



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document, This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education on 13 August 2021, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13603108.2021.1962425> and is licensed under Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 license:

Andrews, Matthew ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0977-9685> (2021) The development of English university tuition fee policy from 1960 with lessons for today. Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, 25 (4). pp. 117-126. doi:10.1080/13603108.2021.1962425

Official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2021.1962425>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2021.1962425>
EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/10117>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

The development of English university tuition fee policy from 1960 with lessons for today

Matthew Andrews
Executive Team, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK

Abstract

Higher education in England has expanded in most years since the Second World War, moving from an elite system to a mass one where half of school leavers now progress to university. A lasting funding settlement, however, has proved elusive as the generosity of the post-war decades became unviable as the sector expanded. Eventually this led to the reintroduction of tuition fees, which have added complexity to the debate about how higher education should be funded since the late twentieth century. The political reality of making changes to higher education funding is, however, more complex than the tense nature of the debate might make it seem.

Keywords

Fees and funding; government policy; HE policy; history of higher education; student admissions

Introduction

Who should pay for a university education has been a source of heated discussion and polarised opinion for many decades. For reasons which will be explored in this paper, it can be argued that much of the heat in this debate has been caused by the reforms introduced in 1962, following the Anderson Report on *Grants to Students*. The cause of the report's long shadow is that the reforms it ushered in meant that a generation of students could rely on generous government support for their studies: essentially free higher education, with the state covering tuition fees for the majority as well as providing liberal maintenance grants (Anderson 2006, 139; Whyte 2015, 236). This period of generosity created an *idée fixe* in England that university tuition should be free and that students should receive generous grants.

Yet, as the number of students in higher education expanded, this settlement proved economically unviable and hence it did not last long – a mere blip in the centuries-long history of English higher education. By 1990, the essentially state-funded expansion of higher education had reached its limits and become unaffordable and hence government loans were introduced to supplement and later replace maintenance grants.

This article has two purposes. First, it seeks to sketch the history of policy in England on tuition fees for home full-time undergraduates from around 1960 to the present day. Second, it then attempts to pull from that history some suggestions that might influence future policy decisions though it does not offer a detailed review of the proposals currently under consideration, either those proposed by the group led by Philip Augar or in the government's recent white paper *Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*.

This paper therefore has some notable omissions, including no coverage of part-time or mature students, postgraduates, or increasing complexity caused by devolution. All these issues, and more besides, are important but the limitations of space and the intent to cover a long time period means that a sharper focus was needed.

Background and context

Apart from a period during the 1970s when growth in the number of university students stalled, since the end of the Second World War higher education in the UK has expanded seemingly inexorably (Figure 1). During this period, the nature and structure of the university sector was transformed. In 1950, there were only eighteen universities in the UK.¹ During the 1960s, a further twenty-three universities were created, and a binary system of higher education was introduced with the creation of polytechnics. This system was effectively dismantled and replaced by a nominally unified sector when the polytechnics were transformed into universities in 1992, almost doubling the number of universities to eighty-four. From the early twenty-first century onwards an even newer wave of universities was created, at first mainly within the public sector but then with private universities too.² These changes have moved the UK higher education system from an elite model to a mass one, with the start of universal higher education, when more than half the population regular gains a higher education, now dawning (Hunt and Boliver 2019; Kyvik 2004; Trow 2006) (Figure 2).³

Throughout much of this period, the underlying value of a university education to society and individuals has not been successfully challenged, though there have been challenges especially in the late 1960s and 1970s (Mandler 2020, 97–98). In fact, universities have typically been places of aspiration for students and society in general. That created an environment ripe for growth. However, as the sector transformed from the early 1960s when around 5% of young people participated to one in which over 50% now do, funding became an increasingly vexed problem.⁴

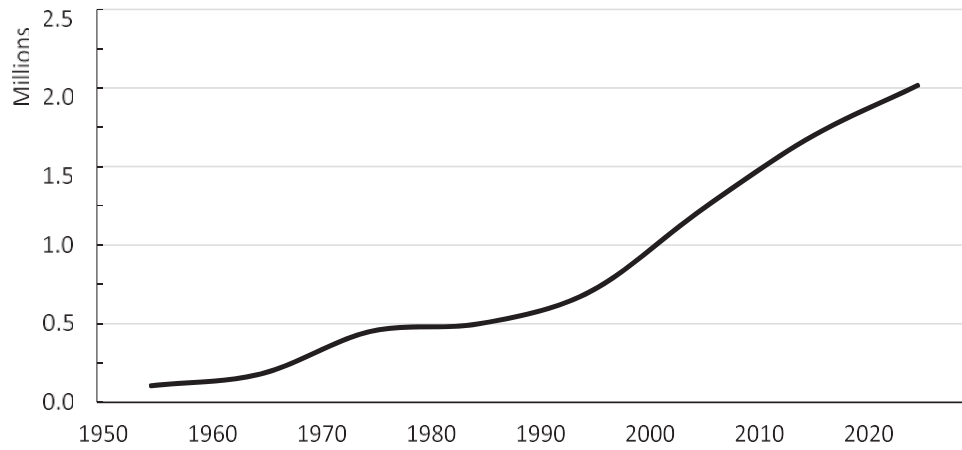


Figure 1. Approximate full-time UK students in UK higher education (Source: 1950 The Robbins Report appendix 1, table 46; 1960–1990 National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, chart 3.1; 2000–2020 HESA; all figures estimated from nearest year as required).

Once again, support for higher education from the government is not as strong as it once was. Indeed, the relationship between the Conservative party and higher education has been uneasy since the late 1970s. At his first meeting as Secretary of State for Education and Science, Keith Joseph asked the question of his civil servants: ‘how do you close a university?’. Joseph felt that the growth of the sector had gone too far, especially as he considered too many universities ‘bred subversion and intolerance on a diet of taxpayers’ money’ (Denham and Garnett 2001, 368). Closing a university was once again mentioned in *Success as Knowledge Economy*, a government white paper from 2016 which noted that institutions which failed to compete in the market for students would need to ‘close some or all of their courses, or to exit the market completely’ (DBIS 2016). The Office for Students has more recently still issued advice on revoking degree awarding powers and managing ‘market exit’.

Once again there are senior members of the Conservative party suggesting too many people go to university, that there are too many universities, and that some reduction in both students and institutions might be both desirable and necessary either to encourage or simply because of more students entering apprenticeships and technical education (Johnson 2019; McKie 2019). However, as the former Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, conceded: such views often come with the ‘undertone that university should be reserved for an elite minority’ (Cameron 2019, 223).

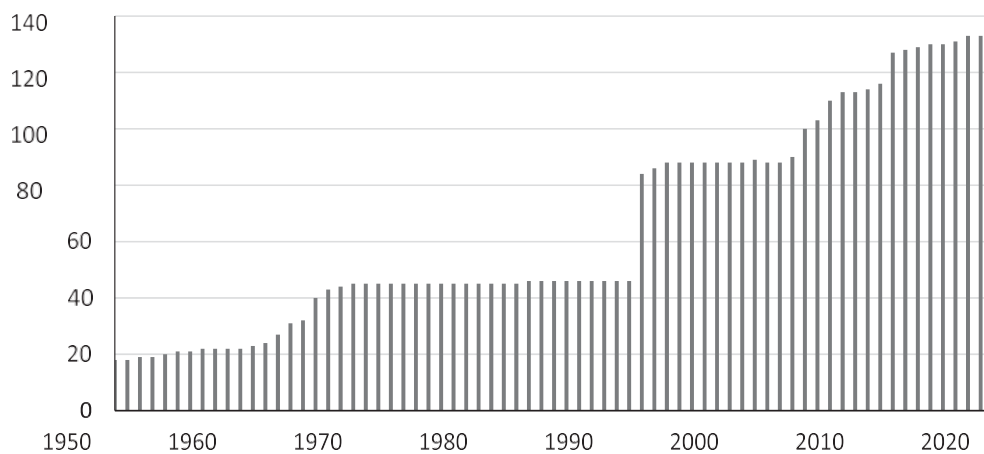


Figure 2. Universities in the UK, 1950–2019.

Such views are also polarised – especially by age. The right-of-centre think tank, Onward, undertook a social attitudes survey which found that while 63% of respondents aged over 65 believed too many students were going to university the comparable figure was only 29% for those aged 18–24: for those aged over 65, 30% would be more likely to vote Conservative if the party pursued a policy to reduce the number of students going to university while 46% would be more likely to do so if the party committed to increase the number of students in technical education (Morgan 2019b; Tanner, O’Brien, and Kanagasooriam 2019). This observation should itself be placed in the context of a political realignment away from traditional conceptions of ‘left’ and ‘right’ towards views based broadly either on autonomy, mobility, and openness or place, security, and belonging, with universities and graduates being part of the former group (Goodhart 2017).

The 1950s and 1960s: expansion, support, and growth

The growth in enrolment during the 1960s was fuelled by changes to the system of tuition fees and funding introduced early in the decade, but those changes were themselves a response to persistently increasing demand for college and university places from the end of the Second World War. The post-war baby boom in part meant that increasing demand for university places during the 1960s was simply demographic led. Increasing national prosperity played its part too and, perhaps most significant of all, changes to secondary education created an increased cohort of students with suitable qualifications for university entrance.

A major milestone was the Education Act 1944,⁵ which significantly improved access to free secondary education and hence increased the number of eligible applicants for higher education (Robbins 1980, 24). This impact was seen early in the 1960s: in 1938 only about 4% of seventeen-year-olds in Great Britain were in full-time education whereas by 1962 this proportion had increased to 15% (Robbins Report 1963, 11). These two factors were described as the bulge and the trend, i.e. a demographic bulge and an increased trend to stay in education (Mandler 2020, 39–49).

Nevertheless, the post-war regime for tuition fees and grants was complex and inconsistent. Prior to the introduction of changes in 1962, students applied to their Local Education Authority (LEA) for support and were often interviewed for discretionary awards. The results of this selection varied between LEAs, with the difference between the most and the least exacting authorities being considerable (Anderson Report 1960, 11).

The changes implemented following the Anderson Report fixed a model of higher education that set a national framework for fees and funding. With generous funding for maintenance grants and no tuition fees for the majority, and with the introduction of a standardised national admissions system for 1964 entry, the number of students going to university boomed (Willets 2017, 42). Universities also benefited from significantly increased funding from government: before the Second World War government funding accounted for around 30% of a university's income, while after the War it rose to over 90% (Shattock 1988).

The 1960s is often seen as a golden age for universities. There was a strong desire from consecutive governments of all parties to deliver more places in higher education, year after year, to meet demand and to deliver benefits to the economy and society. In the mid-1980s, the Chair of the University Grants Committee would look back on this period and the 'benevolent' environment which supported growth as 'part of the Father Christmas aspect of Government' (Swinnerton-Dyer 1985).

The 1970s and 1980s: stagnation and crisis

The euphoria and rapid expansion of the post-war period gave way quite suddenly in the early 1970s to a period of stagnation that lasted almost to the late 1980s (Halsey 1993). Quite why this change occurred remains somewhat mysterious, though explanations for it range from a declining graduate salary premium depressing interest in university entrance through to a wide-spread public critique of the student estate. This is a period of student radicalism, when students were seen by critics as being both scruffy and lazy meaning that studying for a degree no longer seemed such a worthwhile target for the aspirational working classes or a respectable progression route for the traditional middle and upper classes (Ashby and Anderson 1970, 123–138; Mandler 2015; Stevens 2004, 36–44).

The changes introduced in the early 1960s had not strictly abolished fees altogether, as some students still paid fees dependent on their parents' wealth. In 1977, however, all students became entitled to full support for their tuition fees and a guaranteed minimum maintenance grant of £80 (Hillman 2013). Strictly understood, this was the start of the period when higher education was 'free' and not the reforms of the early 1960s. Although it could be assumed that this change indicated growing confidence in the flow of resource to higher education, in fact it preceded a period of fiscal tightening.

In May 1979, a Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher was elected with a commitment to significantly reduce the level of public expenditure. Accordingly, in July 1981, 'savage cuts' were introduced to higher education (Swinnerton-Dyer 1985). These changes compounded the impact of the decision taken in late 1979 to remove the subsidy for overseas students, meaning that universities were expecting to lose up to 15% of their recurrent resources. Only good management and some tough decisions helped universities survive the early 1980s. This point was made abundantly clear at University College, Cardiff, where both attributes were absent and the College faced a severe and public funding crisis in the mid to late 1980s and the real possibility of bankruptcy (Shattock 1988).

This created a sense of crisis in higher education, with a wide-spread expectation that student numbers would contract, courses would close, and compulsory staff redundancies would be necessary (Sizer 1988; Whyte 2015, 273–278). Against this backdrop of crisis in university funding, the Conservative government, and especially Keith Joseph, raised the idea of loans to cover at least part of the cost of maintenance and tuition fees but such was the backlash that the ideas were swiftly dropped (Hillman 2013).

Despite the stagnation of the 1970s and the funding crisis of the 1980s there was still one especially positive and

noteworthy feature of this period: a marked increase in the number of female students, linked to evolving social mores and an increasing supply of places in newer institutions, especially in arts, humanities, and social sciences, which attracted more female students than the sciences and more traditional universities (Whyte 2015, 240–241). Between 1970/1971 and 1989/1990, the number of full-time female students in university increased by 122% (from 68,000 to 151,000) compared to a 20% increase in male students (from 167,000 to 200,000) (Cerych and Colton 1980; Halsey 1993).

The 1990s and 2000s: the return of fees

The issue of how to fund universities to support continued growth in student numbers was, once again, a pressing concern in the early 1990s. During the 1980s, the value of the maintenance grant fell behind the rate of inflation and the assumed contribution from parents to the maintenance costs of their children increased in theory though often not in reality. An early response to this conundrum came in 1990/1991, with the introduction of top-up loans to help students meet their living costs. However, this was matched by a progressive reduction of the maintenance award.

These reforms were minor and financial strains in the sector persisted (Woodhall 1993). The new system of top-up loans did little to alleviate the financial problems of funding an expanding higher education sector along the same lines as its much smaller predecessor. Total expenditure continued to grow but funding per student was reduced; in the period from 1976 to 1997, the public funding received by HEIs per student was reduced by more than 40% (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997). The essential problem persisted: that the cost to the public purse of funding a mass system of higher education on the same basis as an elite system was simply untenable.

In large part to resolve this problem a new review of higher education was ordered. Commissioned in 1996 under the Conservative administration of Prime Minister John Major, the report of the *National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education* was published in July 1997 under newly elected Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The review, chaired by Sir (later Lord) Ron Dearing, had a UK-wide remit to consider the next 20 years and ‘make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education should develop’ (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997, 1).

Leading up to and throughout the period during which Dearing’s committee was undertaking its research, many universities were signalling an impending financial crisis and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals threatened to introduce a £300 top-up fee (Willets 2017, 64). Several institutions, including Oxford and Cambridge, added warnings about the need to charge top-up fees to their prospectuses for 1998/1999. At Birmingham, a charge of £700 for admissions was seriously considered (THE 1996).

Though intended to be bi-partisan, only 3 of the 10 nominations for membership of the Committee made by Labour’s Shadow Minister for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, had been accepted by the Conservative government. This compromised the report’s potential for acceptance by Labour and, as the new Secretary of State after the 1997 election, David Blunkett quickly overturned the Committee’s recommendations on student fees and funding (Robertson 1998).

While Dearing recommended income-contingent payments from graduates towards living costs and tuition, Blunkett announced up-front, means-tested tuition fees (despite there being no manifesto suggestion that Labour would introduce fees). Blunkett did at least keep the rate that Dearing had recommended:

£1,000 per year or around one quarter of the average tuition costs. In this respect, Dearing had been heavily influenced by the perceived success of the Australian Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). Introduced in 1989, this income-contingent contribution scheme was recognised for bringing new funds into higher education from a private source (i.e. graduates) without damaging access (Barr 1998).

Very quickly, these limited up-front tuition fees came under attack from universities, most especially so-called elite institutions which feared for their international competitiveness without more funds. Such concerns were expressed even before the first fees were charged in September 1998 (Barr and Crawford 1997; Thomson 1997). The Russell Group of universities commissioned a report into university funding, which recommended differential fees as high as £12,000 with an income-contingent repayment mechanism (Charter 2000; Greenaway and Haynes 2000). Despite political resistance to higher fee levels, concerns did not abate and calls for above-inflation increases to tuition fees grew (Halpin 2002).

In response, and despite a manifesto commitment not to allow universities to charge top-up fees, in 2004, the newly returned Labour government managed to pass legislation to permit universities to charge variable fees of up to £3000. Although the fee level tripled, in an important and overdue change, students could now take out a loan to cover the cost, which was only to be re-paid on an income-contingent basis. These new fees were introduced in 2006/2007 but strong political opposition meant that the new regime was only implemented following several major concessions, including that a graduate’s income-contingent repayments would stop after 25 years (Hillman 2013).

The impact of these changes was that, after a general erosion of funding throughout the 1990s, the amount of funding per student available to universities shifted upward markedly in 2006/2007. In 1997/1998, the lowest point, universities had only 73% of the funding per student that was available in 2007/2008 (Figure 3).

The 2010s: tripling fees

Once again, the fee settlement came under pressure and, partly in fulfilment of a concession when £3,000 fees were introduced, another review of higher education funding was launched. This review, led by Lord Browne, was commissioned by the Labour government before the 2010 general election with cross-party support but was submitted to David Willetts, as the new Conservative minister, that autumn after Labour narrowly lost the 2010 election (Willetts 2017, 65–66).

Browne wanted to remove the cap on tuition fees altogether, to stimulate price competition. But, in a system of income-contingent public loans, he also had to find a mechanism which would stop fees from shooting up to levels where the taxpayer would face a high cost from writing-off unpaid debt. His review, therefore, proposed that universities pay a levy on their fees, at an increasing rate as those fees went higher, which would go straight back to the Treasury as pre-payment for future loan write-offs (Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance 2010).

Willetts moved forward with a plan to increase tuition fees to £9000 per year. These plans faced bitter criticism not only from Labour MPs but from Conservative and Liberal Democrat backbenchers, who were jointly in power as part of the coalition government. Despite these criticisms, the move was carried by 323 votes to 302.

Willetts originally intended that the higher cap of £9000 would be exceptional and that there would be wide-spread price competition. This was soon proved wrong, however, with almost all universities charging the maximum amount (Willetts 2017, 83–85). Nevertheless, although this market based on differential fees did not materialise, except for a subsequent increase in the cap to £9250 for 2017/2018, this fee regime remains in place. The effect of these changes is that the teaching funding for universities increased considerably for 2012/2013 but has since been eroded by inflation (Figure 4).

Patterns of enrolment

Since the Second World War, university tuition fees have evolved to cope with a generally increasing population and a growing desire to enter higher education. The Higher Education Initial Participation (HEIP) measure is used to calculate participation in higher education and records these changes. Despite perturbations along the way caused by changes to the fee regime, the overall trend is one of consistently increasing participation since 1998 when tuition fees were reintroduced. Worth noting too is the fact that for much of this period the number of students in higher education was capped, with these restrictions only removed from 2012 onwards (Figure 5).

The same pattern can be seen by overlaying home student applications and acceptances against tuition fee increases (Figure 6).

Other than in relatively short-term variations to application and participation rates, it can be seen that the overall trend towards increasing participation survives despite changes to the amounts and methods by which undergraduate students are expected to pay tuition fees.

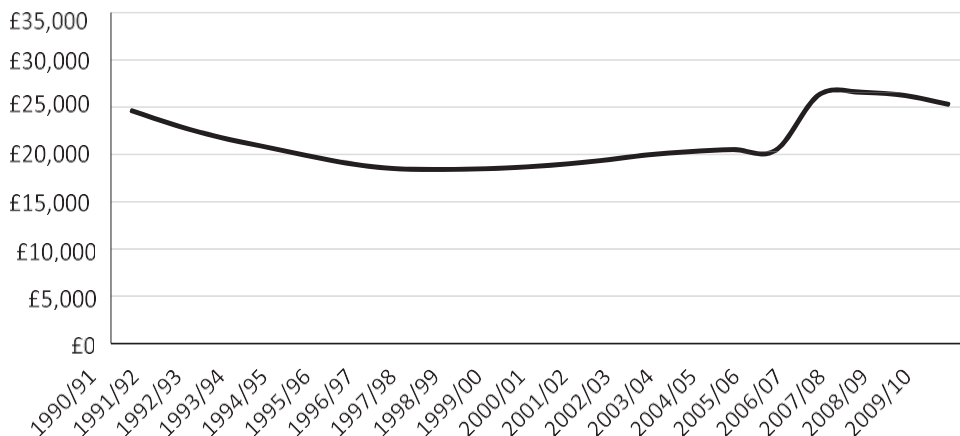


Figure 3. Total teaching resources per student for cohorts starting between 1990/1991 and 2009/2010 (2019 prices) (Source: Britton, Farquharson, and Sibieta 2019).

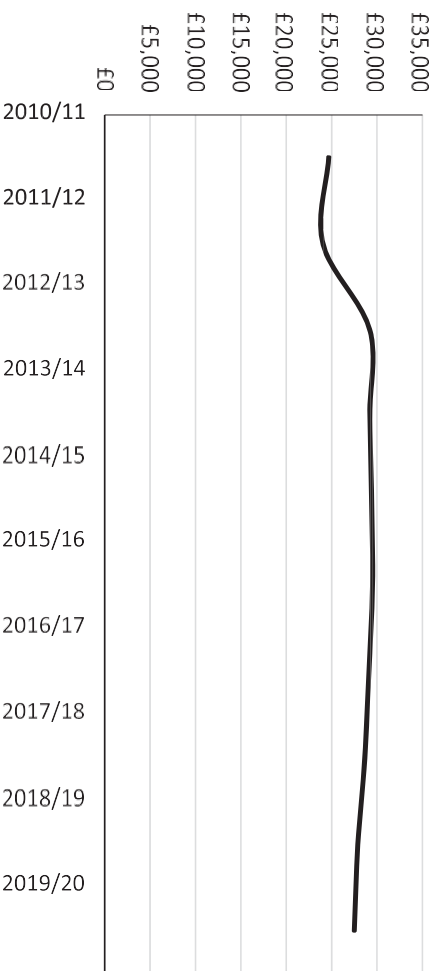


Figure 4. Total teaching resources per student for cohorts starting between 2010/2011 and 2019/2020 (2019 prices) (Source: Britton, Farquharson, and Sibieta 2019).

The political dimension

Although changes to tuition fees have had little long-term impact on university enrolments, the political impact of instigating such changes is perhaps more mixed. While on the one hand much heat is generated by debates on higher education funding there is little indication of a long-term and negative political impact (Figure 7).

The one main exception is the Liberal Democrats. That party had campaigned for the 2010 general election with a manifesto pledge to ‘scrap unfair university tuition fees’ but accepted the tripling of those fees when in power as the minor party in the coalition government. This was a deeply controversial decision at the time and has remained so since.

That the Liberal Democrats were pulverised in the polls is undeniable: in 2010 the party won 23% of the vote and 57 seats compared to 7.9% and 8 seats in 2015. The debatable question is how much of the decline can be attributed to the volte-face on tuition fees. Junior coalition parties tend to perform poorly in subsequent elections, and the Liberal Democrats failed to demonstrate distinctiveness and influence in power more generally (Johnson and Middleton 2016). The political mauling this party received in the 2015 election, it could also be argued, is as likely to be about discontent with their coalition with the Conservatives in general as their sharp reversal on tuition fees (The Economist 2015; Hillman 2016). Nevertheless, even the party’s lead for education, Layla Moran, admitted that tuition fees were the ‘pink dancing elephant in the middle of the room’ for her party (Morgan 2019a).

One persistent criticism of universities is that the fees are too high. It is interesting, however, that universities have been on the receiving end of public concerns rather than government: it is government, not universities, that created the fee regime. Politicians are perhaps well-practised in deflecting criticism but higher education leaders have been active participants in the changes. As described above, they have persistently lobbied for higher fees over several decades so are not disinterested in the changes and so cannot disown them. Yet, despite the moral outrage which often accompanies discussions about tuition fees the number of full-time entrants has not declined nor has access deteriorated (Ibrahim 2011).

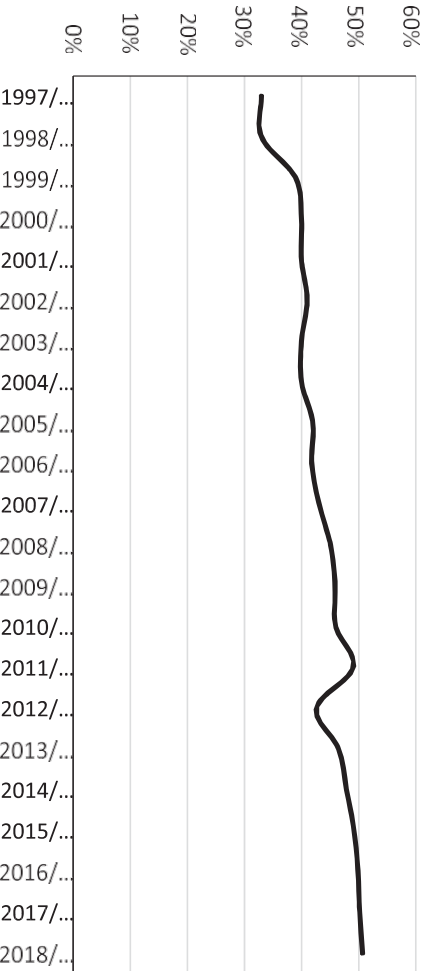


Figure 5. English Higher Education Initial Participation 1997/1998–2018/2019 (Source: Department for Education 2019).

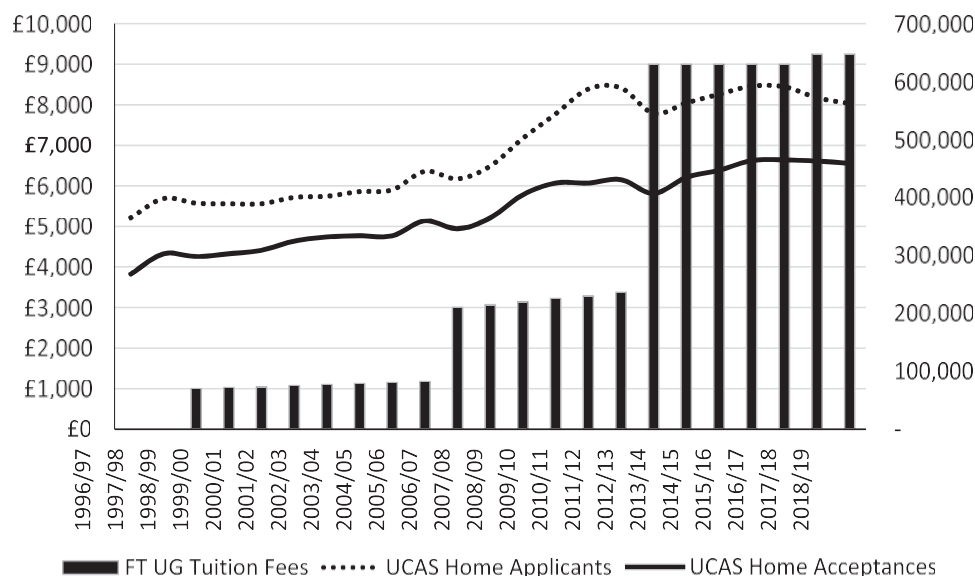


Figure 6. Home applicants and acceptances through UCAS with maximum full-time undergraduate tuition fees 1996/1997–2018/2019 (Source: Bolton 2019).

Lessons for future policy

In February 2018, the Conservative government under Theresa May launched a review of post-18 education and funding and established an independent panel, led by Philip Augar, to feed into that review. Brexit, and its associated political turbulence, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have considerably extended this review which was due to be concluded in early 2019. An interim conclusion was finally published in January 2021, but, at the time of writing, a further consultation is anticipated before changes are implemented.

It is therefore timely to ask: what lessons can be learnt from this brief history of English full-time university tuition fees? Three observations stand out: that higher education funding is in a permanent state of crisis, that little political damage is inflicted on the political party responsible for increasing fees, and that whatever fee regime is in place the underlying trend is towards increasing participation in higher education.

The first of these observations should be self-evident. Since the middle of the last century, approaches to funding higher education have constantly evolved in the face of criticism from universities about under-funding. As the number of entrants increased, and massification placed an untenable load on public finances, an added public dimension to this crisis has been created through the debate about student tuition fees. Each settlement seems only to last a brief period: £1000 fees lasted 8 years and £3000 fees only 6 years. The current system of £9000 fees has survived the longest though, at 11 years and counting.

Yet despite the heat which is created by debates concerning tuition fees, there is little evidence of lasting damage to the political party responsible for fee increases. The obvious exception to this observation would be the Liberal Democrats, and while tuition fees undoubtedly damaged that party their broader engagement with the coalition government seems at least as likely to be the limiting factor on their post-government fortunes. It is also, of course, not

Tuition Fee System	System Agreed	System Implemented	Party in power when agreed	Party in power after next general election
£1,000	July 1998 ¹	1998/99	Labour	Labour (June 2001)
£3,000	July 2004 ²	2006/07	Labour	Labour (May 2005)
£9,000	December 2010 ³	2012/13	Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition	Conservative (May 2015)

Figure 7. Political impact following the reintroduction of tuition fees.

Notes: ¹The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998.

²Higher Education Act 2004.

³The Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2010.

simply that party's decision to support the increase in fees that created the issues they faced but the simple distance between a policy to scrap fees and the eventual outcome to triple them. There is also good evidence to show that students vote more along the same lines as the general population than is often supposed, debunking any wide-spread conception of a specific and influential 'student vote' swaying election results (Hillman 2015; Hillman 2019; Hillman 2020).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, there is little sign that aspiration to higher education has a natural limit. Whatever fee regime is in place it has not deterred young people from wanting to enter full-time university studies. It is clear from the long-term increases in application and participation rates, and the little evidence for significant political impact, that costs are tolerated. Placing caps on that aspiration therefore seems more likely to result in an adverse reaction from the public than increasing costs.

Given that increasing aspiration is a decades-long trend, and therefore capping numbers is arguably a risky political choice, how else can a government face the complex problem of funding an expanding higher education sector? One option is to dissuade especially young people from wanting to enter university. This could be done by making other (cheaper) options look more attractive, or by discrediting universities, as maybe happened to universities in the 1970s, but that risks an adverse impact on widened access to higher education and charges of elitism. Creating greater efficiencies would be another option, but with little evidence that a market for domestic fees can be created it seems unlikely that institutions will see an advantage in more economically efficient practices beyond those which generally exist in the sector.

This leaves a final option: not how much students pay per se but the way in which they pay. As the current fee system relies on income-contingent repayments, it is this repayment system that affects how much income the government can gain from students or more correctly graduates. For example, a recent estimate commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and undertaken by London Economics showed that reducing the student loan repayment threshold to under £20,000 from over £26,500 would save £3.8 billion in public funding and lower the student loan write-off costs in England from 54% to 33% (Hillman 2021). Measures like this seem a more likely route to a sustainable funding model for higher education, given that increasing participation seems inevitable (and, this author would argue, welcome).

Conclusion

The sweep of this article is broad: it is an examination of the overall impact on the higher education sector in England of changes to full-time undergraduate home student funding arrangements over a 60-year period. Inevitably that means that swathes of detail have been lost as the factors affecting enrolment decisions over this period are many and varied. Such factors include, but are by no means limited to, the multitudinous array of influences on applicant decision-making, student number controls and their influence on applicants and universities, the ebbs and flows of political sentiment, and the economic performance of the country. This article has focused on a large group (full-time undergraduates in England) but not ventured into the changes which have affected part-time or postgraduate students, or explored the increasing variations brought about by devolution, but even within that group the differential impact on, for example, mature learners has not been touched. Limitations are inevitable in a brief article with a long time period to cover.

At the start, this article asserted that generous funding for higher education students became an *idée fixe* because of the reforms of the 1960s which heralded a period of expansion as well as full support for students. That has created a sense in which any subsequent settlement is a pale imitation of what once was on offer. The conundrum for government is this: how can a mass (even less a potentially universal) system of higher education be financially viable when it is modelled on an elite system that assumed public funding was lavish but for the few.

It is also interesting to note that things might have been quite different. In the early 1960s, the economist Alan Prest advocated the introduction of loans to students to cover maintenance and tuition costs with income-contingent repayments, triggered by an income threshold, being collected as part of normal income tax. Writing in 1980, Robbins admitted that he did not 'sufficiently appreciate the advantages of the Prest scheme' when leading his review and regretted not backing it at the time. He further bemoaned that the 'Second World War mythology of the bottomless public purse dies hard' (Robbins 1980). How might the history of higher education in the UK be different if Robbins felt differently about Prest's scheme? This is surely amongst the great 'what if?' questions of recent higher education history.

Notes

1. Twelve in England, four in Scotland, and one each in both Northern Ireland and Wales.
2. The five private universities as at August 2019 (with the year that university title was granted) are: University of Buckingham (1983), University of Law (2010), BPP University (2010), Regents University (2013), Arden University (2015). Both the University of Law and Arden University are owned by Global University Systems.
3. Constituent colleges of the federal universities of London and Wales are not counted separately, though many have the characteristics of a university, are larger than some universities, and have degree-awarding powers in their own right.

4. Initial Entry Rate (IER) pre-1963 (Wyness 2010); Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) 2017/2018 (Department for Education 2019)
5. This Act is commonly called the Butler Act after Rab Butler, the Conservative MP who was at that time President of the Board of Education.

References

- Anderson, Robert. 2006. *British Universities Past and Present*. London: Hambledon Continuum.
- Anderson Report. 1960. *Grants to Students*. London: H. M. Stationery Office.
- Ashby, Eric, and Mary Anderson. 1970. *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain*. London: Macmillan.
- Barr, Nicholas. 1998. "Higher Education in Australia and Britain: What Lessons?" *The Australian Economic Review* 31 (2): 179–188.
- Barr, Nicholas, and Iain Crawford. 1997. "Universities in the First Division." *The Guardian*, September 16.
- Bolton, Paul. 2019. "Higher Education Student Numbers (Briefing Paper Number 7857)." House of Commons Library, July 17.
- Britton, Jack, Christine Farquharson, and Luke Sibieta. 2019. *2019 Annual Report on Education Spending in England*. London: The Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- Cameron, David. 2019. *For the Record*. London: William Collins.
- Cerych, Ladislav, and Sarah Colton. 1980. "Summarising Recent Student Flows." *European Journal of Education* 15 (1): 15–33.
- Charter, David. 2000. "Degree Fees of £12,000 Urged by Universities." *The Times*, July 7.
- DBIS (Department for Business Innovation & Skills). 2016. *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Denham, Andrew, and Mark Garnett. 2001. *Keith Joseph*. London: Routledge.
- DfE (Department for Education). 2019. *Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic Years 2006/2007 – 2017/2018 (Provisional)*. London, September 26.
- The Economist. 2015. "Not Dead Yet; Liberal Democrats." *The Economist*, May 16.
- Goodhart, David. 2017. *The Road to Somewhere*. London: Penguin Books.
- Greenaway, David, and Michelle Haynes. 2000. *Funding Universities to Meet National and International Challenges*. School of Economics Policy Report. Nottingham: University of Nottingham.
- Halpin, Tony. 2002. "Top-Up Fees Should 'Rise as High as Universities Need'." *The Times*, December 6.
- Halsey, A. H. 1993. "Opening Wide the Doors of Higher Education." *Education Economics* 1 (1): 85–91.
- Hillman, Nick. 2013. "From Grants for All to Loans for All: Undergraduate Finance from the Implementation of the Anderson Report (1962) to the Implementation of the Browne Report (2012)." *Contemporary British History* 27 (3): 249–270.
- Hillman, Nick. 2015. *Students and the 2015 General Election: Did They Make a Difference?* Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Hillman, Nick. 2016. "The Coalition's Higher Education Reforms in England." *Oxford Review of Education* 42 (3): 330–345.
- Hillman, Nick. 2019. *The Student Vote: Does it Matter in 2019?* Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Hillman, Nick. 2020. *Student Voters: Did They Make a Difference?* Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Hillman, Nick. 2021. *No Easy Answers: English Student Finance in the Spending Review*. Oxford: Higher Education Policy Institute.
- Hunt, Stephen, and Vikki Boliver. 2019. *Private Providers of Higher Education in the UK: Mapping the Terrain*. Working Paper. London: Centre for Global Higher Education.
- Ibrahim, Joseph. 2011. "The New Toll on Higher Education and the UK Student Revolts of 2010–2011." *Social Movement Studies* 10 (4): 415–421.
- Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance. 2010. *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*. London: Browne Committee.
- Johnson, Boris. 2019. "University Isn't for Everyone – Which is Why We Need More Apprenticeships." *The Telegraph*, July 7.
- Johnson, Craig, and Alia Middleton. 2016. "Junior Coalition Parties in the British Context: Explaining the Liberal Democrat Collapse at the 2015 General Election." *Electoral Studies* 43: 63–71.
- Kyvik, Svein. 2004. "Structural Changes in Higher Education Systems in Western Europe." *Higher Education in Europe* 29 (3): 393–409.
- Mandler, Peter. 2015. "Presidential Address: Educating the Nation: II. Universities." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25: 1–26.
- Mandler, Peter. 2020. *The Crisis of the Meritocracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKie, Anna. 2019. "English Universities Face 'Extreme Challenge' Under Next PM." *Times Higher Education*, July 18.
- Morgan, John. 2019a. "Lib Dems 'Moving Towards' Graduate Tax Policy for England." *Times Higher Education*, September 16.
- Morgan, John. 2019b. "Tory 'Rebalancing' from HE to FE a 'Policy and Political Project'." *Times Higher Education*. August 20.
- National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. 1997. *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Robbins, Lionel. 1980. *Higher Education Revisited*. London: Macmillan.
- Robbins Report. 1963. *Higher Education: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins*. London: H. M. Stationery Office.
- Robertson, David. 1998. "Who Won the War of Dearing's Ear?" *Higher Education Review* 30 (2): 7–22.
- Shattock, Michael. 1988. "Financial Management in Universities: The Lessons from University College, Cardiff." *Financial Accountability and Management* 4 (2): 99–112.
- Sizer, John. 1988. "British Universities' Responses to Events Leading to Grant Reductions Announced in July 1981." *Financial Accountability and Management* 4 (2): 79–97.
- Stevens, Robert. 2004. *University to Uni: The Politics of Higher Education in England Since 1944*. London: Politico's.

- Swinnerton-Dyer, Peter. 1985. "Higher Education Into the 1990s." *Higher Education Review* 17 (2): 9–18.
- Tanner, Will, Neil O'Brien, and James Kanagasooriam. 2019. *Generation Why? What is Driving the Growing Age Gap in British Politics and How the Centre Right Should Respond*. Onward.
- THE. 1996. "Top-Up Fees on Agenda." *Times Higher Education*, June 14.
- Thomson, Alan. 1997. "No Extra Cash as Treasury Grabs Fees." *Times Higher Education*, August 22.
- Trow, Martin. 2006. "Reflections on the Transition from Elite to Mass to Universal Access: Forms and Phases of Higher Education in Modern Societies Since WWII." In *International Handbook of Higher Education. Part One: Global Themes and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by James Forest and Philip Altbach, 243–280. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Whyte, William. 2015. *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Willetts, David. 2017. *A University Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Woodhall, Maureen. 1993. "Financial Support for Students in Higher Education." In *Briefings for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation National Commission on Education*, edited by National Commission on Education, 249–265. London: Heinemann.
- Wyness, Gill. 2010. *Policy Changes in UK Higher Education Funding, 1963-2009*. London: Institute of Education.