



The University of Manchester

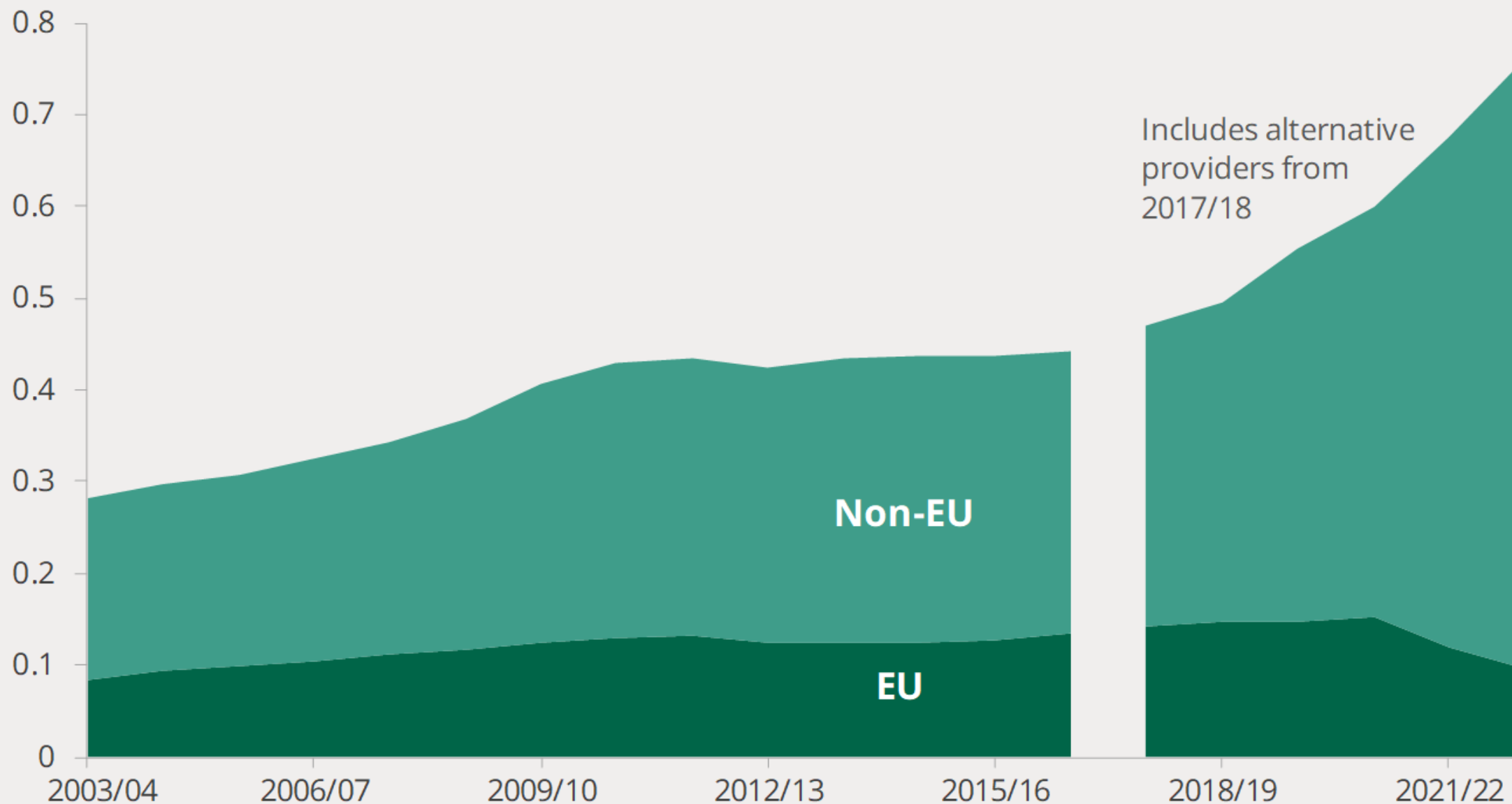
International students in the UK: surviving a hostile environment?

Sylvie Lomer

University of Manchester

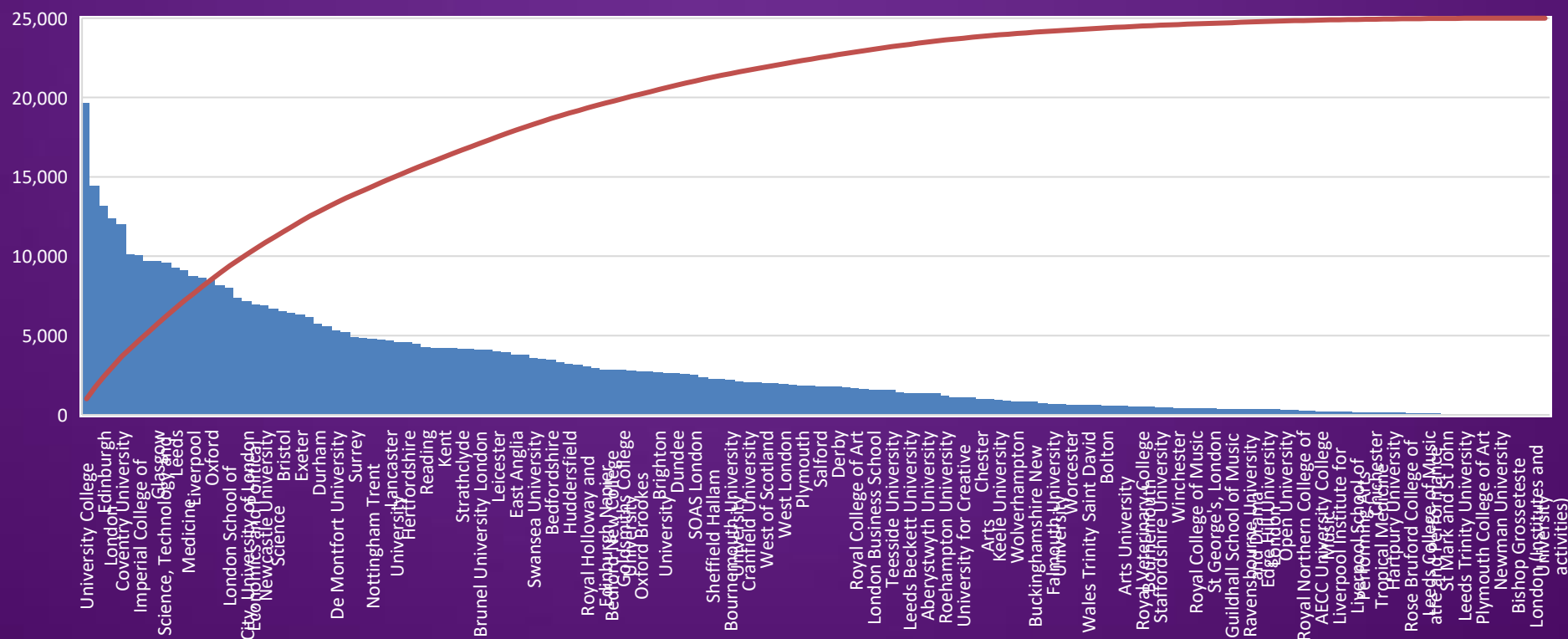
Students from outside the EU have driven the recent growth in international students

Overseas students at UK universities, all modes and levels, millions

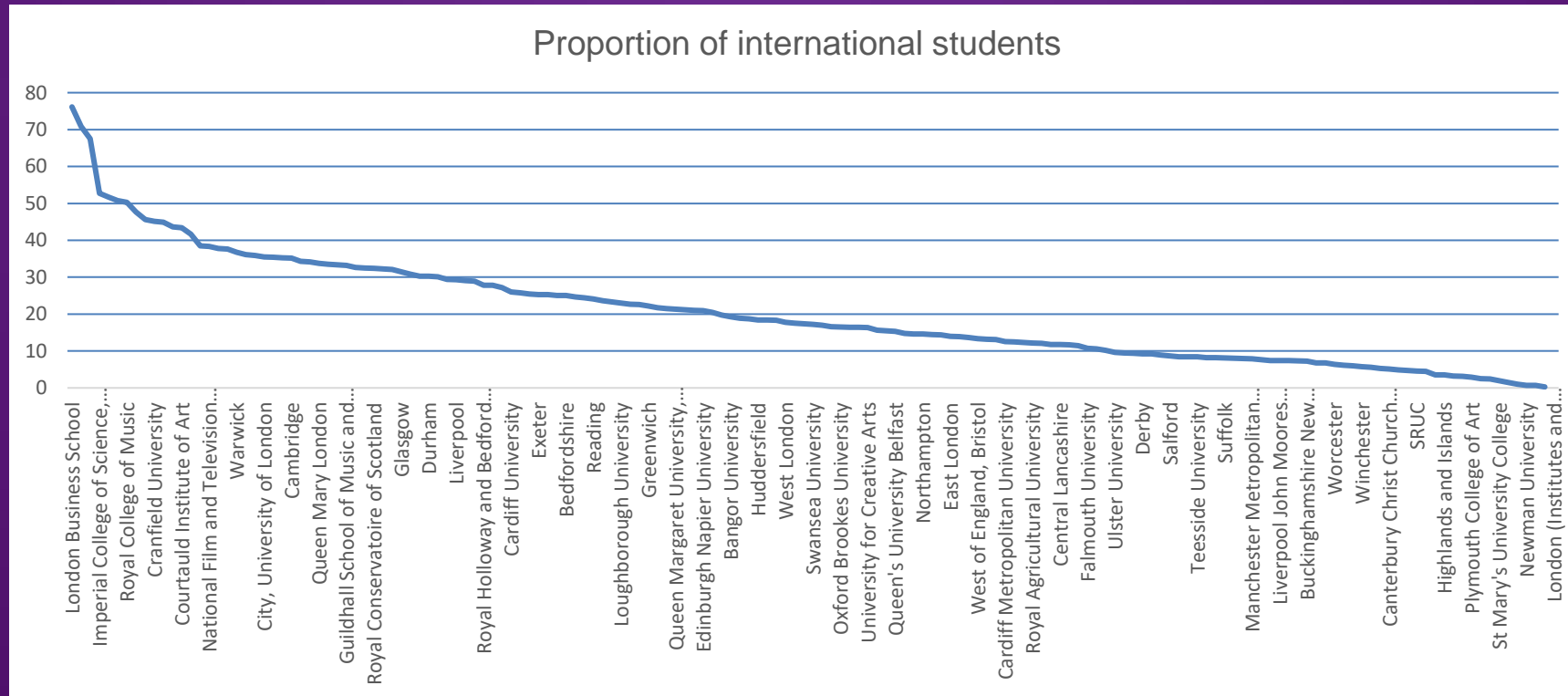


Considerable variation across the sector in numbers of international students

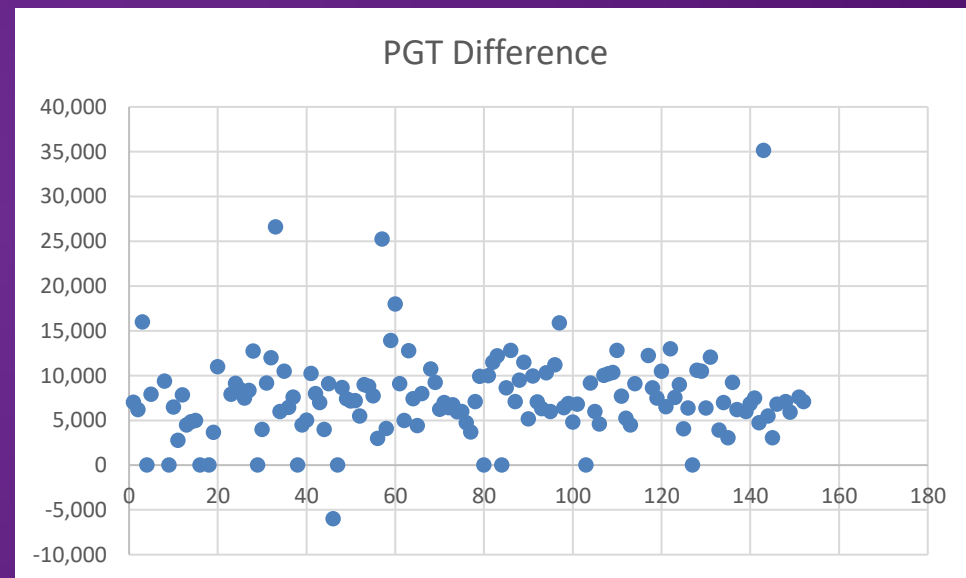
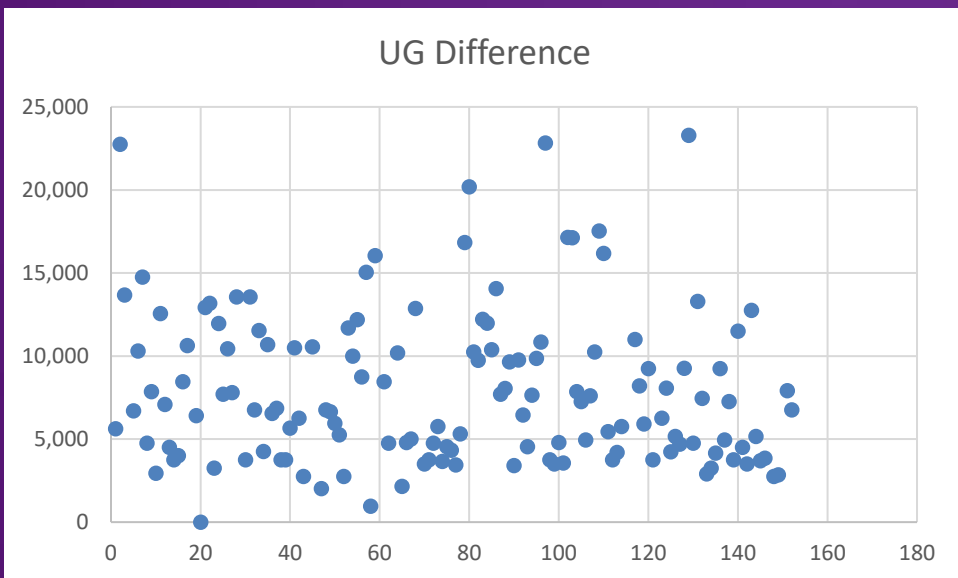
Numbers of international students at UK Universities in 2022



And proportion



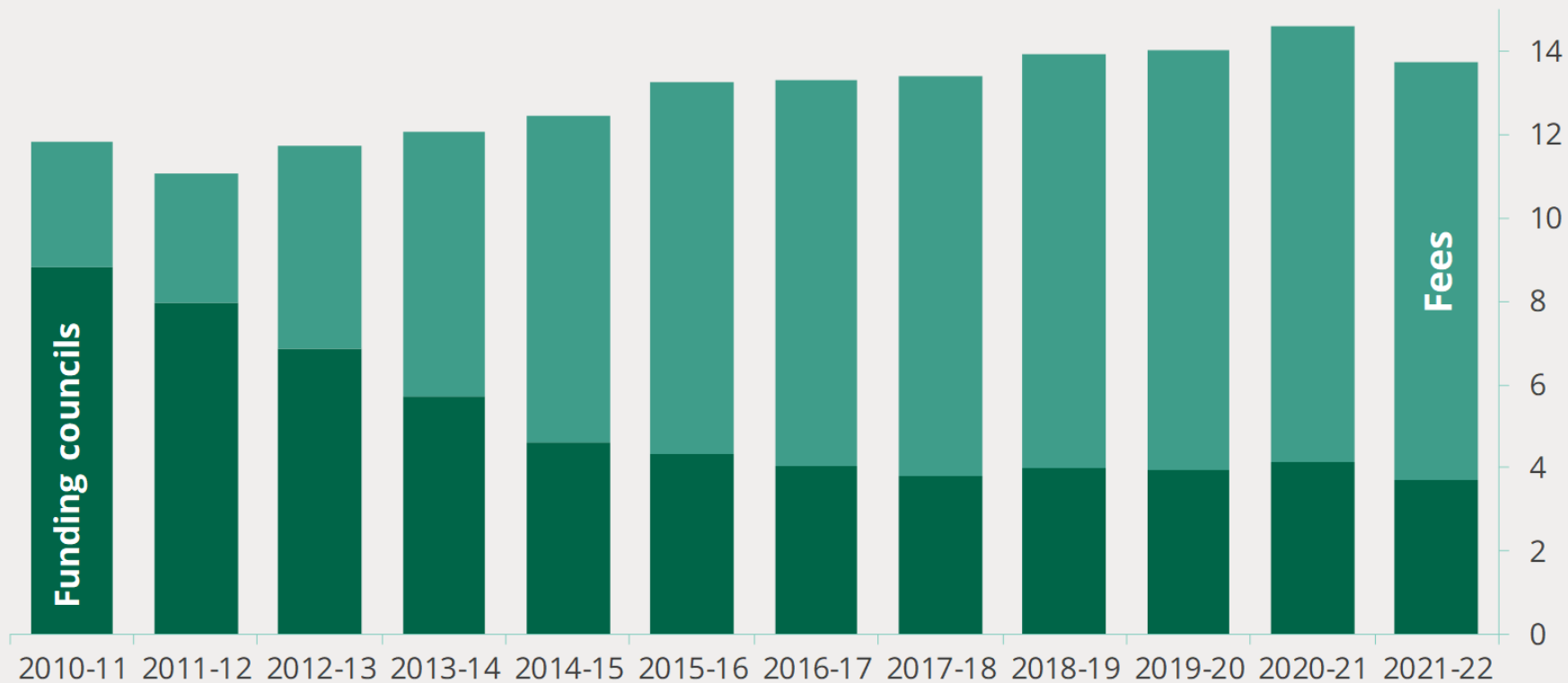
Tuition fee differential



Relative decline of state investment in higher education

Funding for universities shifts towards fees

£ billion 2020-21 prices



A hostile policy environment

- Since 2011, with the election of the Coalition Government (Conservative + Liberal Democrat – centrist)
- Increase in far-right political parties
- Brexit exemplified fears about immigration
- Refugees, EU integration, & labour migration became conflated in public discourse

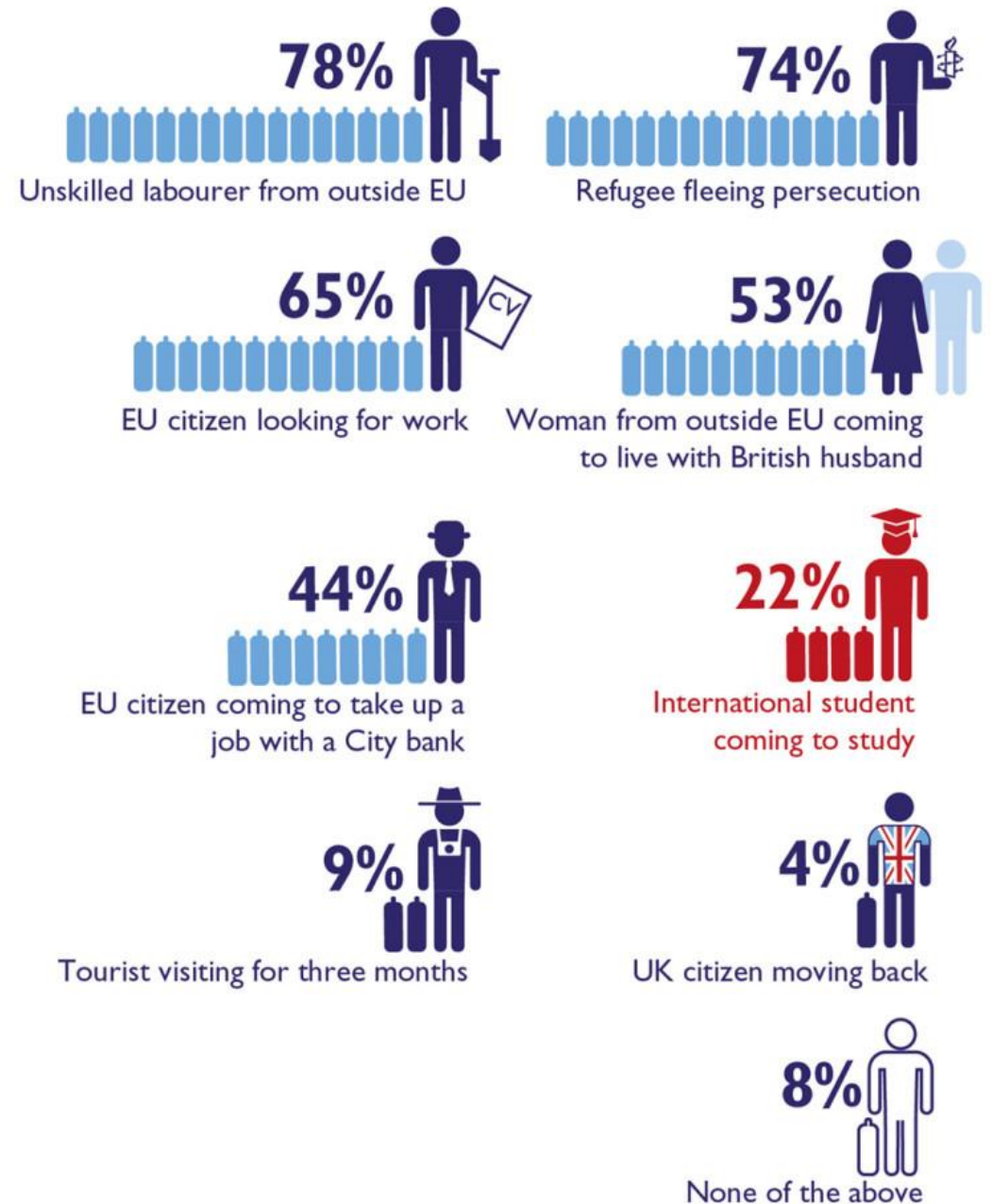


Students = migrants

- Targets for 'net migration' to be at 0% have included international students
- Contradicts calculations performed by many other host countries
- Historically, there has been a methodological question about the use of a survey (rather than digital exit data) suggesting potential for over-estimation of long-term stays after study
- Decision is ultimately a political stance

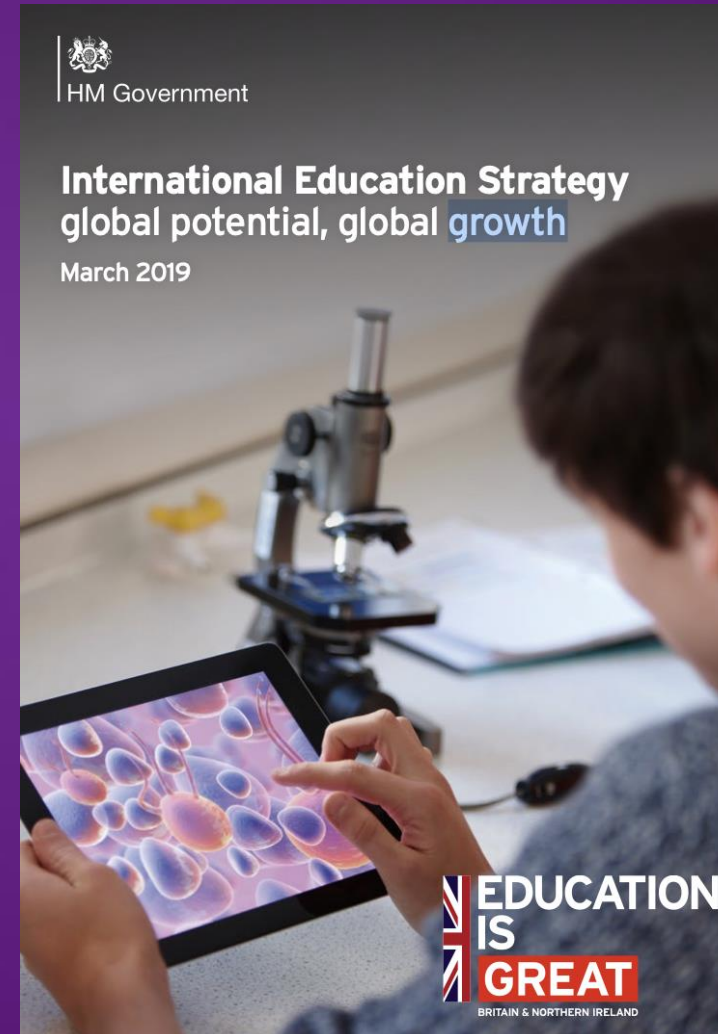
Despite public perception

Figure 5: 'When thinking about government immigration policy, which of the following people do you think of as an immigrant?'



International Education Strategy (2019)

- Increase the value of education exports to £35 billion per year by 2030
- Increase the total number of international students choosing to study in the UK higher education system each year to 600,000 by 2030



Rhetoric around international students as:

- Risks to ‘quality’ of higher education
- Likely to violate the terms of their visas

“The (previous) home secretary, James Cleverly, has said international students may be “undermining the integrity and quality of the UK higher education system” by using university courses as a cheap way of getting work visas.” (2024)

Frequent policy changes create instability & lack of trust

- Post-study work visas:
 - Created 2008 – 2 years post graduation
 - Removed 2012
 - Reinstated 2021 – Graduate Visa – ‘subject to review’
- NHS surcharge
- Right to join with dependants removed in 2024 (Sunak)
- Latest move to restrict visa applications for work AND study from ‘countries most likely to apply for asylum’ (Nigeria, Pakistan, etc)

Lack of political trust in universities

United Kingdom ▼

Alnwick
8/17°C

GBNI

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'Treated like a snowflake!' University slaps woke trigger warnings on Shakespeare plays for 'storms' and 'depiction of magic'

By Eliana Silver

26 Comments

EXCLUSIVE Cash-strapped universities accused of offering 'Mickey Mouse' courses in rap music, esports and social media to stay afloat

By ELEANOR HARDING and WILLIAM HALLOWELL
PUBLISHED: 01:22, 13 August 2024 | UPDATED: 01:29, 13 August 2024

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Universities have been accused of running 'Mickey Mouse' courses to stay afloat as they advertise degrees in rap music, **esports** and social media.

A wide array of novelty courses are on offer for students who do not make their predicted grades on A-level results day on Thursday and have to go through clearing.

Students can apply for taxpayer-provided loans to cover the £9,250 a year tuition

Rise of the university fat cats: Vice chancellors enjoy £80,000 boost to their pay packets despite student funding crisis

By ELIZABETH HAIGH

PUBLISHED: 09:00, 23 October 2024 | UPDATED: 09:42, 23 October 2024

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University vice-chancellors have been awarded pay boosts of up to £80,000 while decrying a cash crisis that they say will lead to higher tuition fees for students.

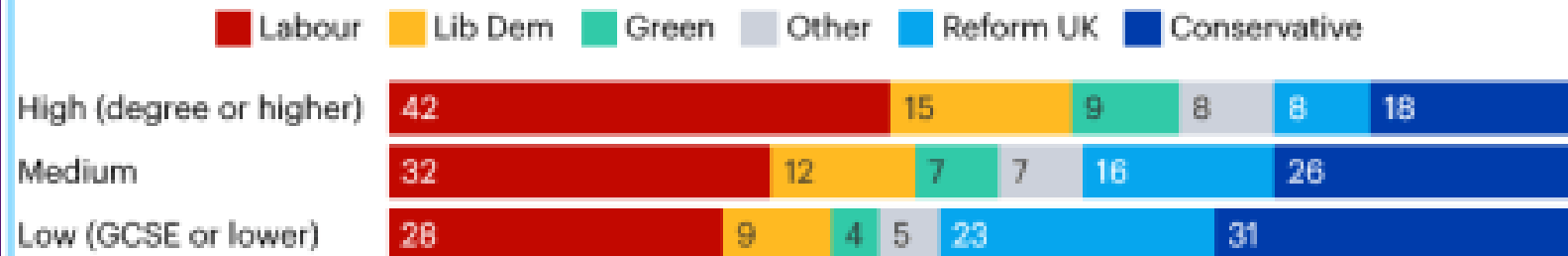
Data from the Higher education Statistics Authority revealed that while university chiefs on average received a five percent pay rise last year, some increased by up to



Socio-political Divide

How did Britons vote at the 2024 general election: education level

Which party did you vote for at the General Election in July 2024? % of 35,205 voters



The human consequences

- ‘Conditional status’ – Hutcheson, 2025 (forthcoming)
- Anxiety & fear
- Political legitimatization of latent racism that condones overt racism (e.g. Mittelmeier & Cockayne 2023)
- Constraints placed on the educational potential of international higher education – the transformative space for relational engagement is compromised by fear and hostility

Conclusion

- In the UK, limited mainstream political will to oppose hostile migration regimes
- Politicians defend international students by conceptualising international higher education as an industry
- University groups adopt similar rhetoric
- Defence of the educational, relational dimension & of international students' rights lacks mainstream traction