

Further information

Further details about each of these policy recommendations are available in policy reports on the 1994 Group website.

www.1994group.ac.uk/publications

1994 group >

Established to promote excellence in research and teaching. To enhance student and staff experience within our universities and to set the agenda for higher education.

The 1994 Group

The 1994 Group represents 19 of UK's leading student-focused, research-intensive universities. It was established in 1994 to promote excellence in University research and teaching.

The 1994 Group represents: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Institute of Education University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of York.

Advice for an Incoming Government

Policies to support high quality Higher Education

1994 group >

www.1994group.ac.uk

Policies to Support High Quality Higher Education

The UK's universities are world class. Our higher education sector is diverse, dynamic, impactful and accessible. Recent success has been built on a stable base of unprecedented levels of government investment over the last decade.

However, our universities now face a number of critical challenges. Student expectations are rising, applications to higher education are at record levels and university finances are under intense pressures. Higher Education institutions must do more to ensure fair access. The economy and society demand greater impact from university research. Years of rising investment are being reversed as Government cuts public funding for Higher Education at a time when universities are being asked to deliver more for students, taxpayers, business and society.

Following the general election of summer 2010, a new government, of whichever political persuasion, must work with universities to address these urgent challenges.

This paper sets out the 1994 Group's policy recommendations in five key areas to support high quality Higher Education and enhance the UK's universities.

- > Quality, Diversity, Autonomy and Internationalisation
- > Enhancing the Student Experience
- > Research Excellence, Economic and Social Impact
- > Fair Access
- > Sustainable Funding

Quality, Diversity, Autonomy and Internationalisation

There should be four principles underpinning the next Government's Higher Education policy. The Government must:

- > **prioritise maintaining the academic quality of UK universities.** Quality is paramount if the UK's universities are to remain internationally competitive and continue to deliver research and teaching to meet student expectations and the nation's needs.
- > **promote the diversity and differentiation** of task and mission which underpins the excellence of Higher Education in the UK. Not all universities are the same – they should not all be expected to succeed at the same level in the same tasks.
- > **ensure institutional autonomy** so that universities can operate innovatively and flexibly to respond to changing needs of their students, the economy and society.
- > **support internationalisation** so that UK students benefit from engaging in an internationally rich learning environment, to strengthen global Higher Education partnerships and to build on the UK's success in attracting international students.

Enhancing the Student Experience

Students are right to expect a very high quality academic experience. Universities must put student experience at the centre of their mission and deliver on this. Many institutions have launched ambitious plans to meet the increased expectations of students, enhance employability and improve learning and teaching. Although much of the responsibility to enhance the student experience lies with universities, there is a key role for Government in supporting this progress.

The Government must:

- > **place enhancing the student experience at the heart of their strategy for Higher Education** and work with universities to enhance graduate employability.
- > **strengthen the information available to all prospective students** about the student experience and employability prospects at all universities, and publish this in a clear and accessible way.
- > **create incentives for employers to become involved in co-curricular programmes** such as developing a scheme in which government matches employers' contributions to university employability awards.
- > **break down the barriers between part-time and full-time study** to create a flexible system that caters for people with different needs.
- > **introduce a new quality threshold on PhD** provision to ensure the best experience for all PhD students.

Research Excellence, Economic and Social Impact

Universities are vital to the UK's capacity to meet current and future national and global challenges and to drive economic growth. Their world-class, innovative research underpins our prosperity and improves our quality of life.

The Government must:

- > **direct research funding to ensure maximum economic and social impact both now and long term.**
- > **maintain research concentration based on excellence by funding the very best research ideas** but not spreading resources so thinly that we risk damaging our world-class research areas within our research-intensive universities.
- > **continue investment in world-leading research in arts, humanities and social sciences, alongside investment in STEM subjects.** All disciplines are needed to address global challenges and ensure the UK's future prosperity.
- > **retain the dual support system of research funding to allow universities the autonomy to invest in new and emerging areas** and a significant funding stream for fundamental, curiosity-driven research to provide answers to tomorrow's problems.
- > **provide support for the development of new researchers through ring-fenced funding** to ensure that we have graduates with the right level of skills and knowledge to replenish the research base and provide leaders for the UK's workforce.
- > **maintain the Higher Education Innovation Fund** to encourage knowledge transfer between universities and business.

Fair Access and Widening Participation

Every effort must be made to ensure fair access for students from all socio-economic backgrounds. Higher Education institutions are offering a wide range of initiatives to widen participation. Government must work with universities and schools to make improvements in some areas.

The Government must:

- > **continue to exempt students from the poorest families from tuition fees** and ensure that universities target bursaries to cover costs of students most in need of financial support.
- > **support the present system of variable bursaries and scholarships** in which universities develop individual bursary schemes to meet the specific needs of all their students.
- > **resist calls for a national bursary scheme** as it would seriously compromise the direct relationship between a student's fees and their education.
- > **enhance advice and guidance at schools to raise the aspirations of young people to progress to Higher Education** and to raise awareness of the range of bursaries available.
- > **increase the role of schools in measuring the impact of outreach activity.**
- > **ensure that the funding system minimises barriers to progression onto masters' degrees and doctoral study.**

Sustainable Funding

Government investment coupled with income from tuition fees has helped universities to enhance the student experience and deliver high quality research and teaching. However, higher education institutions finances are under intense pressures as student numbers and expectations rise. Years of rising investment are being reversed as Government cuts public funding for Higher Education at a time when universities are being asked to deliver more for students, taxpayers, business and society.

The Government must:

- > **stop the current stream of announcements of funding cuts to Higher Education** and address the uncertainty over future funding.
- > **maintain the unit of resource for teaching to ensure high quality and deliver maximum impact.**
- > **consider the recommendations of the funding review and implement a sustainable and robust system of funding** that both resolves our immediate crisis and delivers a genuine vision for Higher Education that can be shared by institutions, students, taxpayers and government.
- > **provide incentives to boost private income streams** such as the matched funding scheme for voluntary giving to universities.
- > **create an environment that recognises the value of Higher Education as a major UK export,** welcomes international students and encourages expansion overseas.