

MillionPlus

The Association for
Modern Universities



Supporting universities to drive growth and opportunity in Scotland

ELECTION MANIFESTO 2021

The seven modern universities in Scotland are a vital component of the higher education landscape. We ask all parliamentary candidates to [#ThinkModern](#) and pledge to support these institutions and their students, and to drive inclusive growth and opportunity across Scotland.



The next government will commit to increase the 'per student' investment in Scottish higher education.



The next government will establish a new Public Services Education Capital Investment programme to enable universities to invest in high-quality, high-tech simulation equipment and other infrastructure.



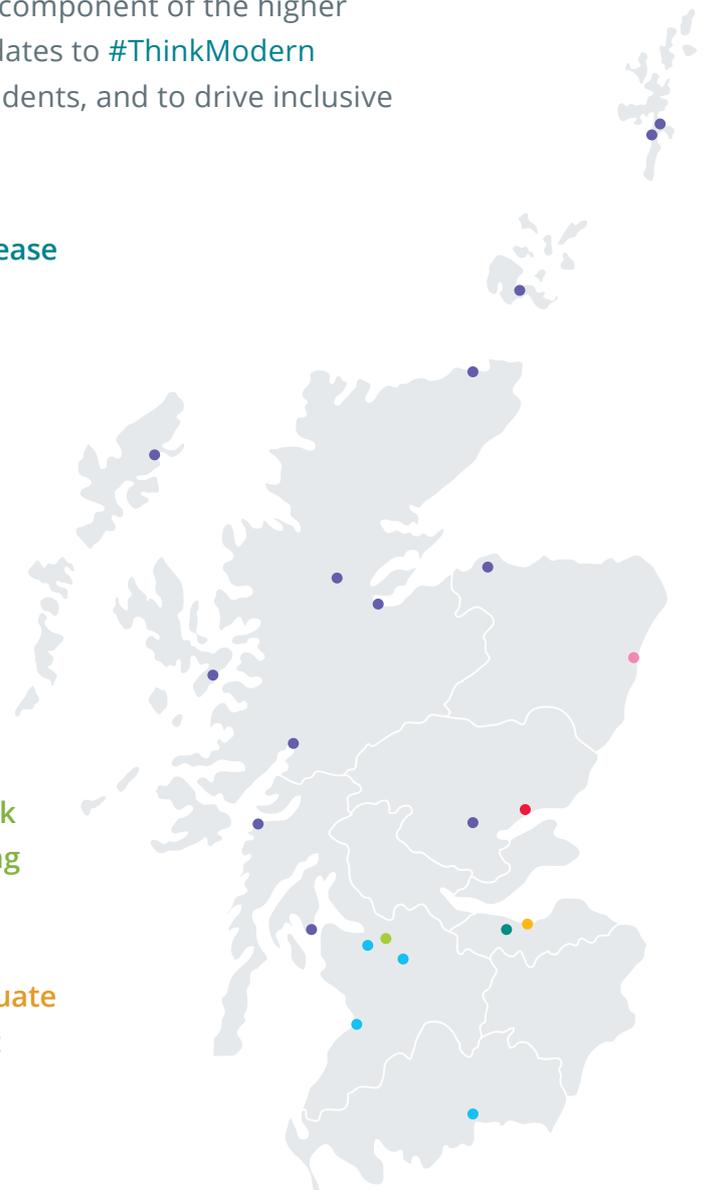
The next government will ensure that investment in widening participation recognises the value and reflects the work done by modern universities in supporting their local communities.



The next government will fully fund graduate apprenticeships and increase investment that is specifically aimed at improving university-business partnerships.



The next government will commit to long-term, sustainable investment in research and knowledge exchange to enable Scotland's modern universities to support businesses to exploit research that creates economic growth and job opportunities for local communities.



- Abertay University
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
- Robert Gordon University
- University of the Highlands and Islands
- University of the West of Scotland



The next government will commit to increase the 'per student' investment in Scottish higher education.



The Scottish higher education system has suffered from long-standing, systemic and structural underinvestment in teaching and research. This has been demonstrated consistently in recent Audit Scotland reports and annual costing surveys: the funding received to teach Scottish students (and EU students enrolled pre-2021) and to conduct research does not meet the full economic cost of delivery. The most recent Audit Scotland report – *Finances of Scottish Universities* – published in September 2019, noted that real-terms investment from the Scottish Government to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) reduced by **7%** between 2014–15 and 2017–8 – from **£1.2bn** to **£1.1bn**.

This decline in investment is most acute for Scotland's modern universities, which on average derive around **70%** of their income from Scottish Government funding via the Scottish Funding Council and the Student Awards Agency Scotland. The consequence is that Scotland's universities are unable to invest in their students, staff and facilities at the same level as the rest of the UK and yet still do their utmost to deliver a high-quality student experience for all.

The next government will establish a new Public Services Education Capital Investment programme to enable universities to invest in high-quality, high-tech simulation equipment and other infrastructure.



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 Scotland. An important element of the provision offered by modern universities in Scotland is the contribution they make to enhancing and strengthening public services. Nearly **30%** of the total student population in the seven modern universities are studying courses linked to key public services (medicine, nursing, allied health, social work or initial teacher education, for example). A strong and inclusive recovery from Covid-19 requires strong public services to ensure the country is healthy and resilient.

While investment in STEM and research has been a priority for several years, specific investment into public services education to support this provision should be considered an equal priority. The creation of a new Public Services Education Capital Investment programme would rightly recognise the importance and value of this provision delivered by universities, especially in a post-Covid landscape. It would also enable universities and the NHS to build on the rapid developments in AI and simulation training technology and fully exploit these innovations to enhance the student experience and open up new opportunities for placements, further widening participation and supporting local communities.





The next government will ensure that investment in widening participation recognises the value and reflects the work done by modern universities in supporting their local communities.



That every citizen, regardless of background or income, has the opportunity to improve their life chances is the hallmark of a progressive society. A recent report by the Scottish Government on the impacts of Covid-19 on fair access to higher education concluded that the greatest burden has fallen on those institutions with the highest proportion of students from disadvantaged areas. Modern universities are sector leaders in ensuring access, with **57%** of full-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds; **66%** of full-time mature students and **42%** of all care-experienced students choosing to study at modern universities. Investment from the Scottish government should recognise the higher costs of teaching students with varying levels of preparedness for university, who often also lack the social and financial capital of students from more advantaged backgrounds.

The next government will fully fund graduate apprenticeships and increase investment that is specifically aimed at improving university-business partnerships.



Fifty-eight per cent of all graduate apprenticeships in Scotland are undertaken in partnership with a modern university. These universities have pioneered high-quality courses co-designed by employers that address the key business needs for the modern Scottish economy. These graduate apprenticeships are often in new and emerging sectors of the economy and offer businesses opportunities to secure a highly skilled modern workforce to drive growth. Scotland's modern universities are major contributors to the social, economic and cultural life of the nation, providing highly qualified graduates to drive forward businesses, public bodies and third-sector organisations to create platforms for innovation, research and knowledge exchange, while acting as vital civic anchors and major employers. The Barnett consequentials from the UK-wide apprenticeship levy provides a source of income for this investment.

The next government will commit to long-term, sustainable investment in research and knowledge exchange to enable Scotland's modern universities to support businesses to exploit research that creates economic growth and job opportunities for local communities.



Research, research application and knowledge exchange are fundamental to Scotland's future as it emerges from the Covid pandemic and adjusts to life outside the EU. It is estimated that modern universities contribute over **£2bn** to their regional economies per annum and are responsible for over **30,000** jobs. Their engagement with businesses to support them in applying research to provide real-world solutions is fundamental to this success. Modern universities provided contract research to over **400** organisations in 2018–19 and are responsible for **56%** of the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) being delivered by Scottish universities. These KTPs enable businesses to access and exploit vital research to create innovation and growth. It is essential to not just maintain the diversity and reach of Scottish universities, but to strengthen them as pivotal players in their regions and facilitators of knowledge creation and exchange.