

HUBS Executive Committee Watching Briefs

Context:

The HUBS Executive Committee have agreed that members of the committee would take on “Watching Briefs”. The aim of this initiative is to support Objective C2 in the HUBS Constitution:

“to enable input from the Heads and Subject Leads in the HE sector into policy formulation and responses for the Society and its Member Organisations”

The role of the brief holder is to:

- Take note of items of interest in the education policy update and science policy newsletter
- Subscribe to WonkHE, and keep up to date on developments
- Engage with relevant Royal Society of Biology staff member for their brief who will share relevant education policy updates, science policy newsletter and relevant consultation responses to inform the brief
- Consult with HUBS Executive Committee and wider HUBS members, if needed, to inform a HUBS viewpoint
- Engage with relevant consultation and inquiry responses, providing a HUBS view.

HUBS Executive Committee have identified the following briefs and current authors are:

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Professor Steve Bevan sbevan@lincoln.ac.uk	Office for Students Teaching Excellence Framework	3
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Consultation responses page for formal RSB positions and responses can be found at:

<https://www.rsb.org.uk/policy/consultations/consultation-responses>

HUBS members are encouraged to open dialogue directly with authors of briefs and copy all correspondence to consultation@rsb.org.uk

Briefs will be updated at regular intervals.

Watching Brief – Office for Students

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April 2019

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So, the Office for Students is now a year old, and what an eventful first year it has been. It is fair to say that the early promises of the OfS to be a regulator rather than a critical friend have continued, although there is still some hope that the bark may be worse than the bite when it comes to Institutional failings and Institutional support. Like it or not Universities are major employers in their region and the political damage caused by a failure, some believe, is more likely to lead to mergers and takeovers rather than Institutional closure. It would be ironic to see a body specifically designed in support of the student interest to condone an Institution failing to deliver its core mission via such an outcome.

The regulatory aspect of the OfS continues, with responsibility for creating a register of providers – a compulsory requirement for those Institutions wishing to access public funds via student loans. This provides a gateway mechanism by which Universities can be required to provide a range of actions and measures to enable continued inclusion on the list. Such a mechanism has the potential to improve the student experience, although it may also encourage a ‘one size fits all’ formulaic response to meet inclusion criteria if not carefully managed.

The OfS continues to flex its muscles over a range of sector issues, not all of which sit well with Universities themselves. The latest example of regulation (or interference, depending on one’s viewpoint) relates to student admissions and, the use of unconditional offers to attract students in an increasingly competitive environment. Universities set their own entry requirements informed by a complex web of factors including but not limited to league tables, competitor actions locally and nationally, recruitment targets and financial position. Like it or not students’ fees are a significant contributor to University coffers and while not profit generating for shareholders, many Institutions have future expansions strategies built based on predicted student numbers. Failure to reach these targets can have far reaching consequences, so anything which upsets carefully laid plans is unlikely to be viewed favourably.

As the OfS move into its second full year and becomes more established as a regulator, we can expect more challenge to the HE sector under the guise of student enhancement. Whether competition really will result in institutional change remains to be seen however, with autonomous HE providers keeping a wary eye on any attempt to curb their independence.

Watching Brief – Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

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‘A week is a long time in politics’ said Harold Wilson. The same might be said of Higher Education, where a multitude of stories vie for attention. Topping the list is the imminent (possibly) Augur report into student fees, with multiple leaks suggesting fees being cut, support for students with lower grades being withdrawn or variable fee support by subject area. There are suggestions that the Treasury and the DfE are at loggerheads over the right approach; and that as a personal project of the current (at the time of writing) PM, it may be wise to establish who is likely to hold the keys to number 10 in 3 months’ time before backing a policy which may be out of favour with any new incumbent.

Additional stories vying for attention in the HE sector include VC pay and remuneration (still); REF and the imposition of non-research contracts on staff; the controversial decision to allow research from staff made redundant to still be included in the REF by their former institution; and last but not least the financial health of the sector as a whole and individual institutions, together with whether they should be allowed to fail. One might be forgiven therefore for thinking that the Teaching Excellence Framework had been rather side-lined recently, left to wither on the vine as it were. The TEF still persists however, albeit with a somewhat unclear future direction.

Originally proposed in 2016 as a measure of Teaching Excellence and a mechanism by which fee increases could be implemented, the original TEF award were made in 2017 and while the fee element has been removed, TEF has continued to evolve. The most recent iteration has seen the introduction of subject level TEF as a pilot scheme, with the promise that detailed feedback would be provided for those entering the pilot, but that awards would not be published for these pilot rounds. The carrot of extensive feedback on submissions is an attractive one for Institutions looking to protect their provider level TEF rating going forwards, and under the adage that ‘all advice is useful’ subject level TEF has been, if not embraced, then at least resignedly accepted, by most institutions.

Grumbles persist around the amount of effort required to prepare a submission, the ability of any such submission to actually measure ‘Teaching Quality’ and the appropriateness of how ‘subject level’ is actually defined; but until results from TEF4 are returned to providers and the quality and extent of feedback are determined, TEF is very much ‘steady as she goes’ from an Institutional perspective. While TEF may have significant impact in the medium term

on Institutional priorities, there are many more immediate concerns that mean TEF is less of a concern that perhaps it once was.

Watching Brief – Research Excellence Framework, REF2021

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Here, we summarise current information on two aspects of the REF, outputs and the Impact assessment.

All staff with a “significant responsibility for research” and being an independent researcher on the census date of 31st July 2020 are counted to calculate the total number of outputs to be submitted by a given institution to a given unit of assessment (UoA). A code of practice must be put in place by a given institution to identify which of its staff fall within or outside this category. This code of practice must be drafted, consulted upon and sent to the REF team by March 2019. It has been noted that there is potential for industrial action to delay this process, which will be more straight forward for some institutions over others, where it might pose a considerable burden.

The number of submitted outputs is defined as a minimum of 1 per staff member with a significant responsibility for research and a maximum of 5 with an average of 2.5 per FTE within the department. However, this can be reduced to 0 for an individual staff member if there has been a demonstrable impact of personal circumstances during the REF period that resulted in no REF returnable outputs being available for submission.

Outputs are not portable but if an eligible former member of staff generated an eligible output before they left the institution then this may be submitted in the pool of outputs for that institution. The REF guidance on outputs have added some flexibility to the open access requirements for a given output to be eligible for submission. This includes the ability of an institution to submit 5% of its outputs that do not comply with the open access restrictions. Outputs will be judged based on their rigour, significance and originality and given a score of 1* to 4*. Impact factors of journals will not be used but citation data may be used by the UoA. Main panel A has stated that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to UoAs 1-6 which fall under its remit. HUMBS members may wish to note that this guidance differs to that of the other main panels.

Impact now more important- to 25% of the REF weighting. Number of impact case studies also changes. Minimum of 2 case studies for up to 15FTE submitted then 1 additional case study per 15FTE up to 105FTE then 1 additional case study for every 50FTE submitted (so a submission of 300FTE will require 12 impact case studies).

For Impact- the initial decisions document from September 2017 states:

“A key recommendation of the Stern review was to ensure the REF could better capture the multiple and diverse pathways and mechanisms through which impact arises from a body of work, and through which real benefits to the UK and wider world are delivered. This aim was widely supported by respondents to the consultation, and the funding bodies will seek to implement this in the exercise. Impacts will also be rated as 1* to 4* and the criteria for impact are of ‘reach and significance’.

- Impact arising from public engagement. This has been made more explicitly approved as an impact in and of its own and not just as a demonstration of impact of a wider impact case study.

The **guidance on submitting impacts on teaching are widened** to include impacts **within**, as well as beyond, the submitting institution. Guidance on demonstrating evidence against the criteria for this type of impact have been submitted. Main panel A states its expectation that evidence for impact will include quantitative data. Main panel B explicitly makes mention of both qualitative as well as quantitative measures to demonstrate impact.

a. Impacts will remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the associated research has been conducted.

b. Impacts should be underpinned by excellent research, with ‘excellent’ research continuing to mean the quality of the research is at least equivalent to two star.

c. The excellent research underpinning impact case studies must have been produced during the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 across all UOAs. This will apply to all case studies, including examples continued or developed from REF 2014. The impacts described in case studies must have occurred within the period from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020”

Main panel A- which includes most UoAs of relevance to HUBS members have stated explicitly that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to their UoAs (1-6). This is a key difference to Main panel B (which includes Chemistry and Physics) where pedagogical research will be accepted to those sub-panels. However, impact case studies could include the results of pedagogical research where impact can be demonstrated, particularly in cases where practice has changed in the sector as a result of the research.

Watching Brief – The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

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The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) is a government proposal to monitor Knowledge Exchange activities within HEIs. It is an attempt to measure the third leg of HEIs' activities and will sit alongside REF and TEF.

There has been a good deal of debate about the purpose and value of a KEF, and about what the metrics might be. In January this year a [consultation document](#) was circulated to HEIs and other stakeholders, and responses were requested by March 14th. At the same time HEIs were invited to put themselves forward as pilot institutions to trial the metrics and process during the remainder of the 2018-19 academic year. Once it has been launched, KEF will be an **annual** process.

For 'fair comparison', the consultation document has grouped HEIs into clusters according to their size and primary business focus, and HEIs can challenge their grouping. The consultation is seeking responses to this clustering in terms of:

- Conceptual framework
- Variables chosen
- Whether members of a cluster see themselves as having similar characteristics to others in the cluster.

The metrics were chosen to be useful, robust, universal, timely and focussed. They focus on seven perspectives:

1. Research partnerships
2. Working with business
3. Working with the public and third sector
4. Enterprise and entrepreneurship
5. Local growth and regeneration
6. IP and commercialisation
7. Public and community engagement

The numbers submitted will be based on the three previous years' data and will be equally weighted. The submission will be accompanied by a narrative to provide context. The narratives will not be formally assessed but they will be fact-checked.

The output of the KEF will be a radar chart showing individual HEIs' scores in the seven perspectives in relation to the cluster mean. The outputs will be available on interactive dashboards which will allow the gross scores to be unpacked. There will not be an aggregate score so it is unclear how overall ranking will be established.

No date has yet been announced for publication of the results of the consultation, nor for the outcomes of the pilot scheme.

Watching Brief – Brexit and HE and Research

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BREXIT and HE and Research

The continued political and economic uncertainty created by the lack of agreement within the UK Parliament to endorse either the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement negotiated by the British Government, or to reach a consensus on an alternative way forward, has inevitably limited progress across a range of areas impacted significantly by Brexit including higher education and research.

Horizon Europe and Erasmus +

The UK universities minister, Chris Skidmore, has stated that one consequence of a lack of agreement is that talks on whether the UK will join the European Union's next research framework programme (Horizon Europe) post-Brexit may be delayed until November, and work on "strong domestic alternatives" to EU funding is needed. He made the comments in January in evidence to MPs on the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. There is still no certainty as to whether the UK will seek to, or be allowed to, associate to Horizon Europe which starts in January 2021.

Mr Skidmore also reported that he had commissioned the government's chief scientific adviser to evaluate alternatives to the proposed [£30,000 salary threshold](#) for skilled immigrants to enter the UK post-Brexit in light of the potential impact on higher education and research.

Meanwhile the UK government is intending to draw up plans for an alternative student mobility programme in case access to Erasmus+ is lost after Brexit. Addressing sector leaders at Universities UK's International Higher Education Forum in March, Mr Skidmore said that the UK was "open to exploring participation in the successor scheme to the current Erasmus+ programme" after the UK leaves the European Union. But, he added, the UK was "also considering a wide range of options with regards to the future of international exchange and collaboration in education and training, including a potential domestic alternative to the Erasmus+ programme".

"The potential benefits of the UK establishing its own international mobility scheme would include the ability to tailor the scheme to UK needs and target the funding where it is most needed," the minister said. He added that "I will be driving forward this work in the coming months."

The UK's future involvement in Erasmus+, which [accounts for more than half](#) of all international mobility of UK students, but which involves substantial net inward mobility to the

UK, has been [in doubt](#) ever since the UK voted to leave the EU. The UK has pledged to cover the funding of continued participation until the end of 2020 under the terms of its withdrawal agreement and has agreed to cover awards approved before exit day in the event of a no-deal Brexit. However, there is significant concern within the UK HE sector at the lack of progress on a domestic alternative, in the event that the UK decides not to participate further.

Peers have urged the UK government to seek full association to the Horizon Europe programme and also to the Erasmus+ mobility scheme and have said that they are “extremely concerned” by the failure to prepare no deal Brexit contingency plans for both. The House of Lords EU Home Affairs Sub-Committee made the recommendations in a report published on 12 February, following an inquiry into the implications of Brexit for the UK’s involvement in the EU programmes that was held late last year.

The Devolved Nations

In recognition of the potential differential impact of Brexit upon the devolved nations relative to England, the Learned Society of Wales, Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Irish Academy have come together to express their common concerns in a letter to the Secretaries of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Housing, Communities and Local Government, and also to the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The letter, which was forwarded in March, underlines the benefits which the European Union has brought to Higher Education and research and innovation in the United Kingdom and the need to ensure that the United Kingdom’s future relationship with the EU facilitates and maintains these positive benefits and experiences.

The three national academies state that membership of the EU has also been an important source of funding for higher education and emphasise that replacing this source of funding will be vital to the universities and the nations they represent. They note that expenditure from the Structural Funds in Wales and Northern Ireland has been highly significant for their universities and also represents an important income stream for further and higher education sectors across Scotland, particularly the University of the Highlands and Islands, supporting research capacity, infrastructure and skills. The academies recognise the importance of the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver prosperity throughout the UK and believe that its operation should respect the devolution settlement and that, to ensure progress in tackling inequalities, be no less in value than current EU Regional and Social funding.

Useful Links

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/brexit>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-driving-forward-plan-post-brexit-alternative-erasmus>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uk-working-domestic-alternatives-eu-research-funding>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/peers-extremely-concerned-over-lack-no-deal-planning-he>

<https://www.ria.ie/news/policy-and-international-relations/ria-joint-letter-royal-society-edinburgh-and-learned-society>

Watching Brief – Degree Apprenticeships

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A review of the apprenticeship levy is being undertaken by the Department for Education. In relation to this, a recent article by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers proposes that the apprenticeship levy should not be used to fund higher and degree apprenticeships (level 6 and 7) and should instead be used to support level 2 and 3 apprenticeships. The article can be found at:

<https://www.fenews.co.uk/fevoices/27347-top-end-apprenticeships-should-no-longer-be-levy-funded-to-stop-levy-going-into-the-red>

UVAC (the Universities and Vocational Awards Council) have responded, opposing the proposal; this can be found at: <https://feweeek.co.uk/2019/03/21/degree-apprenticeships-must-be-funded-through-the-levy/>

The UVAC response provides a good summary as to why this is the AELP approach is the wrong way forward and their argument is based on a productivity and social mobility perspective. A key point is that the apprenticeship levy was introduced in order to 'raise the level of employer investment in skills and tackle the UK's productivity gap'. AELP want funding to go to lower-level skills rather than aiming to develop a 'high-skill, high-productivity and high-wage economy'. The government's industrial strategy suggests that a lack of management skills is important in explaining the UK productivity gap and so a focus on high level management skills is a clear way to boost productivity. The AELP proposal is also misjudged with respect to social mobility. Higher and degree level apprenticeships are important for widening participation and social mobility e.g. attracting women into STEM subjects.

There is also a helpful blog by Tom McEwan (HEPI) entitled 'Are degree apprenticeships fit for purpose' and this also discusses skills shortages and social mobility (<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2019/02/22/are-degree-apprenticeships-fit-for-purpose/>) and reviews the report by the Higher Education Commission on 'Degree Apprenticeships: Up to Standard?'

(https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/sites/site_pc/files/report/1179/fieldreportdownload/hecdegreeapprenticeshipsfinalweb.pdf).

UUK launched a project entitled: 'The future of degree apprenticeships in England' with the aim of promoting the value of these apprenticeships and policies that will make sure they are successful. The work will be based on a survey that is currently being conducted with Universities and employers and a summit meeting – the outcome of this work should be available in the summer.

For the life sciences, the main standards are still Lab Scientist at level 6 and the Healthcare science practitioner at level 7; however, there are relatively few degree apprenticeship programmes currently being offered in these areas.

The QAA published a helpful document 'Quality Assuring Higher Education in Apprenticeships' covering: the responsibilities of HE providers, learning and teaching and assessing apprenticeships, managing provision with others, complaints and appeals, monitoring and review. This can be found at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/quality-assuring-higher-education-in-apprenticeships.pdf?sfvrsn=6e4cff81_26

Watching Brief – Scotland and Curriculum for Excellence

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Universities.

Scotland & Brexit: Concern over student visa plans

Universities are demanding urgent changes to student visa plans in the event of a no deal Brexit. The Home Office has said it will offer EU students temporary leave to remain in the UK for three years. The University of Glasgow principal, Prof Sir Anton Muscatelli, said that was "crass" because Scottish degrees typically take four years. The foreign secretary, Jeremy Hunt, said the UK government would "take full account" of Scottish concerns. Around 9% of Scottish university students are from EU countries outside the UK and more than 4,000 enrolled through the UCAS system last year.

Scottish degree courses are typically longer than three years, as are many specialist courses throughout the UK such as medicine, dentistry and engineering. Sir Anton, who also chairs the Russell Group of top UK research universities, wants the Home Office to reconsider its visa plan. The Russell Group previously described three-year visas as a "kick in the teeth" for Scottish Higher Education.

Scottish universities are worried that leaving the EU will make it harder for them to attract European students, staff and funding. They think student recruitment will be hampered further if there is a no deal departure because of the three-year visa plan.

Scottish Funding Council news.

In a challenging public sector funding environment, the SFC will be retaining teaching and research grants across the university sector at the same level as last year, while increasing funding for the college sector to meet the costs of national bargaining for lecturers and support staff. This year's funding announcement also sees the SFC increasing funding for student support, enabling the SFC to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Review of Student Support.

Sustained decline in Scotland's universities due to funding cuts.

Scotland's university sector is "a declining system under pressure" due to the pace of funding cuts. The latest Public Funding Observatory Report compares the level of public

resource invested in universities in countries across Europe. The report, produced by the European Universities Association (EUA), found funding for Scotland's universities to be in "sustained decline" and put the country's higher education sector in a category with Italy, the Czech Republic, and Serbia. The EUA found 14 European countries chose to increase levels of investment in higher education over the period 2008-2017 compared with only 11 countries which chose to cut funding. Professor Andrea Nolan, convener of Universities Scotland, said: "For an independent report to say that Scottish higher education is a 'declining system under pressure' is significant both for Scottish Government and for our reputation internationally. "If we act now, we can avoid the danger zone and move our universities, their staff and students, in a more positive long-term direction.

"Ministers need to invest in higher education as a key driver of sustainable growth, which is the approach other small, advanced economies like Norway, Sweden and Denmark have taken."

The Scottish Government cautioned that direct comparison with higher education sectors in other countries, including some EU states, did not take account the way in which Scotland provided free tuition for eligible students, while many other countries do not. A spokeswoman said: "This is why we are investing more than £1 billion in 2019-20 in our higher education system for the eighth consecutive year – around 40 per cent of the total university income.

Widening participation for professional subjects.

Last year the University of Glasgow made the headlines when it revealed nearly 20 percent of Scottish entrants to its School of Medicine were from the most deprived areas of Scotland – numbers that were touted as unprecedented among the UK's 34 medical schools. Four of the five students featured in this coverage, who came through the University's own Glasgow Access Programme, got an early start to medicine through the REACH programme – one of two national schools programmes funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Funded by SFC since 2010, the REACH programme works with schools in Scotland's most deprived communities to identify potential student candidates for study in Law, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry and Economics.

Record numbers studying HE courses

New figures from the Scottish Funding Council show that a record 296,695 students studied higher education courses at Scotland's universities and colleges in 2017-18. In addition, a record number of Scottish domiciled students entered the system last year at first degree level (37,410) and the number of students gaining a qualification reached an all-time high. Of the 104,160 students leaving university or college with a higher education qualification, almost 67% achieved graduate-level qualifications.

Between 2014-15 and 2018-19, there was a 17.8% increase in the number of taught postgraduate students, a 7.6% increase in the number of research postgraduate students, and a 1.9% increase in the number of undergraduate students. Over 40% of the increase in taught postgraduates was due to increased enrolments on Initial Teacher Education courses. A change in tuition fee arrangements in 2017-18, enabling taught postgraduate

students to borrow up to £5,500 for tuition fees and a further £4,500 for living expenses is also likely to have contributed to the 4.2% increase in taught postgraduate student numbers in 2018-19.

School developments.

Scotland's teachers received an improved pay offer which averted a strike. Scotland's largest teachers' union has called off its planned strike ballot after an improved pay offer was made. Scotland's Education Secretary John Swinney said he had "looked again" at the pay offer and decided to "increase the funding".

The new offer is for a 3% rise effective from last April, a 7% rise this April and a further 3% rise next April. This represents a compound increase of 13.51% over the course of the three years. The offer means a teacher who has not been promoted could earn more than £41,000 by next year - about £5,000 more than they earn just now.

Watching Brief – International

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April 2019

The international brief concerns international partnerships for teaching and research, the flow of students and staff into and out of UK universities and, where specific data is available, some commentary on how this may impact on the Life Sciences. Global changes in the educational market continue apace with online learning now integral and the use of AI smart systems rapidly developing ways of enabling real time adaptive and personalised learner experiences. Public and private sector higher education providers compete on the international stage. These changes are set within an uncertain geopolitical context and, for us, this refers to Brexit and what it means for our international partnerships and opportunities; Brexit continues to dominate our thoughts and actions.

In the last report, concern focused on unanswered questions around the Brexit agreement and our well-established EU partnerships. With little political movement since, [UK Universities](#) and other agencies such as the [Royal Society of Biology](#), [The Crick Institute](#), [The Biochemical Society](#) etc. continue to lobby for clarity in respect of international research projects and funding, movement and mobility of scientific staff and students.

In the latest data from the [Higher Education Statistics Agency](#) (HESA) a rise in numbers of EU students (students domiciled in the EU excluding the UK) at UK Universities is reported, reaching 139,150 in 2017-18. Domiciled students from outside of the EU hit 319,340 making the total of international students studying in the UK as 458,490 of which just under half are postgraduate (research and taught).

HESA make the point that since 2012/13 the number of student entrants from China *each year* has exceeded the number from all EU countries *combined*. In 2017-18 there were 76,425 first year students from China and by comparison 62,270 first year students from all EU countries (excluding the UK). From the EU the greatest numbers of student entrants are seen from Italy, France and Germany in that order, each over 13,000 entrants.

Within the HESA data, the transnational aggregates show the greatest growth when analysing the data from 2013/14 through to 2017/18. Transnational data counts those students studying on awards or courses of UK universities, but studying overseas without coming to the UK. These hit a high of 80,980 EU students and 612,715 non-EU students, in 2017/18.

UK universities are continuing to attract significant number of international students, showing growth in 2017-18 and in the face of challenging global market competition.

In a report commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan, and shared on WonkHE [Gavan Conlon and Maike Halterbeck](#) used LEO (Longitudinal Educational

Outcomes) data on the earnings of international graduates and estimated their likely contribution in tax and NI over 10 years. International students who stay and work in the UK after their studies were estimated to contribute £3.2 billion in tax revenue and it demonstrated that international graduates who find employment in the UK typically do so in sectors that suffer from acute skills shortages, including the life science and related industries. Their data showed many international students graduating in the scientific, professional and technical subjects.

[Dominic Scott for the UK Council for International Student Affairs](#) (UKCISA) queried in WonkHE (March 2019) some missed opportunities in the UK governments recently published international education strategy. Identifying some positive changes such as the 6-month post study leave being extended to undergraduates, a simpler replacement for the doctoral extension scheme and some changes to visa processing, there was a call for further and whole scale change to the Tier 4 process and sponsorship to seize opportunities to keep talented international graduates for their contribution to the UK knowledge economy.

In recent news from the [Horizon Europe programme](#), the successor to Horizon 2020, agreement has been reached between the EU institutions on the main features of the innovative and collaborative research work from 2021-27. In a statement from [Universities UK](#) (12 April) the UUK board welcomes the agreement and urges the UK government to act now to confirm its association to Horizon Europe, whether we leave the EU or not. Outlining effective and productive collaborations that resulted from Horizon 2020, it highlights that Horizon Europe is committed to funding excellence whether it is found and declares to be even more open to the world.

Finally, an interesting piece on international students and their mental health and wellbeing, referred to student experiences and some preliminary data. As universities continue to develop their support services for students mental health, [Andy Winter](#) (WonkHE March 2019) highlights the urgent need to consider international students and their often unique and very different transition experiences to UK HE which can result in physical and psychological disorientation, compounded by loss of social support and challenges in communication. Collaborative work is planned to create a toolkit for the HE sector to use which will help provide appropriate support for international students and their mental health.