

Higher Education reform

Improving the quality of student outcomes

Student Number Controls

We do not consider SNCs a proportionate measure in reducing the small volume of lower quality provision, particularly if they are to be applied on a blanket basis. As far as we can see, SNCs purely serve to control numbers, not quality. The guidance states that 'by consulting on SNCs the Government is not taking a position on what the correct proportion of people going to university should be' but implementing an SNC would mean that this would have to be considered. Successful student and graduate outcomes are already key metrics for all universities and entry requirements are set by the institution to ensure that students are selected based on the likelihood of them being able to successfully complete the course. We have established expertise in managing this effectively and maximising access to the high standard of education we provide; we consider SNCs more likely to limit access rather than improve it.

Equally we would have concern on the design of any SNCs and the implication of this; the more granular the level, the greater the complexity (and longer lead time) for implementation and the greater the administrative burden. Certainly were SNCs to be introduced, a long lead-in time for universities would be required to manage this additional burden. We would especially discourage very granular level SNCs. We are not in favour of individual providers being set the total number of students they can recruit for certain subjects based on an assessment of student/graduate outcomes at a national level – this doesn't equate provider and quality to numbers. It would be much more equitable to relate it to the individual provider's graduate outcomes.

In the event that SNCs were introduced, we would recommend that outcomes should be considered at individual institutions rather than nationally to ensure that any decision is based on the actual quality of the course at a particular provider and its impact on student outcomes.

As mentioned above, this change would cause a significant administrative burden therefore we would request a long lead in time to amend systems and set in place processes within individual institutions to monitor. The introduction of SNCs is likely to disproportionately impact those from disadvantaged backgrounds and this should be carefully considered as an unintended consequence.

Minimum Entry Requirements

We would not support the introduction of any MERs. We would anticipate a disproportionate impact on Widening Participation students which should be considered. At Nottingham, whilst we have a minimum entry requirement in GCSE English, we only have a minimum entry requirement in Maths GCSE in a few courses where it is particularly relevant.

As an institution, we set entry requirements which are based on the ability to achieve on the course and we are therefore not admitting students without the required level. If MER were in place, we would certainly expect exceptions for Foundation years, Mature Students, exceptional cases for WP students that are managed by the University and exceptions for students who have studied in education systems which do not have Maths/English GCSE equivalents and who only report results at Level 3.

Entry requirements and a review of student outcomes should be used to effect this change, not artificially capping choice.

For example, many University courses do not require a grade 4 in Maths GCSE (or equivalent), in order for students to be successful and entrants without grade 4 Maths should not be impacted in terms of their ability to engage in the course or secure a good outcome.

In terms of scope, we would expect consistent application across full and part time studies as well as recommending an exemption for any student with existing level 4 and 5 qualifications, given they have already demonstrated successful study at this level.

Access to HE

Foundation Years at the University of Nottingham provide an alternative route for diverse intakes of high-quality students who have the potential to succeed but who would normally be denied the opportunity to enter their chosen undergraduate course. The impact is high on students from ethnic minority backgrounds, mature students and students with a declared disability. The benefits of foundation years to the individual, the institution and to society are clear to us with excellent retention and outcome rates. At Nottingham, 85% of our foundation year students continue onto an undergraduate degree with us, with many others choosing undergraduate opportunities elsewhere. In 2018/19, under 1% of all students who had progressed from a foundation year at the University of Nottingham the previous year were deemed “non-continued”; and typically over 70% of home students who have studied a foundation year graduate with a good degree (1st class or 2:i).

Ensuring high-quality provision in foundation years is critical to build on this success. Students are taught by leading academics with full access to university teaching and learning and pastoral facilities. Within our foundation year provision we proactively review changing expectations and learning requirements of students to implement new pedagogy and are early adopters of emerging digital technologies to provide the highest standard of learning experience. Foundation years have considerable success in exposing students to university community and culture, allowing them to integrate into the University at an early stage, having an instrumental bearing on the retention and outcome successes we see. Suggestions that this provision can be provided at a similar funding model to FE Access Courses demonstrates a misunderstanding of these additional aspects and benefits of foundation years.

Foundation years play a critical part in the University’s widening participation agenda. Across all of our foundation year programmes, between 50% and 100% of students are from a WP background. We support the government’s vision of ensuring access as far as possible but do not agree that this is achieved through reduced funding and, as such, reduced provision. We do recognise the discrepancy in foundation year students accumulating higher fees through an additional year’s study and are ourselves looking at means of addressing this with consideration of a shorter summer foundation programme to minimise financial commitments for WP students. Institutions have such autonomy to ensure such provision is not financially detrimental (or off-putting) to WP students. However, setting an expectation that the same provision (and therefore successful outcomes) can be achieved with reduced funding is mistaken.

We welcome the proposal for a national scholarship scheme running in addition to the scholarship provision already available from individual institutions.

Funding changes

In terms of the funding model set out by the Government, we have real concerns about the impact that will be felt by students in terms of the quality of provision which can continue to be provided. In looking to make efficiencies, it is unavoidable that the student experience is impacted as well as research activity. We respectfully ask the Government to consider the

knock-on effects of limitations to funding now and the short-term savings on society and the economy longer-term in restricting the ambitions of Higher Education, defined within this paper as “a great British success story”.

We also have concerns about the impact of proposed funding on Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences subjects despite the considerable value, including graduate outcomes, of these degrees to individuals and society at large. Arts, Humanities and Social Science degrees emphasise the importance of research skills, synthesising material, reflection, careful construction of arguments, and clear communication – all of which are extremely valuable in most graduate careers. They teach students cultural awareness, flexibility, and adaptability. By doing this they prepare graduates for a very wide range of careers, for life-long learning, and for other socially useful activities. Some Arts degrees also develop more specific skills, such as in languages.

Arts and Social Sciences graduates have very similar employment rates to STEM graduates as [research conducted by The British Academy in 2020](#) demonstrates. London Economics has also demonstrated that Arts and Social Sciences graduates are more likely to change career sector voluntarily and without wage penalty than STEM graduates '[suggesting greater flexibility, and soft skills \(and as a result, choice\) to thrive in different industries and roles](#)'. Their earnings also compare well to those of graduates in other disciplines. For example, [median earnings five years after graduation are higher for graduates in Languages and Area Studies than for Law graduates](#).

Arts graduates are comfortable discussing questions of meaning and value and understanding how these questions arise in other areas. These skills are vital in confronting the major social challenges facing the world — for example, in tackling climate change or injustice, or [humanising](#) new technology. Companies and societies benefit from diversity in educational background of graduates — which may explain why several commentators have noted an interest in Arts graduates among large tech companies, [according to the Harvard Business Review](#).