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Towards a new era of collaboration: Next steps for transformation and efficiency

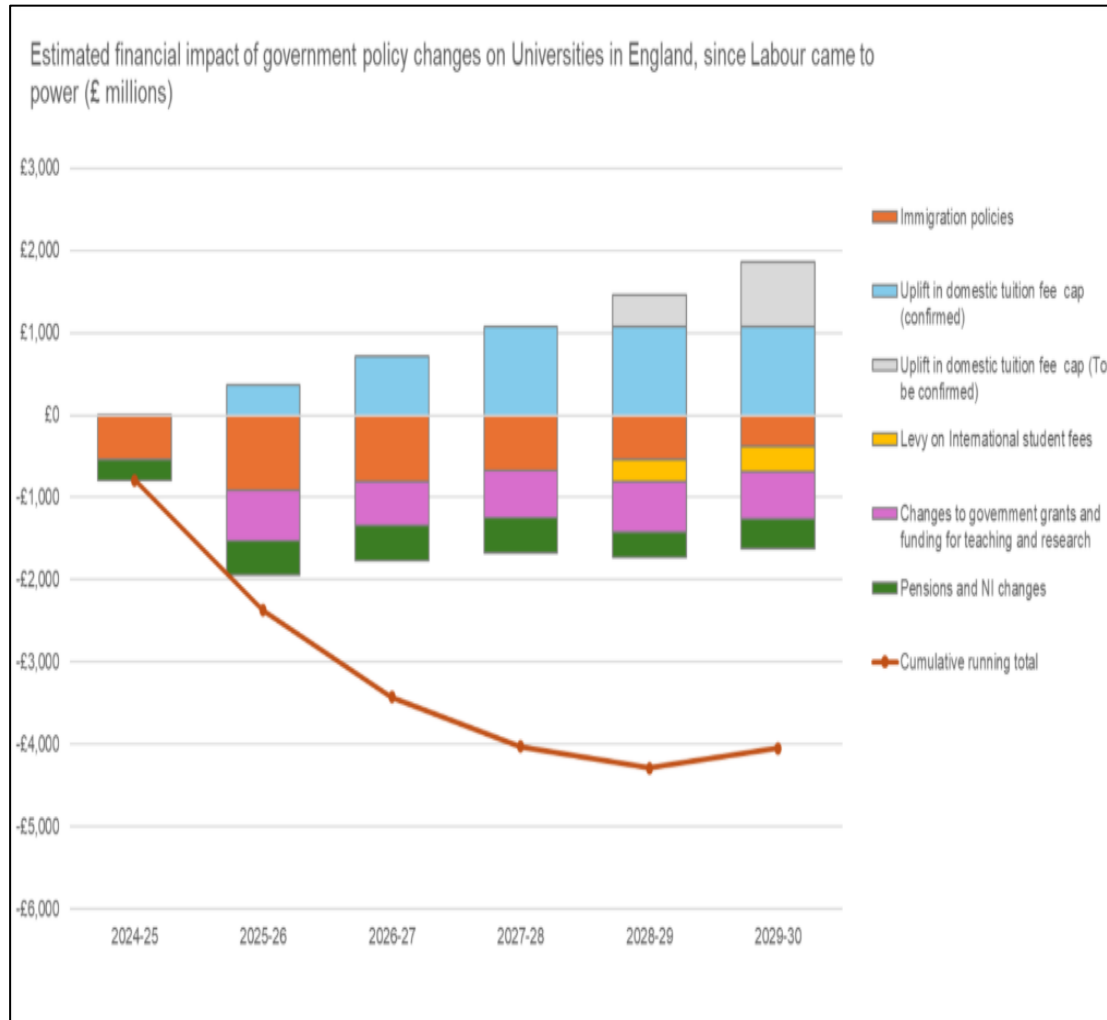
Miriam Deakin, Director of Strategy, Insight
and Member Engagement at Universities UK.

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL | 17TH JUNE 2026

UUK's Transformation and Efficiency Programme



A challenging context



- Volatile political outlook at home and abroad; complex policy landscape
- Variable public perceptions of the value offered by universities
- Demographic change: UK 18-year-olds set to increase by 25%, 2020 and 2030 and then decline
- Very challenging international recruitment environment
- Financial pressure (with averages often masking marked differences between institutions)

UUK cost cutting, efficiency and transformation survey 2026

- **79%** have made voluntary redundancies in the past three years, and over the next three years most are willing to consider further staff cost-saving measures, including hiring freezes (**88%**), voluntary redundancies (**79%**) and compulsory redundancies (**69%**).
- Just under half report having reduced their course offer through course consolidation (**46%**) or closure (**44%**) over the last three years. Although this is slightly lower than last year, it remains substantially higher than in 2024.
- Almost a third of institutions (**31%**) report having cut academic research activity in the last three years (**19%** in 2025 and **14%** in 2024). **27%** have cut student bursaries, and **17%** access and outreach activity.
- **92%** of English/Welsh respondents said **tuition fee uplifts would not fully offset the financial impact of planned policy changes**.
- Appetite for change across a wide range of activities, including **collaborative structures** such as federations and alliances (**65%**). **40%** report being open to or actively considering mergers or acquisitions.



Recap on the Taskforce and phase 1

- The Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce, chaired by Sir Nigel Carrington, was set up in response to the long-term drop in investment in higher education over the last decade to drive sector-led progress in overcoming barriers to transformation and unlocking efficiency. The Taskforce aimed to:
 - Identify the challenges facing the sector
 - Catalyse a sense of collective effort and momentum behind sector-led change, with keen focus on how universities can work together to solve some of the challenges ahead
 - Support a deeper partnership and quality of dialogue with government
- The Taskforce recommendations were set out in the 'Towards a new era of collaboration' report, published in June 2025.



Opportunities identified in phase 1

- The Taskforce identified seven opportunities and a number of actions for sector partners, HE providers and government colleagues:
 - Pursuing innovative, collaborative structures
 - Sharing more services and infrastructure
 - **Leveraging sector buying power**
 - Supporting digital transformation
 - Adopting a common approach to assessing efficiency and benchmarking costs
 - Developing leadership skills in those mandated to deliver change and further improving governance
 - Developing the current regulatory environment and supportive structures to help collaboration and transformation to go further, faster



Phase 2: Focus on delivery

The Taskforce established the case for change and the importance of sector autonomy and collective action to drive transformation and efficiencies.

Phase 2 builds on this work by focusing on:

Delivering the action plan set out in the phase one report

Pressing government to take action to enable transformation

Catalysing change now through events, resources and guidance to support institutions to make change



Transformation and efficiency: Phase 2

Phase 1 Action Plan



- Revised governance code (CUC)
- Collaborative procurement deals (Jisc and UKUPC)
- Common data framework for student systems (UCISA)
- Student Support Services Benchmarking Toolkit (AdvanceHE)
- Operational efficiency maturity assessment tool (AHUA)

Working with Government



- TPS flexibility
- Transformation Fund
- Reform VAT cost-sharing rules
- Competition and Markets Authority sector guidance
- Explore gaps in sector stewardship (e.g. support for vulnerable disciplines)
- Research lender confidence
- Support our wider asks on financial sustainability and regulation

Catalyse change now



- VC leadership development programme
- Webinars, events & resources on:
 - Radical Collaboration (Kent and Greenwich; KPMG, Mills & Reeve)
 - Financial governance and Financial Acumen (Lloyds, PwC)
 - Learning from mergers in the US (Huron)
- Transformation and Efficiency Summit, 7 May
- Efficiency and collaboration in research

Collaborative procurement

Progress:

- Significant progress has been made by Jisc and UKUPC in negotiating better collaborative procurement deals for the sector with major software suppliers nationally.
- BUFDG and UKUPC have also established a dedicated group of procurement leads, HE Procurement, Efficiency and Transformation (HEPET) to drive greater use of existing framework contracts sector wide
- HEPET has made good progress on methods to improve contract management cross sector as well as raising the profile of procurement with senior leaders

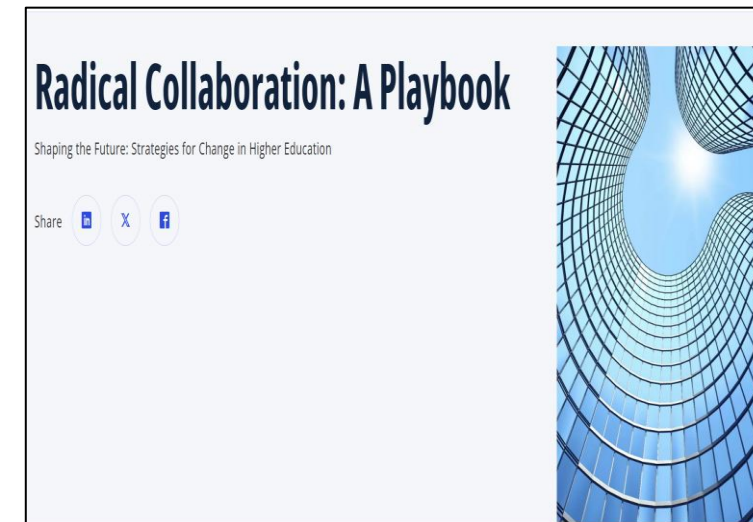
Considerations for future:

- Using existing resources e.g. consortia support and commercial advice
- Considering shared services and using existing frameworks to meet tendering needs
- Considering opportunities to aggregate spend and run joint tender activities - UKUPC can support with this
- Using UUK and UKUPC continue to highlight barriers and drive helpful messages with senior leaders



Resources

- [Opportunities for efficiencies through shared services](#) led by Jisc
- A report led by Jisc on shared procurement of software solutions, shared with the sector
- A series of resources to support transformation including:
 - KMPG/Mills and Reeves report, [Radical Collaboration](#)
 - Reflections from a series of workshops on [Financing Transformation](#) with Lloyds Bank
 - A report on [Driving Efficiency and Value](#) with PWC
 - A [briefing on competition law](#) from Shakespeare Martineau and a blog from the CMA
 - A publication on [Unlocking the Potential of AI](#) with Moorehouse Consulting
 - [Advancing Institutional Maturity in Growth, Economies of Scale, Growth and Efficiency](#), with UEL, Barclays and Shakespeare Martineau



Thank you and your questions



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Thank you

Transformation and Efficiency Programme Lead:
Peter.mason@universitiesuk.ac.uk

Director of Strategy, Insight and Member Engagement:
Miriam.deakin@universitiesuk.ac.uk



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