

British Universities under Threat

A New Future for UK Higher Education

Over 500 university staff have joined two recent on-line meetings of the ***Convention for Higher Education*** to draw up the outline of a rescue plan for the HE sector in the UK. The plan (see the statement of principles below and attached) argues for seven key developments:

- **properly funded teaching and research** in universities to play a central role in reskilling the population during the recession after the COVID-19 crisis, and the advancement of knowledge via academic freedom of research;
- **tuition fees to be reduced by 30%** next year, and while on-line teaching is required, and a **reintroduction of maintenance grants**;
- an urgent **address to the inequalities of access and treatment** in the sector, and to the problem of **precarious contracts**;
- a reduction in the **excessive managerial and some professorial salaries** through a maximum ratio of 6:1 between the highest and lowest pay in each institution;
- a restitution of **recruitment limits for every university** to deter competition and poaching;
- a **welcome for international scholars and students**, and an end to the 'hostile environment' for those from overseas; and
- the reinstatement of **scholarly leadership in universities**, and the **democratisation of their governance**.

The aim is to get the plan discussed in every university across the sector, endorsed by as many individual staff as possible, and adopted by school boards and faculty boards.

Already in difficulty from the consequences of market failure in the Higher Education sector, up to 30 universities now face the possibility of insolvency in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. The next generation of aspirant students faces the possibility that many of its target courses will be closed, and a sharp increase in competition for places on those that survive. Many older universities that have come to rely on overseas student recruitment, including some of the most prestigious in the UK, face deficits that will quickly overwhelm their reserves; and many of the new universities will face crippling losses of income as applicants 'trade up' in Clearing to get more sought-after places, and many students choose to defer their entry. A threat hangs over the jobs of 30 – 60,000 staff across all roles.

The Government has refused to offer bailouts at this stage, and has hinted that any future support will come with strings attached, likely to include differential fees, closures and mergers, a rebalancing of provision towards degrees with higher earnings potential, imposition of teaching-only institutions, and a shift from academic to vocational courses.

Many students would then face a reduction of provision of their chosen studies, and would find themselves forced to study other subject areas, or non-academic, vocational courses. Many academic staff would find their research careers ended, and many more staff would face unemployment in the coming recession.

The plan will be circulating throughout the university sector from the beginning of June, and the Convention will hold a recall on-line meeting to detail and refine the plan, and to build a campaign of support for it.

Convention for Higher Education
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