



PLENARY SESSION

**POLITICS, POLICY AND ADMISSIONS.  
WHAT ISSUES MATTER?  
WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT?**

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# **Politics, Policy & Admissions. What issues matter? What might happen next?**

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**UCAS Conference, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023**

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## Overview

1. Why are policy, politics and university admissions so intertwined?
2. What are the strategic challenges for universities and policy makers in the years ahead?
3. What might a (post next General Election) Labour government mean for universities?
4. What can universities, admissions professionals and UCAS do to navigate the policy and political challenges?



# Foreign students face ban from universities

Ministers explore plans to restrict admissions to top institutions in attempt to cut immigration

Matt Dathan Home Affairs Editor  
Nicola Woolcock Education Editor

Foreign students may be barred from Britain unless they win a place at a top university under Rishi Sunak's plans to curb record immigration.

All foreign students will also have new restrictions on bringing family members with them after the number of dependants almost tripled in a year.

The prime minister said yesterday that "all options" were on the table after it emerged that total immigration had

reached an estimated 11 million in the year to June. About 560,000 people emigrated, leaving net migration at a record 504,000, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

That is triple the 239,000 net migration in the previous 12 months, and higher than the pre-Brexit record of 336,000 in the year to March 2015.

International students are expected to be the main target of efforts to reduce immigration. This is a reversal after the 2019 International Education Strategy, which set a target of 600,000 foreign

students by 2030 to boost the value of Britain's education exports to £35 billion per year. The target was met in 2020-21, and celebrated by the government when Sunak was chancellor.

One of the ideas being considered is barring foreign students unless they have a place at an elite university. The universities that take the most foreign students at present include Manchester, Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield, University College London, King's College London and Imperial.

A crackdown on low-quality degrees

was promised by Nadhim Zahawi when he was education secretary. His measures, recently introduced by the Office for Students, will penalise universities with high drop-out rates and low graduate earnings.

The rise in immigration was driven by "unprecedented world events", the ONS said, including 311,600 people coming under schemes for those from Ukraine, Hong Kong and Afghanistan.

However, it was also driven by the number of foreign students, which rose

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game against Iran on Monday before heading for their swords and shields. Fifa said: "Crusader costumes in the Arab context can be offensive against Muslims." Iman Atta, director of Tell Mama, a UK project monitoring Islamophobia, said "wearing historical crusader Knights Templar outfits [had] very negative implications in the region". Kick It Out, which campaigns against racism in football, said: "Certain attire, such as fancy-dress costumes representing knights or crusaders, may not be welcomed in Qatar."

Gareth Southgate, the manager, said that the captain, Harry Kane, would be fit for the USA game after suffering an ankle injury against Iran. He also said that the Prince of Wales had told the squad to focus on football, not social media commentary. Fifa has been criticised for banning the captains of seven European teams, including England and Wales, from wearing rainbow armbands to promote LGBT equality.

World Cup reports, News, pages 6-7; Sport, page 76; and The Game, pullout



# YOU DUNCES!

**Exam grades in chaos. Teachers in despair. Appeals set for meltdown. And what's the Education Secretary got to say to students getting results today? Er, sorry**



Away on exams day: Boris Johnson



Apologetic: Gavin Williamson

# 43,000 SCRAMBLING FOR PLACE AT UNIVERSITY

Highest number for decade face Clearing frenzy amid post-Covid grades crackdown and huge rise in foreign student numbers

By Camilla Turner EDUCATION EDITOR

TOO many young people are going to university, one of Britain's leading education philanthropists has warned, amid a push by the Government for even the brightest students to take up degree apprenticeships.

Sir Peter Lampl, the founder and chairman of the Sutton Trust and an influential figure in the field of social mobility, said the number of school-leavers seeking university places had become a "massive" problem for the country's finances.

Thousands of teenagers are preparing to receive their A-level results tomorrow which will be based on teachers' predictions after exams were cancelled for the second year in a row because of the pandemic.

This year a record number of students have applied to university, with 44 per cent of all 18-year-olds in England seeking places, a 10 per cent increase on last year.

Experts believe that exam grade inflation could be even higher than last year when 38 per cent of A-levels were awarded A or A\*, a sharp increase on the 20 per cent awarded in 2010.

There is mounting concern in Whitehall about the number of students who are taking up places at university but end up burdened with debt which they are unable to repay, leaving the Exchequer to foot the bill.

Ministers want to promote degree apprenticeships to young people so that more see this as a viable option, including those who would otherwise have sought a university place.

A source close to Gavin Williamson, the Education Secretary, said he "couldn't agree more" with Sir Peter. "There is increased demand for university places this year but the Government has been very keen to highlight the advantages of considering a degree apprenticeship, where in some cases salaries outstrip earnings of graduate jobs after five years," a senior Department for Education official said.

"What the Government is looking for is a turning point in the way that degree apprenticeships are viewed."

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# 'Too many' teenagers going to university

Apprenticeships can be better option with no debt burden, says education charity

By Camilla Turner EDUCATION EDITOR

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Sir Peter, who has devoted the past two decades and spent millions of pounds on boosting the number of dis-

advantaged pupils at leading universities, said he now believes an excessive amount of people are taking degrees.

"I think there are too many kids going to university. Too many graduates out with a lot of debt, the levels are astronomical, and in many cases they come out with skills that the market place doesn't want," he said.

"The students aren't going to be able to pay back the debt so that is a big problem. Who is going to pay? We are taking the money, the taxpayer is paying this, and the taxpayer is not getting paid back."

Britain is an outlier when it comes to the levels of graduate debt, Sir said, adding that we have "by far the highest level of debt in the world which is a 'massive' problem for our finances. He said that a number of

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dents would be "better served" doing a degree apprenticeship "you earn while you learn, you get out with no debt and you come out with the skills the marketplace wants".

Degree apprenticeships, which are offered by companies including Amazon and Unilever, involve a three-year programme between three and six years complete. The course combines full-time working with part-time learning so students can study for a back degree while also getting paid.

Students are not eligible for student loans as their employer pays for their studies, meaning they graduate without debt. Sir Iain Duncan Smith, the former Tory party leader, said there has been an "obsessive" drive to get 50 per cent of students to go to university.

The ambition was first introduced by Tony Blair in 1999, and has become a government policy ever since. The proportion of adults under 30 in England entering higher education rose above 50 per cent for the first time in 2017-18. Last year Mr Williamson said the figure had risen to 52 per cent.

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Tim Stanley Page 17

Tories warn PM against free

# Why are policy, politics and university admissions so intertwined?

Admissions issues of political, public and media interest

Era of 50% participation in HE, large and influential institutions, newsworthy

Political and public scrutiny

Public, media and political perceptions matter – and influence policy, funding, regulation, reputation

Understand concerns, evolve, reform and improve

University admissions linked to many other important and prominent issues:

- ✓ skills needs
- ✓ productivity and economic growth
- ✓ immigration numbers
- ✓ equality and diversity
- ✓ schools
- ✓ levelling up

# What are the strategic challenges for universities and policy makers in the years ahead?

*Three primary strategic challenges:*

- 1) How will universities manage financial pressures?
- 2) As demand continues to grow, can universities expand at scale whilst maintaining quality of provision?
- 3) How can universities manage international risks?



# What might a (post next General Election) Labour government do?

Three big policy questions for Labour regarding universities:

- a) What will Labour's Higher Education funding policy be?
- b) What will Labour do with the Lifelong Loan Entitlement?
- c) Will Labour change immigration policy in relation to international students?

Three predictions:

- i. Many of the policy issues and debates will sound very familiar
- ii. Universities won't be a policy or political priority for Labour
- iii. Access and admissions issues will remain in the political spotlight



# What can universities, admissions professionals and UCAS do to navigate the policy and political challenges?

- 1) Public opinion matters, political views matter - be attuned to these
- 2) Listen to and understand concerns - and address them
- 3) Innovate, evolve and reform
- 4) Collaborate, work together to develop solutions





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**Questions or comments?**