



**Harper Adams
University**



From Challenge to Opportunity: A Vice-Chancellor's View on Higher Education

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Together, we will make the difference

Harper Adams is the University for food production, animal health and sustainable living environments.

Our mission is to advance knowledge: to inspire and equip learners to deliver real change, building a sustainable future for our living planet by working collaboratively on practical research, innovation and new technologies.

This mission is supported by our departments, curricula, research specialisms and areas of focus in:

Science, Technology, Agriculture, Engineering, Economy, Business, Food, Environment, Entomology, Plants, Animal Wellbeing, Veterinary Science, Zoology, Farming, Sustainability, Enterprise, Digital, Data, Policy, Property, Real Estate and more.



Universities Challenged

The HE Sector is facing some significant strategic and financial challenges.

- + Majority of institutions projecting forecasting deterioration in short to medium term
- + Over 70% of institutions to be in deficit from 2025/26
- + Continuing real-terms decline in resources for undergraduates
- + Inflation and economic pressures
- + Pressure on international student recruitment
- + Affordability of estate and transition to net zero
- + Cost of living pressures of staff and students

**BRIDGET
PHILLIPSON
MP**

Appointed
Secretary of State for Education

Office for
Students



UK tuition fees – In one hand and out with the other

- Tuition fees have only risen by £250 since the Government set the cap on fees to £9,000 in 2021.
- Any benefit of the increase to £9,535 is negated by the rise in National Insurance Contributions – OfS estimate that this will cost the sector £430m each year from 2025/26.

University tuition fees rising to £9,535 in England



Budget national insurance hike 'costs universities £372 million'

Chancellor goes ahead with 1.2 percentage point increase, hiking staff costs for already cash-strapped institutions

University cash crisis to get worse despite tuition fee rise, BBC told

Minister does not rule out some universities may close over funding crisis

Higher education minister Baroness Jacqui Smith tells Sky News it is "in the hands of universities to take the action necessary in order to be as efficient as possible".

Domestic and International student enrolment

- Increased competition with universities reducing entrance requirements to sustain enrolment. Ripple effect causing universities to face significant declines in UK student numbers.
- Larger drop in international student enrolment, with 16% fewer applications for visas in 2024 than in 2023.
- Restrictions on family accompaniment and changes to student visas deterring international students.

-10%

On UK undergraduate entrants on previous forecasts for 2024-25.

-28,585 (20.4%)

Fewer student visa applications from international applicants in India.

-25,897 (44.6%)

Fewer student visa applications from international applicants in Nigeria.

+1.3%

Increase in the number of UK undergrad students accepted by UCAS in 2024. Significantly below expected an increase of 5.8%

Cost of Living and Inflationary Pressure

- Rising costs across the board are eroding margins.
- Inflationary and economic pressures on operating costs, capital expenditure and affordability of estates, salaries and pension costs are increasing the strain.
- Universities that are members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme saw their pension contributions rise to nearly 29% in April 2024, compared with 16.4% in 2019.



Food Price Rises since 2020

| | Jan 2020 | Nov 2024 | % Increase |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Whole chicken (1.5kg) | £4.08 | £5.82 | 42.6% ↑ |
| Cheddar Cheese (400g) | £2.76 | £3.56 | 28.9% ↑ |
| Sliced white bread (800g) | £1.03 | £1.36 | 32% ↑ |
| Semi-skimmed milk (2litres) | £0.83 | £1.24 | 49.4% ↑ |

Change.



1. Play a stronger role in expanding and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.



2. Make a stronger contribution to economic growth.



3. Play a greater civic role in their communities.



4. Raise the bar further on teaching standards, to maintain and improve our world-leading reputation and drive out poor practice.



5. Underpinning all of this needs to sit a sustained efficiency and reform programme.



The Role of AI in Higher Education

- The rapid advancement of AI challenges higher education to adapt and prepare students for an AI-driven future, where AI plays a significant role in various sectors.
- Despite AI's existence for over 30 years, its practical use in teaching and learning is still uncertain.
- As educational institutions are tasked with equipping students for an AI-driven workforce, integrating AI tools into education is becoming crucial to enhance learning and employability.
- Across higher education, we are starting to have more intentional and nuanced conversations about what developments in AI mean for universities in the long term and, by extension, the students we educate and nurture.
- The strength of these conversations will come from asking the right questions to inform institutional AI use and policy.



Opportunities and Challenges for UK HE Sector

The UK HE sector is at a crossroads in 2025.

Challenges:

- Declining student numbers due to perceptions about reduction in the value of HE.
- The UK HE landscape in 2025 will be defined by the ability to balance short-term financial pressures with long-term strategic vision and sustainability for both institutions and government.
- How does the sector do more with fewer resources? Leaders must make good if tough decisions about what adds value and what does not, ensuring that staff focus on essential work and diversifying income streams.
- Communicating and strengthening the role of universities as drivers of regional and national development.

Opportunities:

- Opportunity to build closer community connections and consider alternatives like apprenticeships and apprentice-like provision.
- Opportunities exist for institutions who can diversify income streams and move at pace to keep ahead of the economic pressures.
- Strengthen ties to local communities through recruitment, widening participation, and contributing to regional economic growth.
- Opportune moment to review systems, estates, technology and processes to streamline and ensure cost effectiveness(Ref UUK Report and Efficiency Task Force)

Harper Adams Response

Harper Transform

A modern, adaptive and flexible organisation and campuses

Harper Diversify

Shifting our revenue and contribution model across different customer and partner groups

Harper Forward

Protecting and adapting our key strengths for high quality teaching and learning and research with enterprise and impact

Harper Business Connect

Deepening our relationships with business to co-develop and co-fund our future and support their success

The School of Sustainable Food and Farming

- The School of Sustainable Food and Farming (SSFF) is a community of organisations and people collaborating to see a profitable, productive and sustainable future for the UK agricultural industry.
- The SSFF aims to equip farmers with skills, knowledge and training needed to become fully sustainable on all parameters: economic, environmental and social.
- It acts as a trusted source of information to demystify the journey to net zero and sustainable farming - talk a common language about sustainable agricultural systems.
- Encourage new entrants into the farming and food industry, and a diversity of entrepreneurial talent to support the aims. Creating alternative pathways to students, industry engagement and impact.



Harper Adams University Telford

- Our new location, Harper Adams University, Telford, will be our first dedicated hub for digital courses — focusing on future technologies, engineering, business and career development.
- Building on our nearly 125 years of industry expertise, the Quad transforms the university's strong connections into a physical, interactive space.
- Through Harper Adams University Telford we are offering alternative types of degrees and varying our delivery models with closer connection to students at risk of underachievement through Telford Connect, Future Leaders and in collaboration with Telford College and other industry partners.



GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK higher education, championing distinction and diversity in the sector.

GuildHE works alongside UUK as joint guardians of the sector to advocate for institutions within their memberships and on behalf of the entire system.

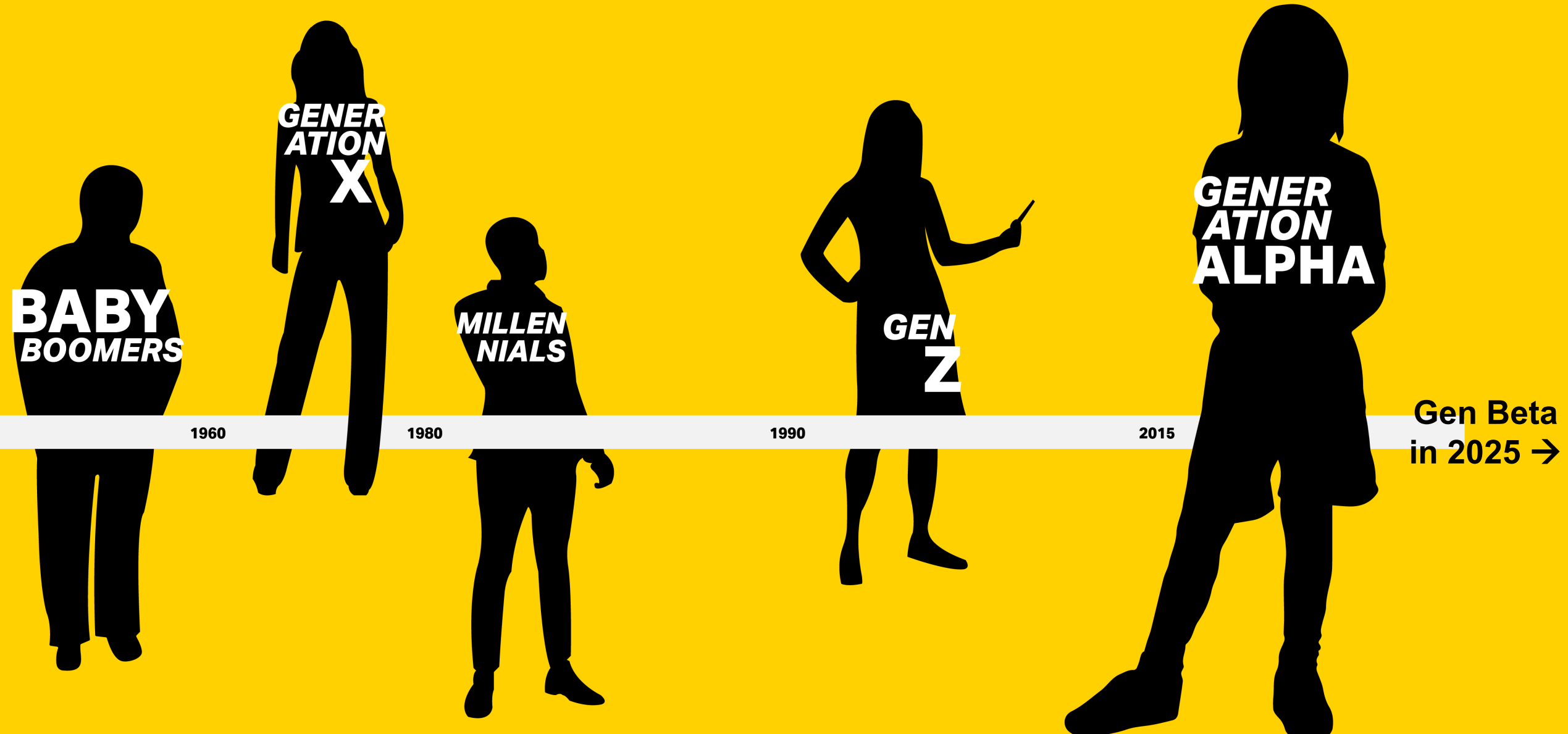
The needs and contributions of specialist and distinctive institutions, like Harper Adams University, are being supported through this time of change.



What Does All This Mean For You

- The professionalism and integrity of your work is more vital than ever.
- All of us need to validate our impact and decisions through data of all types.
- We need to be willing to challenge existing practice -every year is a new cohort. They are changing fast.
- Find the models of engagement that work for different types of potential learners.
- Help your institution to tell rich, compelling stories.

Our Populations of Interest are Changing:





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