

Health Education landscape – challenges and opportunities

Ed Hughes, Council of Deans of Health

Agenda:
About CoDH
HE Sector challenges
Implications for health education
Opportunities



**We are the voice of the UK's
strategic academic leaders in
healthcare education and research**

Our vision is for a thriving health education and research sector delivering a high-quality nursing, midwifery and allied health professional workforce.

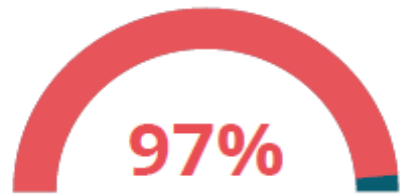
Our mission is to be the collective voice of nursing, midwifery and allied health professions in education and research, positively influencing and impacting policy.

Our values: inclusion, impact, collaboration, integrity

About the Council of Deans of Health

Our member universities deliver the future healthcare workforce of the NHS, charitable and private sectors.

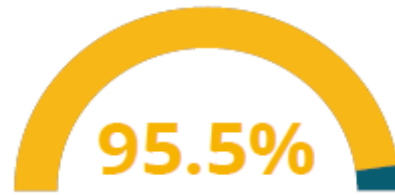
The Council of Deans of Health represents 108 university and further education faculties, across all regions and nations of the UK, engaged in education and research for nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions. Our members teach **200,000 healthcare students** at any one time, including:



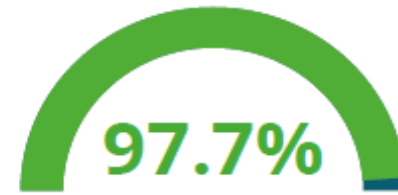
of all UK
**Nursing
students**



of all UK
**Midwifery
students**



of all UK
**Allied Health
(AHP) students**



of all UK
**Postgraduate
Health students**



100% of all
physiotherapy
students



99.9% of all
mental health
students



100% of all
radiography
students



99.9% of all
paramedic
science students

Working with, and for, our members to deliver our key policy building blocks:

Financial viability for health education

Collaboration across tertiary education to support access to health careers

A proportionate and enabling regulatory regime for health education

A high-quality learning experience for all health care students

Innovation in Teaching and Learning to address changing healthcare practice

A more integrated approach to health and social care in health professional education

Responsible use of artificial intelligence and simulation in teaching and research

Joined up health and education policy at all levels

Increased student numbers to meet workforce needs

A sustainable academic educator workforce

Sufficient placement capacity, diversity and quality

Increased Research and Knowledge Exchange capacity and capability

Stormy waters for higher education



- Financial sustainability crisis
- International student recruitment
- Student cost of living pressure
- Higher education in wider political discourse
- Challenging regulatory environment
- Misaligned incentives / policy drivers?

Higher Education in the headlines....

'I received a first but it felt tainted and undeserved': inside the university AI cheating crisis

Thousands more university jobs cut as financial crisis deepens



'University chiefs failed to reveal scale of crisis'

Students feel 'let down' by mental health support - but should it really be up to universities?

Universities risk sanctions over Gaza protests, watchdog says



University of Nottingham suspending nursing courses at 'unforgivable time'

The university has been cautioned its closure plans could have terrible, and long-lasting effects

Cardiff University nursing courses face closure

29 JANUARY, 2025 | BY EDD CHURCH



Cardiff University main building

Source: [Stan Zurek/Wikimedia Commons](#)

One of Wales' biggest nursing schools is facing closure, as Cardiff University plans to cut courses as part of a major reduction in staffing.

The public significantly underestimate higher education's contribution to the UK economy

Badenoch's number caps plan would cut 100,000 university places

Tory leader to use conference speech to attack 'debt trap degrees' and pledge more money for apprenticeships

Published on October 8, 2025

Last updated October 8, 2025

International student levy could cost English universities £600m a year

The proposed 6% surcharge has prompted warnings from vice-chancellors over its impact on budgets and global competitiveness

Significant challenges facing universities...

- Financial sustainability crisis:

“...significant numbers of universities will face deficits by the end of 2025-26. A smaller proportion also face liquidity problems, with our modelling projecting nearly one in six institutions will have less than 30 days’ liquidity”

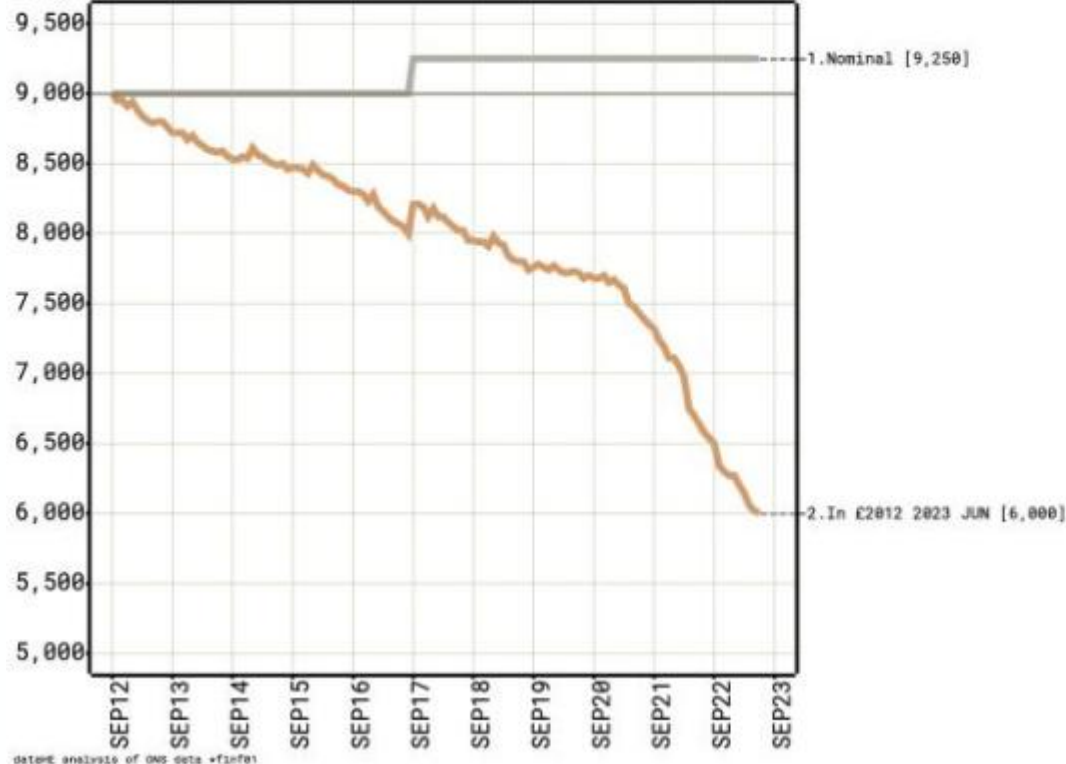
Susan Lapworth, OfS – 20 November 2025

- Cost of delivery: tuition fee loan real terms reduction
- International students – indirect impact on domestic fee cross-subsidy and knock on effects in domestic recruitment
- Increased running costs
- Academic workforce pressures – restructuring, impact on student support

The declining value of the tuition fee loan

Nominal and real fee cap values

English tuition fee cap, actual and inflation adjusted RPI, from SEP12 reference



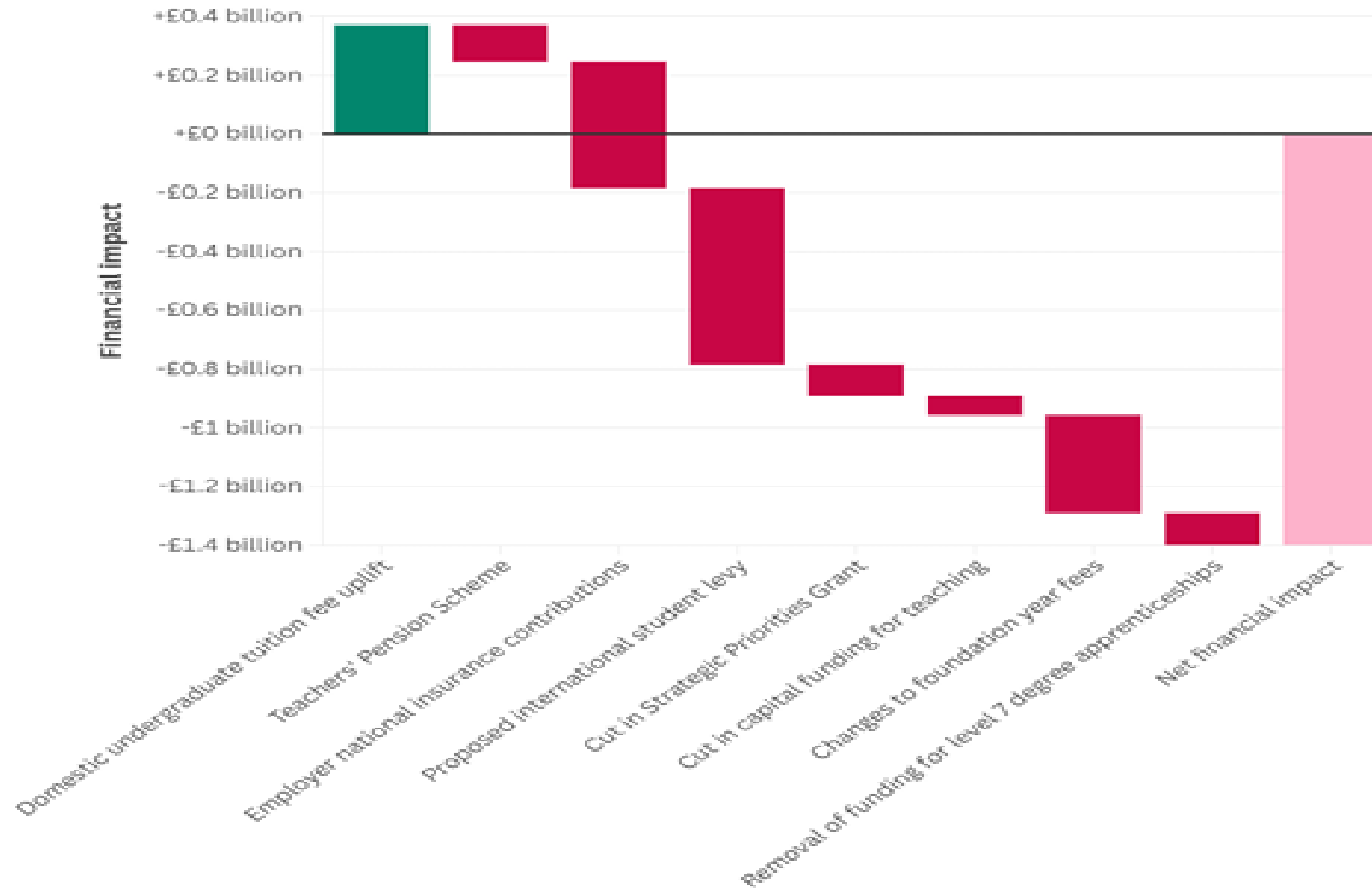
U/G fee cap introduced at £9,000 in 2012.

Raised to £9,250 in 2017.

Recently announced inflationary uplift to £9,535.

After effects of inflation tuition fee now worth about £6,300 in real terms compared to 2012

Giving with one hand, taking away with the other(s)?



... implications for health education delivery...

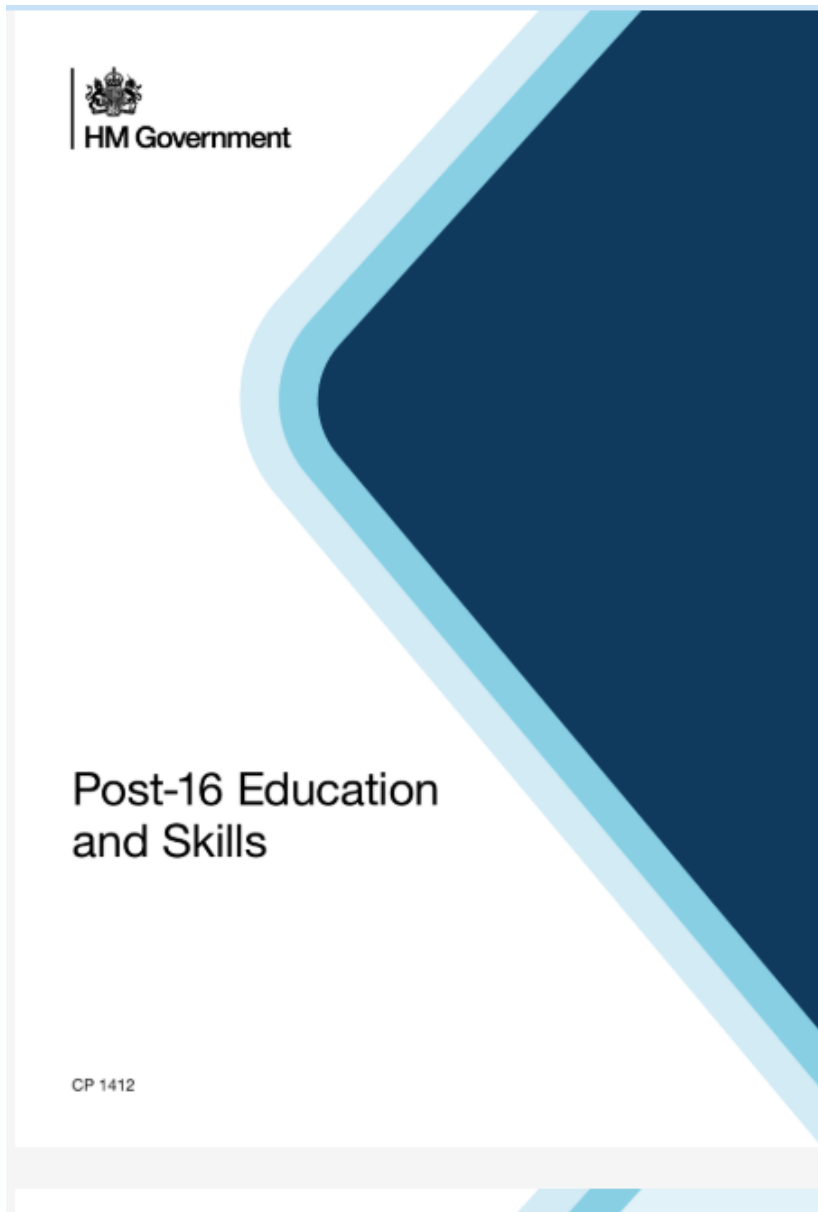


- Cost of delivery unsustainable
- Limited ability to invest in facilities for eg expansion or simulation
- Some of the institutions with largest health provision facing significant financial challenges
- International students – indirect impact via domestic fee cross-subsidy
- Academic workforce pressures
- Restructuring tensioned against regulatory rigidities (eg mandated SSRs)
- Risks to strategically important (national/regional) provision



Pulling in the same direction (or not)?

- Two big policy papers in last few months:
 - 10 Year Health Plan and workforce plan
 - Post 16 Education & Skills White Paper
- Missing pieces – eg social care?
- Are the incentives for students, universities, colleges and employers aligned?
 - Employment challenges for recently graduated health professionals
 - Educator workforce
 - Placement capacity
 - Level 7 Apprenticeship funding



Post-16 Education & Skills White Paper

- Tuition fee uplifts in line with inflation
- Introduce Lifelong Learning Entitlement
- Maintenance loans linked to international student levy
- Reform OfS Strategic Priorities Grant
- Research specialisation
- Increased collaboration across the education sector
- Stronger role for OfS

10 Year Health Plan

- The plan sets out how the government will reinvent the NHS in England through three shifts:
 - hospital to community
 - analogue to digital
 - sickness to prevention.
- Reorientate the focus of NHS recruitment away from international recruitment and towards its own communities; supporting those unemployed or economically inactive into appropriate roles
- New workforce plan being developed by Spring 2026 – assumption that changes to healthcare delivery will require different workforce strategy
- Address significant culture issues to make NHS an employer of choice



10 Year Health Plan - specifics

- Overhaul education and training curricula
- Reform placement tariffs and quicker reimbursement of placement costs for students
- Create 2,000 more nursing apprenticeships over the next three years, prioritising areas with the greatest need
- Development of advanced practice models for nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals, particularly in neighbourhood settings
- Address student attrition
- Reverse the decline in clinical academic roles through collaboration between government and major charity funders
- Increase research opportunities for nurses, midwives and AHPs.



Moving forward

- What do the shifts to community / preventative/ digital mean for future education curricula and placements?
- Education as part of a wider health workforce ecosystem, not just a supplier of trained labour for the NHS
- Capitalise on recognition of importance of research and clinical academics



Opportunities... new Workforce Plan as a platform for collaboration

- Provides a framework for how the sector might evolve – including expansion of apprenticeship delivery and curriculum development
- Could be used to create coordination around supply – both regionally and for specific professions
- Drive culture change in the NHS to value and support learners and educators
- Could provide confidence to allow investment to support expansion in facilities and technology (eg simulated learning environments)
- Signals intent to invest in clinical academic careers and research in NMAHP areas
- Strong emphasis on social mobility and local provision will resonate with many HEIs & colleges

Opportunities... Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper

- Restores principle of inflationary increases to tuition fee loan
- Limited introduction of maintenance grants (at a price)
- Encourage collaboration between Higher and Further Education
- Continued emphasis on access and participation, with reduced bureaucracy for those delivering on this agenda
- Lifelong Learning Entitlement offers flexibility to learners
- Improved cost recovery for research
- Reform of REF

Shared Institutions

**The public's view on the role
of universities in national
and local life**

More in Common and UCL Policy Lab

October 2025



What do voters think:

- Britons view universities positively
- Universities are valued on a national, local and personal level
- Level of education divides views on universities (graduates much more +ve)
- Some voters are sceptical of the HE sector
- Two views on role of HE: “clear path” or “opening doors”
- Cost pressures cutting through – and Gov’t / sector share responsibility for fixing this

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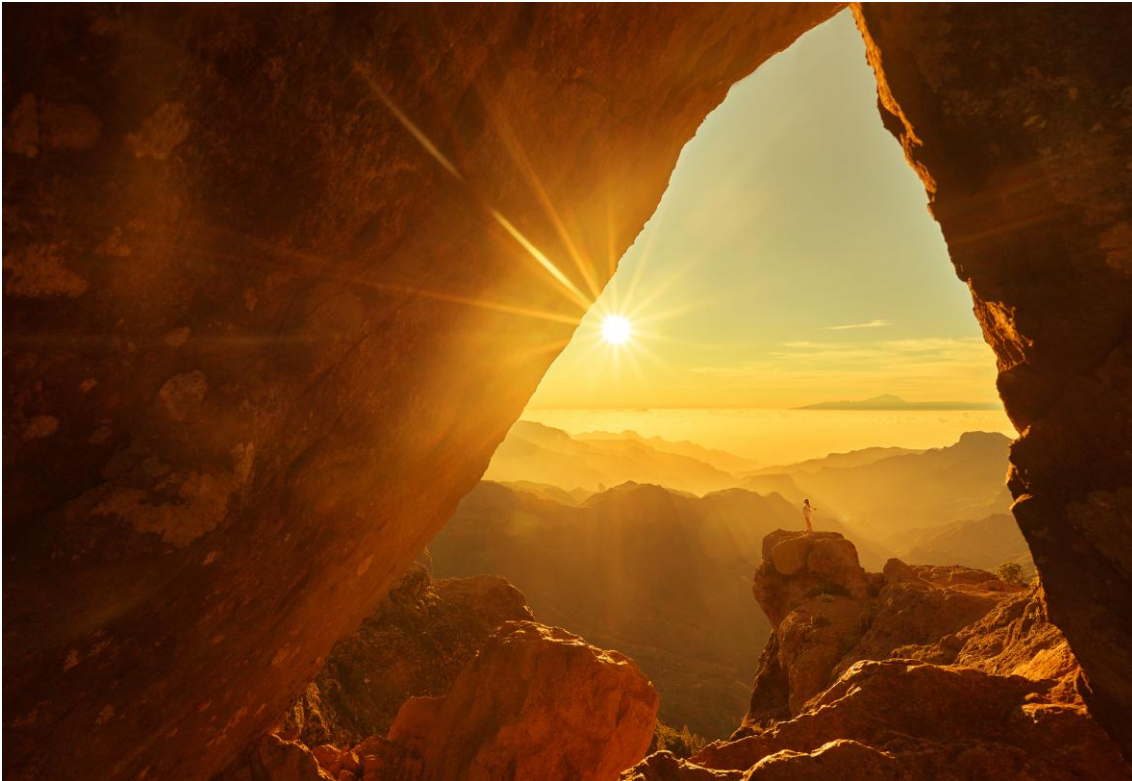


How to respond:

Findings emphasise that universities might benefit from:

- Highlighting research and innovation
- Focusing on the local
- Being proud nationally
- More clearly illustrating the link between university and the workplace

Reasons for optimism?



Opportunities in 10 Year Health Plan

Higher education still valued in many areas of society

Health education contributes positively to key government agendas

Resilience of universities and colleges

Commitment of students – disruptors

Passion and expertise of the academic workforce

Thank you

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