

The soaring twenties: investment, innovation and inclusion in UK higher education

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2019

Modern universities make up over half of the UK's higher education sector, educating over a million students a year. They are dynamic powerhouses of pioneering teaching and research, excelling at improving access to education and ensuring jobs and economic growth in their place and region. Across the country it's time to embrace what higher education and modern universities have to offer. **We ask all parliamentary candidates to #ThinkModern and commit to six pledges:**

■ Increase current levels of investment in line with inflation and guarantee sustainable resourcing for universities to provide world-leading education for students



■ Restore maintenance grants for students from lower income backgrounds



■ Reform the student visa system to attract global talent to study across the UK



■ Invest 3% of GDP in research and innovation to boost our national productivity



■ Improve student financial support so mature and part-time students can better access higher education in a way that works for them



■ Recognise modern universities as being at the heart of technical education and pivotal providers for a skilled public service workforce



■ Increase current levels of investment in line with inflation and guarantee sustainable resourcing for universities to provide world-leading education for students



High-quality university education requires significant funding. Investing in our students brings its own reward by creating a dynamic, successful economy. Every student deserves investment in their higher education sufficient to sustain universities' ability to provide 21st century education and student support services. These include better mental health assistance, careers and employability guidance, and efforts to ensure students from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported to thrive. **The next government should commit to protecting the current level of investment, enhancing in line with inflation at a minimum.**

■ Restore maintenance grants for students from lower income backgrounds



Nobody should be put off from a university education based on an inability to pay. However, for many, living costs remain the major barrier to accessing university and existing students regularly report maintenance as the primary challenge to their higher education experience. Currently, poorer students in England must borrow more and make higher repayments upon graduation, which is socially unjust. **The next government should commit to re-introducing maintenance grants in England to support widening access and participation to university.**

■ Reform the student visa system to attract global talent to study across the UK



The 2019 International Education Strategy is bold in its ambition and has targets for growing student numbers. The UK needs a fresh approach to student visas to meet and exceed these targets, one that is more transparent and simpler for applicants to use to ensure the UK is a welcoming destination. **The next government should commit to reforming our outdated Tier 4 visa system, replacing it with one that fits the UK's global ambitions.**

The UK must remain open and attractive to students from across the EU, and to staff with the expertise needed within universities. Variation across local labour markets must not mean that certain regions thrive at the expense of others. **The next government should commit to helping UK universities remain competitive with EU universities and participate in exchange programmes across Europe and the wider world.**

Invest 3% of GDP in research and innovation to boost our national productivity



Research and innovation are the key drivers of a modern economy. Modern universities provide knowledge and expertise to enable industry to innovate and drive technological advancements to meet tomorrow's challenges. The UK punches above its weight globally on our research output – but we should aim to achieve much more. **The next government should commit to increasing the UK's spend on research and development to 3% of GDP by 2027.**

The UK must build new research partnerships overseas while also maintaining the research excellence already in place. The country should build on the themes of the Industrial Strategy in broadening the scope of access to investment that drives greater regional innovation.

The next government should commit to strengthening the UK's research ambition and investment, as well as enabling a greater number of universities across the country to access funding. It should also take part in Horizon Europe.

Improve student financial support so mature and part-time students can better access higher education in a way that works for them



The steep decline in part-time and mature education has been a disaster for lifelong learning and for access and participation. The decline in mature and part-time students cannot be reversed without sustained and co-ordinated effort matched by political will. Access to university should continue to be supported through Foundation courses for those who might otherwise struggle to progress to higher study. There must be greater flexibility of provision that suits the needs of those learners that do not fit the "typical" model of young, full-time and living on or near campus. **The next government should commit to reversing the decline in part-time and mature students and focus greater support on the needs of students who commute to study at university.**

Recognise modern universities as being at the heart of technical education and pivotal providers for a skilled public service workforce



Modern universities are a driving force of higher technical and vocational education across the UK. Higher education students now learn using work-placements, degree-apprenticeship programmes and by studying world-leading and innovative courses that are simultaneously technical and academic.

The next government should commit to enabling greater diversity of provision, which is focused on the workplace, including continued support through the apprenticeship levy.

Modern universities are responsible for the initial training and ongoing professional development of thousands of staff that are the driving force of essential public services across the UK. These include teachers, nurses, social workers, police officers, town planners, architects and environmental health officers. Modern universities are also adept at unlocking ingenuity by supporting students in creating start-up companies, social enterprises and charities. Not only do they play a central role in making Britain work through this talent pipeline, but the work they do to recruit, educate and support their students benefits everyone in the UK. **The next government must commit to ensuring universities are at the heart of educating our key public services professionals from initial training through to ongoing career development.**