

WONKHE

Where the (Westminster) government is taking HE

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Bridget Phillipson's priorities for HE

Access to HE – incorporating student outcomes and lifelong learning

Economic growth – skills and R&D/innovation; alignment with national and regional plans refreshed international education strategy

Civic engagement and regional development – potentially taking a more problem-led approach

Teaching quality and standards – tackling “pockets of poor quality”

Efficiency and reform – reducing waste, strategic collaboration, shared services



OfS financial sustainability latest

OfS issued an update on the financial sustainability of English providers last week, based on latest UK and international recruitment data.

It warns that based on the financial returns submitted in early 2024 the sector is down ten per cent on projections of UK undergraduate entry and 23 per cent for international.

On this basis, up to 72 per cent of providers could be in deficit in 2025–26.

This projection does not take account of any adjustments to forecast and cost-reduction measures providers may have taken during this year.

OfS continues to work with providers at risk, and has said that “bold and transformative action” may be needed in some cases. It has also questioned the ability of boards in some cases to take such action.



What to make of this?

Higher education institutions working though how to be relentlessly focused on delivering public value and impact, while also being ruthlessly commercial and business-like in their decision-making.

Speaks to:

- The evolution of education provision – cost, quality, and access; making sense of “skills” – and where demand for HE will trend. The assumption that an unbundled model will answer these challenges needs to be more robustly tested
- The evolution of HE staffing – “more with less” is arguably a reasonable institutional challenge, but doesn’t work when it comes to teams and individuals unless you change the environment and structures – and develop the relevant skills to do so (business insight, external collaboration, automation)
- The evolution of sector structures and systems (and regulation!)
- Can it be done? Is there an alternative?

