

## **Teachers' and Advisers' Conference – Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

### **HE Sector Overview notes – delivered by Liam Owens, Pro-Vice Chancellor**

#### **Slide 3**

HE is a very heavily regulated sector. Hasn't always been in Dept of Education. OfS is the independent regulator, protecting students and standards, e.g. student outcomes, fair access/equality, CMA. Have to comply and be on the register to be able to charge the maximum tuition fees.

Dept of Education set the agenda and send written guidance to OfS.

#### **Slide 4**

These are the bodies we have to comply with, generally and at subject/professional levels. A very competitive and complex landscape.

#### **Slide 5**

These are the unknowns by way of priority.

Policy – due in the summer the next comprehensive spending review. What is the balance between education/defence/health?

New Skills England body coming and devolution issues.

Sector/HE reform promised.

Review of english language standards requirements for HE entry.

Industrial relations matters regarding pay and pensions.

New regulator Chair; first time someone from the sector.

Access and participation; driven to a regional approach and universities working collaboratively on underrepresentation initiatives.

#### **Slide 6**

Regulator inspections are more common, particularly around franchise arrangements. Interventions and possible removal from the register.

Potential that HE will be reclassified as public sector; this will impact funding.

#### Slide 7

White Paper (October) in consultation phase. It is a longer-term strategy, beyond the life of this parliament. These are the government priorities to drive the economy and clearly map to local agendas.

#### Slide 8

We are operating in a system of local devolution, with 3 sets of priorities and growth plans.

#### Slide 11

The HE sector is financially unsustainable at present.

#### Slide 13

Universities are spending more than they are getting in through fees, research etc. All universities need a going concern statement to shore up borrowing.

How long can universities manage the deficit?

#### Slide 17

Edge Hill is required by law to offer the TPS and this contribution increase has placed a large strain on the pay bill.

#### Slide 18

This is affecting much of the sector, to varying degrees. Edge Hill have recently gone through a voluntary redundancy scheme to remove £10m from the pay bill.

#### Slide 19

Edge Hil are a medium tariff institution.

Offer making to low-cost subjects in high tariff institutions have increased since the removal of the student number cap.

#### Slide 20

A pronounced change in the subject studied in the last 20 years; reduction in Humanities and Arts, and growth in STEM (typically higher delivery costs)

#### Slide 22

NB the associate costs of supporting these students

#### Slide 23

Reduction in the birth rate tracks through

#### Slide 25

What is our next 5 year strategy?

There are 4 types of university. Not all mutually exclusive.

Who are we trying to be.

Slide 26

We are clear about this and our role as an anchor institution.

Slide 31

Accommodation can still be guaranteed to all first years who apply and respond in the main cycle.

Slide 32

Looking to pharmacy and pharmacology next...

Slide 33

Currently Deputy VC at University of Sunderland.

Slide 35

Changing patterns of demand; is this linked to the labour market or perception of whether they think they will get a place at university? Something happens at the latter end of the cycle when they have a place but get a job/apprenticeship and so don't enrol. University as a back up if needed, even for high achieving A Level students. Students think that industry placements are not as valuable via university (compared to degree apprenticeships) from an employability perspective. It removes the competitiveness of applying for a graduate scheme. There is some feedback from employers (e.g. in the digital and creative sectors) that what the students learn by way of use of facilities/software is not in line with what they will use in employment, so grads join at the same level as an entry level role.

Q about jobs secured via placement opportunities.

Propensity for students staying in the local region increases, but we are still oversubscribed for student accommodation so students can experience that rite of passage.