

Written evidence submitted by Middlesex University

Summary and suggested questions for witnesses

- Further action is needed to avoid students being left behind and ensure they can fulfil their potential and play their full role in the recovering from the pandemic. How can direct support be targeted at disadvantaged learners through, for example, financial support packages, housing support, subsidised broadband access, and access to equipment such as laptops?
- Can the Office for Students provide clarity on which forecasts will form the basis of student number controls and reassurance that there will be consistency in approach between universities to avoid benefiting those who were more optimistic about numbers and may be more aggressive in their pursuit of filling these?
- With UCAS encouraging students to 'trade up' and be aspirational in this year's admissions cycle (as recommended in the Government's support package), care is needed to ensure valuable bridging support for the transition into higher education is not lost and that the financial position of those universities who traditionally support disadvantaged learners is not jeopardised.
- The nature of work will change forever post-COVID-19 with a critical role for technology in enhancing productivity and driving social mobility across all subjects and in apprenticeship programmes. How can university education not just reflect this but lead and inspire the changes that are necessary?

Introduction

With over 19,000 students at our North London campus in Hendon and a further 21,000 studying at our overseas campuses in Dubai and Mauritius or for Middlesex awards around the world, the University is a global operator playing a major role in the London skills ecosystem, as well as generating considerable overseas earnings for the UK. Middlesex has a distinctive practice-based approach at the heart of what we do, which informs how we shape our curriculum, research activity and engagement with external partners and stakeholders. The University also has a long history of providing higher technical education, enriched by our international profile, and are delivering pioneering higher and degree apprenticeships, including in nursing and policing, to meet future skills needs and professionalise public sector roles.

With 52% of our students eligible for free school meals and 50% the first generation in their family to enter higher education the policy messages in this briefing focus on

ensuring the most vulnerable learners are not left behind and are supported to fulfil their potential and play their full role in recovery from the pandemic in the UK and beyond.

Tackling the coronavirus outbreak and supporting our students

The University is working hard to keep students and staff safe, adapt its provision and support the wider community and national effort to tackle COVID-19. With the health and safety of our students and staff our most important consideration, we have swiftly moved all teaching to online-only delivery at our London campus and our international campuses in Dubai and Mauritius. We have also increased digital and virtual provision of employability and mental health support to our students and are planning our future admissions activity to be flexible and support students to progress to higher education. In addition:

- Our staff have laser-cut more than 60,000 protective visors for NHS staff tackling coronavirus and is producing gowns and scrubs for front line workers.
- 500 of our highly dedicated second and third year nursing and midwifery students are working on the frontline through extended clinical placements.
- Alongside critical research work on epidemiology and the management of COVID-19, the University is making a profound contribution in other relevant areas, in particular on social policy in relation to health and health inequalities, the sociology of community organisation and business continuity planning, business recovery and business management.

Ensuring disadvantaged learners are not left behind

- Middlesex University welcomes the Government's recognition that the university sector will continue to play a vital civic role in the economy and communities as we look to recover from the impact of Covid-19. We also welcome elements in the package which re-profile and clarify timings of payments to the sector and liquidity challenges for universities.

- Middlesex students are a group who can have a considerable positive impact on our communities through enhanced economic participation and social leadership, playing a critical role in the recovery. Direct support is needed for these students so that they do not become excluded from the economy and job market now and in the future if we were to put in place a financial situation that is not sustainable. Support could take the form of financial support packages, housing support.

- Digital poverty is a real issue for Middlesex current and prospective students. Subsidised broadband access and large-scale schemes for access to equipment such as laptops (negotiated with commercial providers) could help to support students. Technological innovation is playing a key role in enabling and enhancing learning across a range of subjects, for example STEM, arts and creative industries. We believe there is an opportunity to harness the potential of technology to support inclusion and drive social mobility in the sector, for example using gamification to drive literacy levels.

- There is a risk that the proposed diversion of existing funding towards hardship and mental health support for students weakens support for the access and success of all underrepresented groups in providers' access and participation plans.
- The student number controls are to be based on forecasted intake, however it is not yet fully clear which forecasts will be used for this. It will be important there is consistency in approach between universities, and especially in how collective forecasts align to the market and the actual pool of students likely to commence degree study. If these are further increased by 5%, this will benefit those who were more optimistic about numbers and they could be more aggressive in their pursuit of filling these.
- There is an encouragement in the support package to students to 'trade up' which risks significantly destabilising the system, with lower tariff providers losing out. Clarity is needed on the proposed role for UCAS in supporting students "to review their choices, and be aspirational" and how they will guide students choices. Given the level of flexibility in place around number controls, further consideration needs to be given to what this could mean for the financial sustainability of lower tariff institutions who have played and will continue to play a critical role in supporting lower participation groups and disadvantaged learners in the long term.

Apprenticeships driving recovery

- Higher and degree apprenticeships are a key part of the solution to economic regeneration following the pandemic both to build public sector resilience and ensure that private sector employers have the skills they need to grow. Employers should be in the driving seat when it comes to deciding which apprenticeship they need.
- The primary site of learning for higher and degree apprenticeships is the workplace (even when that is at home) not the university campus and this requires flexible and mobile learning solutions, which have enabled apprentices to continue their apprenticeships during the coronavirus crisis. For example, by equipping student police officers with iPads and providing supported online learning activities, Middlesex Police Constable degree apprentices have been able to adapt to the changes in working conditions required by COVID-19.
- The pandemic has demanded a re-examination of the way that work is undertaken, less reliant upon place and more reliant upon maximising productive interactions between people, facilitated by technology. The delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships have already started to challenge the traditional relationships between work and learning to require productive interactions between apprentices, their employers and university tutors, facilitated by technology. Work will change forever post COVID-19 and university education must not just reflect this but actually

lead and inspire the changes that are necessary. Out of the crisis we should seize the opportunity to redefine the relationship between employers and universities for the benefit of all.

Briefing for Chair of the Education Select Committee - Middlesex University in Numbers, 15 May 2020

Middlesex apprentices and students

- Middlesex has **725 apprentices with a particular focus on the public sector** with plans to double numbers by 2023.
- **Middlesex apprenticeships are attracting a diverse cohort of learners with 53% of apprentices being female, 47% of apprentices from BAME groups and 72% aged over 25 years.**
- **Retention rates for Middlesex apprenticeships are high at 94%¹ overall and 100% retention for our Police Constable and Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship programmes.**
- Apprenticeship programmes include the Policing Constable Degree Apprenticeship, Nursing Associate and Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeships, Teacher, Social Worker, Business 2 Business Sales Professional, Senior Leader, Academic Professional, Healthcare Science Practitioner, Environmental Health, Risk and Safety Management.
- **Over half of Middlesex students are eligible for free schools meals, the highest of any UK university.**
- **63% of Middlesex undergraduate students are classified as BAME.**
- **87% of Middlesex undergraduate UK and EU students fall within at least one widening participation category.**
- **One third of Middlesex undergraduate students come from deprived areas and are also the first generation from their household to enter higher education.**
- Many of our students are commuters, with **76% of our UK students with commutes of more than 40 minutes and around half commuting for more than an hour.**
- 31% of Middlesex students identify themselves equally as a student and a member of community compared to 24% of London students and 22% of non-London students. **Middlesex students were therefore less likely to describe themselves as 'just a student' given their greater sense of attachment to their communities.**

¹ Working through our strong partnership with NHS employers, improvements have been made to the recruitment process for Nursing Associates to ensure a reduction in the small number of apprentices leaving the programme early during the pilot phase; particularly in relation to those who left due to the level of academic challenge the programme presents. These changes would bring overall retention for Middlesex apprentices to 99%.

- **More of our UK students come to us with BTEC qualifications than A-levels.**
- Typically around **37% of our intake only have BTEC qualifications**, compared to just under 30% who only have A-levels.
- Approximately **one quarter of our students, who are often mature, also have neither A-levels or BTEC qualifications.**

Outreach work with schools and colleges

- In 2018-18 Middlesex delivered 19 on-campus visits for **655 students from 32 schools, targeting those schools with high percentages of disadvantaged learners, with 77% from quintile 1 or 2** for the Index of Multiple Deprivation (a key measure of deprivation in the London context).
- Our [Make Your Mark](#) campaign provides a holistic approach to engagement with young people, with repeated touchpoints in order to empower them to make informed and suitable decisions about their futures. It has a particular focus on vocational and apprenticeship routes alongside academic routes and includes interactive, virtual support for 11-16 year olds, designed to keep young people motivated and understand the routes open to them.

Work placements and a practice-based approach to learning

- We embed work placements and contact with potential future employers within our offer to students, to ensure that we equip them with the real-life skills needed for the workplace.
- Most of our students across all facilities have the option to undertake a work placement. In particular **90% of business school students have the option to either undertake a yearlong placement in their third year**, Science & Technology students also have the 1 year option and we are creating a 3 month placement. There are some more specialist options for Natural Science (1 day per week in their final year) and Sport (placements are compulsory for years 1-3 and masters students) and **all arts and creative programmes have the option to do internships in their final year.**
- We need a flexible model for our students, as a large proportion will have part-time jobs while they study and we need to balance placement opportunities with this important income source.

Supporting our students during the COVID-19 pandemic

- To date, the University has **supported 55 students who are self-isolating**, or unable to support themselves financially at present, through food parcel and grocery voucher provision. Of these, there are 10 students whose parcels included food for their children.

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- We are supporting student nurses who have moved or are moving into Middlesex University student accommodation providing them with a welcome food and necessities parcel.

- The University has made **27,496 laptop loans** to students in the last year, 107 of these occurring since the lockdown began on 23 March 2020.

- The University has packaged and couriered 42 laptops to students since the pandemic lockdown began.

Supporting the frontline effort during the pandemic

- Our staff have laser-cut more than **60,000 protective visors** for NHS staff tackling coronavirus through a contract with NHS London Gold Command to provide PPE across their network. Our Arts & Fashion department is also producing gowns and scrubs for front line workers.

- **500 of our highly dedicated second- and third-year nursing and midwifery students are working on the frontline through extended clinical placements.** This response includes stepping up some of our third year finalists onto the government's emergency register, should that be needed.

- In addition to critical research work on epidemiology and the management of COVID-19, the University is making a profound contribution in other relevant areas, in particular on social policy in relation to health and health inequalities, the sociology of community organisation and business continuity planning, business recovery and business management.

May 2020