

The rise of the commuter student

Kenyon, S. 2026. The rise of the commuter student. HELOA National Conference 2026. Crowne Plaza, Stratford Upon Avon, UK. 14-16 January, 2026.

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Overview

- Our aims and outcomes today.
 - Activity 1: commuter students and you.
- Commuter students and HELOA's mission/values.
- About commuter students: who, where, why?
- The residential student bias in UK HE.
 - Activity 2: reflections on your policy and practice.
- Changes to your practice.
 - Activity 3: your commitment to change.

Our aims and outcomes

- Increase awareness and understanding of commuter students and their significance in the sector.
- Begin to reflect on how inclusive our policies, practices and decision-making processes are for commuter students.
- Empower you to identify practical changes that you could make, to (further) support a commuter student inclusive approach to your activities.

Defining ‘commuter student’

‘Students who continue to live at home whilst studying, rather than moving into student accommodation’ (Kenyon, 2024a).

Commuter students and HELOA

‘Our members help potential students, and their families and advisers, make an informed decision about their future in education by providing high-quality information, advice and guidance.’¹



¹HELOA. Nd. What is HELOA? Available online, via: <https://www.heloa.ac.uk/about/>, viewed 09/01/2026.

Commuter students and HELOA

– ‘... each institution and HELOA member is encouraged to continually support the ethos of widening access to higher education. Students from nontraditional backgrounds should not be discouraged from attending any event that may promote awareness of higher education.’²

Young people from lower socio-economic groups;

Mature students;

Looked after children/care leavers;

First in family HE applicants;

Minority ethnic applicants;

Young people from military families;

Asylum seekers and refugees.

– ²HELOA. 2014. Good Practice Guidelines. Available online, via: <https://www.heloa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/HELOA-Good-Practice-Guidelines-Feb-2014.pdf>, viewed 09/01/2026. P10).

47%

Nationally 2022*

12-85%

Nationally 2022*

31%

18 year old accepted applicants 2025**

66%

CCCU 2023 *

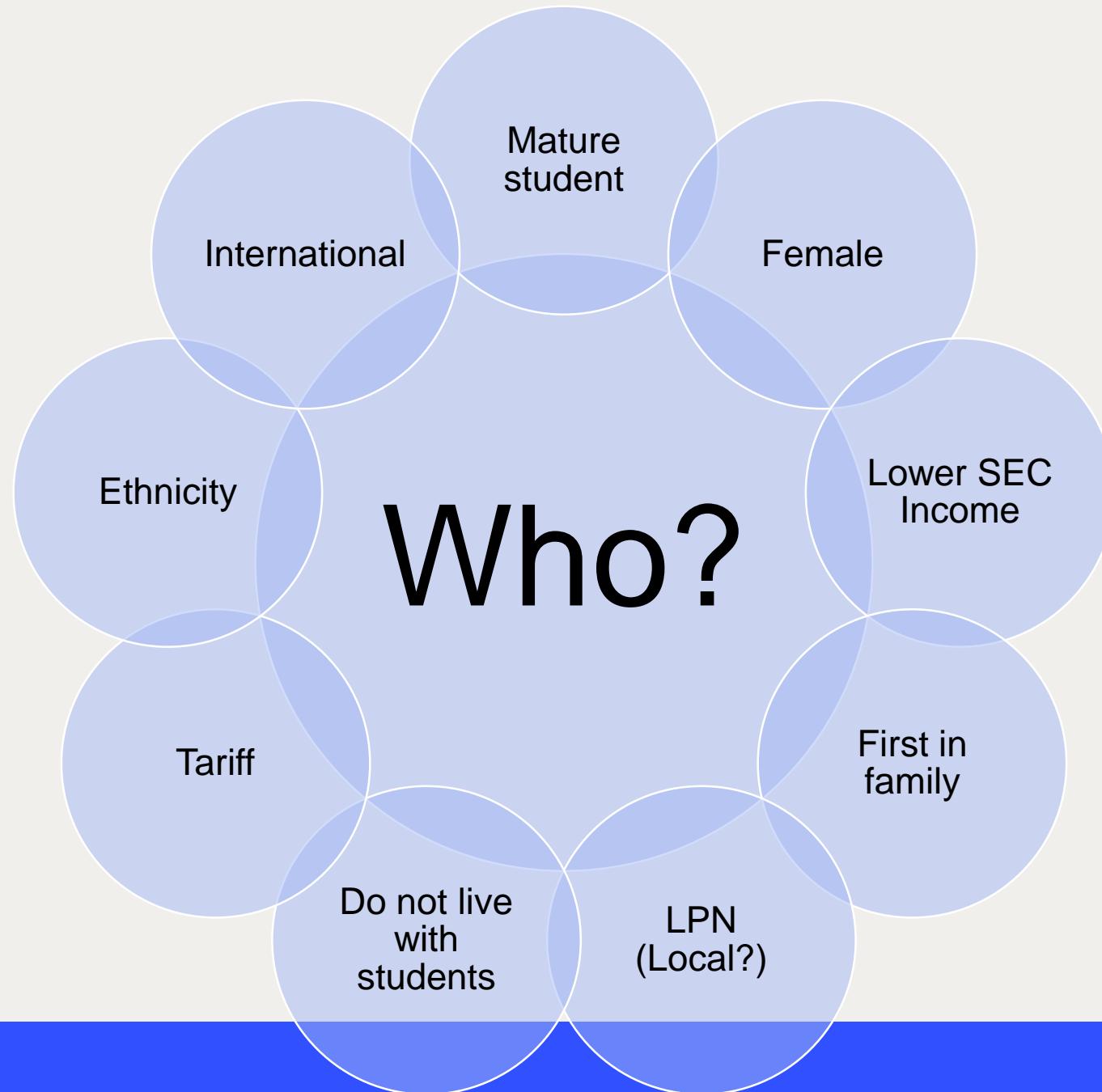
54%

HEIs mention commuters in APPs ***

* Kenyon, 2025 – please see me for details.

** UCAS. 2026. Available online, via: <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/more-school-leavers-living-at-home-for-university-and-college-study>, viewed 09/01/2026.

Marshall, M. 2025. Available online, via: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-commuter-students-show-up-in-new-access-and-participation-plans/>, viewed 09/01/2026.



Where?

Social
science,
business,
education

Post-92

Postgraduate

City-based

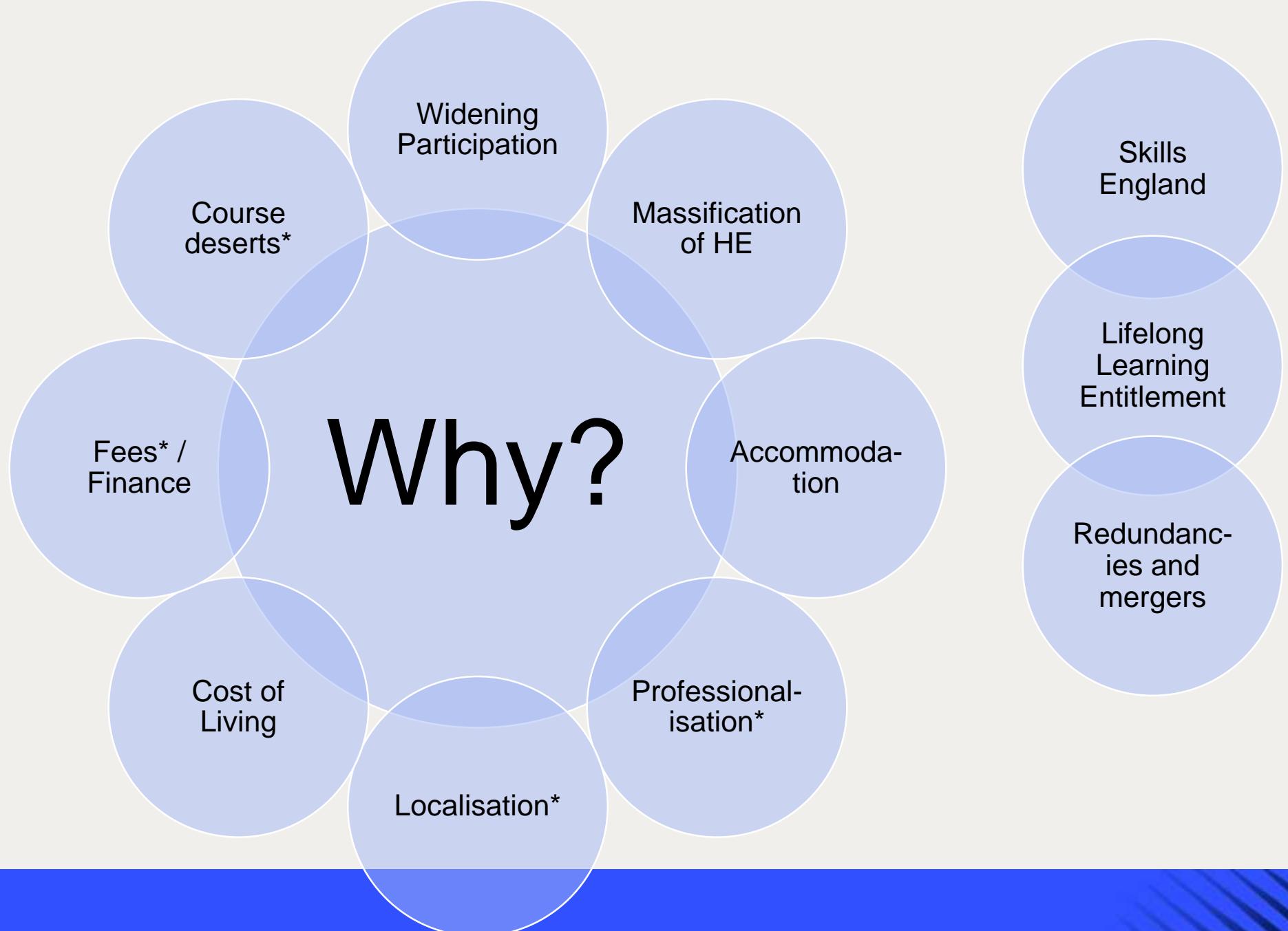
Non-Russell
Group

Lower league
table

Lower tariff



Why?



* Hypothesised at the time of writing.

Activities

Travelling

Parenting

Caring

Social /
leisure

Employment

Community
activities

Studying

‘I am a student’.

‘I am a parent, an employee, a
community activist, a volunteer, a
band member... and I study.’



These students are likely to experience the following risks:

Risk 5 →

Risk 6 →

Risk 7 →

Risk 10 →

Commuter students

This refers to students based on the distance or time they take to travel from their accommodation to their place of study.

- Risk 5: Limited choice of course type and delivery mode.
- Risk 6: Insufficient academic support.
- Risk 7: Insufficient personal support.
- Risk 10: Cost pressures.

- Lower attainment, attendance, engagement.
- Poorer experience.
- Less sense of belonging.
- Disconnection from course, university, community.
- Poorer emotional wellbeing.
- Poorer financial wellbeing.
- Retention.
- Recruitment (league tables).
- An increasing market.
- Regulatory and reputational risk for sector.
 - Increasing OfS interest.
 - CMA?
 - Political climate.
- 15% CCCU CO2e emissions from student commute.
- Commuters drive; residents walk/bus.
- Transport network impacts.

The residential student bias in UK HE

- Whole institution.
 - Pedagogy.
 - Policy.
 - Processes.
 - Places.
- Entire student journey.
 - Pre-pre-application to post-graduation.
- Government policy.
- UK culture.

The maximum amount you can get depends on where you live.		
	2024 to 2025 academic year	2025 to 2026 academic year
Living with your parents	Up to £8,610	Up to £8,877
Living away from your parents, outside London	Up to £10,227	Up to £10,544

Activity 2. Is there a residential student bias in recruitment, outreach, marketing and admissions?

Reflections on your policy and practice.

What can we do?

A whole-institution approach

In the classroom.

In our support services.

Students and Students' Unions.

At the Institutional-level.

In recruitment, outreach,
marking and admissions.

Changes to your practice: ideas from this conference

Workshop 5 (10:45-11:45).

- Student ambassadors; student finance and fresher's week; international students; Future Students Office at University of Leicester.

Previous workshops.

- CRM; outreach; prospectus; contextual admissions; in-region recruitment.

Activity 3. Your commitment to change.

What could you do?

Acknowledgements

CCCU:

- Adam Elston and Alex O'Mara, Student Experience and Insights Team.
- Prof. Mike Weed, Dr Peter Rands, John Hills, Academy for Sustainable Futures.
- Prof. David Bates, Impact lead.
- Research participants.
- Felicity Lindo, FSESS student intern.
- Governance and Legal, IT Services.

Dr Becky Turner and all participants in the CCCU Commuter Student Symposium, 3 December, 2025.

Mack Marshall and all contributors to our Wonkhe series on Commuter Students.

HESA data is from a bespoke dataset, provided by Jisc.

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