from the Vice-Chancellor
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Helen Hayes MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
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Dear Chair

Thank you for inviting me to take part in the Education Select Committee's one-off session on Higher Education and Funding on 8 April. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to members of your Committee about the financial position of universities on behalf of Universities UK.

I am writing to provide additional evidence on two specific areas that were touched on during the oral evidence session.

Your letter to the Education Secretary of 6 May included acknowledgement of my point that the gross-value added (GVA) of my institution, Manchester Metropolitan University, outweighs that of both Manchester United and Manchester City football clubs combined (the same is true for the University of Manchester). I wanted to provide you with the evidence behind that claim. A BIGGAR Economics report, forming the basis of our forthcoming Economic Impact Report, found in 2022/23 the university generated £1.4 billion across Greater Manchester, and supported 23,880 jobs in the region. By way of comparison, an EY report from 2019/20 found that Manchester United and Manchester City together added £1.1 billion to the Greater Manchester economy and supported 21,000 jobs.

Another area to follow up on is the impact of currency changes on the enrolment of Nigerian students in UK Higher Education. Nigeria has been facing an economic crisis over recent years that has seen the value of the Naira drop significantly, particularly from 2023 onwards. Prior to this, Nigeria had been one of the key growth markets for universities; between 2020-2023 the number of Nigerian students studying at UK universities increased significantly (third in terms of likelihood to be granted a Student visa behind India and China). After the sharp devaluing of the Naira in June 2023, many Nigerian students were unable to afford to study in the UK as the cost had increased dramatically. Home Office data show the number of student visas granted to Nigerian nationals decreased by 68% between 2022 and 2024. During this period many universities sought to work with their Nigerian students to provide flexible repayment plans and support those impacted by the currency devaluation. To note, this period also coincided with the previous government's changes to immigration rules, which prevent most international students from bringing dependents which will have affected the number of applications.

Finally, I wanted to alert you to the findings of a recent Universities UK members' survey that was published on 6 May. The survey reveals the extent of cost cutting measures amongst the 60 institutions that participated, following years of tuition fees being frozen and government action to reduce international student numbers.

In terms of provision and student choice, the survey found 49% of responding institutions had closed courses, 55% had consolidated others, and 18% had closed departments. Whilst some of these changes may reflect sensible strategic repositioning to remove modules and programmes with low student numbers, the survey provides a clear picture of ways in which the sector is responding to financial pressure.

Of concern, 19% have reduced investment in research, and 79% are considering future reductions. The data found that universities are trying to protect investment in student hardship and bursary funding, but almost half of respondents reported that they may need to consider making cuts in this area over the next three years.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee as your work on higher education continues. Please do let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Press

Professor Malcolm Press CBE
Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
Incoming President of Universities UK (from 1 August 2025)