

# MillionPlus

The Association for  
Modern Universities



**GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO**  
Building a Modern Britain

As Britain heads towards a General Election, it's important to recognise the vital contributions that universities up and down the country are making within their communities, regions and for the country.

It is no secret that universities are heading into the election period facing some significant challenges including financial uncertainty, with budgetary pressures on multiple fronts: the existing tuition fee model coupled with high inflation sees their income fall year-on-year and having to do more with less; their pension costs are rising sharply; and post-Brexit arrangements remain up in the air, with no clarity on replacement research and innovation funds. Universities are also grappling with a review of international students and the graduate route, new challenges with franchise provision, an underfunded apprenticeship system and are still dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 and the need to adapt teaching and research methods.

However, despite these challenges, universities across the UK continue to deliver the skilled workforce, translational research, economic growth, aspirational opportunities, and life-chances that are crucial to the future success of this country. Nowhere is this truer than at modern universities, which are some of the UK's greatest assets in driving growth, social mobility and addressing the broad challenges facing Britain.

MillionPlus affiliated modern universities have six shared missions:

The infographic features a central circle with the text "MillionPlus universities" and "Are forward looking and responsive to change". Surrounding this are six mission areas, each with an icon and a description:

- Are placemakers in their local area:** Represented by a map of the United Kingdom.
- Work collaboratively with business and boost the public sector workforce:** Represented by an icon of a person with a gear and an upward arrow.
- Drive social mobility:** Represented by an icon of a person on a staircase with an upward arrow.
- Produce innovative, applied and translational research:** Represented by an icon of a computer monitor showing a line graph.
- Deliver excellent teaching which provides the skills for students to succeed:** Represented by an icon of two graduates in caps and gowns.
- Are forward looking and responsive to change:** Represented by an icon of three interlocking gears.

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## Building a Modern Britain

These missions are at the heart of the role of modern universities in training the public sector workforce, in supporting regional and economic growth; and in helping to meet the UK's targets in research and development. The success of these institutions both in terms of their teaching, and increasingly their world-leading research too, make a clear case for why Britain needs a thriving, diverse UK higher education sector.

Modern universities are crucial regional anchors. Researchers and academics at these universities are vital in ensuring that businesses across the UK can benefit from expertise in research and innovation. They are essential in bringing these experts closer to business, supporting them in providing solutions to major challenges and driving economic growth in all parts of the country.

Modern universities are directly responsible for training thousands of the backbone public service staff that keep Britain working. From high-profile roles such as teachers, nurses, social workers and police officers to the less well acknowledged town planners, architects or environmental health officers, year after year modern universities create the highly skilled workforce that keeps the economy growing and society thriving.

The creative industries employ over 2 million people in the UK and are projected to create an additional 1 million jobs by 2030 and modern universities are at the forefront of delivering this talented workforce. From video games to design, creative arts to software engineering, modern universities are leading the charge training the workforce of the future.

Vocational, technical and professional education has been the beating heart of modern universities from the very start, with some institutions having roots dating back over a century. Working in partnership with employers, often in their local regions, they have created high-quality, work-focused courses that ensure graduates are fully equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to be job-ready on day one.

“Vocational, technical and professional education has been the beating heart of modern universities from the very start ...”



Modern times call for modern solutions and modern universities thrive at meeting this challenge. With little fanfare, these universities have an enormous impact across the UK, and do much of the hard work in developing the key skills for the future jobs market. With decarbonising the economy through green technology a national priority and AI and cybersecurity continuing to drive change and the policy agenda, it is high time to embrace their modern offer and unlock the potential of their students.

To ensure modern universities can continue to deliver world-class teaching and research against a mountain of pressures, to support their local communities and local people and to maintain a prosperous higher education sector into the new parliament and beyond, they need the support and backing from the Government.

“With little fanfare, these universities have an enormous impact across the UK, and do much of the hard work in developing the key skills for the future jobs market.”

**To support higher education, and modern universities in particular, to continue to deliver for the future success of a modern Britain, an incoming Government should implement policies across five priority areas:**



### Public services

Work with modern universities to deliver the essential public services workforce on which the country depends



### Financial sustainability

Invest in universities and students so they have a solid foundation from which to succeed



### Skills

Put modern universities at the very heart of the skills agenda in every region



### International

Re-affirm Great Britain's commitment to be a world-leading destination for higher education



### Research

Acknowledge, value and invest in innovative and impactful research, wherever it is found

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### Public Services

Modern universities are ready, willing and have the capacity to support the delivery of the NHS long-term workforce plan and train the next cohort of doctors, dentists and other NHS workers that the country desperately needs.

The public sector is experiencing significant skills shortages in England and Scotland, with deficits particularly pronounced in teaching including early years education and the health and social care sector which is still recovering from the immense pressures heaped on it by the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why an incoming government must make it a priority from day one.



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There should be greater involvement of higher education institutions in long-term NHS workforce planning. **The higher education sector should be invited to work with a new cross-government health education taskforce** to share the innovative research, including developments in simulation training, being developed by institutions across the UK and to deliver the NHS workforce needed for the future.

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MillionPlus's report '[Who trains the nurses – universities and the placement shortfall](#)' identified that a 20% increase on forecast numbers would be needed to meet nursing targets. Working with NHS Trusts and Boards across the UK, modern universities stand ready to support this increase, but reforming nursing clinical placements is vital. **The next Government should invest in expanding clinical placements in the NHS and social care** to foster and sustain a pipeline of skilled workers.

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At modern universities medical students can train and gain experience working alongside the nurses and allied health professionals of the future. **The Government should commit to funding new medical school places** to meet workforce plan targets and widen access to the profession.

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To tackle the longstanding recruitment and retention crisis across our vital public services. **The Government should implement a Fee Loan Forgiveness scheme for nursing and teaching** that would increase the number of teachers and nurses entering and staying in the profession.

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**The Government should conduct a thorough review of funding structures for bursaries across the teacher training landscape and NHS workforce**, including travel bursaries, and prioritise areas where applicant numbers are down significantly. This is needed to ensure equitable support for trainee teachers and NHS workforce from all backgrounds.

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To address placement shortages across schools **the Government should mandate all schools to provide teacher training placements**. This is essential to ensure equitable training experiences address placement shortages.

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**A long-term strategic framework for teacher recruitment and retention should be developed**, offering comprehensive support systems for teachers' career progression.

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**The Government should explore National Priority grants to universities** for delivering teacher education equivalent to existing grants for STEM.

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### Financial Sustainability

The higher education sector faces a challenging financial environment with funding per student in England, through tuition fees and teaching grants, falling year on year over the last decade. Higher education institutions continue to deliver world-class teaching and research against a backdrop of economic uncertainty. UK universities are a global success story and to remain so a sustainable HE funding model is essential.



**Implementing a new sustainable funding model should be a priority.**

**The Government should increase student maintenance funding.** This could be achieved with a four-pronged approach: reintroducing maintenance grants; expanding the pupil premium into higher education; exploring reintroducing increased and easily accessible student opportunity funds; and conducting a review of maintenance loan support to allow them to be adjusted with inflation when higher than forecast.

Modern universities are fantastic advocates for their local communities. They do much of the heavy lifting in terms of widening participation and invest considerable resources into recruiting and retaining students from less advantaged backgrounds, creating opportunities for people who might not otherwise have access to higher education. However, the current funding arrangements are reducing these opportunities. **That is why the Government should introduce a social mobility premium paid to institutions that create opportunities for communities that do not traditionally enter higher education.** This would recognise the additional support put in place by institutions whose core mission is to support these students.

The already challenging financial environment for modern universities is exacerbated by a spiralling increase in pension contributions for staff in the Teachers' Pension Scheme but no government support to meet these extra costs (unlike schools and colleges), and the lack of flexibility for modern universities locked into that scheme. **A review of pension legislation is required to ensure equity across pension arrangements and to ensure universities are not restricted in their pension scheme options.**

The current regulatory system in England places a large administrative pressure on institutions that are currently facing financial uncertainty. **There should be urgent consideration of the regulatory burden on higher education providers** to ensure it is driving the type of higher education system that the Government wants to see and that there is value for money for institutions and the regulator.



### Skills



- **The next Government should broaden the Apprenticeship Levy into a wider Skills and Training Levy and incentivise training spending through tax reliefs,** while prioritising firms committed to staff training in public sector contracts.
- **Modern universities should be put at the centre of skills strategies across the four nations,** with multi-year funding for specific regions and jobs where they can use their experience and expertise to deliver the right skills to the right places. This should include prioritising skills in strategic sectors such as technology, the green economy, advanced manufacturing and the creative industries.
- **A long-term, cross-departmental plan for degree apprenticeship provision should be established,** so that providers are given the confidence and required funding to invest, design and deliver innovative education and training routes at degree level.

### International



- **The Government should maintain the Graduate Visa** to ensure the UK continues to benefit from the significant economic, cultural and social impact international students have on the country.
- **The next Government should draw up a new international education strategy** to reaffirm the commitment to the UK staying a top destination for international students, studying at our world-class universities.

### Research



- UK universities continue to deliver world-leading research and innovation, with modern universities ensuring that businesses – especially the small and medium enterprises that are the lifeblood of the country's towns, communities and regions – can benefit from expertise in research and innovation. **The Government should commit to 3% of GDP being spent on R&D by 2030 to continue the vital work being done up and down the country.**
- **Innovation strategies should be developed, in coordination with universities, to foster and promote place-based innovation in regions across the UK.** This should include Government and relevant funding councils maintaining the principle that research excellence should be funded wherever it is found.



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