

## CLOSURES...?

## Thinking about change

H3	ACT	PLAN	TRACK	PARK	OPP	THR	NEU
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Some existing UK universities should be closed down while new institutions that are free from excessive regulation should be established to save the UK's higher education sector, two scholars have claimed in a [report](#) published by thinktank [Cieo](#). Lee Jones, reader in international politics at Queen Mary University of London, and Philip Cunliffe, senior lecturer in international conflict at the University of Kent, call for a "fundamental rethink of UK HE", which they argue was "already in deep trouble well before Covid-19 struck" as a result of over-expansion and marketisation. The authors say that widening participation has largely involved funnelling poorer students into low-quality institutions, while marketisation has led to wasteful spending, bureaucracy and managerialism. Their proposal is that the UK university sector be reduced in size, through a mixture of institutional closures, mergers and transformations. This would include the creation of three new kinds of institutions: new technical colleges; "super-universities", formed by merging weaker institutions with stronger ones; and liberal arts colleges with a teaching focus.

The report also calls for the creation of four new "free universities", one for each country in the UK, which would be endowed with independent funding and entirely autonomous from the government. "Their founding constitutions should commit them to the most wide-ranging pursuit of intellectual freedom, represent the widest possible range of intellectual views, and pursue research excellence for the long-term future, with a liberal ethos of teaching," it says. "Faculties and departments should be focused around multi-disciplinary areas identified for future need and putting Britain at the cutting edge of global discovery."

## MARKETING ACCOMMODATION

## The strategic importance of accommodation

H1	ACT	PLAN	TRACK	PARK	OPP	THR	NEU
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Writing in *The University Times*, Nnamdi O Madichie, research fellow at the Bloomsbury Institute, considers the strategic importance of accommodation in the marketing of study destinations; especially for international students. In particular, he argues, student accommodation needs to be given more consideration and should be an area of priority attention in any discussions about the student experience in higher education. This is especially important in an increasingly competitive market for international students in the wake of COVID-19.

Madichie sets out a number of points that universities need to consider in their marketing strategy, including

- ✦ First time undergraduates mainly see the quality of student life as paramount. Formal academic work may rank alarmingly low to them and their approach to accommodation is about facilitating the student life experience
- ✦ Returning students – for whom learning is more important and who need assistance finding affordable housing – are more concerned with the academic experience and need support to find suitable housing
- ✦ Universities with low rankings might find their ranking improved if they invested more in student housing and communicated this more forcefully

Accommodation, Madichie argues, is an overlooked element of the total student experience; the NSS questionnaire, he points out, does not include an accommodation question, meaning the measurement of student satisfaction may be skewed. He goes on to suggest that universities and their partners will need to undertake due diligence and/or risk assessment to hone their student living offer and make it part of their USP for the student experience in the future. They need to ask themselves whether international students know about the cost of living in their country and how the hassle of finding suitable and affordable housing impacts on their time for study and class attendance.

## FURTHER READING

