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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The state of student experience

Student experience now headlines the university agenda. The [6th Annual Student Experience Conference](#)—held last Thursday—stands as testament.

This was not always so. In fact, the 1994 Group came together in mutual recognition of the need for research-intensive universities to champion student experience. Back then, the idea that universities might cement their elite credentials through the delivery of rich student experiences was novel.

But what is a ‘good’ student experience? And how do we deliver it? I believe three overarching principles should guide further action in the sector.

First, the relationship between students and their *almae matres* should be meaningful and long-term. It should start before a student’s enrolment and continue after their graduation.

In the early stages universities should engage in outreach—they mi-

ght sponsor academies or summer schools; then, once students have enrolled, universities should deliver a rich *campus experience* alongside a rigorous academic one, and, finally, once students have graduated, universities should help them build a career—through specialised careers advice, internships and industry connections.

Second, students ought to be valued as important members of the academic community themselves. [1994 Group institutions](#) are at an advantage here: Our smaller campuses are conducive to tight-knit academic communities—with few barriers between students and researchers.

But we must incentivise further engagement. We might take cues from the US National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE goes beyond asking student how ‘satisfied’ they are—an imprecise notion—and, instead, calculates hard figures for academic challenge, active learning, and student-staff interaction.

Finally, student experience should be integral to institutions—it should not be a strategic ‘add on’. Recently, some have worried that signalling a commitment to student experience might mean abandoning research focus.

This is ludicrous. The fact that 1994 Group members *are* amongst the UK’s leading research institutions informs and shapes our students’ experiences. In particular, students are given a unique opportunity to work alongside researchers who are generating new knowledge daily. A commitment to a rich student experience is a reaffirmation of a commitment to research.

Taken together, if UKHE is to meet accelerating student expectations, we must work intelligently—guided by these principles.

Read the speech Alex delivered at the 6th Annual Student Experience Conference. ■

FORTNIGHTLY HE NEWS IN BRIEF

11 new universities, including first for-profit

In the biggest shake-up since 1992, 11 HEIs have been awarded university status. Most of the new additions are smaller specialist institutions, like the Royal Agricultural College.

But the College of Law (CoL) is also part of this mix: Montagu Private

Equity, owner of electronics superstore Maplin, has been given clearance to turn CoL into the UK’s first profit-making university. It previously operated as a charity.

Rt Hon David Willetts, MP, Minister of State for Universities, said the new universities would bring welcome diversity to the

sector. [more in *THE*, *The Guardian*]

Boris attacks student visa restrictions

Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, warned the Government that a student visa clampdown was sending the “wrong signals” to international students.

Mr Johnson noted that the number of Indian students studying in the UK fell 9% this year; he expected the figure to plummet an extra 25% next year.

[more in *The Independent*, *The Guardian*]

International students brought £2.5b into London last year. ■

POLICY WAVES

Emerging consensus on postgraduate provision

Postgraduates fuel the UK economy.

Masters and doctoral programmes deliver highly skilled graduates that form the basis of the future research base and skills needed to help drive the increasingly knowledge-based economy. And yet, at the same time as the Government ‘prioritises’ economic growth, postgraduate provision languishes.

In February, the 1994 Group published a [report warning of an impending “postgraduate crisis”](#).

The report argued that cuts to postgraduate teaching would force universities to raise tuition fees on postgraduate students—to be paid upfront—just as they faced heavier undergraduate debt burdens. We warned that this risked deterring talented, poorer students from postgraduate study.

Now the [Higher Education Commission \(HEC\)](#), the [British Academy](#), and the [National Union of Students \(NUS\)](#) have echoed our warning. All three have published reports highlighting the difficult postgraduate funding market: Research council funding is limited; bank-sponsored Personal Career Development Loans (PCDLs) are uncompetitive, and self-funding—through personal savings or credit card loans—would limit access to those most able to afford it.

Our original publication called on Government to consider a number of proposals, including leveraging public stakes in RBS and Lloyds to negotiate better PCDL terms, incentivising businesses to sponsor individual students and courses, and supporting flexible study options, so students could work alongside study.

The HEC, NUS and the British Academy offer several alternatives including introducing state-backed postgraduate loans. If paid back at a reasonable rate of interest (once the graduate earns over a certain threshold), there would be a zero net cost to the Government.

If the UK is to remain a research trailblazer, the Government must take action now. It is frankly economically and socially unacceptable that talented students cannot afford postgraduate education.

The Government must listen to the unified voice of the sector; it must consider all the options on the table.

Read Alex’s article on postgraduate funding in [The Huffington Post](#). ■

1994 GROUP IN THE NEWS

Cameron must stand up for European research budget

In *Research Fortnight* Alex Bols, Executive Director of the 1994 Group, called on David Cameron to safeguard the European research budget.

Although Horizon 2020, Europe’s main research funding instrument, has been allocated €80b—a €30b increase on its predecessor—€13b of this figure is earmarked for projects that once

fell outside the research budget, including the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor and the Innovation Framework Programme.

Mr Bols called on Cameron to make the case for shifting these projects outside the Horizon 2020 funding, writing that “[t]here is no obvious champion calling on the government to take a line on European research funding, so those involved in higher education need to step up.”

1994 Group welcomes intervention on postgraduate funding

In the *Huffington Post* Alex Bols [welcomed the Higher Education Commission’s \(HEC\) report into postgraduate education](#).

Rate of postgraduate study in the UK trails behind that of comparable economies. While 50-70% of students go onto further study in France and Germany, the same figure is 10% in the UK.

The editorial, and a

subsequent [press release](#), stressed that the Government must keep all options on the table (*see above*).

Alex Bols delivers address on the future of student experience

Alex Bols delivered a speech at the 6th Annual Student Experience Conference that was [covered in Times Higher Education](#). The speech called on delegates to focus on three student experience priorities going forward (*see p.1*). ■

HE AGENDA

01/12/12 - Registration deadline for ‘QAA Education Review Feedback Conference’

03/12/12 - HEA workshop: ‘Addressing the Gulf between Perspectives on Employability’

03/12/12 - UKCGE workshop: ‘Meeting the Needs of PGT Students’

04, 05, 07/12/12 - HEA and British Council workshop: ‘European HE

Reforms Opportunities and Implications’

05/12/12 - **HM Treasury Autumn Statement**

05/12/12 - Education select committee on KS4 exams.

06/12/12 - British Council Bologna workshop: ‘Developing Successful Joint Programmes’

06/12/12 - HEFCE lecture: ‘The

Way Forward for STEM Subjects in HE’

11/12/12 - UUK immigration workshop: ‘Managing Partnership Arrangements’

12/12/12 - HEA workshop: ‘What Makes a Good Placement?’

18/12/12 - HEFCE and HEA conference: ‘Widening Participation 2012 and Beyond’ ■