

UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission – Terms of Reference

Name and Scope

The Commission will be known as the “UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission”.

The purpose of the Commission is to explore how, in light of the disruption everyone has faced during the pandemic, universities can take action to support students from September 2021 to make the best of their remaining time at university and support those who are starting their journey in higher education this year.

We will seek to discover approaches that will help get students' success back on track from September 2021. This will include considering what additional support needs to be put in place for students – academic and more widely - recognising that student days are a time of learning and living as well as a chance to build a foundation for students' future professional careers.

The Commission will also consider what opportunities there are to build on a fast-evolving model of higher education, and what developments there have been during the pandemic that could be made more permanent to enhance and augment the student experience post pandemic.

Objectives

The Commission has three objectives:

- To ensure students get back on track after the pandemic by contributing to a generous and collaborative effort in the sector to ensure their successful futures.
- To make practical recommendations for universities and future plans for the sector and government, for the academic year 2021-2022 and onwards.
- To curate ideas, insights and learnings from all stakeholders in higher education that can be widely disseminated and used to enhance the post-pandemic student experience.

Commission approach

- To bring together a number of commissioners from a wide set of backgrounds – and advised more broadly – to consider the areas in which universities, individually and collectively as a sector, can take action.



- To draw from a wide range of sources – including written evidence, oral evidence, student advisory, academic literature, field visits – to bring together an authoritative summary of the issues, both positive and negative.
- To understand the experiences which students of all backgrounds and modes of study have received in higher education during the disrupted 2020-2021 academic year.
- To produce multiple outputs at regular intervals during the work of the Commission to share emerging thinking and findings.
- To be a repository for the views and expertise of a wide range of stakeholders from within and beyond higher education.

Scope and remit

The Commission will focus on the actions which universities – individually, and collectively as a higher education sector – can take to improve students’ futures.

The Commission will be future looking. It will consider what can be done from the start of the next academic year – that is, from September 2021. Although there is no formal time period that the Commission will consider, it is expected that the focus will be on events in the short term (which is defined here as actions for the 2021-2022 academic year), and into the medium term (which is defined here as actions principally acting over the next 4-5 academic years).

Although there will likely be a consideration of initiatives which government should take, the Commission will be focussed on government action only to the extent that it supports – or does not impede – things which universities, individually and collectively – can do to support students.

In order to ensure that the Commission adds most value, these terms of reference set out a number of issues which are considered to be in scope and out of scope of its work. While commissioners are free to consider any and all issues which seem pertinent – and it is likely that oral and written evidence will range widely – it is the intention of the Commission to focus on a small number of substantial and meaningful recommendations that are actionable by universities individually or collectively.

Although we recognise that there are matters of significant concern to students about tuition fees and related issues, the Commission is focusing its attention on practical solutions that can be delivered primarily by universities this year, relying on as little government policy action as possible. As such the following issues are beyond the scope of its initial work:

- Fees – tuition, accommodation rents/fees, maintenance.
- Admissions to universities, specifically around any system of post-qualification admissions, but also any consideration of minimum entry requirements, or student number controls.
- The balance between the overall quantum of students undertaking Level 6+ study, and those undertaking Level 4+5 study.
- Research funding – the quantum, the allocation mechanisms, or the way in which impact is measured.
- The legal and regulatory architecture of the higher education system in any of the home nations.
- Staff pay and working conditions.

The work of the Commission is focused on the English system of higher education. However, where appropriate, commissioners will consider evidence and good practice from any and each of the home nations, and make recommendations similarly, and we hope that much of the work will ultimately be useful for universities across the UK.

The Commission will strive to be inclusive by ensuring it takes into account the experience of all students including those who may be under-represented or disadvantaged in higher education by age or ethnicity or home geography or circumstances around pre 18 education, those who study part time or are mature learners, and international students studying in UK institutions, as well as those who commute.

Issues that may be in scope are set out here not as an exclusive list, but as a guide. They may include:

- How incoming students can be supported and empowered as they transition from a largely online Year 12 and 13.
- Student mental health and wellbeing, including how students can be supported to reacclimatise in terms of socialisation and peer support.
- How returning students going into the latter years of undergraduate provision, or undergraduates transitioning to postgraduate study, can be supported as they transition from a largely online study over the past year.
- The experiences of those who have continued face to face study, largely around practical qualifications and those requiring professional and workplace training.
- Whether students requiring a minimum level of hours for professional qualifications are supported to transition into work.
- The blended model of teaching and learning, the successes and challenges from it, and how that can be built on and effectively transitioned into the post-Covid environment.
- Curriculum design and identifying areas of "lost learning".
- Role of grading and assessment practices and policies that have been adapted in light of the pandemic.
- The impact of the pandemic on university staff in so far as it affects engagement with students and the delivery of teaching and research.
- Student experience, including the roles of clubs and societies and student support services.
- The ongoing nature of physical university campuses, buildings, and accommodation, and how the future physical estates and facilities in universities could evolve.
- The role of students' unions.
- Digital access and expertise for all students, and delivery by staff.
- Career support, employability support, and the future job market preparation by universities.
- Rebuilding placements, travel abroad and industry partnerships.
- What information students want and need and where they get it from.
- Who feels left out, what they feel left out of and how can this best be addressed.

Membership

The Commission will be chaired by Mary Curnock Cook, CBE.

Commissioners will act in a voluntary capacity and will not be paid. Reasonable expenses for travel and subsistence in any field visits, as well as external face to face meetings, will be covered by the UPP Foundation.

Commissioners will be likely to include members from higher education institutions, students and students' unions, experts from secondary education, and representatives from the charity and voluntary sector. All commissioners will be independent and give their private advice rather than representing their institution(s) or organisation(s). Wonkhe, acting as a partner of the Commission, will assist in convening conversations in the sector, and in raising the profile of its work in the sector and in policymaking.

Given the importance of student voice to the Commission, in addition to student commissioner(s), the Commission will specifically convene groups of students to give oral evidence, and to feed into the thinking and recommendations of the Commission.

The Commission is being funded by the UPP Foundation who will have a representative on the Commission. The Commission is being managed in partnership with Wonkhe, and Public First (who will operate the secretariat for the Commission on a paid basis).

Timings and outputs

The Commission will launch its work in May 2021 and will conclude, with a final report and recommendations, by the end of the calendar year 2021.

Given the speed with which this issue is being considered, the Commission will not publish a formal interim report, but instead will publish interim findings and emerging thinking on a frequent basis during the period of the Commission. Specifically, it will aim to publish:

- A call for written evidence in May 2021, concluding by June 2021, with all submissions published on the Commission website. This will include, as a priority, identifying and sharing instances of good practice that universities are taking forward for bringing all students back onto campus from September onwards.
- A number of public oral evidence sessions, run virtually or face to face, over the period of June to September 2021, with the sessions being held and broadcast publicly, and with transcripts being published on the Commission website.
- Participation in high profile sector events to bring additional voices into the work and raise its profile including at Wonkfest in June 2021.
- An ongoing process whereby informal evidence or submissions can be made on the Commission website during the running of the Commission.
- Frequent newsletters and updates about the Commission's work, published on the Commission website.
- Regular commentary pieces from Mary Curnock Cook and other commissioners on emerging thinking, published on the Commission website and on Wonkhe.
- Commentary from third parties about the work of the Commission, including but not exclusively from those who have given evidence, published on the Commission website and on Wonkhe.