

With the Conservative Party conference over, it will be back to business for the government. The one announcement that has gripped the HE policy networks is of course Amber Rudd's speech on immigration – a tough announcement was expected but this went further than anticipated:

“We will also look for the first time at whether our student immigration rules should be tailored to the quality of the course and the quality of the educational institution.....our consultation will ask what more can we do to support our best universities – and those that stick to the rules – to attract the best talent ... while looking at tougher rules for students on lower quality courses”

We look forward to the consultation on this – there is a lot of speculation about what “quality” means (can it mean TEF rating?) – may be, or this may just be a hardening of the rules on Tier 4 visas. And the separate question is what will happen to EU staff and students – likely to be subject to the same rules, work permits etc? On the EU question, we will not be told, because it is part of the negotiations.

There is an interesting article by the [VC of Bath Spa on Wonkhe](#) and a proposal for [a new approach](#) by David Morris. Over last weekend you will have seen the [PM's speech on hard v soft Brexit](#). This confirms the inevitable – the government's priorities are immigration control and control over UK laws. There can be no EEA type deal that compromises either of those. That may mean in practice that with no free movement of people to the UK, the EU will not be willing to give the UK access to the single market, access to H2020, access to Erasmus etc. – but the PM has not said that she does not want those things, she has said that she wants the best possible deal that can be negotiated as long as it does not compromise the two priority issues. So in theory those things are still up for negotiation, although European politicians are generally taking a hard line so far. Nicky Morgan last week on the [Today programme on the BBC](#) said that was just a negotiating position (she used to be a lawyer).

Also at the conference, Philip Hammond [extended](#) the guarantee for EU funding awards. In August, he announced that the UK government would guarantee payments due after Brexit under EU awards that were made up to the date of the Autumn Statement -in case the EU stops the payments. That has now been extended to cover awards made up to the date the UK leaves the EU – provided they are good value for money and they are in line with domestic strategic priorities.

And Theresa May, in her [speech \(Spectator\)](#), repeated her points about schools – we are preparing some workshops to pull together a response on the universities (and any other aspects) of the schools consultations – more to follow next week. HEFCE published a [“how to” guide today](#).

It was fantastic to welcome Professor Les Ebdon, the Director for Fair Access at OFFA, to BU today, he spoke to the BU board and the Fair Access Management Group about the challenges of widening participation and improving outcomes for disadvantaged groups – and ended characteristically with a call to action – “let's not forget that this is all about transforming lives”

UUK are [reviewing skills](#) – we will be working on a response to this one too.

And the UUK social Mobility Group issued its [final report today](#). Its recommendations include:

- The establishment of an independent ‘Evidence and Impact Exchange’ to systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to the role of higher education in supporting social mobility and to support the sharing of data from schools through to employers. This will help build greater strategic coherence and coordination between all parties and allow for more effective targeting of interventions at each stage of the student lifecycle.
- A greater focus on outreach activities by universities, colleges and employers to support attainment in schools. This should be supported by a systematic review of the evidence on the impact and effectiveness of these interventions by the Evidence and Impact Exchange.
- Further consideration to be given to developing, strengthening and expanding universities links with schools. The form this takes will depend on institutional mission and local circumstances and should include an evaluation of impact.

- Higher education institutions to monitor their admissions, retention, attainment, transition to postgraduate study and graduate employment data to identify where there may be gaps, particularly in relation to race, socioeconomic status, gender and disability, and to explore how these gaps can be addressed. This could include using higher education sector frameworks already in place.
- The expansion of datasets to enable universities to assess their work on social mobility, including the development of a shared basket of indicators in relation to socio-economic disadvantage.
- Greater use of contextual data to inform offer-making, supported by the identification and sharing of good practice.
- The development of a directory of charitable third sector organisations across the country to enhance school, college, university and employer collaboration.
- Greater coordination of information and advice across schools, universities and employers, particularly in terms of the impact of subject choice and the qualifications taken at school and graduate careers.
- Universities UK to work with government to develop a more robust approach to information, advice and guidance, including greater alignment between government and higher education sector communications around social mobility and higher education. To include raising awareness of the different routes into and through higher education and the promotion of the value of lifelong learning and the value of part-time study.
- Universities UK to work with employers and other local partners including Local Enterprise Partnerships and the new Metro Mayors to tackle disadvantage at a regional level. This will include monitoring and publication of data on the recruitment of underrepresented groups by graduate employers.
- Universities to work with league table providers to understand the potential impact of league tables on social mobility.