



**UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON**

Reflections on Higher Education policy and politics 2013-2023 - and what might happen next?

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3rd May 2023

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Overview

1. What is the political context that has shaped the policy environment for universities over the past decade?
2. Where have politics and universities become intertwined?
3. Which specific policy developments have had the greatest impact on universities over the past decade?
4. What can we learn from the last 10 years?
5. What challenges are ahead for universities and policy makers?
6. What might we expect from the Conservative government over the next 18 months?
7. What might a (post next General Election) Labour government do?

What is the political context that has shaped the policy environment for universities over the past decade?

General Election date	Party in power	Majority	Date of PM change	Prime Minister
6 th May 2010	Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition	78	6 th May 2010	David Cameron
7 th May 2015	Conservative majority	12		David Cameron
			13 th July 2016	Theresa May
8 th June 2017	Minority Conservative (confidence and supply, DUP)	-5		Theresa May
			24 th July 2019	Boris Johnson
12 th December 2019	Conservative majority	80		Boris Johnson
			6 th Sept 2022	Liz Truss
			25 th Oct 2022	Rishi Sunak

What is the political context that has shaped the policy environment for universities over the past decade? (2013-2023)

Five Prime Ministers - David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.

EU referendum, June 2016.

For the majority of these years the governing party hasn't held a significant parliamentary majority.

Ten Education Secretaries - Michael Gove, Nicky Morgan, Justine Greening, Damian Hinds, Gavin Williamson, *Nadhim Zahawi, Michelle Donelan, James Cleverly, Kit Malthouse, Gillian Keegan.*

Eight different Ministers with responsibility for universities – David Willetts, Greg Clark, Jo Johnson, Sam Gyimah, Chris Skidmore, Jo Johnson, Chris Skidmore, Michelle Donelan, Andrea Jenkyns, Robert Halfon.

Where have politics and universities become intertwined?

Populist politics and an attack on institutions, culture wars

Criticism from left and right

Media headlines

Political and public scrutiny

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

Rise of social movements

Making political hay at the expense of universities can be highly tempting

Where have politics and universities become intertwined?

From politics to policy... three issues of primary political and policy focus on over the last decade:

- 1) the role of universities in driving economic growth, productivity and innovation; the skills and employability of students
- 2) value for money (for students and taxpayers); student experience; quality of education
- 3) immigration policy for international students

Which specific policy developments have had the greatest impact on universities over the past decade?

My top 6 in chronological order:

1. Ending student number controls in England
2. The Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017
3. The establishment of the Office for Students (OfS) and development of the new regulatory regime
4. The establishment of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
5. Improvements to post-study work visas
6. Augar and everything after... the Lifelong Loan Entitlement

What can we learn from the last 10 years?

❑ The shape and size of the university sector has changed significantly.

- Winners and losers
- Few successful new providers
- Innovation and adaptation of offer to students

❑ Demand for a university education remains very strong.

- UK and international, in absolute terms and as a proportion of school leavers
- Alternative options, political attacks, covid-19 haven't dampened appetite for HE

❑ The university sector is resilient and adaptable.

- Covid-19, Brexit
- However, very significant challenges ahead...

What challenges are ahead for universities and policy makers?

Three primary strategic challenges for the sector and policy makers for the years ahead:

- 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 we expect from a Sunak-led Conservative government over the next 18 months?



A focus on economic growth and economic recovery

Rhetorical focus on popular causes - supporting the NHS, investing in social care, improving skills and productivity, on levelling up and on making the most of Brexit opportunities.

A muscular, confident foreign policy - projecting power diplomatically, economically, strong defence

Universities are not a priority

An economic role for universities – skills, innovation, employment

Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)

Culture wars

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. External events will have more impact than policy



Questions or comments?



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