



# The All-Party Parliamentary University Group

All-Party Parliamentary University Group Meeting  
Post-18 Reforms  
Wednesday 8 December

## Speakers

- Ed Dorrell, Director, Public First
- Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton
- Professor Malcolm Press, Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University

**Ed Dorrell** began by introducing Public First and the research project, before outlining the research methodology, which included a poll of over 1000 young people, focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Presenting the key findings from the research, Ed explained that young people still saw university as a path to improvement and, ultimately, they felt university is worth the cost. Looking at the current process of applying for student finance, the research found that young people 'muddle through' when they are applying and struggle to find financial planning information. However, young people from less affluent families were much better informed about the costs associated with university and the financial help available to them.

Moving on to the potential post-18 reforms, he reported that the research showed low support for limiting student numbers, young people disliked fees but accepted they are here to stay and interest rates were overwhelmingly seen as unfair. Finally on options available, Ed said the research found that poorer students benefitted the most from more university options locally and generally young people did not think about part-time options available.

**Professor Debra Humphris** opened her remarks by agreeing with the APPG report's conclusion that prospective students are muddling through in terms of finance and access to higher education. She told the group of a recent meeting where she heard stories from first year undergraduates of the challenges they faced navigating the current system of student loans and maintenance and suggested reforms to the Student Loans Company. However, she said prospective students, particularly mature students, are determined and they see the value of the university of higher education.

Secondly, Professor Humphris said that a lifelong loan entitlement was a clear and simple idea in theory, but that a significant amount of interrelated complexity needed to be worked through before it could become a reality. She said unless a new system is tested, and the unintended consequences worked through, there was a risk of destabilising our world class university and skills sector. Therefore, she advocated for starting small and building an evidence base.

On disadvantaged students valuing higher education, Professor Humphris said her experience chimed with the APPG report conclusions that students don't think of their courses as "low value" but as an opportunity to transform their lives and go forward.

**Professor Malcolm Press** began by stating that the university sector is hugely supportive of the lifelong loan entitlement (LLE) and are keen to take ownership of it and to do the utmost to make it work. He agreed with Professor Humphris that testing a new system is key. To give the group some sense of the complexity he explained a number of considerations including how credits will be transferred from other organisations; who is going to be responsible for auditing those credits and acting as a banker for those credits; and how are they going to ensure that funding can easily be made available to people who are doing bite sized chunks. Professor Press felt the sector needed to work very closely with organisations such as UCAS and the Student Loans Company.

Professor Press referred to the report's findings that prospective students do not always understand how to access opportunities. He felt this was because they are created from the sector's perspective rather than the students. He said when building these new systems and approaches, the sector should co-create and work with the users.

Finally, Professor Press's concluded by stressing the importance of clear information, advice and guidance. He asked how many employers really understood what the lifelong loan entitlement (LLE) was and how they would recognise and value these qualifications. He also questioned whether young people and workers saw this as a valuable way of investing in their future stressing that piloting and testing were therefore important.