

Higher Education Funding David Eastwood

The future of Higher Education Funding and Student Support: Are the Browne Review's proposals the right way forward?

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"The review's proposals offer a very good deal for students and a fair and progressive way forward that will enable universities to provide a high quality education on an affordable and sustainable basis.

If the recommendations are adopted by government no-one will pay fees up front. Graduates, not students, make a contribution to the cost of their higher education, and they will only do so when they are in work and can afford it. Graduates will contribute only when they are benefiting from their higher education.

There will be new quality guarantees and greater student choice. These proposals will mean that universities must provide open and transparent commitments to guarantee students the right kind of information, the right amount of teaching, and the right quality of learning.

There will be a generous system of support for student living. The grants for the least well off will be increased, and no-one should be deterred from studying by the cost of their maintenance. Where families can contribute, they will; when then can't, students will receive grants. All students will benefit from loans which, again, they repay only when then can afford to do so. There is a new flexibility too. Part-time students will enjoy the kind of support both for tuition and living that the current system denies them.

Our universities are a huge success story, second only to those of the United States in terms of reputation, quality, and impact. We have one of the lowest drop-out rates of any country, because we recruit our students carefully and offer them an excellent academic experience. But despite this success Government spending on higher education will not be maintained at the current level; we are in line for deep cuts. We need to be bold and imaginative in seeking alternative solutions to maintain the UK's world class universities.

Lord Browne's proposals offer the best way, and perhaps the only way, to maintain a high quality, flexible higher education system which gives all who can benefit from higher education the opportunity to do so. If the government adopts these progressive recommendations, we will achieve the higher education system our country needs and that our students deserve.