



## **CGHE 2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE – PARALLEL SESSION**

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### **The structure of the private higher education sector in the UK**

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There are over 800 private higher education providers throughout the UK, yet they are subject to few restrictions, and little official regulation, and there is a concomitant lack of information concerning the sector as a whole. The present research presents data from a comprehensive survey of private providers in the UK conducted in 2016/1. Previously it has only been possible to take a piecemeal view of the sector by examining differing characteristics in isolation. The present research statistically integrates these data to identify any underlying structure in the sector.

Analysis indicates there are four groups or types of provider. Accounting for fifty per cent of the sector are a group of recently founded for-profit institutions concentrating on Business or IT courses at sub-degree level. This group tends to be accredited providers of other organisations' course and qualifications. The second group accounts for over a quarter of providers: these, in contrast, are charitable or not for-profit institutions: longer established, these tend to be specialist providers concentrating on provision at degree level or above, often validated by a university or professional body.

A tenth of providers are for-profit institutions concentrating on Business or IT courses at post-graduate level. The remainder belong to a group characterised as the longest standing institutions and of charitable or not for profit status. These are either specialist providers excluding Business/ IT or non-specialist providers. This group includes all providers with the legally protected title of University or University College. The latter two groups have a far higher proportion of providers that are entitled to recruit international students and students with publically backed tuition fee loans than the former, and are far more likely to have had their provision subject to a quality review.

In policy terms the analysis indicates that rather than representative of the sector as a whole providers subject to any oversight or quality review are concentrated in one of two small groups accounting for less than a quarter of all providers: the remainder go almost entirely unaccounted. This situation is unlikely to change under the Office for Student's new system of higher education oversight.