; graduates from high tariff HE providers; graduates with a first-class degree; and for graduates who had gained employment experience;
 - In both cohorts, younger graduates and those from middle and lower social classes tended to be in non-graduate jobs;
 - Gender did not play a significant role in the 'Class of 1999' but female graduates from the 2009 and 2010 cohort were more likely to be in non-graduate jobs;
 - International mobility and work experience increased the probability of working in a graduate job for the 1999 cohort; and
 - Many of the 2009 and 2010 graduates felt that it would have been easier for them to enter graduate jobs had they gained work experiences during their studies.
- The proportion with a further study record five years after graduation varied by subject studied, from around four per cent for those who studied Business and Administrative Studies and Computer Science, to around 20 per cent for those who studied Subjects Allied to Medicine and Biological Sciences; and
 - Five years after graduation, Medicine and Dentistry graduates had the highest median annualised earnings (£46,500), while Creative Arts and Design graduates the lowest (£20,000), though the figures did not include earnings from self-assessment.

In a report to HEFCE, Pye Tait Consulting (September 2016) examined 'intermediate technical education' in HE. This comprises Higher National Certificates (HNCs), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHEs) and Foundation Degrees (FDs) and all occupy Levels 4 and 5 on the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) in England. The report noted:

Focusing on their new Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset, the DfE (December 2016) published analysis of the employment and earnings outcomes of those graduating with a UG degree in 2008/09 from an English HE provider. The data revealed:

- Biological Sciences and Medicine and Dentistry had the highest proportion of graduates in 'further study, sustained employment or both' five years after graduation (83.5 per cent and 83.3 per cent respectively);
- The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) entrants to intermediate technical qualifications declined by 40 per cent between 2009/10 and 2013/14;
- In a survey of employers it was found that a degree was most sought after when recruiting technicians (in spite of the fact that many of the roles did not require this level of qualification). This was largely attributable to the increased number of graduates in the labour market; and
- Of those recruited to technician roles, respondents considered graduates to have the most pronounced skills gap. Thus, whilst the availability of a large pool of graduates was attractive to employers, in the longer term, skills

mismatches may cause employers to question the value of graduate skills.

University rankings

In a HEPI report, Bekhradnia (December 2016) outlined the dangers represented by international university rankings. With reference to “the four main international rankings” (p. 1) (the *THE* World University Rankings, QS World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities and U-Multirank), the author argues that current international rankings are almost entirely based on research-related criteria, thus “skew[ing] the results in favour of a small number of institutions” (p. 23). The author posits that if universities are to move up the rankings, they are forced to focus on their research performance at the expense of teaching, widening participation and other activities. Further, the author suggests that the data underpinning the rankings are of questionable quality. Bekhradnia concludes by advising governments, university management and governing bodies to ignore rankings when making decisions and “should do what they do because it is right, not because it will improve their position in the rankings” (p. 25).

Partnerships in universities

In a ‘small development project’ undertaken for the LFHE, Kemp et al. (November 2016) presented findings from three case studies that explored the relationships between different groups (students, administrative/professional staff and academic staff) and sought to determine the ways in which barriers between the groups could be broken down. Taken together, the three case studies outlined the importance of communication, clarifying roles and responsibilities and building cohesiveness through social groups and networks.

Civic engagement

The LFHE produced a summary report (Goddard, November 2016), as part of its Leadership Insight series, of an earlier scoping study (Goddard et al., March 2010) on the civic role of universities and ways to develop strong local and regional partnerships. This summary paper also highlights subsequent developments that are resonant with the original findings: the Whitty Review undertaken for BIS (*Universities and their Communities: Enabling Economic Growth*); the Northern Powerhouse debates; the funding squeeze in local government; the Government’s national science and innovation policy; the Stern Review of the REF; the HERB; and EU referendum result. Goddard concludes, “Deep rooted civic engagement will... require a renewed sense of purpose and a connection between global and local roles [and] may require institutional change to integrate teaching, research and engagement at every level” (p. 10).

In a report to HEFCE, Allan (October 2016) summarised the experiences of 20 HE providers involved in the establishment, development and sponsorship of academies, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and free schools. It was found that a range of factors influenced HE providers’ decisions to become involved in school sponsorship, with the most prevalent including: performance related reasons (e.g. to address institutional underperformance, raise attainment and support learners to achieve their potential); industry/sector related reasons (e.g. to meet local employer need or to promote specific subjects, sectors or approaches to learning); and community and regeneration related reasons (e.g. to improve the social capital of a local area). HE providers’ contributions across an array of strategic and operational areas were summarised:

- 19 HE providers had been involved in the creation of new UTCs, academies or free schools. Specific contributions included bid writing, project management, marketing and promotion;
- All 20 HE providers had a place on the board of governors or trustees at the school(s) they sponsored;
- Nine of the HE providers had been involved in curriculum development;
- 11 of the HE providers shared corporate resources (e.g. finance, payroll and HR systems, CPD resources, access to university libraries, laboratories or sports facilities);
- In relation to learner experience and enrichment, HE providers' staff delivered outreach activities, campus visits, student buddying systems and advice on HE pathways; and
- In a small number (n=5), the sponsor relationship provided the opportunity for undergraduates to access placement, training and volunteering opportunities in the sponsored schools.

Whilst challenging in the early stages of engagement, HE providers noted many benefits, including a strengthening of their reputation and profile and a deepening of their knowledge of school curricula, school governance and finance.

Internationalisation

HESA (January 2017a) showed that across all UK HE providers, for all student enrolments, there was a four per cent decrease in the numbers from other EU countries between 2011/12 and 2015/16, (although between 2014/15 and 2015/16 there was an increase from 124,575 to 127,440 enrolments). The analysis also revealed that, over the five-year period, among the top ten countries, Italy had seen the largest percentage increase (+52 per

cent) in the number of student enrolments; Ireland saw the largest percentage decrease (-32 per cent) over the same period.

In relation to non-EU countries, HESA noted that the number of student enrolments from China was much larger than from any other country, rising to 91,215 enrolments in 2015/16 compared with 78,715 in 2011/12. Both the HESA analysis and HEFCE (September 2016) highlighted significant decreases in UG entrants from India. HEFCE also noted that about 60 per cent of all PGT students were from non-EU countries, with numbers of PG entrants from India and Nigeria registering falls of 11 and 8.1 per cent, respectively, in 2014/15. HESA (January 2017a) also recorded that 701,010 UK domiciled students were studying wholly overseas in 2015/16, compared to 663,915 in 2014/15 (+six per cent). A majority (89 per cent) were studying outside the EU.

In a study commissioned by HEPI and Kaplan International Pathways, Conlon et al. (January 2017) reported on analysis of the determinants of overseas demand for UK HE. This econometric analysis highlighted a range of factors that determine demand, such as domestic (e.g. UK fee levels) and external factors (e.g. exchange rates, fee levels charged by competitor countries, overseas economic growth and policy interventions within a country). The analysis determined that, although some factors had a relatively immediate effect on the demand for UK HE (such as overseas GDP per capita), other factors (such as the exchange rate and UK fee levels) had both an immediate effect and longer-term (lagged) impact. The study modelled a range of scenarios that considered certain policy changes (e.g. decision of the UK to leave the EU).

Morris et al. (September 2016), in an IPPR report reviewing UK migration policy, made the following recommendations in relation to the HE sector:

- Students should be excluded from the drive to reduce net migration and be classed as temporary rather than permanent migrants;
- The UK Government should create a new role, a minister for international education, to develop and take forward a ten-year plan for expanding the UK's international education sector;
- As part of the ten-year plan, the Government should reintroduce the post-study work visa for STEM and nursing graduates;
- Students should be exempted from the cap on Tier 2 visas and the resident labour market test for one year after they graduate, rather than for four months as at present;
- The Office for National Statistics should seek to improve its data collection methods to enable more robust assessment of the migration patterns of international students; and
- The Government and HE sector should take steps to measure the extent to which international students return home by boosting response rate of HESA's DLHE survey.

Alternate providers

To the QAA (December 2016), alternative providers of HE represent an important, and growing, part of the post-16 education landscape “contributing to the diversity, choice and opportunities available” (p. 1). Their Viewpoint Paper noted that, since working with alternative providers in 2012: 462 applied for QAA review; 246 of these withdrew, transferred or had poor outcomes (meaning that 216 or 46.7 per cent were still in the programme). Common areas of good

practice identified through QAA's reviews included: responsiveness to the student voice; provision of vocational learning in specialist areas that prepare students for industry or professional practice; and improvement of students' learning opportunities through engagement with the QAA's Quality Code.

In a report to HEPI, Fielden and Middlehurst (January 2017) assessed the current state of play in relation to alternate providers in the UK. Drawing upon experiences in the USA and Australia, the report authors reject the overly optimistic view that such providers are always beneficial as well as the pessimistic assumptions that they are problematic. They predict the challenges awaiting the proposed OfS in capturing the key providers in its registration and monitoring processes.

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