



Universities UK

# RECOVERY, SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND OPPORTUNITY

A VISION FOR UNIVERSITIES

SUMMARY



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# INTRODUCTION

## **Covid-19 has had - and continues to have – a unique and extraordinary impact on all of our lives.**

The years ahead are set to be a time of unparalleled change, challenge, and opportunity. Universities will be at the heart of not just a recovery, but new ways to invest in our people and local communities, our world-leading research and creating a more equal, healthier, and sustainable future for the next generation.

The UK government will be making significant decisions on the future of higher education in its next spending review and response to the Augar review. In this [vision](#) we set out how universities can step up and lead the way when it comes to the levelling up agenda, skills, social justice, research and creating new opportunities for everyone – from local communities to the global stage. This summary spotlights some of the ways this vision recommends that government support can help universities fulfil their potential.

# 1

## ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND LEVELLING UP



**The current pandemic has left some roles redundant while leaving many to adapt to new and different roles and ways of working.**

Universities can let people study throughout their lives and retrain to meet new skills needs. They can also support those individuals and communities who feel left behind when it comes to access to education and their career prospects, particularly in the wake of Covid-19.

**The government can support this by taking the following steps:**

- › **Expanding financial support** for higher education so there is greater access to studying shorter courses from levels 4/5 up to postgraduate study – specifically removing the requirement to study at an intensity of 25% or greater of a full-time equivalent course and to follow a full course for a specified qualification.
- › **Formally recognising the level 4/5 components** of an undergraduate degree rather than viewing them as non-completion of a degree and reviewing how those studying flexibly are counted in performance indicators and other metrics.
- › **Supporting a national intern scheme**, getting highly skilled graduates into companies to help them thrive. There is the potential for the Kickstarter Scheme to be supported by existing university-run schemes and universities would also commit to invest to expand such schemes.
- › **Create an innovative transformation fund** where universities and others could bid for a range collaborative activity that would prove to achieve outcomes including economic recovery through and enhancing local and regional growth and enterprise.

## 2

## EQUAL CHANCES: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND TRANSFORMING LIVES



**We want to create a future where anyone with the potential can succeed, regardless of their background, by improving university access, participation, and student success for underrepresented groups.**

Through the [UUK fair admissions review](#) we will soon announce a set of reforms that puts students and applicants at the heart of the system.

### **Government can commit to:**

- › **Continuing funding for HE-FE-school partnerships** once the OfS' Uni Connect programme comes to an end in 2021. This offers activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. This should include high-need schools, given the specific barriers they face.
- › **Introducing targeted maintenance grants** for those that need them the most, including those who wish to study more flexibly.
- › **Maintaining remaining government funding** per student and the premium or supporting those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.
- › **Ensuring there are no barriers to access** through the imposition of student number caps (in England).

## 3

## A HIGH-QUALITY UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS



**Students, the public and employers must have confidence in the value of a degree and that classifications are a fair and accurate reflection of students' attainment.**

Universities are continually reflecting on and looking to improve the quality of their offer across the courses they deliver.

To support this, UUK is exploring development of a sector-led Charter for reviewing the value of courses. This would provide a way of assessing courses to make sure they are in the student interest.

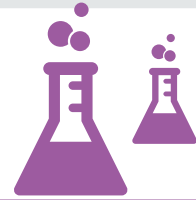
Universities have agreed [new principles](#) to tackle grade inflation to improve transparency, fairness and reliability in the way they award degrees. Degree classifications are featured explicitly in some university league tables.

### **Our recommendations to government include:**

- › **Engaging with league table providers** to address any perverse incentives to prioritise an increase in upper degree awards.
- › **Working with students and universities on proposed reforms of National Student Survey (NSS)** to ensure it can continue to play a role in driving up quality and providing useful information to students while keeping burden to a minimum.

# 4

## WORLD-BEATING RESEARCH



### The Prime Minister has committed that the UK becomes a global “science superpower”.

He states that the benefits of this investment and status must be more widely felt across the UK, making sure our research maximises the benefits to the economy, society, and people’s everyday lives.

#### To fully unleash our local and global potential, we want to see the government commit to:

- › **Ensuring that research funders meet more of the cost of research**, and boost the growth in the flexible, excellence-driven research funding for universities (known as quality-related research) with an above inflationary increase.
- › **Growing and setting out longer term funding commitments for the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)** in England. The removal of the lower thresholds in the fund should be considered, enabling smaller, research active universities to drive growth and support the recovery in their localities.
- › **Developing regionally focused research hubs** which would focus on pooling the research strengths of a region and help drive innovation in the local economy.

## 5

## THE UK'S GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE POSITION



### Universities must be global in their influence and impact, attracting talent and investment from around the world.

We cannot fulfil our goals of leading the world in science, research, and the arts if we make it too difficult for people to study, work and live here. With the UK having left the EU, the UK's university sector is a key national asset and a major competitive advantage for the country.

#### To help grow our education exports and attract, nurture and retain global talent, government can:

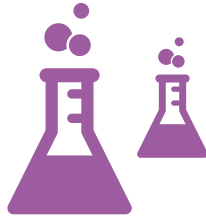
- **Invest £12.5 million to create up to 2,500 new scholarships** targeted at EU students, co-funded by universities.
- **Enhance efforts to promote the UK higher education offer overseas** by increasing investment in Study UK to £20m a year.
- **Establish a one-stop-shop through the Office for Talent** to provide immigration and resettlement advice to prospective applicants to the UK.
- **Bringing visa costs in line with international competitors:** costs associated with coming to the UK are very high compared to our competitors.

#### To enhance the scale and impact of international research collaboration, mobility, and partnerships, Government action should:

- **Prioritise full Association** to Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.
- **Ensure that that funded contingency plans are in place** should Association not be possible.
- **Develop a new global prestige research fund** to attract and retain global talent to pursue new, blue sky research ideas in the UK and growing the range and scope of system-to-system funding agreements with other funders.

## The vision also sets out the role of universities in other societal challenges including:

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### Improving health and wellbeing

Universities will increase their role in training up our doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals with government support and funding needed to grow the number of health care programmes and social care placements. This must include investment in teaching capacity.

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### Addressing climate change

On climate change, we propose that through the new National Skills Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund there could be routes for universities to work with business, particularly SMEs, to develop workforce capability and support low carbon business transformation.

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### Culture and community

And among our recommendations on culture and community, government should work with education, business, and the public sectors to get behind the delivery of the national languages strategy so the UK can become a linguistic powerhouse.

The recommendations in this summary are part of a suite of commitments and ideas from the sector in our vision and the full version can be found [here](#).



Universities UK is the collective voice of 140 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our mission is to create the conditions for UK universities to be the best in the world; maximising their positive impact locally, nationally and globally. Universities UK acts on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution.



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