

Written evidence submitted by the University of Cambridge

## **University of Cambridge submission to the Education Select Committee inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services**

Submitted on behalf of the University of Cambridge by: *Professor Graham Virgo QC, Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education)*. 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020

### **Introduction**

1. At all times during the Covid-19 pandemic, our top priority has been to protect the health and safety of our students and staff. The University has acted in line with official Public Health guidance and statutory requirements. We have welcomed the issuance of sector-specific guidance by DfE, BEIS and other Government departments; this has provided universities (and current and prospective students) with additional useful information.
2. The University has striven to provide the highest quality teaching and student support services throughout the pandemic. The social distancing requirements have forced us to be innovative in our approach and we have accelerated projects involving the digitisation of learning and teaching resources and remotely-accessible support services.

#### *Impact on school-age attainment*

3. We have significant concerns about the long-term effect that lockdown and school closures will have on school-age pupils' attainment over a number of years. We are keen to work with schools and the UK Government to see how we, and other HE institutions, can best support pupils who have faced educational disruption, and particularly where this disruption disproportionately affects young people who are already under-represented when it comes to higher education progression.
4. Further, we are increasingly concerned about the extent to which learning has been missed during 2020, with a significant impact on undergraduate entrants who are commencing courses in autumn 2020. We are offering additional, intensive learning support to ensure our first year students are ready to start their courses and to make the most of the educational opportunities at the University and its Colleges.

### **2020 Admissions Round**

5. Following the issue of revised examination results based on centre-assessed grades (CAGs), the collegiate University has accepted all offer-holders who met the grades of their offers. Our undergraduate intake for 2020/21 is calculated to be 10% larger (+400) than the cohort entering in 2019/20.
6. 70% of our incoming UK students will have previously attended a state school (the highest percentage since comparable records began). Further, the proportion of 2020/21 entrants from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation

measure, will rise from 18.8% (2019/20) to 21.7% for the new cohort.

7. It is important to emphasise that the collegiate University has admitted all students who met their offer in whatever way and who wished to attend from autumn 2020: no student has been required to defer their place at Cambridge this year, although some have voluntarily done so.

## **Operational and Financial Impacts**

### *Undergraduate teaching and support*

8. The University announced in May that teaching at collegiate Cambridge in the academic year 2020/21 will be delivered by a blend of in-person and online provision, with most lectures being delivered online. Wherever possible teaching by seminars, practicals and small group teaching will be delivered in person, and it may be possible for lectures for smaller groups to be given on this basis. We will be reviewing our arrangements regularly with reference to public health guidance and any statutory requirements.
9. Like other HE providers across the sector, we have had to move rapidly to adjust to the circumstances of the pandemic. It is important to emphasise that remote modes of delivery are no cheaper than “in-person” modes. Significant sums have been spent to convert certain teaching spaces into studios to enable high-quality recording of lectures. Further, this shift across student-facing services (pastoral support, counselling, careers advice etc) has entailed significant additional upfront costs.
10. In light of the increased student intake from autumn 2020 – and the challenges that students across all cohorts will be facing as a result of Covid-19 related uncertainty and disruption – we will also experience additional costs associated with counselling, disability support and the pastoral support offered by Colleges. Due to the expanded intake in 2020, the collegiate University will also need to increase its bursary spend for undergraduates by roughly £600,000 over the next four years. We are also anticipating that more students will require access to hardship funds during the year.

### *Cost savings*

11. In responding to the immediate financial challenges posed by Covid-19, the University has sought to reduce costs by suspending a number of pre-Covid-19 capital projects. We are also identifying annual recurrent operational cost savings.
12. We have welcomed the UK Government’s decision to support researchers’ salaries across the UK by making available an additional £200m available this year, and to support universities’ cash-flow by reprofiling some funding. It is likely, however, that significant financial losses will still have to be dealt with further down the line, particularly if no additional support for teaching activities and research is made available to universities.

### *Financial pressure on teaching resources*

13. It is worth emphasising that the collegiate University of Cambridge already meets, from its own resources, over half of the overall cost of undergraduate education per Home undergraduate student each year. This is due to the gap of £12,850 between the calculated

cost of a Cambridge undergraduate education per student (£22,100, based on 2018-19 figures), of which £9,250 is met by the tuition fee (for Home students).

14. Significantly, from autumn 2020 (and for at least until 2023/24) the collegiate University's teaching deficit is likely to be larger compared to previous years. This is because we will admit in 2020/21 over 400 more students than anticipated, occasioned by the adoption of CAGs to determine A-Level results.

#### *Postgraduate students*

15. Postgraduate and doctoral students have been particularly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are pleased that UKRI announced an extension to funding for UKRI-backed doctoral students. However, many non-UKRI students remain without the funding needed to complete and publish their research. The collegiate University is urgently seeking to raise additional funding to support such students. We have been modelling significant reductions in the number of postgraduate students coming to Cambridge, especially from abroad.
16. We have spent significant time with offer-holders to respond to their concerns about coming to the UK generally and to Cambridge in particular. This appears to have been effective. At the end of September we have an increase in postgraduate students of 1.6% (73 students), although we are still waiting to see whether all these students arrive for the start of term (5<sup>th</sup> October)

#### *Capital projects*

17. The collegiate University has welcomed the UK Government's decision to make available some funding to support universities' capital projects for larger student intakes in the coming academic year
18. We are seeking to accelerate a number of projects to meet the expanded need from 2020, both in terms of Collegiate accommodation and the central University's teaching space/facilities (such as in medicine and veterinary medicine). One College project seeks to build accommodation to house additional students who are, in particular, from groups currently under-represented in higher education. The collegiate University would of course welcome any funding support that would enable us to proceed with these projects as quickly as possible.

### **Impact on disadvantaged young people and children in need**

19. Recent reports published by the Sutton Trust<sup>1</sup>, the Institute for Fiscal Studies<sup>2</sup>, and the Educational Endowment Foundation<sup>3</sup> have highlighted how the recent closures of schools and colleges impacted disadvantaged students much more than their peers, with gaps in

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-impacts-university-access>  
<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14849>

<sup>3</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-school-closures-on-the-attainment-gap>

attainment and progression likely to be more marked.

20. Research from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education argues that opening schools, and keeping them open, should be prioritized by the Government, as school closures risk severe social and economic effects that will endure for decades<sup>4</sup>. The negative impacts of closing school are “considerable and robust.”
21. We would like to put forward two recommendations in this area, which we hope would go some way towards mitigating these negative impacts:

#### 1) *Uni Connect / neaco*

22. Since 2017, Cambridge has been the lead partner in the Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach, a consortium of all five universities and eight further education colleges in East Anglia. It is the largest of the 29 partnerships which make up the Office for Students (OfS) *Uni Connect* programme, created to provide impartial information, advice and guidance to students from underrepresented neighborhoods across England.
23. Our partnership works with over 80 secondary schools and colleges serving identified target areas with low levels of HE participation throughout the region, such as Peterborough, West Norfolk and Lowestoft. The programme has worked with 52,000 young people since its launch and longitudinal tracking has shown considerably higher HE participation rates among the students from underrepresented groups (39.9% compared with 27.8% for POLAR 4 Q1) and a smaller gap (6.8 percentage points, compared with 29.9 percentage points) between the most and least underrepresented groups, when compared with students across England.
24. *Uni Connect* provides long term, coordinated outreach to support student progression, which enables schools and colleges to focus resources on mitigating the negative effect of the pandemic on the academic performance of young people from disadvantaged groups.
25. Funding for *Uni Connect* has been confirmed until July 2021. To build on the work being done in East Anglia and across England we believe that the UK Government should continue to invest in *Uni Connect* partnerships, with the funding cycle brought into alignment with the current Access and Participation Plans, which are active until 2025.

#### 2) *Data-sharing with universities*

26. As we have raised previously, universities do not receive verified data on the FSM/Pupil Premium/Children in Need status of applicants as part of the applications process. This means that universities cannot use this data to inform their contextual admissions or decide bursary eligibility. UCAS is introducing self-declaration tick-boxes for FSM status for 2021 entry. This is a step in the right direction, but the approach has limitations.
27. Ideally, universities would be able to access (at the point of application) each state-maintained school student’s full FSM eligibility record, and Children in Need status, held in the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Children in Need database. Crucially, NPD data is

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/facultyweb\\_content/news/content/opening-schools-%E2%80%93-and-keeping-them-open-%E2%80%93-should-be-prioritised-government-report-says](https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/facultyweb_content/news/content/opening-schools-%E2%80%93-and-keeping-them-open-%E2%80%93-should-be-prioritised-government-report-says)

verified, and usefully records exactly when and for how long a pupil has been FSM eligible. Other means of accessing this data are not uniform and are time-consuming for applicants, teachers and universities alike. Further, the data these yield frequently cannot be verified.

## **Lifelong Learning**

28. The economic disruption wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the fact that opportunities for re-training and re-skilling need to be available to those in and out of work: and throughout people's lifetimes.
29. At Cambridge we have seen evidence of this need in, for example, a significant uplift in the demand for our Institute for Continuing Education's online non-award bearing courses since the onset of Covid-19, as well as our for the Institute's award-bearing UG programmes.
30. There is clear demand for more flexible forms of higher education, though our experience suggests that fees are the major barrier for those who would most benefit from engaging. We look forward to further information about the Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, announced by the Prime Minister on the 29<sup>th</sup> September. At Cambridge we have sought to mitigate some of these barriers through our popular 1000 Futures Bursary Scheme, which will provide a bursary of £1,000 to 1,000 part-time course participants who have been most affected by the pandemic.
31. The University of Cambridge is keen to develop further our role in the delivery of lifelong learning and transferrable skills training. We already recruit and train apprentices, including the recruitment of apprentices without first degrees on to our Level 7 degree apprenticeship courses. We are also progressing plans to deliver apprenticeships at Levels 4 and 5.

### **About the University of Cambridge**

*The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence. To date, 109 affiliates of the University have won the Nobel Prize.*

*The University sits at the heart of the 'Cambridge cluster', which employs more than 61,000 people and has in excess of £15 billion in turnover generated annually by the 5,000 knowledge-intensive firms in and around the city. The city publishes 316 patents per 100,000 residents.*

September 2020