

KEYNOTE: Student Support and Mental Health

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Now what? What's going on and what should IAG professionals do about it?

WonkHE is about getting the conversation about HE into the hands of professionals, students and academics.

Erasmus plus - solemn vow that it will continue by Boris, even though it's not in the withdrawal agreement.

Aalto University SU promo. Works for 70-80% of students, but what about those it doesn't work for?

Assumption that HELOA Conference delegates here had a good experience at uni and have remained in the sector, but what about those who don't have a good experience?

Short-term developments

Cabinet reshuffle after Brexit – 'real' launch of this government.

OfS- no updates or activity for some time, now there's lots happening at once

Strikes continue

Climate change action on campus

Culture wars - racism in HE - Uni of Sheffield training students to lead conversations about racial harassment on campus (against a backdrop of Harry and Meghan). Creator of TEF says universities should be promoting academic standards not 'woke' ideology

What if this is the new split in politics and not temporary? For the first time, HE will be on one side (the left) and not straddling both, as it has managed to do in the past.

It is not going to be a good 5 years for HE under the current government

1 in 2 of the population now goes to uni. Conservatives have real concerns that a generation of left wing voters are coming.

The 'How HE provides advantage' message will be under pressure. The idea of being better by going to uni won't be a popular societal message.

What comes next?

1. Culture wars continue - religious freedoms and academic mobbing (trans issues)
2. Government will impose student number controls - cannot continue to be unregulated
3. Subject TEF - Pearce Review - messaging to students for bronze courses in gold institutions?
4. Relationship between student and uni - advertising and messaging to students - can it be trusted? Exaggerated claims. OfS will be doing work here.
5. Harassment - need to professionalise and standardise responses. Will continue to dominate press.
6. Mental Health - continues to be a priority for SU policy. Global phenomenon. Charter participation will become a default. Line between NHS and uni; responsibility of academics

for MH; data - safe and responsible collection; student loneliness; resilience. 16% of students feel lonely every day. Disabled students twice as likely to be lonely every day. Non-EU students are 10% less likely to agree they have someone to call on. 17% of all students say they have no true friends. Loneliness/friendship and involvement - linked to mental health.

7. Industrial relations
8. Student conduct
9. Student contracts / SSPs
10. NSS review - starts in February
11. Free speech
12. Brexit

Michael Barber – current Chair of OfS. Dominic Cummings hates Michael Barber

Not telling people how to do things, but setting the outcomes. Baseline of high standards but encourage competition between institutions that's above it.

Supply vs demand - 'just get people in'

1. Challenges for the IAG profession

All IAG is sales - viewed as self-interested. Bound to be viewed cynically. Suppliers of IAG are also recruiters in a marketplace. Saying you're honest and credible won't help. HELOA code of conduct becomes much more important - what are you doing and why are you doing it?

2. Lives and products

A shift from describing the lecture theatres to what the experience is like. Fraught with danger - it won't be like that for everyone. What will happen to me? - also fraught with danger! This tension isn't going away. You are saying something that might not come true.

3. Mental Health

Danger of social media - unattainable lives and lifestyles. During Clearing - unis paint a lifestyle which might not be attainable by large chunks of the student body.

4. Scarcity

Scarcity where it isn't true is a big issue in consumer law. Pressure selling / misleading - honesty about grades, getting a room in halls. As consumer law develops in our sector, what is ethical and unethical is going to become more of an issue.

5. Bloody kids

Married at 33; mortgage at 35 (ONS) - twenties becomes a new middle stage, less mature - uni becomes an extension of school. Are institutions keeping people safe? Warn that uni might not be safe / equip students to navigate / or make the environment safer?

6. Fake news!

Applicants can see through this. Will HE IAG get caught up in data manipulation wars?

7. More for less

In next decade, unis will have more to do with less. Frozen fee, not inline with inflation. What can realistically be delivered? But also pressure to deliver the best. Wanting people to come there, but being honest about financial pressures. What IAG staff say can be used in future consumer law suits.

8. Ready steady

If you get into uni, you're ready. You got the grades and you're as ready as everyone else. Question of readiness. Can we be honest about whether someone is ready? And the work required to turn potential into readiness.

Questions from the floor

Finance linked to household income - parents have to contribute - feel that they have a say.

Messages that suggest that it's affordable but parental contribution is hidden. Only Martin Lewis talks about this. Morally right thing to do is to be honest - problematic if you're trying to get students through the door. Student ambassadors told absolutely not to talk about the high cost of living in a particular city. We have a responsibility to address this. Setting them up to fail.

Haven't had a piece from an IAG professional in WonkHE for a long time- it's read by senior officials at OfS. It does influence decisions and policy. Can HELOA respond?

People in the room know the market-model is terrible. Without a new government, what can we do?

There are always scandals, but it is possible to operate in a marketplace ethically. Much less conversation about ethical behaviour in this market. If we don't become better, OfS will intervene, reputation of sector is dragged through the mud. International recruitment horror stories - Oxford Brookes sold as Oxford University. What can we do as a collective? Healthy competition - becomes the broadband, used car sector. What about the sponsors at conference?!