

21 July 2023

## **Statement on the UK Government's proposals to crack down on "low value" degree programmes in English universities**

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak last week announced government plans to ["crack down" on "low value" degree programmes offered by English universities](#), as well as to limit universities' recruitment to foundation degree programmes as an alternative means of entry to Higher Education. While it is not currently clear which specific degree programmes or institutions the government has in mind, it is clear that the definition of "low value" is based on course drop-out rates and career trajectories/earnings potential post-graduation and is largely, therefore, an evaluation of the likelihood of students paying back their student loans.

As representatives of the Arts and Humanities Alliance, we would like to protest such a socially regressive move. It is a policy that will set back the clock on the levelling-up agenda, making it much harder for students from non-traditional backgrounds to undertake university-level study, and dissuading students across the board from selecting the subjects they wish to study based on aptitude and interest in preference for those programmes deemed to be "high (economic) value" in the eyes of the government. This will have the effect of impoverishing our society more generally.

It is also a policy that will further destabilise the Higher Education sector, making it more likely that universities that rely more substantially on providing for non-traditional students and who have been very successful in addressing previous policy initiatives that incentivised addressing questions of equality, diversity and inclusion in access to Higher Education, will experience significant financial difficulties leading to further course closures, restructurings and staff redundancies.

We would suggest that the level of debt acquired by the average undergraduate student is a "rip off" for all students because fees are so high in comparison with what their peers pay in other countries. This is a situation that is fully in the Government's power to address by overhauling the way in which it supports universities to deliver qualified graduates – of all different disciplines - that will help our society thrive into the future.

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On behalf of the affiliates of the Arts and Humanities Alliance  
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