

AHUA PRIORITIES FOR 2024

Last year the Executive Committee agreed a number of priorities to provide a focus for AHUA activities over the coming year. Our hope was that the identification of priorities would help us make an active impact and convey clearer positions of opinion on areas that are of priority to all our members.

The three priorities identified were:

- 1) Better Regulation and Bureaucracy – particularly to think about what ‘good regulation’ looks like, (including future positive models of regulation) and to ensure bureaucratic efforts are placed in areas making the most difference to core activities of teaching and research;
- 2) Student Life – focusing on what constitutes most effective support for the student experience, identifying emerging innovation and where key improvements could be made;
- 3) Future Planning – anticipating changes that shifts in demography and geopolitics may have on the shape and size of the sector, associated risks and responses for governance and management.

We were able to use these priorities as a focus to members and also to other sector agencies and groups. The following are examples of engagement around these priorities in 2023.

- 1) Better Regulation and Bureaucracy
 - Engaged with UUK and Russell Group on exploring different models of potential regulation, including contributing to the UUK Symposium on Better Regulation; engaged with both the Chief Executive and Chair of OfS and new Director of Regulation on where regulatory burden was occurring and how communication and trust could be improved;
 - Contributed evidence (written and oral) to the House of Lords Inquiry into the OfS;
 - Led on initiating changes to the B4 condition, highlighting cost and challenging benefits of bureaucratic requirements;
 - Raised issues and sought better legislation and guidance on the regulation of Freedom of Speech with OfS and in support of UUK;
 - Contributed to considerations around new legislation restricting activities of HE in the context of international security/foreign policy priorities.
- 2) Student Life
 - Engaged with OfS on approaches and issues arising out of consultation on sexual harassment and misconduct;
 - Contributed to UUK considerations on student accommodation and rental reform;
 - Contributed to UUK policy briefing development on the Duty of Care.

3) Future Planning

- Engaged DfE and OfS on issues relating to financial sustainability and forecasting risks;
- Continued engagement with UKVI and Home Office on Visa issues and immigration policy.

We also set out the intention to develop clearer position papers which articulated the issues from our distinctive perspective around key issues. Our initial foray into this on Freedom of Speech has been welcomed by members and produced some learning for us about developing the AHUA 'voice'. We are now looking to see how that might develop further.

In December 2023, the Executive Committee reviewed the priorities for 2024. We noted the context which would shape our engagement, including:

- Engagement with policy development for the political parties in the lead up to the next election;
- Continuing concerns about the impact of the cost of living on student participation and recruitment; impact on study and continuation;
- The shift developing in the HE market and issues of financial sustainability – including the potential publication of UUK's work on financial sustainability; growing focus from OfS on financial forecasts; changes in participation in both domestic and international markets;
- Anticipated further regulatory activity including on Freedom of Speech; Sexual Harassment and Misconduct; extension of reach of OfS investigations.

For 2024, the Committee supported continuing with the three priorities, but noted that the agenda around future planning would grow. In particular under this theme this year, we will be contributing to the development of the UUK White paper on the future of the sector; engage with DfE on the financial impacts already being felt by institutions and the responses to it, and also look to increase the ways in which our members can find opportunities to share practice and insights into how they are approaching operational efficiencies in their own institutions. We hope our regional meetings will provide a forum for these discussions, as well as opportunities at conference.

We believe that our membership has a breadth of experience and knowledge to bring a distinctive voice and insights to sector discussion about what the future holds, and how best to respond to the volatility we are all experiencing. As ever, we need our members to help us draw out those experiences, so please contribute to forum discussions and let us in the Executive Committee know how you would like to get involved.

January 2024