



SKILLS, JOBS AND OPPORTUNITY

A vision for
higher education



Universities UK

The UK's world-leading universities transform lives for the better, make local communities better places to live and improve society and social justice through our access, teaching, research and partnerships.

We play a vital role in:

- Improving the lives not just of students and staff, but also in the communities around us.
- Delivering prosperity to the whole of the UK by providing jobs, skills and innovation.
- Strengthening international partnerships and the UK's global influence through our links across the world.

The UK's universities generate more than £95 billion for the economy, £13.1 billion in export earnings and over 940,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

We are a success story – and one of the UK's greatest assets. Universities UK calls on the government to work with universities to support us in the key role we have to play in skills productivity, social justice and research, from local communities to the global stage.

Letting people and places reach their potential

The years ahead are set to be a time of unparalleled change as the pace of technological development gets ever faster.

We will need to make sure that people can study throughout their lives, retraining to meet new skills needs and replace outdated knowledge. We will also need to make sure that the benefits and rewards that higher education provides are shared more equally throughout the UK, so that everyone can benefit and no one is left behind.

More than half of young people are now choosing to go to university. These students need to feel that they are getting the best value from their degree while wider society benefits from the value that graduates bring to local communities and economies.

With a rise in the number of 18-year-olds – reaching 887,000 by 2030 – any new funding proposals must show how the opportunity to benefit from higher education in a world where knowledge is ever more important will be shared even more widely. A long-term funding deal will mean universities can plan how they will make sure the quality of teaching stays high, that they produce the skills that employers need to thrive, and that they carry on opening their doors to those who will benefit from study whatever their background.



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Not everyone wants, or is able, to start a three-year, classroom-based degree course at 18. We need to make sure that lifelong learning is available to those who will benefit from getting new skills or updating old ones, and that universities can serve communities and populations across the UK. Learners want more flexibility to study over a longer period of time, accumulating credits that work towards a full degree that also meets the needs of their employers. The UK needs to offer adult learners greater choice in when, how and where they study. That includes working with universities, further education colleges and employers to bring world-class education and training to towns and regions where it currently doesn't exist.

Letting people and places reach their potential

We want to see the government promise to:

Keep universities open to all

- ✓ commit to no cap on the number of students who can benefit from going to university, keeping aspiration open to millions who otherwise would have been locked out.
- ✓ make sure there is no cut in real-terms funding per university student, ensuring the prioritisation of high-quality teaching, world-class facilities and important resources, like long library opening hours.
- ✓ cut the interest rate on loans while students are at university.
- ✓ provide a new challenge fund for local partnerships to provide higher education in current 'cold spots' in England, like rural areas and coastal towns, where getting access to higher education and training is harder.

Increase flexible learning

- ✓ sweep away barriers that stop universities offering a more flexible credit-based system, so that learners can earn credits toward a qualification over a time period that suits them and their employers.
- ✓ support universities to offer more degree-level apprenticeships which allow people to get skills while being paid, especially in professions where there is a clear shortage, like nursing.
- ✓ reform the current Apprenticeships Levy so that the money it provides can cover a wider range of courses to provide in-demand skills, as the economy and technologies change.

Harness the value of universities

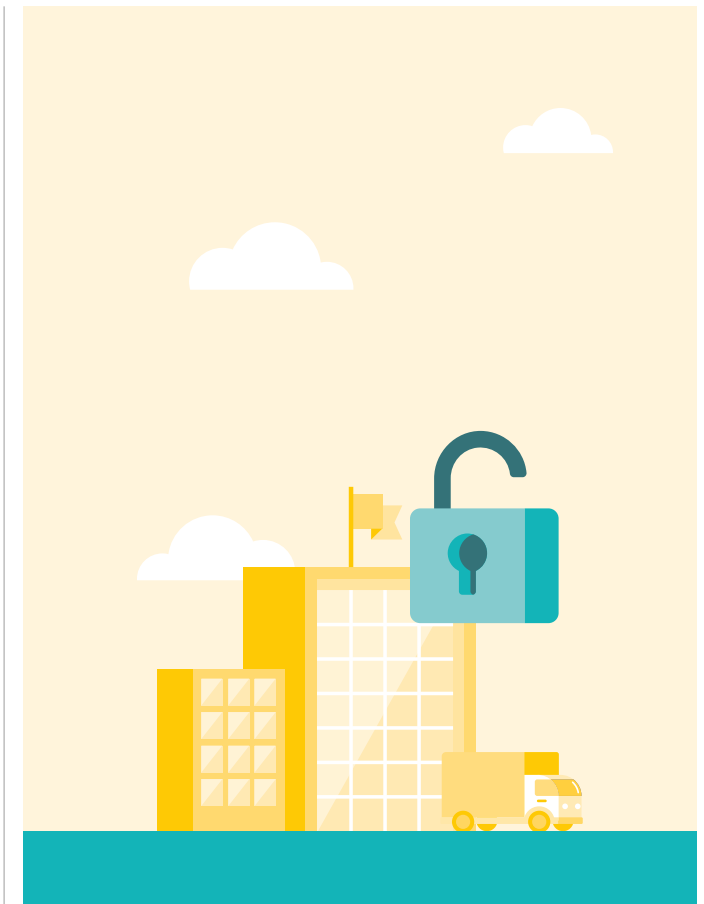
- ✓ adopt a framework to properly define what value means when it comes to a university degree.
- ✓ provide a new £500m 'civic university fund' which will help universities better serve the communities around them, whether that is by improving cultural life, offering part-time courses or working with left-behind groups like disadvantaged school pupils.

Delivering opportunity and fairness

Education drives social mobility. Recent data has shown that the university entry rate of 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds in England is higher than it has ever been before.

The gap between students from the most and least disadvantaged backgrounds getting into university is getting smaller. But more needs to be done and we need to speed up progress, not just in terms of people getting to university but making sure they get the best out of it when they get there.

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Delivering opportunity and fairness

The government can commit to:

Improve equality of opportunity

- ✓ continued funding for foundation year courses that introduce non-traditional students to life at university gradually and encourage a second chance at academic success for people who might have missed out.
- ✓ re-introducing maintenance grants for students who need them.
- ✓ funding more collaboration between universities, schools and colleges to deliver higher education outreach programmes to disadvantaged and 'left behind' communities.
- ✓ continuing to support universities' efforts to bring equality of opportunity, such as in widening access to growing numbers of disadvantaged students, and our pledge to eliminate the attainment gap between white students and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students.

Ensure students are fully informed

- ✓ increasing funding for careers advice services in schools so that young people can choose the best post-18 education or training route for them, based on the best information available and knowing all the options.
- ✓ funding a national education programme on student finance to ensure students are fully informed of all the different ways they can get financial support before applying to university.
- ✓ increasing funding for the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) to provide the best evidence possible of what works when it comes to making sure everyone has a fair chance of getting to university.

Focus on mental health

- ✓ providing more money to improve the mental health of all 18 to 25-year-olds, including specific services for students in places with large numbers of them.
- ✓ implementing the commitments in the NHS Long Term Plan related to young people's mental health.

The above recommendations focus on England due to the devolved nature of higher education policy and funding. But any policy change on funding and student support should meet the principle that students can study wherever they choose across the UK.

The recommendations for the following themes apply across the UK.

Putting global talent to work for Britain

The UK must attract and retain the most talented people from across the world to come and train, work, and live in the UK.

We should aim to be the natural choice of the best and brightest across the world. We need an immigration system that allows universities to recruit and retain international students and staff at all skill levels across the UK, and takes into account the skills needs and demographics of different nations and regions. If we want to continue having a world-class university system, we need access to talent from anywhere in the world. Having the best staff, from Nobel Prize winners to expert technicians, will also be crucial if hitting the current target of 2.4% of GDP being spent on research and development is going to be achievable and worthwhile.

We want to make sure that European students still choose to study in the UK. Equally, UK students who spend time abroad to study, work or volunteer achieve better degrees and get better jobs, and the number of UK students going abroad is rising each year. International experience makes us richer in every way, and better citizens of the world.

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Putting global talent to work for Britain

We want to see the government commit to:

Attract more talent

- ✓ attracting international talent to the UK by reforming the burdensome visa process for talented international scientists and researchers and making it easier for them to work for short periods in the UK.
- ✓ lowering the proposed salary requirement for international workers to gain a high-skilled work visa to £21,000 to ensure we can attract the university staff the UK needs.
- ✓ developing a national scholarship offer for European students to ensure that the UK continues to be an attractive choice for such students following Brexit.
- ✓ a £20m investment into the GREAT Study UK Discover You campaign to promote the UK as the top study destination for EU and other international students.

A competitive UK offer

- ✓ implementing the recently announced two-year post study work offer to international graduates, so we can keep international talent and make sure students choose to study in the UK and not in rival countries like Australia or Canada.
- ✓ maintain and plan to increase the UK's 10% share of the international student market.
- ✓ scrapping the target to reduce net migration.

UK universities and students abroad

- ✓ support a national target of doubling the percentage of UK students who work, study or volunteer abroad to 13%.
- ✓ helping universities open branches and campuses in other countries, generating income which supports students and research at home.

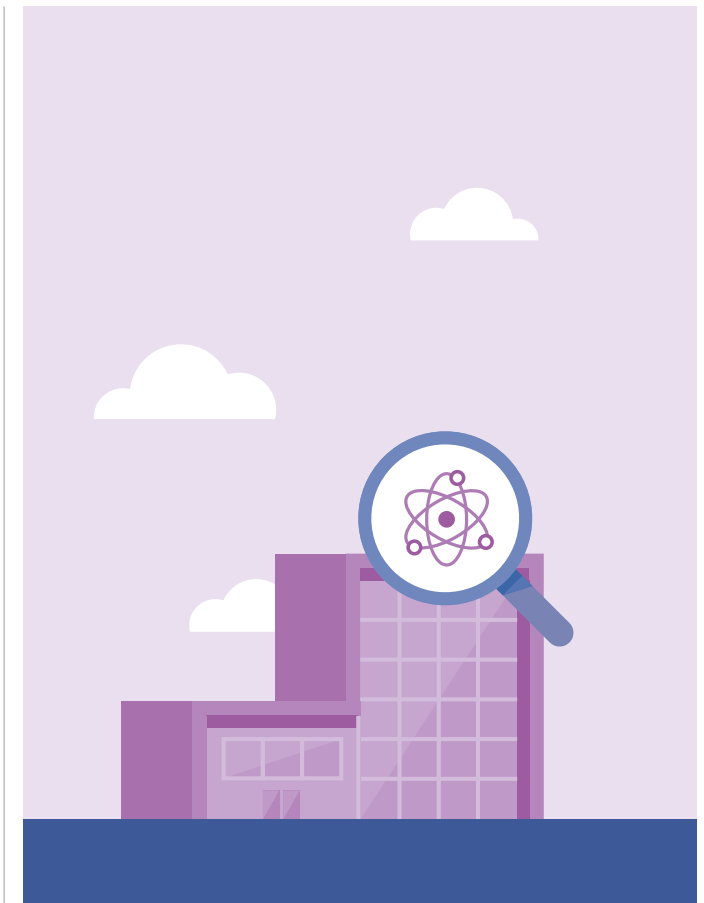
World leaders in science and research

The UK is second only to the United States for producing Nobel Prize winners. Our universities are dynamic hubs for ideas, innovation and research.

The UK cannot stand still if we are to remain competitive as a country and if we want to help tackle global problems like climate change. We need ambitious research and development (R&D) investment targets and to create the right conditions for the UK to be a magnet for global talent. This will help to build on the UK's strengths as a world leader in research, boosting economic growth and productivity in all regions and nations of the UK.

Investing 2.4% of GDP in UK research is vital to keep up with other countries like China or the United States, but it will not guarantee that the UK remains one of the undisputed leaders. Bringing R&D spend up to 2.4% will only mean that the UK spends the average amount that the OECD group of developed countries do. If we are to be better than average then the UK needs to make sure that the best and brightest from around the world choose to come here. Otherwise we will fall behind.

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World leaders in science and research

We want the government's vision to include:

Increased investment in research

- ✓ making sure universities can continue to get funding from the EU's Horizon Europe programme.
- ✓ reaching the target of 2.4% of GDP invested in UK research and development by 2027 by increasing, year on year, public investment in R&D by £1.39bn from the 2020–21 spending review. This amounts to £20bn of additional funding over a five-year period and means that the UK stays at the forefront of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence.
- ✓ growth in the flexible, excellence-driven research funding for universities (known as Quality Related research). In England funding should rise to £2bn ensuring it at least keeps pace with inflation.

- ✓ doubling the Strength in Places Fund run by UKRI to £240m, supporting local growth through science and research and spreading opportunity so that all parts of the UK have a chance to lead innovation.
- ✓ long-term funding of Official Development Assistance (ODA) research through the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund so that the UK's universities can help the world's poorest.
- ✓ preparing for the longer-term goal of increasing the amount of GDP invested in research and development to 3% by 2034 at the latest.

Growing the UK's research workforce

- ✓ increasing the number of scientists and researchers by at least an additional 260,000 by 2027 to build the capacity required to reach the 2.4% target. Innovation requires human brain power, not just money.
- ✓ attracting global talent through increased funding for international fellowships for researchers and scholarships for talented post-graduate research students.

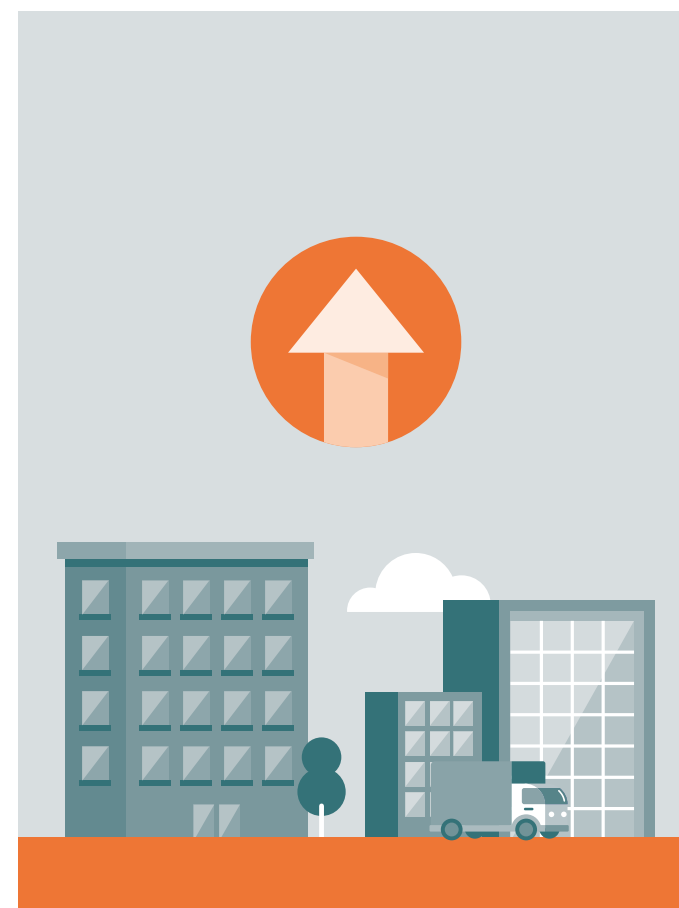
A prosperous UK post-Brexit

Putting universities at the heart of any post-Brexit settlement will help the UK to create opportunities for trade, to build networks and partnerships and to create opportunities to grow international collaboration following our exit from the European Union.

The UK's universities are already a global success story and the envy of much of the world. For 'Global Britain' to be more than a slogan, we need to reinforce this key advantage. In an ever-more connected world, we need to make sure that as we leave the EU our ties across borders are strengthened, not loosened – and that academic cooperation, collaboration and exchange between the UK and our EU partners endures and grows. The UK's regions have benefited significantly from The European Structural and Investment Fund.

This money is given to local areas for innovation, businesses, skills and creating jobs. When we leave the EU, the UK needs its own fund to keep this investment going, and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must benefit from this fund too.

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A prosperous UK post-Brexit

The government should commit to:

Continued access to EU funding

- ✓ securing full association to the next EU Framework Programme, Horizon Europe, and making sure there is – at a minimum – no decline in the total funding available for big, international projects of the sort that Horizon 2020 has provided.
- ✓ creating a UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) that provides equivalent alternative domestic funds at a UK and devolved administration level.

Ease of movement for staff and students

- ✓ an immigration system that facilitates and promotes academic collaboration and exchange among students, researchers and scientists.
- ✓ securing ongoing full UK participation in the next Erasmus+ programme, which allows university students and staff to move between universities across Europe.

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