

A literature review that analyses the decrease in number of student enrolments within UK Higher Education.

Niamh Marvelley

1700924

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Introduction

The issue of student enrolment in higher education in the United Kingdom is complex, with trends varying significantly across different student groups. While headline student numbers have reached record levels in recent years, particularly for full-time undergraduates, this overall growth masks concerning declines in other segments of the student population. The short dip in enrolment following the 2012 reforms has been countered by steady increases in entry rates, including among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have also achieved record participation levels (Bolton, 2024). However, part-time undergraduates (particularly those not pursuing first degrees), certain postgraduate groups, EU students, mature students, and some disadvantaged demographics have experienced declining or idling numbers.

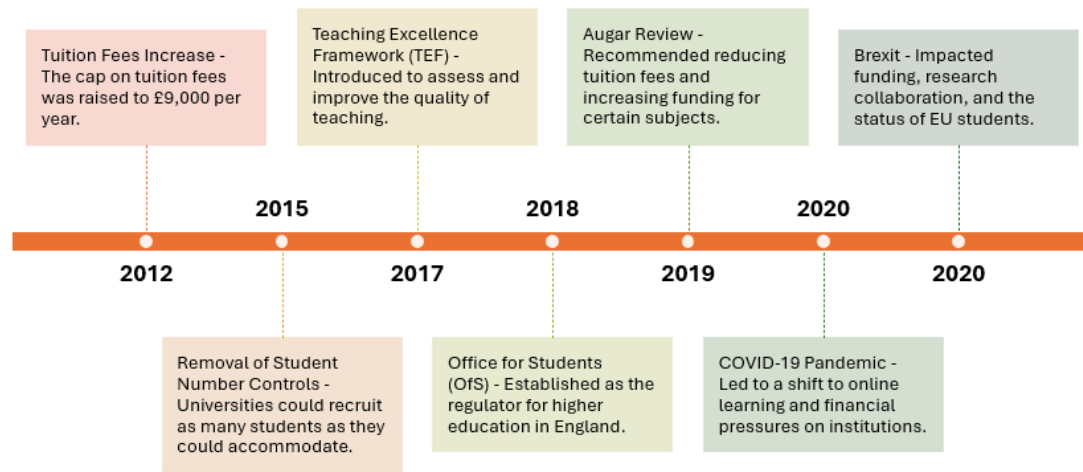
Adding to these complexities are concerns about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which has disrupted international student mobility and posed challenges for institutions reliant on overseas enrolments. This decline in diversity among student types raises critical questions about access, equity, and sustainability within the higher education sector. Understanding these dynamics is essential for identifying targeted interventions to address areas of decline and ensure a balanced and inclusive approach to higher education growth.

This literature review examines the drivers of these enrolment trends, focusing on economic, social, and policy-related factors. Particular attention is given to the differences between full-time undergraduate enrolments and other student groups, as well as the influence of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By synthesising findings from existing studies, the review seeks to highlight gaps in the current understanding and provide a foundation for further research on addressing declining participation in underrepresented groups. The review is organised thematically, analysing the economic and policy changes, demographic shifts, and broader societal factors contributing to these trends, before concluding with a critical evaluation of the gaps and challenges in the current literature.

Timeline

Over the past twelve years, the landscape of UK higher education has undergone significant changes, shaped by a series of policy reforms and reviews. These reforms, including substantial increases in tuition fees and shifts in funding structures, have had a profound impact on enrolment patterns (Geven, 2015). While some measures have sought to expand access and enhance competition among institutions (House of Commons, 2017), others have introduced financial and structural challenges that disproportionately affect certain student groups and institutions. Understanding the timeline of these changes is essential to evaluating their effects on participation, equity, and the sustainability of

higher education across the UK.



Economic Drivers of Enrolment Trends

The economic landscape has played a significant role in shaping enrolment patterns within UK higher education. One of the most impactful changes was the 2012 increase in tuition fees, which raised the cap from £3,000 to £9,000 annually. This dramatic rise in costs shifted much of the financial burden onto students and their families. Dearden et al. (2011) estimated that a £1,000 increase in fees could lead to a 3.9% decline in enrolment, particularly affecting students from lower-income families. International findings from countries like the US and Canada support the notion that rising tuition costs tend to disproportionately deter participation among disadvantaged groups (Geven, 2015).

Although income-contingent loans introduced in 1998 aimed to alleviate financial barriers, issues in their design have limited their effectiveness. These loans often fail to fully cover living costs, forcing students to rely on parental contributions, which are not always provided. This reliance has been shown to contribute to student poverty, dropout rates, and distorted academic choices, as some parents condition their financial support on students pursuing certain "sensible" subjects (Barr & Low, 1988; Callender & Kemp, 2000). Such dynamics raise significant equity concerns, particularly as unpaid contributions disproportionately affect students from lower-income households.

Furthermore, the system's complexity exacerbates these issues. The process of assessing family income to determine eligibility for financial aid is intrusive and administratively burdensome. Parental or spousal income assessments, for example, can be difficult to navigate and deter students from engaging with the support system. This complexity undermines the accessibility of financial aid, leaving students from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly vulnerable.

Despite these barriers, other researchers, such as Schofer and Meyer (2005), argue that broader structural factors, including the global rise in educational attainment and the perceived value of a degree, mitigate the impact of rising tuition fees. This resilience in enrolment rates among some groups, particularly full-time undergraduates, suggests that other mechanisms may offset financial deterrents. Financial aid programmes, such as maintenance grants and income-contingent loans, are believed to play a role in counteracting the deterrent effects of high fees (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002). However, these measures may not fully address debt aversion, a significant psychological barrier for many disadvantaged students (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997).

This interplay between rising costs, financial aid, and student decision-making underscores a critical gap in the literature. While enrolment rates have remained strong for certain demographics, the

specific impacts of economic policies on underrepresented groups require further investigation. Addressing the inadequacies of loan systems, simplifying financial aid processes, and mitigating debt aversion will be essential to promoting equitable access to higher education.

Policy Impacts and Institutional Responses

The removal of student number controls in the mid-2010s marked another significant policy shift, with mixed outcomes for students and institutions. McCaig and Taylor (2014) argue that this policy was intended to enhance flexibility and competition, allowing universities to expand enrolment. For Russell Group universities, which already attracted high-achieving students, the impact was minimal; these institutions remained stable, with only a 1.7% drop in enrolment (Geven, 2015).

Conversely, non-Russell Group institutions experienced a 6.8% decline, as lower-cost further education colleges gained a significant share of new students under the core-margin policy. This redistribution of students raises questions about equity and institutional sustainability. While the policy presumably created opportunities for more students to access higher education, mid-tier institutions were disproportionately affected, struggling to compete with both prestigious universities and budget-friendly colleges (Williams, 2020). The literature points to a growing divide within the sector, with implications for the inclusivity and diversity of higher education in the UK.

International students play a vital role in the success and competitiveness of UK higher education institutions (HEIs). In 2018/19, non-EU international students made up 14% of the total student body, contributing nearly £6 billion annually in tuition fees over 30% of all course revenue (HESA, 2020c). UK HEIs have heavily invested in marketing to key markets such as China, India, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, with China alone accounting for 35% of non-EU students. However, this reliance on a limited number of countries raises concerns about financial vulnerability should geopolitical tensions or policy changes disrupt enrolment from these regions (Falcone, 2017).

The UK government supports HEIs in accessing strategic markets, but diplomatic disputes such as those with China over Hong Kong and Huawei could lead to sudden enrolment declines. Similar scenarios have been observed in New Zealand and Australia, where tensions with China led to sharp drops in student numbers, causing significant economic challenges. UK HEIs are particularly exposed due to the large proportion of Chinese students, who are influenced by both government directives and parental concerns about the long-term value of a UK degree amid rising costs and geopolitical risks (Scott & Nathara, 2021).

Additionally, competition from international and domestic markets has intensified. Emerging markets offer English-taught programmes, lower tuition fees, and proximity to home, while traditional student-exporting countries like China and India are investing in their own HEIs (Meur et al., 2014; Falcone, 2017). This increasing competition, coupled with geopolitical uncertainty, challenges UK HEIs to maintain their attractiveness and financial sustainability in a rapidly shifting global education landscape.

Demographic Shifts and Underrepresented Groups

Despite overall growth in undergraduate enrolment, certain demographic groups have seen stagnating or declining participation. Mature students, part-time learners, and non-EU international students have been particularly affected (Bolton, 2024). Mature student numbers, for example, have been on a steady decline since the 2012 reforms, reflecting both the financial burden of higher fees and the limited availability of flexible study options. This trend is supported by Breen and

Goldthorpe's (1997) sociological rational action theory, which suggests that the perceived risks and costs of higher education disproportionately impact non-traditional learners.

In addition to these challenges, underrepresented groups, such as BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) students and disadvantaged White students, face distinct barriers to university access. The study found that both groups share similar motivations for attending university, such as obtaining a good qualification and securing a career, which aligns with previous research on the aspirations of underrepresented students (Baars, Mulcahy, & Bernardes, 2016). Both groups also cited financial difficulties as a significant barrier to accessing higher education, echoing the broader concerns about the financial burden of university education that have been documented in the literature (Bowes et al., 2015; Hillman & Robinson, 2016). However, the study also identified some important differences in attitudes between these groups that highlight the complexity of university participation among underrepresented students.

BAME students, for instance, often felt that university was their "only choice," a sentiment not echoed by disadvantaged White students. This aligns with broader trends that show ethnic minorities are more likely to apply to university compared to their White counterparts, as evidenced by UCAS data from 2019. Previous studies have suggested that White working-class boys do not view university as a desirable option, with many perceiving non-graduate employment opportunities as more attractive (Bowes et al., 2015; Hillman & Robinson, 2016). This reflects the ongoing challenges faced by White working-class students, who often do not view higher education as a viable pathway to career success. Many parents of these students also believe that leaving education at 16 or 18 does not limit career prospects, contributing to a lack of aspiration for university among this group (Bowes et al., 2015).

The role of parents in shaping university aspirations is another critical aspect of these findings. Research by Goodman and Gregg (2010) highlights that low-SES mothers are less likely to expect their children to attend university compared to their higher-SES counterparts, which may contribute to the lower university aspirations observed among White working-class students. In the present study, some underrepresented White students still considered university as "the only option" despite the negative views of their parents, which suggests that aspirations may not always align with the family's beliefs. Additionally, BAME students were more likely to cite the need to care for family members as a barrier to university attendance, a concern that was less frequently mentioned by White students (McCabe., *et al* 2021).

The study also revealed differences in students' decisions to study close to home. BAME students were more likely to cite financial reasons for staying local, while Asian and White students mentioned safety or medical reasons. These motivations illustrate the varied factors influencing university choices across ethnic groups and suggest that outreach efforts should consider these diverse concerns. Financial barriers were consistently reported by all groups, yet BAME students were more likely to question whether university was "worth it," indicating a need for outreach programs to better articulate the long-term benefits of higher education, particularly in terms of career outcomes and financial stability (McCabe., *et al* 2021).

This better understanding of underrepresented students' experiences further supports the need for targeted interventions that address the unique barriers these groups face, particularly in light of demographic shifts that impact their participation in higher education. While broader trends show overall growth in enrolment, these specific groups remain vulnerable to systemic barriers that limit their access to higher education. By addressing these issues through more inclusive and tailored

outreach initiatives, universities could work to bridge these gaps and better support underrepresented students in achieving their higher education aspirations.

Part-time enrolments have also been negatively impacted, particularly for those not pursuing first degrees. Research by Geven (2015) attributes this to the decline in government funding for higher education, which shifted the financial burden onto students. The literature indicates a pressing need for targeted interventions to address these gaps, as these groups often bring unique perspectives and skills to the academic environment.

Global Disruptions: The Role of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Brexit.

The dual challenges of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly disrupted higher education globally, with Brexit introducing unique obstacles for UK universities. This section focuses on how Brexit has specifically impacted student enrolment, particularly among European Union (EU) students, within the broader context of global disruptions.

Brexit marked a fundamental shift in the UK's relationship with the European Union, creating significant barriers for EU students. Prior to the 2016 referendum, EU students represented a critical demographic for UK universities, contributing both financially and culturally (Broc, 2020). Favourable conditions such as home fee status, access to student loans, and freedom of movement encouraged steady enrolment (Mayhew, 2017). However, Brexit introduced substantial uncertainties. EU students now face international fee rates, loss of financial support, and stricter visa requirements, which have collectively diminished the UK's attractiveness as a study destination (Broc, 2020; Mayhew, 2017). Consequently, the number of EU students, previously estimated at 130,000, is expected to decline sharply, posing a significant challenge to the sustainability of UK universities (UCAS 2018).

Post-Brexit, EU student applications have frozen, increasing by a mere 1% in 2019/20 compared to previous years. This contrasts entirely with a 33% rise in applications from China during the same period (ICEF 2019), highlighting a shift in the demographic makeup of the international student population. While non-EU markets have partially compensated for the decline in EU applications, this reliance on markets like China raises concerns about overdependence on a single demographic, particularly in the context of global geopolitical uncertainties (Cherry, 2017).

The financial repercussions of reduced EU enrolment are significant. EU students previously contributed to the financial stability of universities, both through tuition fees and their broader economic impact (Beer, 2019; Weale, 2019). Although charging international fees may appear to offset this loss, it risks alienating EU students entirely, as the increased financial burden is likely to deter many from applying (Bothwell, 2017). For UK universities, this financial instability compounds existing pressures brought about by other global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another critical consequence of Brexit is the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus+ program, which previously facilitated seamless student exchanges between the UK and EU. The lack of a nationally funded alternative, unlike Switzerland's approach, has significantly reduced mobility opportunities for EU students in the UK and UK students in Europe (Maurice, 2017). This erosion of exchange programs diminishes academic and cultural collaboration and further deters EU students from considering the UK as a viable study destination (Broc, 2020). Additionally, fewer UK students benefiting from exchanges weakens the global exposure and opportunities offered by UK universities, reducing their appeal to prospective applicants (Corbett & Gordon, 2020).

Uncertainty surrounding fees, loans, and immigration status continues to deter prospective EU students. Temporary financial support measures, such as home fee status for the 2019/20 academic

year, provided limited reassurance, with no guarantees for future cohorts (Hubble, 2016; Conlon., *et al* 2021). Such ambiguity undermines the UK's reputation as a stable and welcoming destination for international education. The absence of robust cooperation agreements with EU universities further isolates the UK within the European academic ecosystem, reducing its competitiveness in attracting top-tier talent (Conlon., *et al* 2021)

The decline in EU student enrolment poses a broader threat to the global competitiveness of UK universities. EU students have historically enriched campus diversity, fostered cross-cultural collaboration, and contributed to the international standing of UK higher education institutions (Mayhew, 2017; Hubble, 2016). Their diminishing presence risks making UK universities less attractive to other international students, further compounding the challenges posed by global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic. While non-EU markets have offered a temporary buffer, this overreliance on select regions leaves UK universities vulnerable to future shocks, such as shifting travel restrictions or changing geopolitical landscapes.

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted enrolment trends, particularly for international students. Restrictions on global mobility and economic uncertainty reduced the number of overseas students, a key revenue stream for many institutions. While detailed data on the pandemic's long-term impact is still emerging, preliminary studies suggest that the decline in diversity among student populations has significant implications for both institutional finances and the overall student experience (Williams, 2020).

Some researchers (Dias., *et al* 2020; Willis., *et al*, 2021; McGivern & Shepherd 2022) argue that the pandemic has also exacerbated existing inequalities. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who were already less likely to enrol, faced additional barriers such as limited access to technology for online learning (Paul Balton). This underscores the need for future studies to explore how global crises intersect with existing structural inequalities in higher education.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted higher education (Sahu, 2020), with both positive and negative impacts on student enrolment. While the pandemic presented challenges such as lockdowns and a rapid shift to online learning, it also triggered unexpected growth in some areas, reflecting a complex and complex impact on student numbers.

One of the most notable positive effects was the 10% increase in first-year enrolments between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (HESA 2022). This growth was largely driven by UK-based first-degree students and taught postgraduate enrolments, as students sought to use the pandemic period to invest in education during an uncertain job market (HESA 2022). However, this rise was not uniform across all levels of study. For example, postgraduate research enrolments declined by 7% in 2021/22 (HESA 2022), suggesting that the disruptions of the pandemic may have discouraged long-term academic commitments for some, possibly due to the challenges of conducting research remotely or limited access to laboratories and fieldwork opportunities.

Despite the overall increase in numbers, the pandemic created significant barriers for certain groups of students (Jones, 2006; Irawan., *et al* 2020). The initial shift to online learning and successive lockdowns disrupted the traditional higher education experience, potentially deterring some students from enrolling (Irawan., *et al* 2020). For example, in 2021/22, first-degree and other undergraduate enrolments fell by 2% (HESA 2022), highlighting that some prospective students may have been dissuaded by the lack of in-person teaching or concerns about the value of an online education. These declines contrast sharply with the 10% surge in taught postgraduate enrolments

(HESA 2023), emphasizing how the pandemic's impact was uneven, with some students seeing the period as an opportunity to upskill while others delayed or avoided higher education altogether.

Moreover, while the pandemic encouraged some international students, especially non-EU students, to enrol, partly due to the Graduate Route visa introduced during this time (Wang & Liu 2024), the pandemic also created logistical challenges. Travel restrictions, health concerns, and uncertainty around visa processes may have made studying abroad less appealing to others (Burki, 2020; Firang, 2020). These mixed effects demonstrate how the pandemic simultaneously acted as a motivator and a deterrent, depending on students' circumstances and priorities.

Finally, the increase in domestic students pursuing higher education during the pandemic highlights the changing role of universities in times of economic uncertainty. The slight 1% increase in UK first-degree enrolments (HESA 2022) reflects a growing tendency for young people to see education as a way to weather economic uncertainty and prepare for future job markets. However, the pandemic also amplified inequities in access to education, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds faced greater challenges adapting to remote learning or lacked resources such as reliable internet and private study spaces (Andrew., *et al* 2020).

The Intersection of Economic and Geopolitical Barriers for Underrepresented Students

The challenges faced by underrepresented students in UK higher education are compounded by a combination of economic policies and geopolitical shifts. The *economic drivers of enrolment trends* section highlight the significant role of tuition fees and financial aid in shaping enrolment patterns, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While income-contingent loans were designed to reduce barriers to higher education, their limitations, such as not covering full living costs and placing additional reliance on parents, disproportionately affect lower-income students (Barr & Low, 1988; Callender., *et al.* 2014). These students, who already face significant financial barriers, are further disadvantaged by the complexity and invasiveness of the financial aid system, which deters many from applying for support (Schofer & Meyer, 2005).

However, the challenges these students face extend beyond domestic financial structures. As discussed in the *policy impacts and institutional responses* section, Brexit has created new barriers for EU students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Before Brexit, EU students benefited from home fee status, access to student loans, and freedom of movement, making UK universities an attractive and affordable option. Yet, with the UK's exit from the European Union, EU students now face international fee rates, the loss of financial support, and stricter visa requirements (Broc, 2020; Mayhew, 2017). This shift has had a disproportionate impact on underrepresented EU students, who may already have limited access to the financial resources needed to attend university.

For many of these students, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the added financial burden of international fees and the absence of access to student loans create insurmountable barriers. As Bowes et al. (2015) and Hillman & Robinson (2016) point out, financial difficulties are often cited as a primary barrier to accessing higher education among underrepresented groups, including BAME students and disadvantaged White students. The loss of financial aid opportunities, such as those afforded by EU membership, makes it even more difficult for these students to pursue higher education in the UK, further entrenching inequalities in access.

Moreover, the challenges posed by Brexit to EU students are compounded by the general economic pressures that affect underrepresented domestic students. The economic barriers faced by UK students, especially those from low-income families, intersect with Brexit's impact on EU students, demonstrating how these global and domestic factors overlap to disproportionately affect the same

groups (Broc, 2020). The increasing reliance on international student revenue, especially from markets like China, leaves UK universities vulnerable to shifts in geopolitical relations, exacerbating financial uncertainty for all students.

Therefore, the intersection of Brexit, economic shifts, and financial aid structures presents a complex landscape for underrepresented students. As these students face compounded financial and systemic barriers, the need for more targeted interventions and a rethinking of both financial aid policies and international student recruitment strategies becomes clear. Addressing these challenges holistically, considering both domestic and international factors, will be essential to ensuring equitable access to higher education for all students.

Gaps and Future Directions

In recent years, research on access to higher education for underrepresented groups has identified several key areas where further exploration and policy intervention are crucial. Despite significant progress, economic barriers remain one of the most prominent factors limiting participation for disadvantaged students. As research by Olbrecht *et al* (2016) indicates, financial aid policies, though critical, often fail to account for the full spectrum of expenses, including housing and living costs, which disproportionately affect students from low-income backgrounds. These hidden costs, alongside tuition fees, can lead to financial insecurity, which research by Moores & Burgess (2022) shows has long-term impacts on both academic persistence and career outcomes for underrepresented students. Future research should therefore examine the complex interplay of these factors and explore new models for financial aid that go beyond simply tuition coverage.

One critical gap is the role of policy reforms aimed at addressing the structural inequities within higher education. According to Wylie (2017), the financial aid system is often opaque and difficult to navigate, especially for first-generation college students. Simplifying this process and increasing transparency in financial aid allocation could enhance access for disadvantaged students. McKinney and McKinney (2020) argue that the introduction of more comprehensive support systems—such as expanded mental health services, career counselling, and flexible learning options—could alleviate the burdens faced by these students, enabling them to complete their studies successfully. Future research should examine the effectiveness of such reforms in improving long-term outcomes for underrepresented groups.

Geopolitical shifts, such as the aftermath of Brexit, have also significantly impacted higher education, especially for students from the European Union (EU). Research by Mayhew (2022) highlights the significant reduction in EU student enrolments due to the loss of fee-free education and access to student loans post-Brexit. This has exacerbated inequalities, particularly for lower-income students from the EU, who may now face insurmountable financial barriers to studying in the UK. As Eurydice (2020) points out, understanding these changes and exploring how universities can create alternative funding models to support these students could help mitigate the long-term effects of such geopolitical shifts.

The global reliance on international student tuition, particularly from countries like China, has also raised concerns about the sustainability of this funding model. As noted by Wang and Liu (2024), universities that depend heavily on international students are vulnerable to the fluctuating geopolitical landscape. Studies, such as those by Wang and Liu (2024), have explored how UK universities could diversify their international student body and reduce reliance on specific markets to safeguard against potential disruptions. Understanding these dynamics, particularly in light of

growing tensions between the UK and China, is crucial for shaping future international student recruitment strategies.

Another underexplored area is the experience of non-traditional students, including mature learners, part-time students, and those from marginalized backgrounds. Research by Arday (2022) emphasizes the unique barriers these students face, such as juggling work, childcare, and academic demands. These students often encounter educational systems that were not designed with their needs in mind, and their experiences with financial and social stressors are under-researched. Future studies should focus on understanding the support systems that could help non-traditional students succeed in higher education, ensuring policies are inclusive of their specific challenges.

Outreach efforts have been increasing to support underrepresented groups, yet gaps remain in identifying the most effective strategies for engaging these students. Thompson and Brooks (2018) note that outreach programs targeting Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students often fail to account for the diverse cultural and financial barriers that these groups face. Research could explore how outreach initiatives can be more tailored to specific communities, considering factors like geographic location, family background, and access to resources. Understanding these nuanced needs is critical for designing targeted interventions that increase both participation and retention for underrepresented students.

Finally, the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational equity warrant further exploration. The sudden shift to online learning disproportionately affected underrepresented groups, many of whom lacked access to reliable technology or a conducive study environment at home. Research by Mukhtar et al., (2020) suggests that while some students benefited from the flexibility of remote learning, many others struggled with isolation and a lack of adequate support. The lasting impact of this disruption on underrepresented groups' attitudes toward higher education and their educational outcomes is still largely unknown, and future studies could provide insight into how universities can better support students in the aftermath of such crises.

Addressing these gaps in research will allow policymakers and higher education institutions to create more inclusive and equitable environments, ensuring that students from all backgrounds have an opportunity to thrive in higher education.

Conclusion

The complex landscape of higher education enrolment is shaped by an interplay of economic, geopolitical, and global factors. Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic have emerged as critical disruptors, introducing profound challenges for universities in the UK and beyond. Brexit has fundamentally altered the educational prospects for EU students, erecting financial and procedural barriers that have reduced their participation in UK institutions. This decline not only jeopardises institutional finances but also diminishes the cultural diversity and collaborative potential that EU students contribute. Simultaneously, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the sector's vulnerability to global crises, disrupting enrolment trends, exacerbating inequalities, and necessitating a shift towards more flexible models of teaching and learning. While the pandemic saw an increase in enrolment among some groups, it also deepened disparities for underrepresented students, particularly those from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds.

For underrepresented students, the challenges are compounded by intersecting economic pressures and geopolitical changes. Brexit's reclassification of EU students as international applicants, coupled with rising tuition fees and the withdrawal of financial support, has disproportionately affected lower-income students. These barriers, alongside the increasing reliance on revenue from specific

international markets such as China, highlight the precariousness of higher education funding models. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive financial aid reforms, diversified international recruitment strategies, and outreach efforts that more effectively target underrepresented groups.

Moreover, significant gaps remain in the understanding of the long-term impacts of global disruptions and structural inequalities. Future research must explore the interconnections between economic barriers, geopolitical shifts, and global crises, as well as their collective influence on enrolment trends and student experiences. Research should also prioritise the development of policies and support systems that address the unique needs of non-traditional and underrepresented students, ensuring the higher education system is both equitable and resilient to future shocks.

Ultimately, a holistic approach that considers the intersections of economic, geopolitical, and social factors is essential to safeguarding the sustainability and inclusivity of higher education. By prioritising equity, transparency, and adaptability, universities can better navigate future disruptions while ensuring higher education remains accessible and inclusive for all.

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