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Sector reports review: February to August 2018

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Abstract

This paper provides a summary of selected reports and papers ('grey literature') published by key higher education sector organisations, 'think tanks' and other relevant bodies between February and August 2018. These include: Advance HE; Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); Chartered Management Institute (CMI); Department for Education (DfE); Equality Challenge Unit (ECU); Fair Education Alliance; Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI); Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); Institute for Fiscal Studies; Jisc; Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE); Learning and Work Institute; MillionPlus; National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE); National Education Opportunities Network; National Union of Students (NUS); Office for Students (OfS); Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OLA); Office for National Statistics (ONS); PA Consulting; Public First; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP); Student Minds; The Sutton Trust; UK Data Services; Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); Universities UK (UUK); Universities UK International (UUKi); and UPP Foundation.

The themes in this paper include: review of post-18 education; formation of the OfS; vice-chancellors' outlook on HE; the civic university; student satisfaction; applications and teaching excellence; contextual information in admissions; widening participation; part-time and mature learners; social mobility; supporting progression; non-continuation trends; feedback from assessment; HE analytics; financial concerns of students and perceptions of value-for-money; the student academic experience; student complaints; postgraduate experiences; supporting undergraduate research; mental health; student participation in sport; ethnicity and diversity; sexual misconduct; student drug use; Prevent duty; student poverty; student and employment outcomes; earnings after graduation; internationalisation; the HE workforce; and the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme.



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Review of post-18 education and funding

On 19 February, the Prime Minister announced that there would be a “wide-ranging review” into post-18 education led by Philip Augar, which would report early in 2019. The ‘key issues’ were highlighted in the terms of reference (DfE, February 2018):

- Choice and competition across a joined-up post-18 education and training sector;
- The accessibility of the system;
- Delivering the skills needed in the country; and
- Ensuring value-for-money (VFM) for graduates and taxpayers (including how future students would contribute to the cost of their studies).

The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (June 2018) released its report on ‘the HE market’ and made the following observations (pp. 5-6):

- “The [DfE] treats the [HE] sector as a market, but it is not a market in the interests of students or taxpayers.”
- “Young people are not being properly supported in making decisions on [HE], due in large part to insufficient and inconsistent careers advice.”
- “The [DfE] does not have enough of a grip on actions to widen participation in [HE], and is over-reliant on the actions of some universities.”
- “Students have limited means of redress if they are unhappy with the quality of their course, even if they drop out.”
- “The new [OfS] has not yet articulated how it will support the varied and complex interests of students.”

The OfS

On 1 January 2018 the OfS, which was established under the provisions of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 [HERA], came into legal force. In April 2018 it took the role of regulatory body for HE in England: *The Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England* was released just prior to this (OfS, February 2018). (The framework adopts a risk-based approach to regulation to be implemented fully from August 2019, after a transitional period.) As part of the restructuring process HEFCE was closed and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was merged into the OfS. In its strategy for 2018-21, the OfS (April 2018) outlined its objectives:

- *Participation* – all students, from all backgrounds with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from HE.
- *Experience* – all students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.
- *Outcomes* – all students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.
- *Value-for-money* – All students, from all backgrounds, receive VFM.

UK HE outlook

(*The following was omitted from the previous sector reports review.*) In the ninth of PA Consulting’s annual survey of vice-chancellors and other institutional heads (n=163), Boxall and Woodgates (January 2018) described them as “distinctly

beleaguered and uncertain of the outlook for the next few years.” Among the paper’s highlights and themes:

- On the rising anti-university sentiment and policies, 88 per cent of respondents thought these criticisms to be largely (party) politically driven. In relation to the ‘students-as-consumer’ criticisms, 74 per cent viewed any significant reduction in the cap on fees as potentially damaging for the sector.
- Almost all respondents foresaw difficult times ahead for the sector with financial security and resilience as presenting the greatest risk. Nearly two-thirds of vice-chancellors saw future ability to attract international talent as a major problem.
- A significant proportion of respondents expected the sector to shrink and stratify over the coming years, though 83 per cent predicted increases in academic alliances between providers. (International alliances were considered more important than domestic partnerships for most institutions.)
- Expansion of work-based learning and apprenticeships was identified as a top priority for 39 per cent of respondents, followed by a focus on local growth (37 per cent), and innovation projects.
- Business development opportunities from online delivery, continued professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning were given as top priorities by only 12-14 per cent of institutions, lower than in previous years.

Looking to the future, Bekhradnia and Beech (March 2018), in a report for HEPI, speculated on the demand for HE. They asserted that the increase in demography alone, with no increase in participation or any other changes, would lead to demand for about 50,000 additional places by 2030. However, if participation continued to

increase at the medium-term (15-year) rate, it would still leave the participation rate in England lagging behind that of some other western countries – implying a demand for about 350,000 additional places. They concluded, “On the basis of known facts, an increase in demand of over 300,000 by the end of the next decade is the most likely outcome” (p. 4).

UUK (August 2018) argued that the education of more people at university was vital to meet the challenges of the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (automation, robotics, artificial intelligence and digital technology). Their report underlined that 440,000 new professional jobs were created in 2016, yet there were only 316,690 first-degree UK-based graduates, leaving a recruitment gap of 123,310, “more than double the gap in 2015.”

The civic university

In a report for UPP Foundation, Public First (February 2018) set out findings from two English cities on whether the population felt connected to their local universities (City A – a large northern metropolis; City B – a smaller city). In this qualitative investigation, four focus groups (comprising people from various socio-economic groups) were undertaken, and supplemented by a quantitative poll. Three key findings were documented:

- In both cities, participants across the groups felt “quiet satisfaction” (p. 1) in their universities. There was an appreciation of the benefits to the NHS by the presence of high-quality universities.
- More affluent, better educated and ‘civic-minded residents’ (i.e. people who volunteered locally) had better perceptions of local universities.

- In City B, ‘ordinary lower middle class’ and ‘affluent working class’ residents had an extremely negative attitude towards the expanding student population. It was thought that students “put pressure on housing and changed the ‘feel’ of where they lived” (p. 1). Negative perceptions of the student population were not evident in City A.

Manners (May 2018) presented the NCCPE’s response to a consultation on the Civil Society strategy. The paper highlighted several examples of universities’ civic engagement activities.

Student satisfaction

The 2018 National Student Survey (NSS) sector results for full-time and part-time students achieved a response rate of 70 per cent (over 320,000 responded to the survey: 413 universities, colleges and alternative providers took part) (OfS, August 2018).

Overall satisfaction dropped by one percentage point: no specific area showed improvement compared with the previous year.

Scale	2017	2018
Teaching on my course	85	84
Learning opportunities	84	83
Assessment and feedback	74	74
Academic support	80	80
Organisation & management	75	75
Learning resources	85	85
Learning community	77	76
Student voice	73	73
Students’ union	57	57
Overall satisfaction	84	83

HEFCE (March 2018a) presented findings of an evaluation of the implementation of the revised NSS in 2017. Students responded to an online survey (n=84,435), and just 60 per cent definitely agreed with

the statement ‘the purpose and aims of the NSS are clear’. Only 43 per cent strongly agreed that the NSS had a ‘strong recognisable brand’, while 40 per cent were unaware of the NSS promotional campaign at their institution.

Student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement

The QAA (July 2018) provided an insight into practices around student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement across the different nations in the UK. The briefing was produced to align with the 2018 revisions made to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Awareness of TEF

UCAS (June 2018b) analysis, based on the responses of more than 85,000 applicants surveyed shortly after their applications, revealed that fewer than one in five applicants (who applied by the 15 January ‘equal consideration deadline’), knew what the TEF (Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework) was prior to applying. Applicants from the UK were twice as likely to know about the TEF, compared to applicants from the EU, and those from outside the EU.

Amongst those who knew what the TEF was, almost all knew the TEF rating awarded to at least some of the providers they had applied to, and three in five thought that the TEF award was important, or extremely important, when deciding where to apply. Applicants who knew about the TEF before applying made more applications, on average, to Gold award providers, compared to applicants who did not know about the TEF.

Quality assurance

Martin (March 2018), in a paper for the QAA, offered an overview of the lessons

learnt over the three years of the Higher Education Review (HER), 2013-16. The paper documents good practice in relation to the development of graduate skills and attributes (e.g. independent learning, the development of graduate skills frameworks, digital literacy), staff development, and the development of international partnerships. Martin noted, “In the first two years of HER, reviewers found that while there had been systematic interrogation of data in best practice, elsewhere there were inconsistencies...” (p. 2). However, it was asserted that, by the end of HER, “robust scrutiny had improved the validity, reliability and availability of data across the sector” (p. 2).

Admissions

In UUK (June 2018) analysis of trends in admissions it was surmised that the sharp increase in the population of 18 to 20-year-olds from 2022 would impact on the admissions environment significantly – with potential changes in offer-making and application routes. Other key points from the analysis noted that:

- The uncertainty of the new environment was having an impact on institutional recruitment strategies. Aside from London, there was no significant link between type of institution and the size of changes in undergraduate (UG) acceptances. Having a lower entry tariff did not seem to be correlated with decreases in acceptances.
- All type of universities were now recruiting applicants with a wider range of pre-HE qualifications. The higher number of acceptances of applicants with vocational qualifications would, it was deduced, open up new routes to university for groups historically underrepresented in HE.

- Students were increasingly using the full length of the admissions cycle and clearing to change their choices – thus exercising more power in choosing between institutions.

In UCAS (July 2018) analysis, unconditional offers to 18-year-olds from England, Northern Ireland and Wales increased by nearly a third in 2018. In 2013, there were 2,985 offers recorded as unconditional, which accounted for 0.4 per cent of all offers (to 18-year-olds from England, Northern Ireland and Wales). By 2017, unconditional offers increased to 51,615 (5.3 per cent of all offers made that year). In 2018, the number of unconditional offers increased again, by 16,295 (+32 per cent) to 67,915 (7.1 per cent of all offers).

In a study for the UCU, Atherton (June 2018) argued that global evidence supported the view that a move to post-qualifications admissions (PQA) would enable England, Wales and Northern Ireland “to better achieve major goals associated with HE” (p. 3). The report noted that PQA was the global norm and worked in larger systems (England, Wales and Northern Ireland was the only one of the 12 systems with over one million students, with a pre-qualifications admissions system). The report noted that nine of the ten countries in the world with the best performing graduates had PQA in place; Atherton posited that PQA could enable more equitable access to HE.

In analysis of 2017 admissions patterns for mature applicants, UCAS (June 2018a) reported a decline of seven per cent for UK applicants to full-time UG courses aged 21 to 25, and a decline of 9.8 per cent for applicants aged 26 and over. UCAS data also revealed that mature students were more likely to apply later in the application cycle, with 44 per cent of students aged 21 and over applying after the January 2017

deadline, compared to just 3.3 per cent of 18-year-olds. Most mature students lived at home whilst studying (e.g. nearly 80 per cent of those aged 30 and over). Mature learners were also more likely to be drawn to a smaller range of courses (Subjects Allied to Medicine, including Nursing, being the most popular). Students aged 30 and over were more likely to make just one choice of university and course; older students tended to favour lower tariff providers.

Contextual information

The Fair Education Alliance (July 2018) argued for improving the effectiveness of the use of contextual data. Amongst their recommendations were:

- To apply alternative, more accurate, measures than the ‘participation of local areas’ (POLAR), such as free school meal eligibility and the multiple equality measure (MEM) quintile;
- To hold institutions to account, with annual student intakes broken down by the recommended measures (e.g. MEM); and
- For the OfS to require HE providers to publicise the kind of data used in their contextual admissions processes.

Widening participation

HEPI and Brightside (a social mobility charity) presented essays on the theme of fair access and widening participation (WP), in the wake of the merger between OFFA and HEFCE, and creation of the OfS (Clarke and Beech, May 2018).

Recommendations were presented by academics, WP practitioners, students’ representative bodies, third sector organisations, schools and colleges, think tanks, journalists, politicians, and employers, and included the following:

- Encourage rigorous research on any hidden assumptions behind the content and delivery of the curriculum and examination and assessment techniques;
- Introduce mandatory unconscious bias training for staff;
- Appoint a Commissioner for Student Mental Health;
- Establish a repository for high-quality evidence on what works for widening participation and fair access;
- Place a top priority on HE access for white working class boys, as well as white working class girls;
- Encourage universities to focus on employability and broader success for all groups across the student lifecycle;
- Provide external funding for a national programme for Year 5 to Year 11 pupils to break some of the cultural barriers to HE that are difficult to tackle through short-term interventions;
- Require all institutions to include a target to improve the access, success or progression of students with experience of being in care;
- Develop a basket of measures to support contextual admissions, target outreach activity and assist in monitoring and tracking student progress and outcomes;
- Support widening participation targets that go beyond one Parliament;
- Fund pilots for work connecting parents of first-generation students with parents of potential first-generation students;
- Use more appropriate calculations, such as progress towards closing the Black Attainment Gap, when taking a metrics-based approach to teaching quality;
- Roll out access regulation via Access and Participation Plans at a subject (cluster) level akin to what is happening with the TEF;
- Guarantee mentoring support for every school and college student who wants it;

- Draw upon expertise in the FE sectors and prioritise training for all WP staff, enabling them to produce materials and activities that represent the entire sector;
- Urge universities to fund basic costs for those who cannot otherwise afford them (e.g. travel to university open days);
- Increase articulation partnerships, to form efficient and cohesive pathways from school through college to university;
- Encourage the oldest, richest and most prestigious universities to boost the number of students from underrepresented groups;
- Encourage universities to devote attention to nurseries;
- Encourage universities to develop rural outreach programmes to eradicate HE ‘cold spots’;
- Put greater scrutiny on employers to ensure they are not just attracting students from a limited list of the least diverse institutions;
- Take action to curb the surge in unconditional offers;
- Reintroduce a cap on student numbers, with hard quotas for students from working-class backgrounds at each university;
- Incentivise universities to offer degrees to meet the country’s skills needs;
- Recognise the transformative qualities brought about by good careers advice; and
- Focus on the decline in part-time students.

National Collaborative Outreach Programme

The NCOP began in January 2017, bringing together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges, schools and other local agencies to deliver programmes of HE outreach with young people in Years 9 to 13. Reflecting on an evaluation report produced by CFE

Research, the OfS (May 2018) recognised that the first year of the programme was focused on establishing the partnerships. It confirmed that the programme would continue in 2018/19 with the expectation of seeing “significant increases in the numbers of young people engaged [in the programme]” (p. 34) (nearly 53,000 learners were engaged in the programme in 2017).

Part-time learners

In a report for The Sutton Trust, Callender and Thompson (March 2018) reflected on the sharp decline of part-time UG entrants living in England attending UK universities and English FECs (further education colleges). The report authors focused attention on the 2012 reforms which abolished means-tested fee and course grants, introduced fee loans and reduced teaching grants leading to large increases in tuition fees. The report noted that the biggest drops, since 2012, were evident in the number of mature students over 35, those pursuing sub-degree qualifications (such as courses leading to institutional credit), and low intensity courses. Employer support was highlighted as a major stimulus to part-time study but, between 2010 and 2015, there was a 54 per cent fall in the numbers of students living in England receiving employer funding.

The report authors posited that the decline in part-time study would have significant effects for WP, “particularly as young part-time students tend to be less well-off than those studying full-time” (p. 5). It was also noted that the sharp decline of mature and part-time study would have consequences for social equity and social mobility as “Mature entry provides a way into [HE] for those who have not followed the traditional route from school and... for those whose work or family responsibilities make full-time study impractical” (p. 5).

Mature learners

MillionPlus (March 2018) drew attention to the plight of mature students (defined as ‘somebody who embarks upon further or higher education aged over 21’). A number of recommendations were made in respect to what the government and OfS should do. The following recommendations were addressed to universities, to:

- Further improve engagement with mature students to acknowledge their diversity and establish places/opportunities on campus for mature students to meet each other;
- Continue to provide flexible routes into HE;
- Ensure adequate support for students with caring responsibilities;
- Avoid changes to term timetables that could increase childcare costs for mature students; and
- Be bold in targets in Access and Participation Plans relating to mature students.

Social mobility

Donnelly and Gamsu’s (February 2018) report to The Sutton Trust is part of a larger programme of work addressing the spatial and social mobility of HE students in the UK, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The authors analysed student records data (those aged 20 or under entering university in 2009/10 and 2014/15) to trace the extent and nature of student mobility, examining who leaves home and who does not, as well as how far different groups travel. This was complemented by in-depth qualitative work in 20 purposefully selected fieldwork locations across the UK. Amongst the findings, the authors noted:

- The majority of young people (55.8 per cent in 2014/15) attended a university

less than about 55 miles away from their home address.

- The number of ‘commuter’ students (those staying in the family home whilst studying) increased from 72,310 in 2009/10 to 77,945 in 2014/15, but representing a small percentage drop.
- Social class was identified as a key factor driving the mobility choices of young people, with disadvantaged students less likely to leave home and travel further. White, middle class, privately educated young people were more likely to leave home and attend a distant university.
- British Pakistani and British Bangladeshi students were found to be six times more likely than white students to remain living at home and studying locally.
- The increase in tuition fees to £9,000 in 2012 was not shown to affect overall trends in student mobility.
- Those in northern regions of England, especially the North East, were much less likely to be mobile compared to those in the South.

Supporting progression

The Commission on Education and Employment Opportunities for Young People (‘Youth Commission’) was set up to consider the education and employment prospects for young people (16-24 year olds) in England (Learning and Work Institute, July 2018). In its first report, and one of its five ‘key challenges to raise attainment and narrow inequalities’, the Commission posited that there needed to be greater diversity of higher level learning routes through life. In a poll to 5,000 young adults, those from higher socioeconomic groups were more likely to advocate an abolishment of HE fees. The poll also revealed that the option ‘opportunity to learn through life’ was more popular among those young adults from lower socioeconomic groups. University Alliance (June 2018) made

recommendations to improve technical and professional education. They were focused on fostering better understanding of skills gaps and shortages, and improving understanding by employers and potential students of the extent and quality of technical and professional education on offer.

Non-continuation

HESA (March 2018) published the non-continuation rates of full-time entrants (2015/16) after the first year at an HE provider. In England, 6.4 per cent of young students (i.e. those aged under 21), and 11.8 per cent of mature students (i.e. those aged 21 or over) did not continue HE after their first year. HESA concluded, “Although there have been fluctuations in the [non-continuation] rate, the overarching pattern for both mature and young entrants has been one of decline since the start of the millennium.”

Learning gain

Following two years’ investment, HEFCE (March 2018b) announced the establishment of a Learning Gain Toolkit, intended to “provide a basis for learning gain methodologies to be quality assured and used comparatively” (p. 3).

Feedback from assessment

QAA Scotland (August 2018) undertook analysis of Student-Led Teaching Award nomination data to explore what students valued in the feedback they received from assessment. Three themes that were critical to students’ experiences of feedback, emerged across all nominations data:

- The nature of feedback – this was the most significant theme, focusing on aspects of feedback and the feedback

process that students valued, and which they recognised as supporting their learning and educational success.

- The personal qualities of the teacher – this recognised that feedback sits within the teacher-student relationship and that there were characteristics which students positively identified as a reason for nominating their teachers. The study indicated that the personal attributes shaping the dynamic of the teacher-student relationship could not be detached when exploring feedback.
- The academic expertise and support for students that accompanies the provision of feedback was identified as critical to students’ perceptions of what constituted effective feedback.

Analytics in HE

UCISA and Sero HE (March 2018) published the outcomes of a workshop of analytics practitioners “who were prepared to share the truth and challenges and the way of advancing data and analytics relevant to the HE sector.” The ‘common problems’ were identified as: internal and external drivers (i.e. the increasing use of metrics to drive policy and to measure the success of institutions); skills and investment (e.g. “lack of skills and understanding of the value and the process required for achieving data analytics”); governance and leadership; data confidence; and legal and compliance issues. Three institutional case studies (Greenwich, Northumbria and Nottingham Trent) are presented in the report.

Quality of provision

In a report for the QAA, Griffiths et al. (June 2018) explored whether student reviews might be used to identify the quality of HE provision. Over 210,000 reviews (from Facebook, Whatuni.com and Studentcrowd.com) were gathered from 165

HEIs, 211 FECs and 12 alternative providers, and compared with more mainstream measures such as the NSS, TEF, and external reviews of the quality of education provision. The research found that in general, online feedback about UK universities was positive – the social media ratings were predictors of TEF, NSS and other assessment outcomes.

Financial concern of students

UUK and NEON (June 2018) focused on how prospective students (aged 16-24) perceived the student finance system, and measured their understanding of it. Their report explored their concerns and evaluated the extent to which they could influence changes. The study compared the views of full-time and part-time students, aged 18-24, on a UG degree (n=501) with those who had no intention of attending university (n=504). The study found that:

- Improved, more detailed, information on the costs and benefits of HE was needed;
- The student finance system was causing high levels of concern for students over meeting living costs while studying, and financial decisions after graduation;
- Spending on HE was viewed to be just as (or more) important than spending in primary and secondary education and
- There were wide-ranging views on whether greater variation in fee levels would be beneficial, with some expressing the view that it could address skills shortages and others highlighting the potential for distortionary effects on student choice.

On the issue of differential tuition fees in Hillman's (February 2018) study for HEPI, two-thirds of students thought that all full-time UG courses should have the same fee levels. Over half of respondents were prepared to think that higher fees might be justified for Medicine, but just six per cent

thought they could be justified for Modern Languages.

Value-for-money

In research commissioned by the OfS, and led by a consortium of students' unions (n=31), students' perceptions of VFM were explored. 5,685 HE students in England, 534 graduates (graduating between 2014 and 2017), 410 school students (in Year 12 and Year 13) responded to an online survey (trendence UK, February 2018). Among the findings it was revealed that:

- Only 38 per cent of students thought that the tuition fee for their course represented good VFM, though just over half considered investment in HE as being good VFM;
- 24 per cent of students did not feel they were informed about how much everything would cost as a student (particularly in relation to costs for accommodation, books and paying for extracurricular activities);
- Provider quality measures – quality of teaching, fair assessment and feedback, and learning resources – were the top three factors demonstrating good VFM (i.e. these measures came ahead of those directly focusing on student outcomes, such as having access to industry connections or securing higher earnings than non-graduates); and
- Overall, students were found to have a broad conception of VFM.

In the 2018 Student Academic Experience Survey (see below), 38 per cent of respondents reported as having a good/very good perception of VFM compared with 32 per cent who felt that they had received poor/very poor value. In 2017, almost equal numbers of students felt they received poor value for their HE experience as good value. Students from TEF Gold-rated

institutions were more likely to perceive they had received good value, with no notable difference on this measure between Silver and Bronze-rated institutions. Russell Group students were the most positive about the value they felt had received; Post-92, whilst performing least well on this measure, experienced an increase since 2017 (Neves and Hillman, June 2018).

The survey results revealed a strong relationship between the subject studied and the perception of VFM. Health subjects stood out as delivering the best value, with more than twice as many Medicine and Dentistry students (62 per cent) reporting good value compared with Business and Administrative studies (28 per cent). Technology was highlighted as ‘unique’ among STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects in being ranked towards the bottom of the scale. The report also highlighted a complex picture emerging, with ethnicity, working status and accommodation (e.g. commuter students) all being linked with low VFM.

The top five reasons for good/very good value were: teaching quality (68 per cent); course content (67 per cent); course facilities (62 per cent); career prospects (53 per cent); and quality of campus (51 per cent). The top five reasons for poor/very poor value were: tuition fees (62 per cent); teaching quality (45 per cent); contact hours (44 per cent); course content (37 per cent); and cost of living (37 per cent). Spending on teaching facilities and on teaching staff were identified by the respondents as areas where institutions should prioritise investment.

Student academic experience

Just over 14,000 students took part in the Advance HE/HEPI 2018 Student Experience Survey. Overall, a large proportion of students continued to find

some aspects of their experience different from their prior expectations, with a majority (53 per cent) recognising a mixed experience. However, two out of three students were happy with their choice of course.

Two-thirds of students felt they had learnt a lot, a further 29 per cent indicated learning a little, and just seven per cent not much or nothing. Higher levels of ‘learning gain’ were reported by students from Russell Group institutions (e.g. 71 per cent compared with 60 per cent at Post-92 institutions). On the quality of teaching, the gains evident in 2017 were not built upon, with students’ ratings of teaching staff being marginally lower.

Student complaints

As recorded in the OIA’s (May 2018) *Annual Report*, marginally more complaints were received (English and Welsh providers) in 2017 compared with the previous year. Most (53 per cent) were ‘not justified’, 11 per cent were ‘partly justified’ and four per cent, ‘justified’. Most complaints received related to academic status, followed by service issues. Academic misconduct, plagiarism and cheating accounted for five per cent of all complaints.

More complaints were received from students on Business and Administrative Studies courses and students studying Law than those studying other subjects. The OIA noted that the courses attracting the most complaints were likely to involve placement opportunities or study requiring access to specialised facilities and resources. Non-EU international students continued to be overrepresented in the complaints received. Similarly, PG students were also overrepresented in the complaints received in 2017. In light of changes in legislation (HERA), the OIA (April 2018) issued revised guidance for students.

Postgraduate experiences

In response to the UK not applying a survey to taught postgraduates (PGT) in which all providers participate, HEFCE commissioned a study that gathered feedback from PGT students and other experts. The study made recommendations for the structure and content of a survey of PGT students for consideration by the UK funding bodies; Pollard et al. (May 2018) put forward the following themes (and suggested structure) in any future questionnaire:

- Motivations to PGT study
- Transitions to PGT and settling in
- Teaching, learning and academic community
- Feedback and assessment
- Placements, dissertation and major projects
- Organisation and management of the programme
- Learning resources, facilities and wider support
- Learning outcomes
- Overall assessment

In a small development project for the LFHE, 17 postgraduate research (PGR) tutors participated in discussion groups aimed at sharing experiences of PGR tutoring (Guccione, June 2018). The “most urgent challenges” raised included:

- Supporting good mental health, being aware of the early warning symptoms of mental health challenges;
- Responding to the increasing numbers of students per supervisor and managing workload;
- Being able to approach senior colleagues to discuss underperformance in supervision, without damaging relationships; and

- Supporting students wishing to leave their doctorate, against rising pressure to increase student numbers and completion rates.

Supporting UG research

The UK Data Service (July 2018) released a resource (comprising practical templates and exemplars) aimed at encouraging better data management and research integrity in UG dissertations.

Mental health

The Advance HE/HEPI Student Experience Survey reported relatively low levels of student wellbeing (Neves and Hillman, June 2018). The authors concluded that, “there is still a way to go before the issue of student wellbeing is fully understood and supported in order to influence a positive change” (p. 51). Hall (July 2018) argued for the expansion and application of Jisc’ “proven expertise in learning analytics” in the broader area of student wellbeing, “and specifically to the current crisis in student mental health” (p. 10).

In experimental statistics the ONS (June 2018) reported that the rate of suicide in the 12 months ending July 2017 for HE students in England and Wales was 4.7 deaths per 100,000 students, equating to 95 suicides. It was noted that this number was higher than in most of the earlier years studied. Those aged 30 years and over had the highest rate of suicide with 6.4 deaths per 100,000.

UUK’s (May 2018) Task Group on Student Mental Health Services issued an overview of practice. The publication highlighted a need for universities to:

- Engage with partners, including local Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health teams, and secondary care

- organisations (including mental health trusts);
- Assess need, based on aggregated individual data and any local implications from published epidemiological evidence;
- Work with partners to promote positive mental health and wellbeing;
- Forge links between NHS providers and student services;
- Map the appropriate skills, expertise, experience and attitudes to meet young peoples’ needs; and
- Co-produce with students user-centred services.

In a small development project for the LFHE, Dooris et al. (May 2018) explored the views of vice-chancellors, members of the UK Healthy Universities Network and people from networks in other countries on health promotion in universities. The findings indicated growing support in the sector for a ‘whole university approach’ and for effective leadership to make health and wellbeing a strategic priority “that is understood to underpin core university business and productivity” (p. 1).

Staff responses to mental health

Hughes et al. (February 2018), in a study for Student Minds, sought to understand how academics were managing student mental health. A total of 52 academics at five universities were interviewed. Participants reported large numbers of students experiencing mental health difficulties. A number of academics described experiences of student mental illness that carried high levels of risk and distress.

The study noted that academic and pastoral responsibilities could not be easily separated as “academic problems almost always have a non-academic cause” (p. 5). Ambiguity and uncertainty around the academic’s role in relation to student mental health made

establishing and maintaining boundaries difficult for some – these were felt to be structural. There was an awareness of the responsibility to signpost students experiencing problems but the task of signposting was more complex than first appeared (e.g. identifying when a student is experiencing problems that would benefit from support, identifying services and explaining how they could be accessed, outlining how and why a service could help a student).

For many, the relationship academics had with their student services was, at best, ‘problematic’. There were concerns raised about who held responsibility for the wellbeing of a student (e.g. academics, departments, or the wider university).

Many academics described responding to students in distress in the evenings and weekends. They described impacts on sleep and home life, worries about students that persisted into time away from work, exhaustion and negative consequences for their own emotional and mental wellbeing. Overall, academics felt that they were not equipped or supported to respond to student mental health problems, and most participants indicated that they had little or no training in mental health or in how to support students generally.

LGBTQ+ students and mental health

Smithies and Byrom’s (July 2018) report for Student Minds summarised data from an online survey relating to the intersection of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and others) identity and experiences of mental health difficulties among HE students. The survey was completed by 353 students, 44 recent graduates and 70 members of university/students’ union staff. Amongst the findings:

- Many respondents noted that they experienced barriers accessing support owing to feeling misunderstood or judged. Students commented that student support services needed to be made more inclusive and “culturally competent.”
- Reports of post-traumatic stress, panic and eating disorders were high (though the authors stressed that the proportion of students reporting mental health difficulties in the survey could not be used as general prevalence data).
- Many respondents noted that greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity might reduce the need for additional support.
- Students in lower year groups were found to be less involved and engaged with both the university and local LGBTQ+ community. These students also sought support for emotional problems from fewer sources.
- Respondents suggested that LGBTQ+ societies/representatives were not always welcoming (the leadership of LGBTQ+ societies were perceived to be ‘cliquey’).
- Half of respondents felt a strong connection with their university LGBTQ+ community but 28 per cent did not feel engaged. Respondents identified a range of barriers to students’ union services and activities (e.g. sports clubs’ inclusivity, provision of LGBTQ+ social spaces).
- 79 per cent of respondents agreed that there was a need for additional mental health support specifically for LGBTQ+ students. Further, 89 per cent of respondents thought peer support would be beneficial, with 77 per cent indicating that they would engage with peer support.
- 93 per cent of respondents stated that they had sought help and advice for emotional problems from friends.

Neves and Hillman (June 2018) also reported lower levels of wellbeing among LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or others), compared with the total student population.

Impact of drugs on mental health

In NUS’s (April 2018) report on student drug use (see below), of those respondents who reported that drug use had affected their health (n=775), two-thirds stated that it had improved their day-to-day experience of an existing mental health condition, though the remainder thought that a mental health condition had worsened as a consequence of drug use.

Student participation in sport

(Summary omitted from previous sector reports review.) Milani and Shotton (January 2018) presented data, from a variety of sources, on the role sports activity plays in the experience of students. The report authors concluded that participation had resulted in impacting on academic attainment, retention, improved mental and physical health, and employability. The report presented good practice in relation to breaking down the ‘lad culture’ in sports, and engaging ‘liberation groups’ (Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic [BAME], disabled, LGBT+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, and others], and women).

Ethnicity, equality and diversity

In results from the Advance HE/HEPI Student Experience Survey (see above), in comparing VFM and learning gain, Asian students reported low levels of learning gain and “particularly low” VFM (Neves and Hillman, June 2018).

UCAS (June 2018a) data on the admissions patterns for mature applicants noted that, as

age increases, the percentage share of self-declared Black students increases. In 2017, 10.6 per cent of acceptances aged 21-25 were in the Black ethnic group, 11.9 per cent in the 26-30 age group, 18.7 per cent in the 31-35 age group, and 31.3 per cent in the 36 and over age group.

The NUS (March 2018) released findings from its Muslim Students' Survey which was launched in 2017. 578 responses were received from UK-based Muslim students (82 per cent were UK citizens) and almost all (93 per cent) were in full-time education. The study "consistently found" that the Prevent duty had a significant effect on many. This included being referred to authorities under the scheme, having organised events cancelled or significantly changed because of it (30 per cent of those affected), or having disengaged from political debate specifically because of concerns on being reported under Prevent. 43 per cent of respondents who reported as being affected by Prevent "felt unable to express their views or be themselves" (p. 7).

Overall, Muslim students' experiences of leadership within their students' union and NUS democratic structures was limited, with some expressing that they felt "unwelcome" or that events "were not supportive of Muslims" (p. 8). Only 38 per cent of respondents agreed that their students' union understood their needs as a Muslim student. 40 per cent agreed that negative portrayals of Muslims in the media would dissuade them from seeking a high-profile position in their students' union. 39 per cent felt able to participate in their union's sports activities: drinking cultures, a general lack of inclusiveness and mixed sex sports were stated as barriers to getting involved in sport.

90 per cent reported that they had a prayer space or mosque on or near the campus. Only two-thirds reported awareness of halal

food on or near the campus and only 28 per cent were aware that they had a Muslim chaplain or cleric at their institution.

One in three respondents had experienced some form of abuse or hate-related crime at their place of study (20 per cent experienced verbal abuse). Respondents experiencing an Islamophobic incident were more likely to report it to a member of academic staff at their place of study (36 per cent), followed by the police (29 per cent) or their Islamic society (29 per cent). One in four respondents indicated that they would not report an incident.

In an ECU Research Insight paper, Guyan (February 2018) examined qualitative data from staff who disclosed as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in the 2016 version of the Athena Survey of Science, Engineering and Technology (ASSET) survey. In conclusion, the paper argued the need for greater discussion about the full range of gender and sexual diversities, the complex ways in which they intersect and an awareness of who might feel excluded from debates around gender binaries (e.g. 'minorities within minorities', such as bisexual staff).

In Christofferson's (May 2018) Research Insight paper, focused on the influence of non-UK nationality and ethnicity on migrant female academics' role and position in UK HE. Using HESA 2015/16 staff record data. Overall, both ethnicity and nationality were found to have individual effects on the likelihood of being a professor for female academics employed in UK HE, as well as on the likelihood of being in an early career post. With regards to professorial status, if ethnicity is not considered, it was noted that "the compounded disadvantage for BME (black, minority, ethnic) female academics from outside the EU was hidden by a disproportionate advantage for white female academics from outside the EU" (p. 3).

Simon (July 2018) presented findings from a review of 61 successful UK Silver and Gold Athena SWAN and Juno Champion (gender equality in physics) applications from the November 2016 and April 2017 rounds. Qualitative analysis of the applications identified 181 initiatives that demonstrated positive outcomes for gender equality in HE, which were grouped into 19 thematic areas (BME support, career breaks, career development, culture, disability support, external and internal publicity, flexible working, governance, induction, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] support, new starter, promotion, public engagement, recruitment, reporting misconduct, role models, staff wellbeing, training, and workload model).

In Barnard et al.'s (December 2017) report for the LFHE, the views and progression of women in HE who had participated in LFHE's Aurora leadership programme were considered. In this second year report, the analysis revolved around two key areas: leadership approaches and practice, and institutional structures and practices.

The ECU published a 'research and data briefing' paper aimed at assisting the design of impact evaluations of equality and diversity initiatives (Aldercotte, March 2018). A further briefing on 'intersectional approaches to equality and diversity' was issued to complement a 2017 paper on 'intersectional approaches to equality research and data' (ECU, February 2018).

In a 'Leadership Insights' paper for the LFHE, Moss et al. (April 2018) outlined a small-scale study that explored the relationship between the quality of academic leadership on the attainment levels of BME students. The authors reported that leadership style was one of the top four factors (out of 14) that BME students thought that influenced their academic

achievement (alongside motivation, fair treatment, and fair assessment).

TSEP (April 2018) provided a brief summary on BME statistics, degree attainment, satisfaction and belonging, and learning and teaching. The short literature review examined reviews from recently published reports and studies.

Sexual misconduct

In 2017, the NUS Women's Campaign paired with The 1752 Group (a UK-based research and lobby organisation working to end sexual misconduct in HE), to undertake research into staff-student sexual misconduct. A total of 1,839 respondents contributed to a survey, or to focus groups, which were held across the UK (NUS, April 2018c). As noted in the report, "the concept of misconduct moves beyond sexual harassment as 'unwanted behaviour' to address the specific nature of the power imbalance between staff and students" (p. 8). 41 per cent of all respondents had experienced at least one instance of sexualised behaviour from staff, and one in eight current student respondents had experienced being touched by a staff member in a way that made them uncomfortable. 2.3 per cent of current student respondents had experienced non-consensual sexual contact by a staff member, while nine had experienced sexual assault or rape.

15.6 per cent of women reported being touched by a staff member in a way that made them uncomfortable, compared to seven per cent of men. PG students were more likely to have experienced misconduct than UG students, as were LGB women. A vast majority of reported perpetrators were academics rather than other university staff; 13.5 per cent of respondents reported a female perpetrator.

Women respondents were three to four times as likely to report changing their behaviour (e.g. skipping lectures, tutorials or supervisions), as a result of misconduct. Of those who experienced sexual misconduct, a fifth of women reported losing confidence in themselves; a similar proportion experienced mental health problems; and 15.5 per cent reported avoiding certain parts of the campus.

Fewer than one in ten respondents who experienced staff sexual misconduct reported this to their institution. The most common reason, provided by one in three respondents, was that they were unsure if the behaviour was serious enough to report. Many respondents, that reported such incidents, felt that their institution had failed them (e.g. by not responding adequately to the debate, making reporting difficult). In a House of Commons briefing paper, Long and Hubble (August 2018) provided an overview of the issue of sexual harassment in colleges and universities, setting out the legal duties and responses to the problem of rising incidents.

Student drug use

The NUS (April 2018a) released results of a study on student drug use (i.e. “all controlled or illegal substances as well as non-prescribed drugs and novel psychoactive substances [legal highs]”). The study comprised an online questionnaire (Students’ Drug Survey) which elicited 2,810 responses. It also incorporated an analysis of policy responses of UK HEIs related to drug use. These data were collected through freedom of information requests sent to a sample of 151 universities and colleges. The report included the following findings:

- Cannabis was the most frequently taken drug used, at some point, by 94 per cent of respondents (cannabis was also the only drug in the survey more likely to be

used regularly, “rather than on special occasions”). Ecstasy/MDMA had been taken by two-thirds of all respondents (the second most popular drug). Six per cent of respondents reported using ‘study drugs’ (drugs taken to improve focus and motivation) at least once a month.

Respondents mainly used drugs for recreational purposes (80 per cent), 39 per cent “to enhance social interactions”, and 31 per cent had done so to combat stress. One in ten respondents had sought advice and information about the drugs available; seven out of ten did not know where to go for information.

- 84 per cent indicated that they did not feel pressured to take drugs whilst at university or college, whilst 25 per cent of respondents thought that there was a “problematic drug culture” at their campus. Just under half of respondents indicated that drug use had affected their attendance (e.g. missing a seminar or arriving late to a class).
- 47 per cent thought that institutions should not punish students that did take drugs; half felt confident that if they turned to their institution for support it would be dealt with appropriately. In the 2016/17 academic year, there were at least 2,067 recorded incidents of student misconduct for possession of drugs. While many were resolved via a formal warning or another type of sanction, such as a fine, at least one in four incidents (n=531) were reported to the police. There were 21 permanent exclusions from HE for possessing a drug for personal use.

Free speech on campus

In a report for HEPI, Beech (July 2018) presented ideas and recommendations for universities to “grip the issue of free speech to ensure political and social attitudes [could] be properly debated, to expose

unpalatable and extremist attitudes for what they really are and... to promote a culture of tolerance and respect” (p. 43). The OfS (July 2018) reported that there were 271 instances of events and speakers being escalated to the highest levels of approval in 2016/17, under the Prevent duty.

Prevent duty

The OfS (July 2018) revealed that there had been 183 Prevent-related welfare concerns escalated to institutional Prevent Leads, and 24 referred to the Channel process (the multi-agency support programme for people identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism).

Student poverty

In a report of the NUS Poverty Commission (NUS, April 2018b), which drew attention to the issue of class and poverty in post-16 education, a ‘poverty premium’ was described as “endemic” in FE and HE. Amongst the recommendations, the Commission called for the reinstating of grant funding in HE (including maintenance grants for UG students), the development of a ‘student employment strategy’ (“prioritising students for suitable internal jobs”), and supporting particular groups of students (e.g. part-time provision, those in/leaving the criminal justice system, and those with childcare needs). The report was followed up by a resource that highlighted particular projects, schemes, partnerships and activities aimed at supporting working class students to achieve in HE (NUS, July 2018).

Differences in student outcomes

HEFCE (March 2018c) considered how employment and degree outcomes differed according to various student characteristics measured in terms of class of degree

awarded (2016/17 UK-domiciled first degree graduates) and employment outcome six months after graduation (2015/16 graduates). The report highlighted changes since the previous reports on the 2013/14 graduates. The analysis revealed that differences have persisted between different student groups; differences on the basis of gender, disability and educational disadvantage remained consistent between 2013/14 and 2016/17. Among the findings, it was noted that:

- The gap between POLAR Quintiles 1 and 5 gaining a first or upper second class degree had remained at ten percentage points since 2013/14. The gap between graduates without a disability and graduates in receipt of Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA) remained at three percentage points from 2013/14. White graduates had the highest proportion gaining a first or upper second class degree, (82 per cent). The group with the lowest proportion was Black graduates with only 60 per cent. Among Asian graduates, the proportion gaining a first or upper second class degree was 72 per cent. The difference between the proportions of white and Black graduates decreased from 23 percentage points in 2013/14 to 22 percentage points in 2016/17. The difference between proportions of white and Asian graduates reduced from 12 percentage points in 2013/14 to 11 percentage points in 2016/17.
- In terms of graduate employment outcomes two characteristics saw an increased gap between 2013/14 and 2015/16: differences between male and female graduates, and the differences between graduates with and without a disability. Among female graduates, 73 per cent were in highly skilled

employment or study compared with 72 per cent of male graduates. This gap increased slightly from 0.2 percentage points in 2013/14 to one percentage point in 2015/16. The graduate employment gap between graduates without a disability and graduates in receipt of DSA had increased: from two percentage points in 2013/14 to 2.6 percentage points in 2015/16. The gap between disabled graduates not in receipt of DSA and those without a disability increased from 2.2 percentage points in 2013/14 to 2.8 percentage points in 2015/16. Mature graduates continued to do slightly better than young graduates: 77 per cent of mature graduates were in graduate employment or further study compared with 73 per cent for young graduates. The gap between graduates of different ethnicities and different educational disadvantage backgrounds decreased. Black graduates had a 69 per cent graduate employment rate, while White graduates were at 74 per cent. This gap decreased from seven percentage points in 2013/14 to five percentage points in 2015/16. POLAR Quintile 1 graduates had the lowest percentage in graduate employment or further study – 71 per cent – while Quintile 5 graduates had the highest proportion in graduate employment or further study, at 75 per cent.

Vocational degrees and employment outcomes

HEFCE (February 2018) investigated the relationship between how vocational a subject is and the employment outcomes of graduates. Early-career employment data of four cohorts of first degree graduates (n=600,000) was used to create a measure based on the proportion of graduates entering a narrow set of occupations (the OSCR – ‘occupation-subject concentration

ratio’). The report then outlined whether there is an advantage to studying more vocational subjects. This was done by analysing the relationship between the OSCR and two employment outcomes six months after graduation: the likelihood of being in highly skilled employment, and earnings.

The study noted that the mean OSCR was 0.365, indicating that on average more than a third of graduates from a given subject area were employed in three highly skilled occupations. About ten per cent of subjects had an OSCR of over 0.9 (i.e. highly vocational) and all in the broad subject groups of Medicine and Dentistry, Veterinary Sciences, and Subjects Allied to Medicine. A further ten per cent of subjects had an OSCR greater than 0.5 (e.g. Information Technology, Landscape Design, Civil Engineering). In the subject group Business and Management, substantial variation was noted. For example, Marketing had an above average OSCR of 0.427 while Business Studies an OSCR of 0.199. The study did not examine whether the vocational qualities of a subject varied across the type of HEI but concluded, “Analysing the relationship between how vocational a subject is and employment outcomes shows that graduates in more vocational subjects are more likely to be employed in highly skilled roles” (p. 4).

Employment outcomes

In HESA (July 2018a) data derived from the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey, the proportion of full-time first degree graduates of 2016/17 in employment and/or further study, showed a small rise on the previous year. Five per cent of the 2016/17 graduates were assumed to be unemployed compared to 5.2 per cent of the 2015/16 graduates. A larger proportion of the

2016/17 graduates were in ‘further study only’ (16.2 per cent compared to 15.8 per cent of the 2015/16 graduates). HESA (July 2018b) noted the differing outcomes for graduates from different subjects of study. For instance, over 93 per cent of full-time first degree Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science graduates were in full-time work six months after graduation while the highest rate of unemployment were among graduates from Computer Science at 9.5 per cent. The subject areas with the highest proportions of graduates entering further study were Law and Physical Sciences, with over 30 per cent of these graduates going on to further study.

HESA (June 2018) statistics also revealed that 2016/17 witnessed the largest pay gap in five years in the median salary of professional job roles between UK domiciled full-time male and female leavers who obtained first degree qualifications and entered full-time work in the UK. The gap was estimated at £2,000 per annum.

Career readiness

In AGCAS’s (July 2018) First-Year Student Career Readiness Survey, different levels of career-readiness and engagement in career-related activities were revealed. The study was undertaken at 18 UK universities (England, Scotland and Wales), incorporating responses from 2,008 students who started study in 2017/18.

- *Career readiness* - Fewer than a third of younger students (below the age of 20) had clear career ideas before they chose their university course. Mature students demonstrated higher confidence levels across most aspects of career readiness than their younger counterparts. Female students were marginally more confident in goal-setting but less confident in identifying relevant employers and

attending an interview. Male students scored higher than female students in most aspects of employability skills, with the exception of business culture awareness. Students educated at private schools reported significantly higher confidence levels than students educated at state schools in making appropriate conversations with professionals, delivering a presentation at a job interview, and understanding the organisational culture of employers.

First-generation university students’ confidence levels in career readiness were no lower than their counterparts. They were also slightly more confident than students where both parents/guardians had attended university in two aspects of career self-efficacy and business culture awareness. Asian students reported significantly lower confidence levels than students from other ethnic backgrounds in determining the steps needed to complete their university course.

- *Careers guidance* - a significantly higher proportion of students educated at private schools reported that careers support had been provided compared to those educated at state schools.
- *Career-related activities* - For students under 20, 71.6 per cent had done part-time work, 54 per cent volunteering, and 49.8 per cent had undertaken work experience/work shadowing. More female students than male students had participated in career-related activities with the biggest gender difference lying in participation in volunteering activities. A higher proportion of white students (74.9 per cent) had done part-time work compared to students from other ethnic backgrounds. Fewer Asian students had done part-time work (56.2 per cent), yet more (52.6 per cent) had undertaken work experience/work shadowing (required by their school/college)

compared to students from other ethnic backgrounds. A lower proportion of first-generation university students and students educated at state schools had done volunteering or undertaken work experience/work shadowing (required by their school/college) compared to their counterparts. Fewer students where both parents/guardians had attended university and those educated at private schools had done part-time work compared to their counterparts.

Students' perceptions of the importance of university activities did not match their participation in these activities. Applying for work experience and networking with professionals were perceived as important; however, students' participation (or intention to participate) in these activities was much lower than for most other activities. Accessing the careers service website and attending careers fairs were perceived as less important than most other activities, but students' participation (or intention to participate) in these activities was much higher than for most other activities.

- *Constraints to career-related activities and career planning* - Mature students and first-generation university students reported greater time constraints compared to their counterparts. Mature students spent more time on study, doing paid work, family responsibilities and commuting, and less time on social or extracurricular activities. Mature students were less confident than younger students in their ability to finance their university education. Over a quarter of mature students reported that they had major concerns and were not sure they would have enough funds, compared to 13.6 per cent of younger students. A significantly higher percentage of male students had no financial concerns compared to female students, regardless

of age. Factoring in students' time pressures, financial position, social capital, cultural capital, accommodation and the career-related activities they had undertaken in the past, different students reported different constraints to career planning, thus revealing the need for a variety of nudge/support approaches within HE and wider society.

The AGCAS study also highlighted findings in relation to cultural and social capital. For instance, students from different ethnic groups reported different patterns of involvement in community activities. Overall, "White students had more social capital than students from other ethnic backgrounds."

Following their 2014 report, the CMI (February 2018) explored the interplay between employers, HEIs, students and other learners, plus the role of professional bodies in championing learners' professional development. The research included a survey of 837 Business and Management students (55 per cent of respondents were first year students) who were asked how their universities were helping build their employability. The students agreed that their universities supported them most in developing collaborative and team working skills, in taking responsibility, and being self-aware. Students wanted more information, engagement and opportunities to get experience from employers (31 per cent disagreed that work experience was embedded in their course).

Earnings after graduation

The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated the relative labour market returns to different degrees (measured by earnings and employment five years after graduation) for the DfE (Belfield et al., June 2018). The report noted that:

- The labour market returns to different degrees vary considerably: both the subject of degree and institution attended make considerable difference to graduates' earnings.
- Medicine, Maths and Economics graduates all typically earn at least 30 per cent more than the average graduate, while Creative Arts graduates earn around 25 per cent less.
- Graduates from independent schools and the top quintile earn around seven to nine per cent more than graduates from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds (adding an extra A at A-level increases earnings by around three per cent).
- Medicine, Pharmacology and English have relatively higher returns for females than males. Computer Science by contrast is more beneficial for males. Medicine and Education have higher returns for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Social Care and Creative Arts have a relatively higher return for students with lower levels of ability, as measured by their prior achievement.
- Pre-1992 universities typically have higher-earning graduates. Once differences in the student composition between universities have been accounted for, the variation in returns is considerably reduced, though significant differences remain.
- The top-earning specific courses (i.e. a specific subject at a given university) attract a 100 per cent premium over graduate earnings, while the lowest-earning courses attract earnings that are around 40 per cent below average graduate earnings. These findings imply that studying the same subject at a different institution can yield a very different earnings premium (particularly

acute for those on Business Studies programmes).

Internationalisation

[Para 85] *The UK and EU should continue to give young people and students the chance to benefit from each other's world leading universities, including cultural exchanges such as Erasmus+.*

HM Government (July 2018)

In UUKi's (July 2018) *International Facts and Figures 2018*, a snapshot of the international dimensions of UK HE was presented. The publication noted that the UK remained an extremely popular destination for international students, attracting more students than any other country other than the USA. However, the USA, Australia, France and Germany (the UK's closest competitors) had faster growth rates than the UK.

In response to the Migration Advisory Committee's call for evidence into the impact of international students in the UK, the NUS (February 2018) presented evidence from a number of sources and recommended strategies that:

- Create a more welcoming environment to attract international students;
- Develop a simpler visa system so as not to deter international students;
- Remove international students from net migration targets and, thus, alleviating any hostility felt by international students;
- Reinstate the Post Study Work Visa to facilitate the ability to work during and after study;
- Consider how fees might impact on the competitiveness of UK HE;
- Recognise the net financial benefits derived from international students, especially in relation to services such as the NHS;

- Allow international students to change courses and make adjustments in the same way as domestic students;
- Reclassify refugee and asylum-seeking students as domestic students;
- Increase orientation programmes and the range of options to learn English as part of a support package; and
- Develop a national strategy setting increased targets for both inward and outward student mobility.

UUKi (May 2018) released its fourth *Gone International* report. 16,580 UK-domiciled graduates that responded to the 2015/16 DLHE survey were reported to have had at least one period abroad as part of their UG first degree, representing 7.2 per cent of all relevant respondents. UUKi noted that this did not amount to an increase in percentage terms on the previous DLHE cohort but, nevertheless, a rise in student numbers from 16,165 in 2014/15. The following key findings were recorded (note: ‘mobile’ graduates are those who had at least one period abroad of one week or longer):

- By subject group, language graduates had the highest mobility rate (87.4 per cent);
- The gender split for non-language student mobility was almost equal (5.7 per cent of female students and 5.6 per cent of male students);
- Students from less-advantaged backgrounds were less likely to be mobile (8.7 per cent of more-advantaged students participated in mobility compared with 5.1 per cent of less-advantaged students);
- Students from low participation neighbourhoods participated at a lower rate (4.3 per cent) compared to students from higher participation areas (7.6 per cent);
- White students were more likely to be mobile than BME students (white students participated in mobility at a rate of 7.6 per cent compared to 5.5 per cent for Asian students and 4.2 per cent for Black students);
- Only 80 part-time students were reported as being mobile (0.4 per cent);
- Graduates whose parents held HE qualifications participated at a rate of 9.1 per cent compared to five per cent for students whose parents were not graduates;
- The majority of mobility instances between 2013-16 were delivered by provider-led programmes (45.4 per cent) or the Erasmus+ programme (44.8 per cent);
- 39 per cent of all instances were to just three countries (France, Spain, the United States);
- 55.7 per cent of all mobility instances took place in Europe, followed by the United States (12.1 per cent), then Australia (5.4 per cent), and Canada (3.9 per cent);
- 68.5 per cent of all mobility instances were for long-term programmes of 14 weeks or more;
- Students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups were more likely to participate in short-term mobility than the sector average;
- 29.7 per cent of graduates who undertook mobility achieved first-class honours, compared to 25 per cent of non-mobile graduates;
- A smaller percentage of mobile graduates were unemployed (3.6 per cent) compared to non-mobile graduates (4.4 per cent);
- A higher proportion of mobile graduates were in further study (17.1 per cent) compared to their non-mobile peers (16.4 per cent);
- Mobile graduates in work were more likely to be in a graduate-level job (77.7 per cent) than their non-mobile peers (70.5 per cent);

- Mobile graduates' average starting salaries six months after graduation were 6.6 per cent higher than those of non-mobile students; and
- Students from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups appeared to have more to gain from mobility periods (e.g. Asian students were 43.5 per cent less likely to be unemployed than their non-mobile peers. 81.2 per cent of BME graduates were in graduate-level employment compared to 69.5 per cent of their non-mobile peers).

In the Advance HE/HEPI Student Academic Experience survey, there was recognition in some of the positive benefits to studying alongside international students, especially in regard to helping UK-domiciled students develop a world view.

In Ilieva's (July 2018) analysis for UUKi, some of the significant shifts in international student enrolments were presented as five facts:

1. More than half of the UK's international students are new entrants (i.e. in their first year of student in the UK and contrasting sharply with the US and Germany where about a third of international students are new entrants).
2. The UK hosts the second largest population of masters and doctoral students in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries after the US.
3. There is a strong positive correlation between post-study work options and growth in international student enrolments.
4. Future demand for international students to undertake PG research in the UK is uncertain.
5. The majority of international students on UK programmes are studying overseas (e.g. on transnational programmes overseas).

In response to the growing number of displaced people in the world (estimated to be more than 65 million or one per cent of the global population), UUKi (March 2018) released guidance to inform institutional strategy and practice to support the educational and wider needs of displaced people.

Internationalisation: transnational education

In analysis of HESA data, UUKi (February 2018) concluded that HE transnational education (TNE) was becoming an increasingly significant characteristic of UK universities' international activity. Over 700,000 students studied for UK degrees outside the UK in 2015/16, or 1.6 times the number of international students in the UK in the same year. TNE student numbers grew by 17 per cent from 2012/13 to 2015/16, with 82 per cent of UK universities delivering TNE. UG programmes accounted for 65 per cent of student intake.

The ten countries hosting the highest number of students in 2015/16 were the same as in 2014/15 (in both years Malaysia and Singapore hosted the highest number of students). At 12.6 per cent, South America had the highest average year on year growth from 2012/13 to 2015/16. At 1.7 per cent, North America had the lowest year on year growth rate and a 0.8 per cent decrease in student numbers from 2014/15 to 2015/16. Student numbers fell by five per cent in non-EU Europe over the same period.

HE workforce

HESA's (February 2018) *Staff in Higher Education* provides detailed data on academic and non-academic staff employed at UK HE providers and includes information on personal and demographic characteristics. New data featured in 2016/17, which

looked at teaching qualifications held by academic staff with a teaching component (teaching only, and teaching and research) to their contracts (English HE providers only). 65.5 per cent of all staff had a teaching qualification, though the proportion of full-time staff (71 per cent) and staff on open-ended/permanent contracts (69.6 per cent) was higher than for part-time staff (55.9 per cent) and staff on fixed-term contracts (51.6 per cent).

In a ‘stimulus paper’ for the LFHE, Harding et al. (February 2018) presented a snapshot of the ways in which coaching to support the development of staff was applied, valued and evaluated. LJMU was one of six institutions that contributed to the evaluation.

National Teaching Fellowship Scheme

In a review released by the OfS, and conducted by a team from Sheffield Hallam University, 72 institutions responded to a survey on the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) (Austin et al., August 2018). The study set out to evaluate the impact and relevance of the NTFS, establish the extent to which the scheme had achieved its aims, and to set out considerations and options with regard to the format of the scheme, the approach to delivery, and its funding in the new regulatory regime.

Overall, NTFS had retained its value as an exemplar award for institutional staff. However, evidence indicated that “the benefits and impact for the individual needed to better align with the benefits and impact for the institution” (p. 6). The report authors advised that institutions needed to raise the awareness of NTFS winners and “be more instrumental in how they are used to directly enhance the student experience” (p. 6). The study found that there was little evidence to suggest that

institutions would cover any additional resource costs to participate in the NTFS.

LFHE Small Development Projects

The LFHE released a number of reports funded under its small development projects scheme.

- Devecchi et al. (June 2018) in looking at cultural change across the HE workforce, collected evidence from a national survey (n=356), from interviews (n=11), and from focus groups with 11 participants that were representative of the HE workforce. The study noted: variation in the change management adopted and their degrees of effectiveness; participants’ expectation of a more inclusive, relational, empathetic, contextual and ‘diffused’ model of leadership; and, when appropriate resources and opportunities to work together were in place, academics and professional service staff were able to create spaces for change to take place.
- Neary et al. (July 2018) conducted research that assessed the possibility of establishing co-operative leadership as “a viable organisational form of governance and management for [HE]” (p. 1). The study established a diagnostic tool to evaluate and develop co-operative leadership and ‘co-operativism’.
- Macfarlane and Burg (July 2018) presented ideas related to rewarding ‘academic citizenship’ (i.e. “those activities distinct from research and teaching that support and offer services to both the university and wider society” [p. 1]). The report highlighted “negative framing” associated with an expectation on academic staff not to be “poor academic citizens”. This sense, as argued by the authors, was “connected to the growing performative pressures on

- academic life within the [HE] sector” (p. 2).
- Sternberg and Dawe (June 2018) described a yearlong programme focused on designing and testing a model for student engagement based on leadership capabilities nurtured through emotional, psychological and social wellbeing.
 - Aimed at academic leadership at programme level, Barefoot et al. (July 2018) produced guidance to enable inclusive curriculum enhancements to address the BME attainment gap. Structured interviews were conducted with 30 programme leaders, to explore examples of inclusive practice and actions identified by the programme leader as well as any potential challenges they perceived in trying to enhance inclusive practice. 11 case studies of good practice are presented in the report.
 - Yelken (July 2018) presented findings from the Aditi Leadership Programme at the University of Birmingham, a targeted BAME leadership programme for staff in Grades 6-8. Individuals were reported to have experienced increased levels of confidence and competence, resulting in improvements in the “managerial aspects of their roles” (p. 4).
 - In a qualitative case study, Weston and Oakley (June 2018) reflected on the factors that contribute to consistent excellence in the educational output of four high-performing academic departments from a TEF Gold-rated institution. The findings indicated that academic departments invested time in reviewing the ways in which they communicated with their students (focusing on clear and consistent student-centred messages). The findings also revealed the importance of engaging stakeholders in how employability is embedded in the curriculum.

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