

An aerial photograph of a modern university building with a curved facade and a glass-enclosed upper level. The building is surrounded by other university buildings and greenery. A red rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

# THE UK GLOBAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN TURBULENT TIMES

*THE DRAPERS' LECTURE*  
QMUL, 14 NOVEMBER 2024

SIMON MARGINSON





## THE UK GLOBAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN TURBULENT TIMES

- Universities are both local-national *and* global
- How we got here
  - (1) Golden age of the global research university 1990-2016
  - (2) Partial deglobalisation and the university 2016-2024
  - (3) Specific challenges in UK
- Where we might go next



A top-down view of a diverse group of young people, including men and women of various ethnicities, smiling and looking towards a central globe of the Earth. They are gathered around the globe, with their hands resting on the surface or near it. The globe shows the Americas and parts of Europe and Africa. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

UNIVERSITIES ARE BOTH  
LOCAL-NATIONAL  
AND GLOBAL



An aerial photograph of Bologna, Italy, showcasing its dense urban landscape. The city is characterized by its terracotta-tiled roofs and historic stone buildings. In the foreground, the Piazza Maggiore is visible, featuring the Palazzo del Comune and the Palazzo Re Enzo. The Basilica di San Petronio is partially visible on the left. The background shows rolling green hills under a clear sky.

# LOCAL/NATIONAL AND GLOBAL

University of Bologna, Italy, founded in 1088 CE



# LOCAL/NATIONAL AND GLOBAL

local &  
national



global

University of Bologna, Italy, founded in 1088 CE





# LOCAL/NATIONAL AND GLOBAL

- “As institutions deeply embedded in the social fabric of individual states yet also holding a significant global role, higher education institutions are particularly susceptible to those changing geopolitical dynamics. Parallel to the shifting geopolitics is the increasingly internationalisation of higher education, characterised by the embedding and further expansion of international student recruitment, regional alliances, academic mobility schemes and international branch campuses.”

~ Hannah Moscovitz and Emma Sabzalieva, *Conceptualising the new geopolitics of higher education. Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21 (2), pp. 149-165.

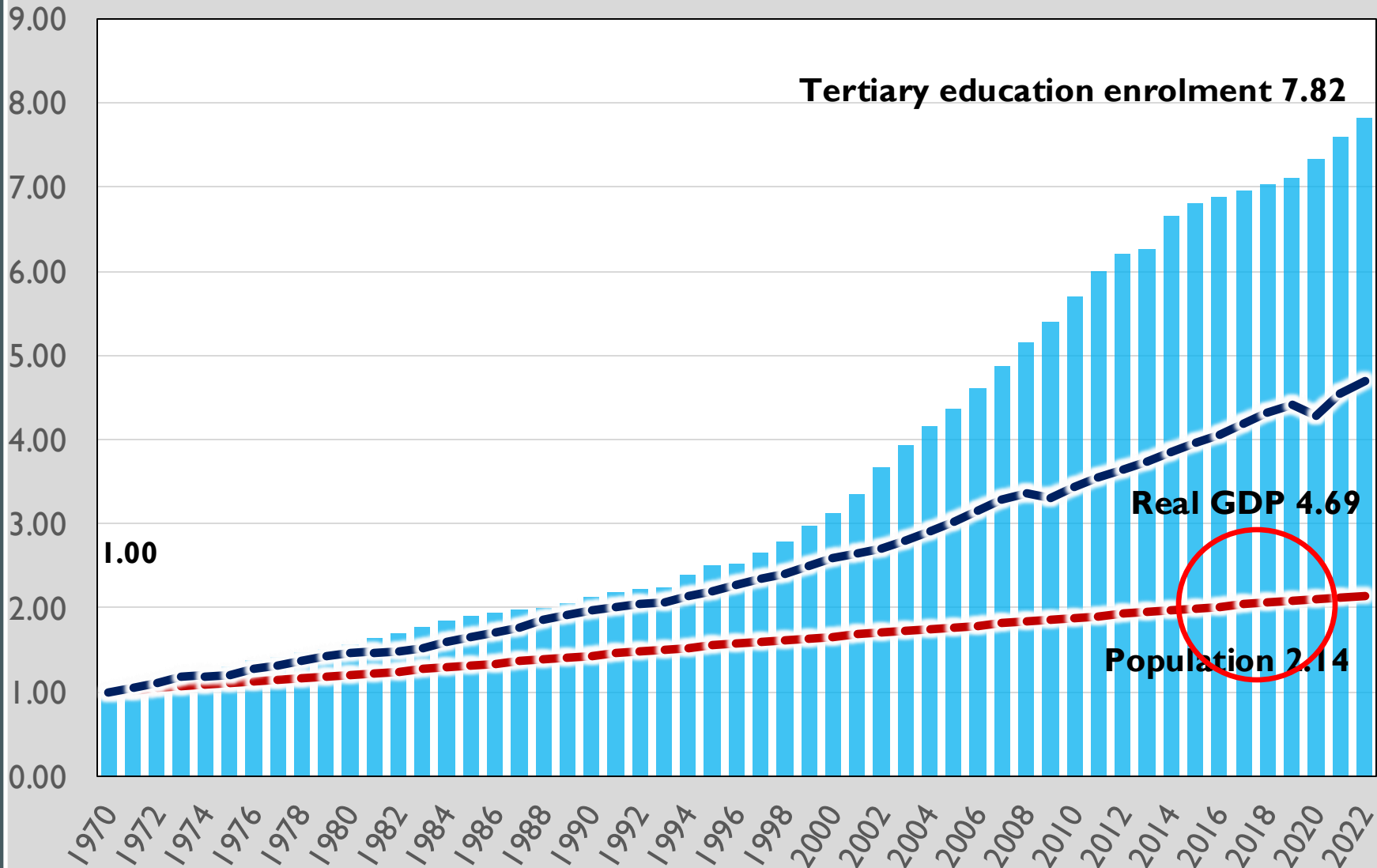




*HOW WE GOT HERE:*

**(I) GOLDEN AGE OF THE GLOBAL  
RESEARCH UNIVERSITY 1990-2016**

# Growth of worldwide tertiary student population compared to growth



# WORLD GROWTH OF TERTIARY ENROLMENT: 1970-2022

The world Gross Tertiary Enrolment ratio reached 42% in 2022

84% North America, 81% Europe and Central Asia, 59% East Asia and Pacific, 41% Middle East and North Africa, 27% South Asia, 9% Sub-Saharan Africa

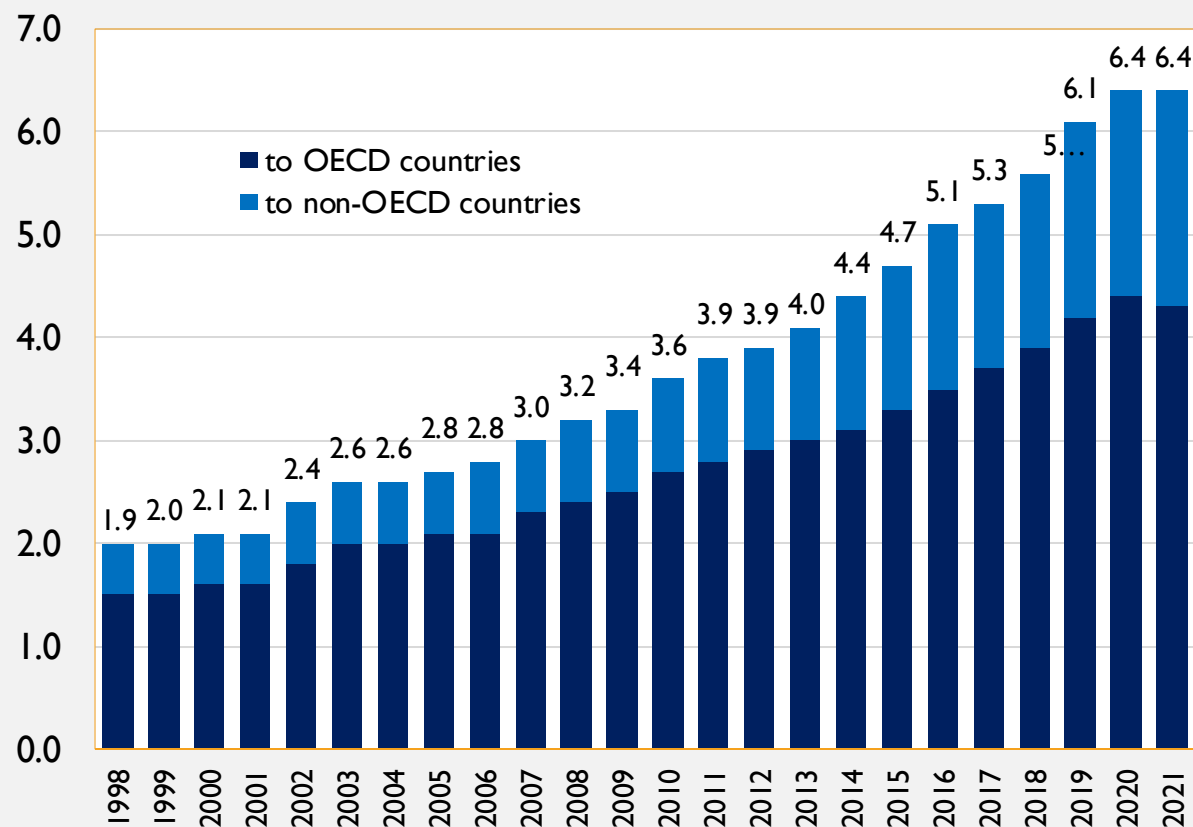


# GROWING ACTIVITIES IN THE GLOBAL SPACE 1990-2016

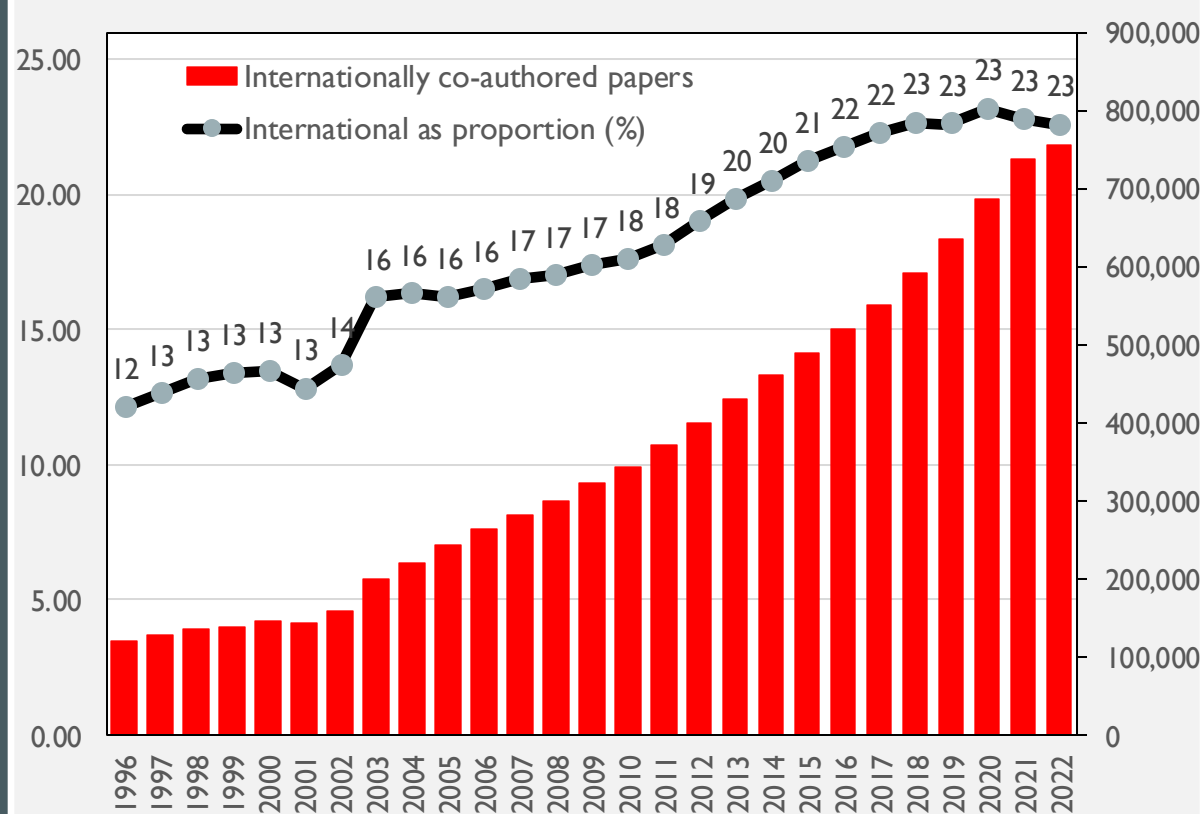
1. Networked communications / data transfer
2. Emergence and rapid growth of global science
3. Rapid growth of cross-border student mobility
4. New forms of cross-border provision, such as joint degrees, twinning programmes, branch campuses and franchising
5. Online education and MOOCs
6. National strategies including export promotion and global 'hubs' and 'villages'
7. University partnerships and consortia
8. Global comparisons and ranking



# TOTAL CROSS-BORDER/FOREIGN TERTIARY STUDENTS (MILLIONS) WORLD: 1998-2021 (UNESCO)



# NUMBER AND PROPORTION (%) OF CROSS-BORDER PAPERS WORLD: 1996-2022 (SCOPUS)





# QMUL IN LEIDEN RANKING FOR 2019-2022: TOP 5% PAPERS ON THE BASIS OF CITATION RATE, BY DISCIPLINE GROUP

	Number of top 5% papers	Proportion of all papers in top 5%	Rank in UK: number of top 5% papers
Mathematics and computing	58	10.2%	8
Biomedicine and health	198	9.8%	12
Physical sciences and engineering	67	7.6%	17
Social sciences and humanities	43	7.5%	25
Earth and life sciences	26	10.7%	38
<b>All fields</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>15</b>



# CONDITIONS FOSTERING INTERNATIONALISATION





# CONDITIONS FOSTERING INTERNATIONALISATION

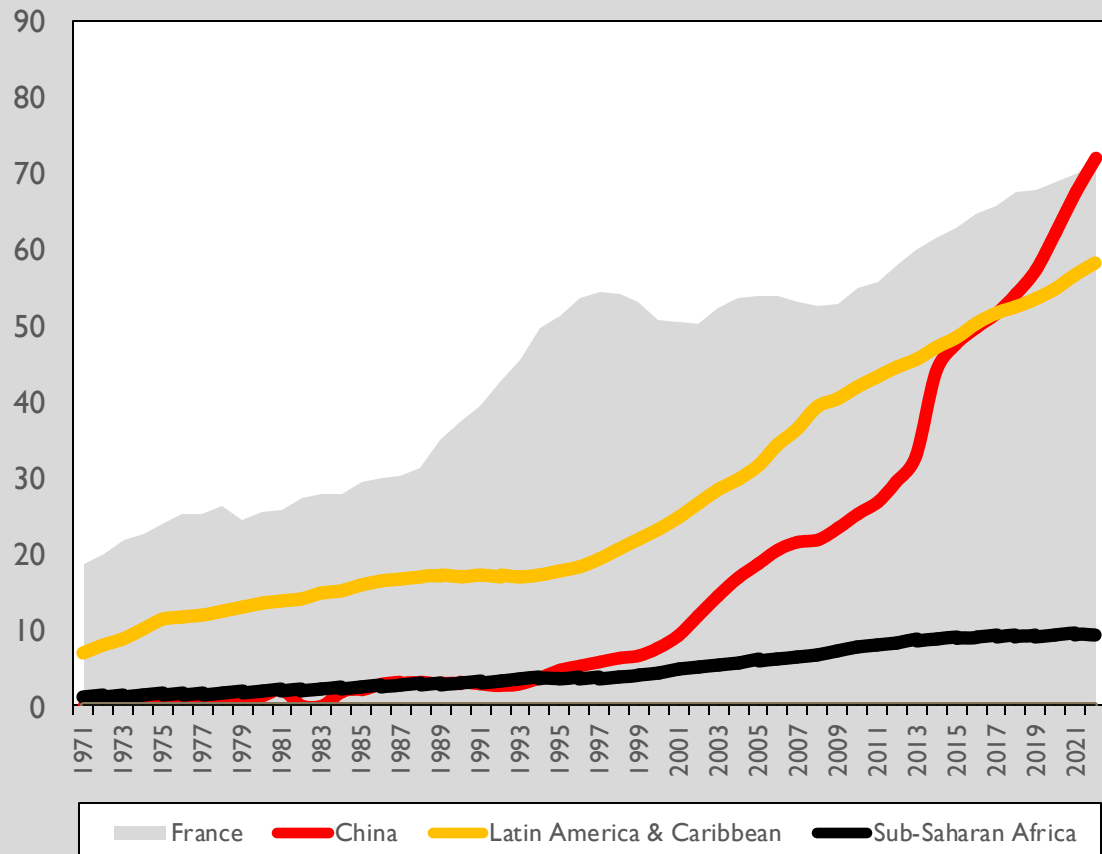


- Normative internationalisation – every cross-border connection and activity seen as good, and the unconnected seen as left behind
- Broad liberal support for global economic openness and engagement, ideology of higher education in the global knowledge economy
- In universities in Anglophone, cross-border activity a source of power, resources and status, while being relatively secure and manageable



# THE GOLDEN AGE HAS LED TO A MULTI-POLAR HIGHER EDUCATION WORLD: *THE NON-WEST IS RISING*

**Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio 1975-2022**  
France (in grey), China, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa

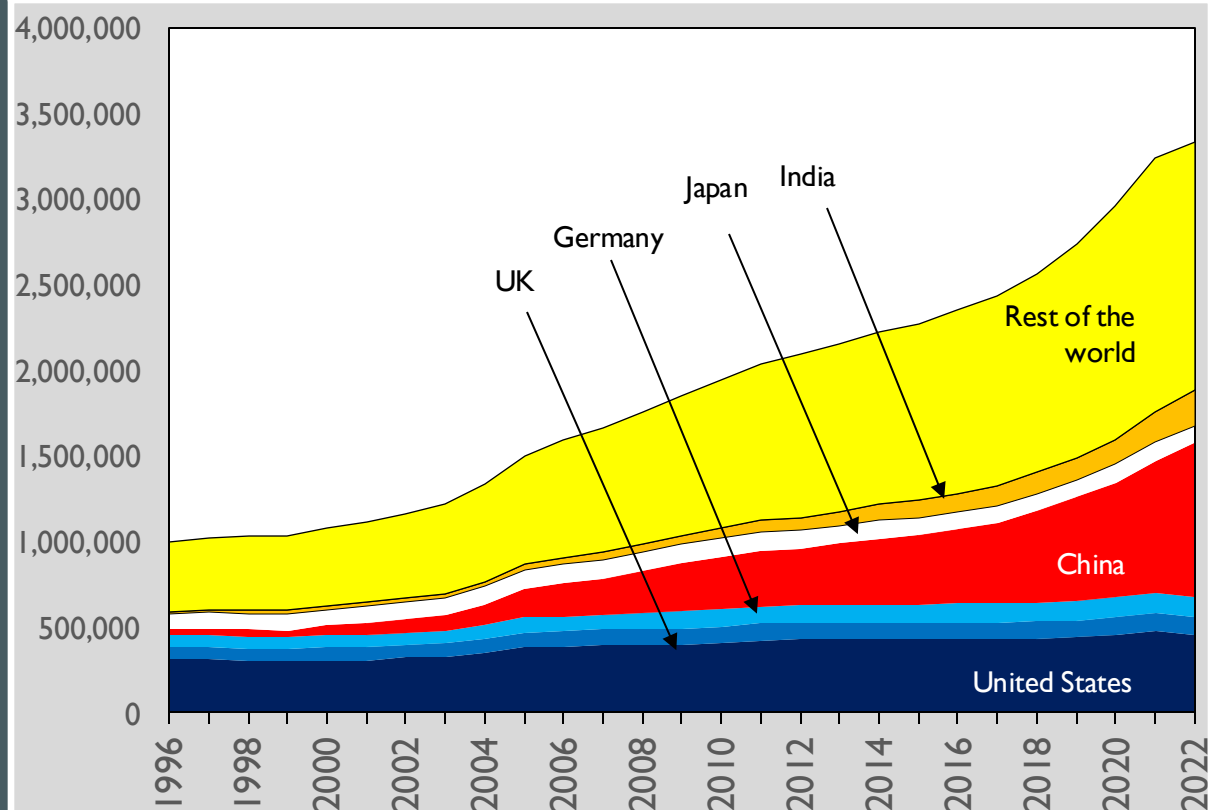


Country	GTER 1990	GTER 2022
China	3	72
India	6	33
South Korea	35	103
Brazil	11	60
Iran	n.a.	61
Indonesia	8	43
Turkey	12	128
United States	70	79
Germany	34	77
United Kingdom	27	80
Japan	28	65



# SCIENCE SYSTEMS HAVE SPREAD TO MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES AND SOME LOW INCOME COUNTRIES

Science papers by country/region: 1996-2022  
Data from NSB/Scopus



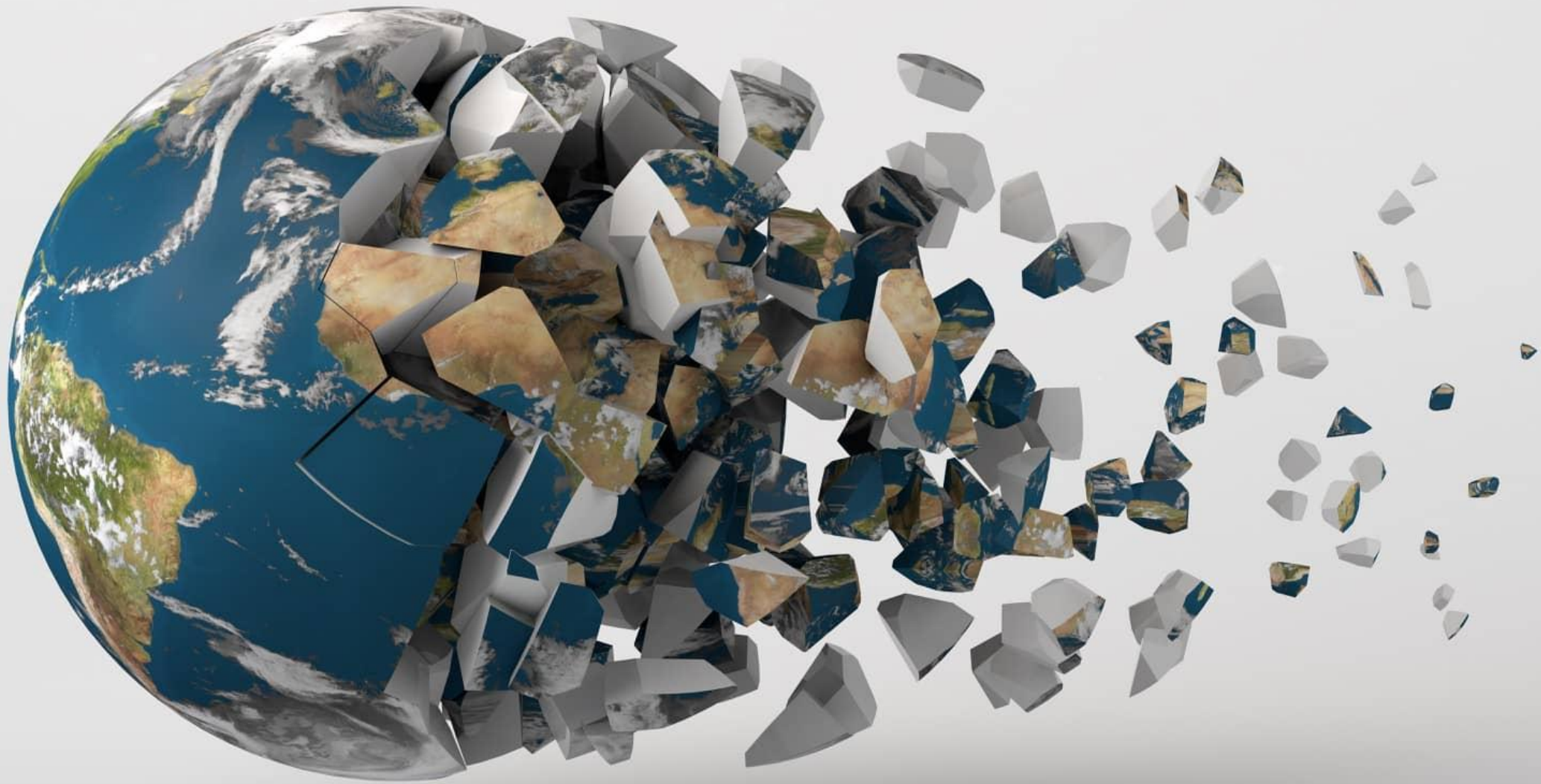
Country	Scopus papers 2003	Scopus papers 2022
China	88,585	898,949
India	26,638	207,390
South Korea	23,880	76,936
Brazil	17,731	67,001
Iran	3,907	60,940
Turkey	13,376	52,658
Indonesia	387	31,947
United States	336,491	457,335
Germany	74,320	113,976
United Kingdom	77,151	105,584
Japan	101,382	103,723



# CHINA'S UNIVERSITIES NOW LEAD IN STEM RESEARCH

University	System	Top 5% cited papers in all disciplines 2019-2022 (Leiden/WoS)
Harvard U	USA	4,223
Zhejiang U	CHINA	2,331
Tsinghua U	CHINA	2,068
Shanghai JT U	CHINA	2,045
Stanford U	USA	2,030
Huazhong U S&T	CHINA	1,801
U Toronto	CANADA	1,760
U Oxford	UK	1,739
Central Southern U	CHINA	1,549
Peking U	CHINA	1,545
Sichuan U	CHINA	1,488
U College London	UK	1,476
U Chinese Ac Science	CHINA	1,462
U Michigan	USA	1,459

University	System	Top 5% cited papers in physical sciences and engineering 2019-2022
Tsinghua U	CHINA	1,160
Zhejiang U	CHINA	871
Shanghai JT U	CHINA	865
Harbin IT	CHINA	792
U Science & Technol	CHINA	772
Huazhong U S&T	CHINA	761
Tianjin U	CHINA	752
Xi'an Jiaotong U	CHINA	750
U Chinese Acad Scien	CHINA	703
Central Southern U	CHINA	649
Chongqing	CHINA	604
Hunan U	CHINA	591
Northwestern Pol U	CHINA	576
MIT	USA	560







*HOW WE GOT HERE:*  
**(2) PARTIAL DEGLOBALISATION  
AND THE UNIVERSITY 2016-2024**



## CHANGING CONDITIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- Multipolarity weakens the Euro-American hegemony in the economy, universities and science
- US rejects open globalisation and partly decouples from China
- Pushback on globalisation, migration resistance, nativism in politics
- Populist culture wars
- New worldwide assertion of states, security politics, militarisation
- States problematise higher education





# RESISTANCE TO MIGRATION







# RESISTANCE TO MIGRATION

“National protectionist agendas ... intersect with anti-intellectual and anti-elitist nativist populism through the denunciation of internationalisation and migration”.

~ Katja Brogger (2023) Post-Cold war governance arrangements in Europe: the University between European integration and rising nationalisms. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21(2), pp. 278–292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2075832>







NATIVISM'S PAYOUT IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION: BARRIERS TO  
INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY





## NATIVISM'S PAYOUT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BARRIERS TO INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

- Brexit 2016 trigger's U.K. exit from Erasmus +. Turing supports outward mobility only, both UK governments reject European student entry
- UK bars graduate students from bringing dependents with them, numbers drop
- Full international fees in Norway and Finland
- 30% reduction in student visas in Canada and a similar scale cut happening in Australia
- Reductions in students in English language programmes in Denmark and Netherlands



The image features a vertical split background. The left side shows the American flag (stars and stripes) and the Chinese flag (red field with yellow stars). The right side is a dark grey background with a white-bordered box containing the title and a list of bullet points.

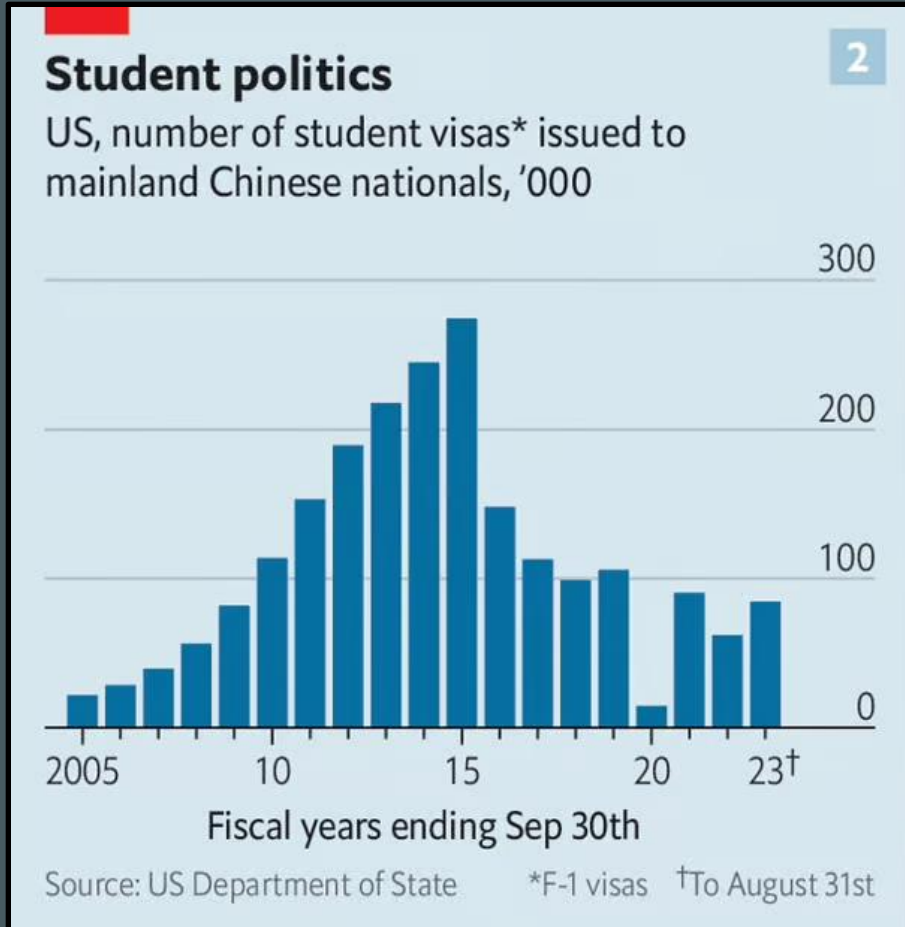
## 'NEW COLD WAR' DECOUPLING IN SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- China/US cooperation 1980-2015 in all domains including S&T and universities. This fails to integrate China into liberal order as was hoped in the US, and becomes seen in US as causal in China's rise in the economy and S&T
- Decoupling moves: anti-Huawei, 2018 China Initiative in U.S. and persecution of scientists, reduced China to U.S. visas and border harassment of returning Chinese students, less university diplomacy and U.S./China agreements, closing of 90% of Confucius Institutes and refusal of CSC funding
- China/US papers down from 62,904 (2020) to 58,546 (2022)
- Decoupling spreads through the West but not elsewhere

## PROBLEMS OF A ZERO-SUM APPROACH IN RESEARCH

- ‘The axiom of openness is challenged ... While researchers generally seek to collaborate with the best suitable partners due to complementarity in knowledge, resources and access to data, this is now becoming more difficult ... The process of aligning science with national strategic goals threatens to impede global scientific excellence and the capacity to mitigate global challenges.’

Tommy Shih et al. *University World News*, 10 June 2023



*The Economist*, 11 October 2023



The image features a vertical strip on the left side showing the American flag (stars and stripes) at the top and the Chinese flag (red field with yellow stars) at the bottom. The main content is a dark grey box with a white border containing the title and a list of quotes.

## COSTS OF DECOUPLING

- “[UK] officials increasingly mention China in the same breath as Russia, Iran and North Korea”  
~*The Economist*, 18 May 2024
- “China has become more inward looking, as the West has become more wary.”  
~*The Economist*, 17 February 2024
- “China now has one of the world’s largest, most important, and increasingly productive academic systems. It is of central importance that it be integrated in world science”  
~ Phillip Altbach & Hans de Wit, *University World News*, 9 September 2023
- “Closing the door to Chinese scientists and researchers wishing to come to Western labs would also be disastrous for Western science”  
~*The Economist*, 15 June 2024

# GOVERNMENTS BECOMING MORE ASSERTIVE



Hungary's Viktor Orbán with Donald Trump



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis





## GOVERNMENTS BECOME MORE ASSERTIVE

”An increased willingness of the nation-state to intervene in affairs belonging to autonomous institutions such as the university” (Brogger, 2023, p. 288)

Turnbull, N., Wilson, S. and Agoston, G. (2024). Revaluing and devaluing higher education beyond neoliberalism: Elitist, productivist, and populist policy and rhetoric in a field of conflict. *European Educational Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041241272627>

- National security takes priority over cross-border mobility
- Greater impatience with autonomous course provision and reliance on student choice, more emphasis on direct policies on employability and ‘job-ready graduates’
- Less support for growth and widening participation
- Conservative governments align with culture war tropes (e.g. free speech Tory UK, anti-woke Florida, gender studies in Hungary)
- Insufficient social support for Humboldtian model in universities



TRUMP'S ELECTION FORESHADOWS  
MORE INTENSIVE CULTURE WARS





## TRUMP'S ELECTION FORESHADOWS MORE INTENSIVE CULTURE WARS

- “The targeting of universities by populist elements of the right has become an inevitability given the size and cultural power of the education system in shaping the course of modernity itself, and therefore the conflicts that define it. The leaderships of universities are themselves part of the cultural and policy elite and thus in competition with traditional conservative rivals for influence. At the same time, the transformation of higher education into a consumer good, with the unequal outcomes justified by neoliberal values, has itself contributed to the rise of populist politics, as the meritocratic ideal humiliates the losers from social transformation.”

Turnbull, et al. (2024). Revaluing and devaluing higher education beyond neoliberalism: Elitist, productivist, and populist policy and rhetoric in a field of conflict.

THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY  
IS UP FOR RE-NEGOTIATION





GOVERNMENTS WANT A MORE NATIONAL  
MISSION, LESS GLOBAL – LIKE THIS:

local &  
national

global







*HOW WE GOT HERE:*  
**(3) SPECIFIC CHALLENGES IN UK**



# REVALUATION AND DEVALUATION IN THE UK





# REVALUATION AND DEVALUATION IN THE UK

- Prestige competition in neoliberal markets, mediated by student choice and with continued institutional control of teaching programmes and research agendas, has not delivered on government goal of tailoring courses more precisely to the economy. Has led to expansion not efficiency, and large continued enrolment in 'unproductive' courses not STEM. Hence direct focus on employability and value for money, next step is to limit specific enrolments
- Declining appetite for expansion of participation in university degrees (though UK is not high in OECD terms) and social widening of participation; tertiary focus is more about routing people away from university than lifting FE
- Tory/Reform/tabloid culture wars in universities continue to shape debate
- Commitment to export earnings decisively displaced by migration politics



GOVERNMENTS WANT A MORE NATIONAL  
MISSION, LESS GLOBAL – LIKE THIS:

local &  
national

global





BUT IN UK FUNDING INCENTIVES PRIORITISE  
GLOBAL MORE THAN EVER BEFORE

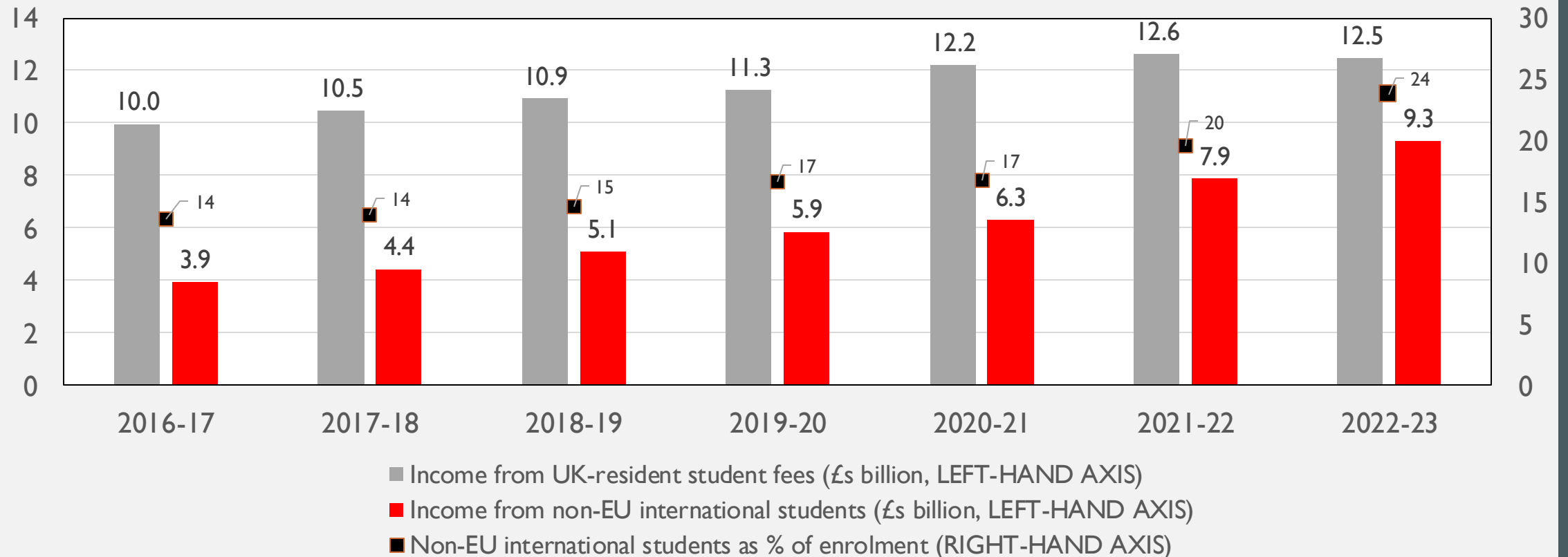
local &  
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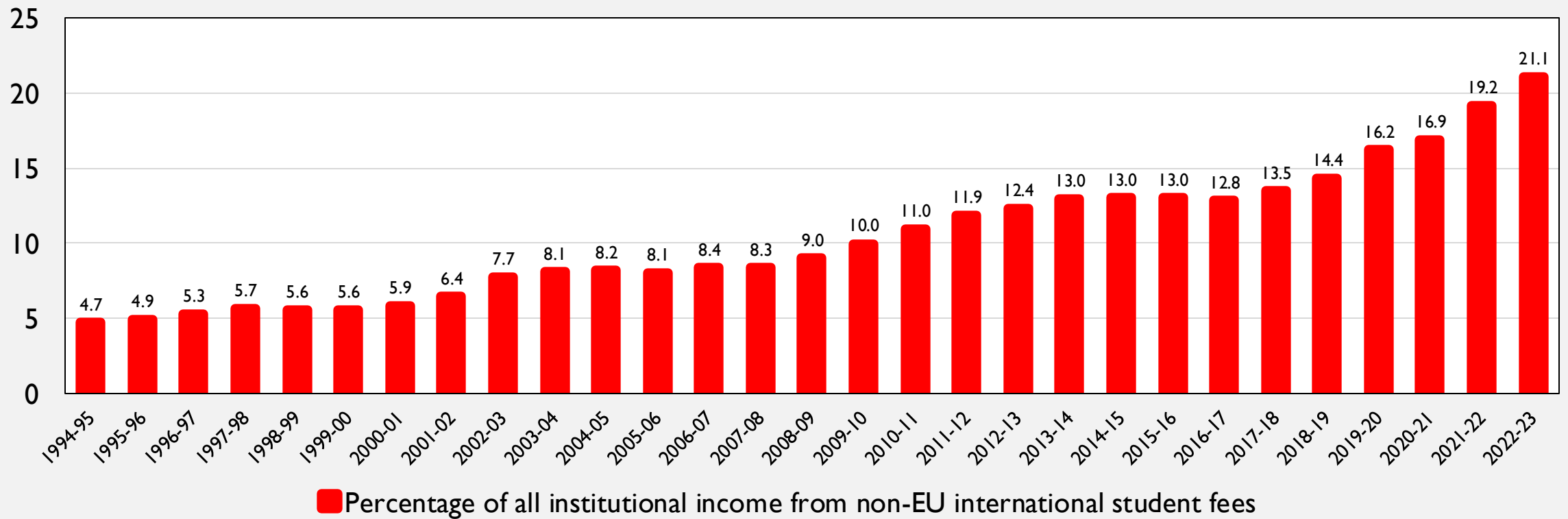




# INCOME (£S BILLION) FROM NON EU INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COMPARED TO INCOME FROM UK RESIDENT STUDENTS: ENGLAND 2016-17 TO 2022-23

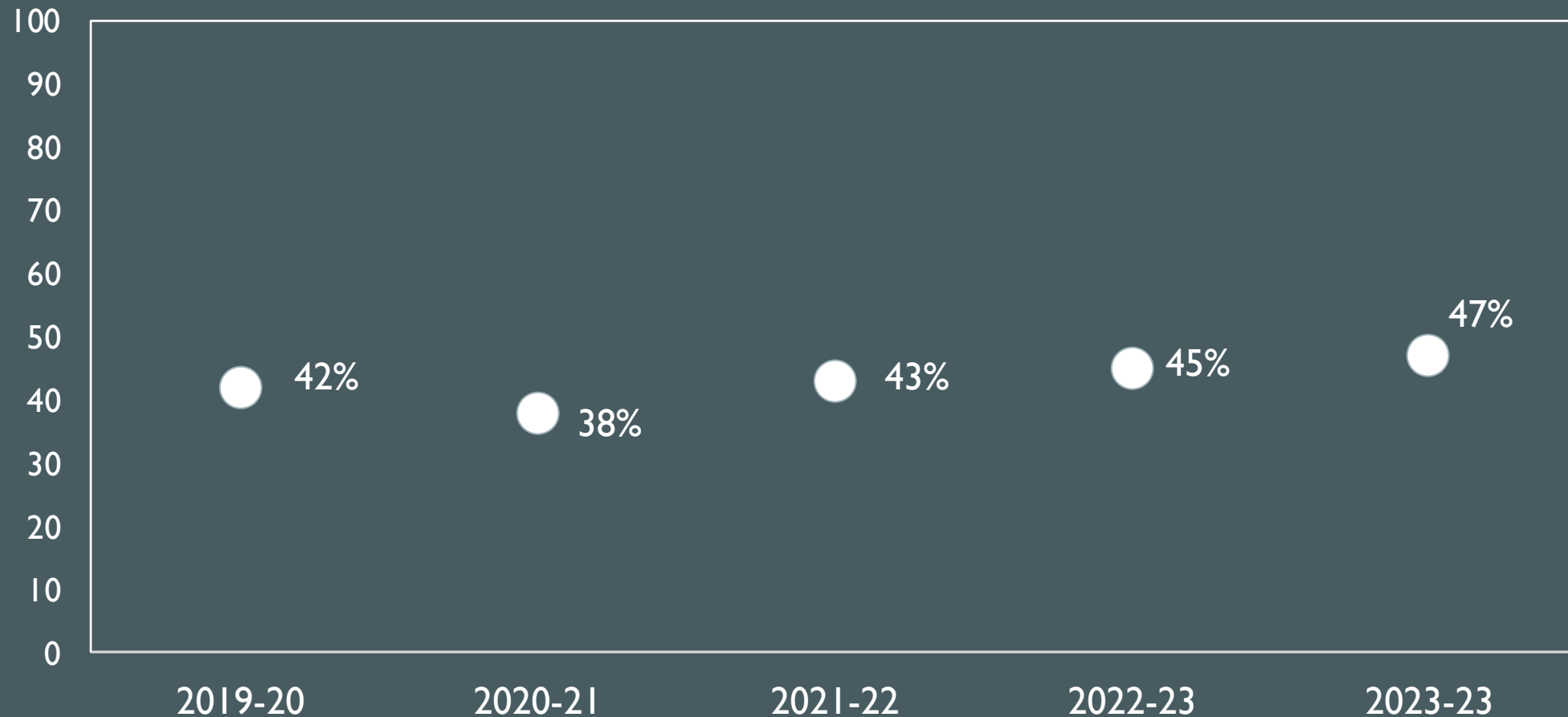


# NON-EU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FEES (AVERAGE £22K PER YEAR) AS A PROPORTION OF INCOME: ENGLAND ONLY, 1994-95 TO 2022-23 (%)



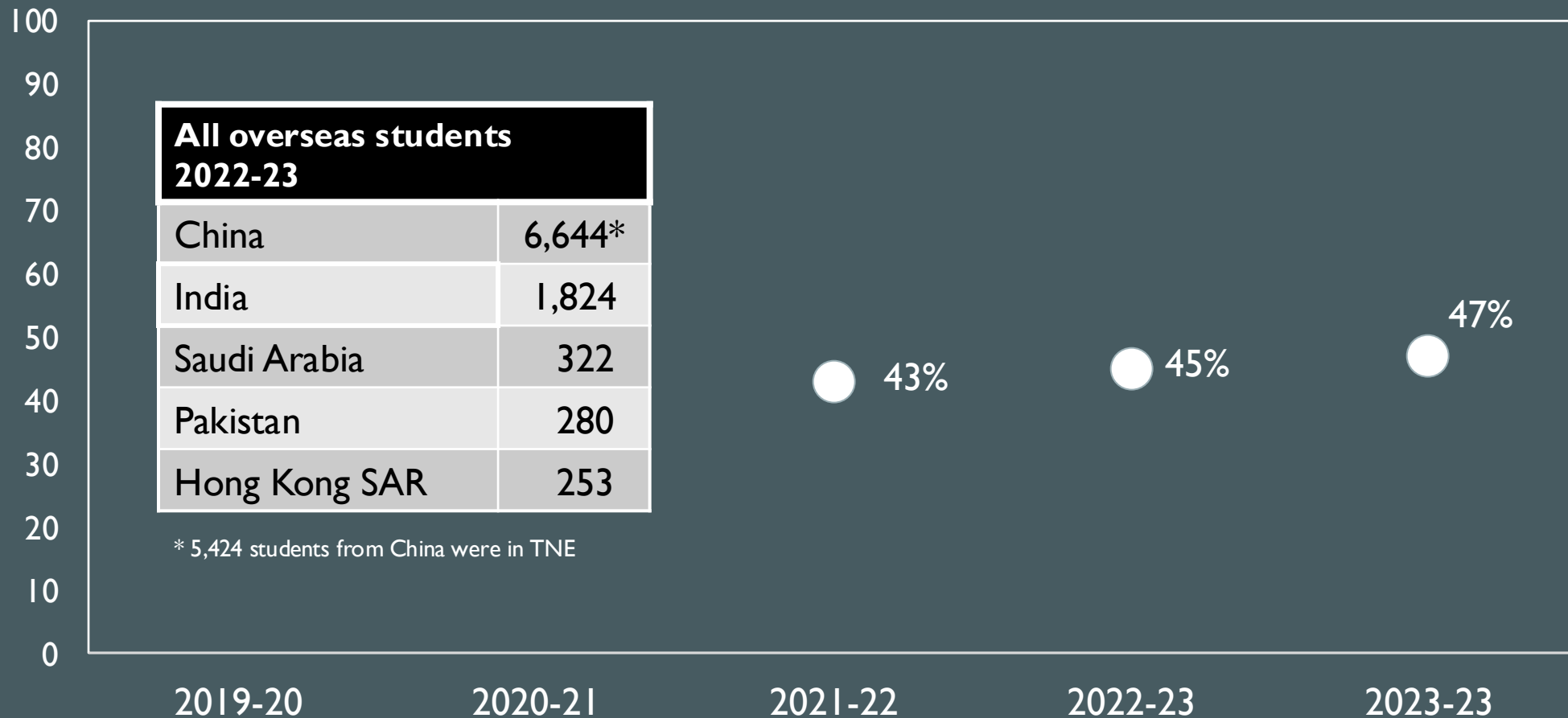


PROPORTION OF ALL STUDENTS AT QMUL PAYING  
OVERSEAS FEES 2019-20 TO 2023-24 (%)  
WITH HEAVY RELIANCE COMES EASY DISRUPTION



# PROPORTION OF ALL STUDENTS AT QMUL PAYING OVERSEAS FEES 2019-20 TO 2023-24 (%)

## WITH HEAVY RELIANCE COMES EASY DISRUPTION







## WHERE WE MIGHT GO NEXT

1. Grants for teaching: re-establish a mixed public/private funding base like every other country
2. Tertiary system and collaboration with FE and stakeholders in regions, lift FE funding
3. Reduce proportion of students in UK who are international from 25% to c.15%
4. Mix of fees and scholarship in international programme, include European students
5. Pressure publishers to broaden global science to include knowledge in multiple languages



*Dickonsia Antarctica*, Otways, Australia. Photo: SM

Thank you for listening