



## **CGHE Annual Conference 22-23 May 2023** **Session Details**

### **PANEL DISCUSSION - Pre-Election Issues in UK Tertiary Education (Regionalisation, Tuition and Lifelong Learning)**

22 May 2023, 12:15pm - 1:15pm (UK)

*Chair: Huw Morris*

*Speakers: Mike Shattock, Claire Callender, Nicholas Barr*

It's 18 months till the next general election in the UK and after the political turmoil of recent years and the negative outcomes of the government's signature policy, Brexit, a change of government is very much a live possibility. This makes this pre-election period, and the views of the larger parties other than the Conservative Party – the Labour Party, Liberal-Democrats and Scottish Nationalists – more than usually important. The panel will look at the possibilities for new policy in three areas of fundamental importance. Mike Shattock will argue for a new approach to the administration and financing of higher education in England, a radical reversal of the long trend to centralisation and a greatly expanded role for regions, bringing universities into conjunction with other tertiary education providers as has already happened in Wales. Claire Callender will explore the prospects for the development of a lifelong learning approach which is on the table of the present government and has broad support, but involves challenging problems of financing. Nick Barr will examine the present tuition loans system in English higher education, with its high individual fee and large component of unpaid debts, and consider how a more stable and balanced financing system can be created.

#### **Regionalising Tertiary Education in England**

*Speaker: Mike Shattock*

Even with devolution to Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland the UK has been characterised as having the most centralised governance of any state in Europe. This essentially reflects the position in England, where 85% of the population are located, and where higher and further education are governed exclusively by central bodies with little or no local or regional involvement. This presentation, based on our Universities and Regions research project, will argue that the time has come to revise this structure. Our research points to a realignment of higher and further education into an integrated tertiary system following the example in Wales and the decentralisation of substantial areas of policymaking in a new tertiary structure to regional bodies. The creation of a structure of combined local authorities and metro mayors, supported by both major political parties, provides the opportunity to re-

integrate higher and further education with local and regional priorities. Such a decision would continue to need to maintain a balance with central concerns about the management of research, the maintenance of quality, financial accountability and matters of direct concern to the state but at the same time it would stimulate institutional innovation, regional engagement and initiative, and bring a new vigour to the system as a whole. This is suggested not as a short term policy fix but as a long term re alignment away from too great a concentration of central control.

#### A Structure for Lifelong Learning in UK

*Speaker: Claire Callender*

The Conservative Government is planning to introduce a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). From September 2025, individuals will qualify for loans equivalent to four years' worth of tuition fees (currently £37,000). Individuals can use their LLE flexibly over their working lives to pay for academic, technical, or vocational courses at Levels 4-6 which are full time, part-time, or modular. This is an exciting and potentially radical new development. While fully supporting the strategic aims and objectives of LLEs, this presentation questions how LLE's are to be implemented and whether there is the policy framework and infrastructure in place to realise the Government's ambitions for LLE's.

#### The Future of the Income Contingent Loans System

*Speaker: Nicholas Barr*

Income-contingent loans are here to stay. This is because of four reasons: (a) cost sharing is here to stay, but (b) most students are broke, hence cannot pay their share upfront, hence student loans are an essential element in the system; however, (c) mortgage-type loans are the wrong mechanism, thus (d) we end up with income-contingent repayments. This panel segment outlines a strategy (i.e. a mutually supporting set of elements) for financing tertiary education that builds on these conclusions: finance of education providers primarily through a mix of tuition fees and taxpayer support; student finance through a well-designed system of student loans; and policies to promote access, mainly through interventions earlier in the system. The panel would conclude with a brief look ahead. There are questions about the details of loan design, including for how long repayments should continue. There are big questions about tertiary education as a whole. Barr argues for a more flexible system so that people can build skills in different ways, in different combinations, at different speeds. That flexibility implies the need for more granular delivery and more granular funding – a natural segue to Claire Callender on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.