

United Kingdom



REGION: WESTERN EUROPE

Also included in this region: Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

PART I: ENROLMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

The UK HE system loosely follows the unitary model. Almost 90% of students were enrolled in comprehensive universities in 2018, with the remainder attending university colleges and Further Education colleges (which we classify as secondary schools). Enrolments fell by 5% between 2006 and 2018, whereas they increased across the rest of Western Europe by 20%. The number of universities slightly increased, causing average institution-size to fall. Although the UK has a robust private sector comprised predominantly of university colleges (one for which data has been very limited at least until recently), well over 95% of UK students attended public providers in 2018, which was above the average for the rest of Western Europe.

TABLE 1 – Types of higher education providers

CATEGORY	INSTITUTIONS	INSTITUTIONS COUNT IN 2018		
		PUB.	PRIV.	TOTAL
Comprehensive Universities	Universities	138	6	144
University Colleges	University colleges and institutes	25	95	120
Secondary schools	Further education colleges	NA	NA	NA

FIGURE 1 – Numbers of institutions by type, 2006-2018

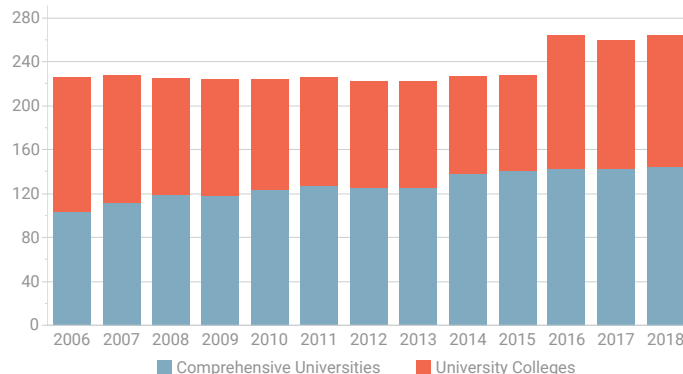


FIGURE 2 – Total enrolments with public and private higher education providers, 2006-2018 (Millions)

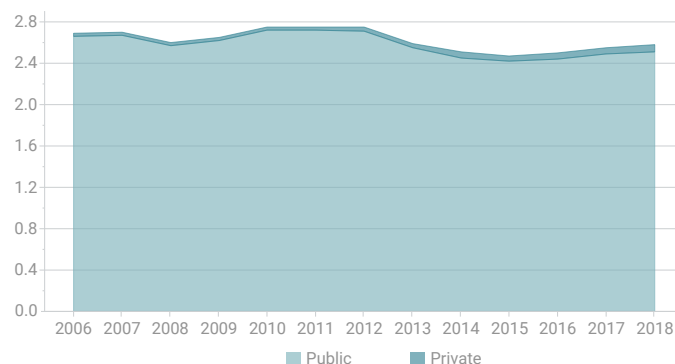


FIGURE 3 – Changes in enrolment, in the UK, the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

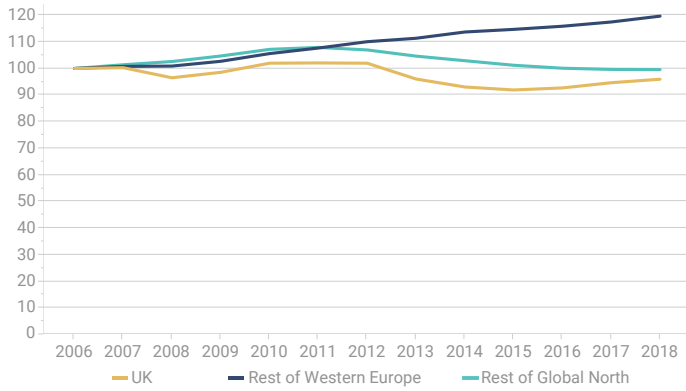


FIGURE 4 – Share of enrolments by institution type in the UK and the rest of Western Europe, 2006 and 2018 (2006=100)

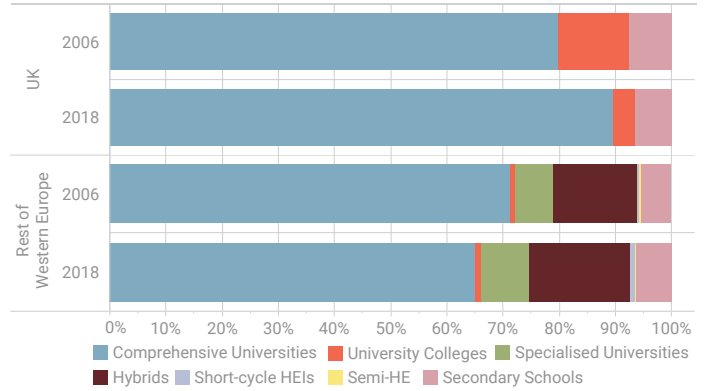


FIGURE 5 – Share of enrolments in public and private institutions, by institution type in the UK and the rest of Western Europe, 2018

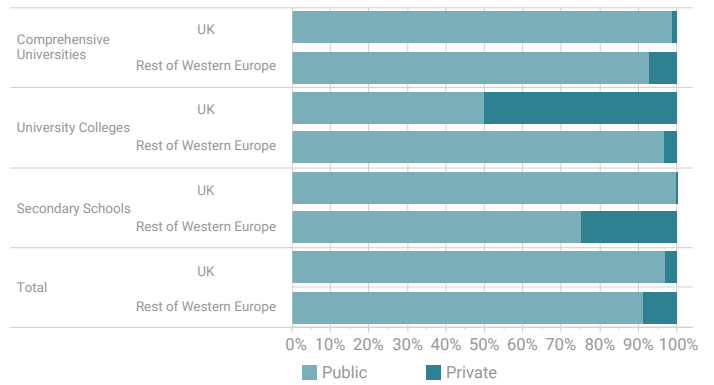
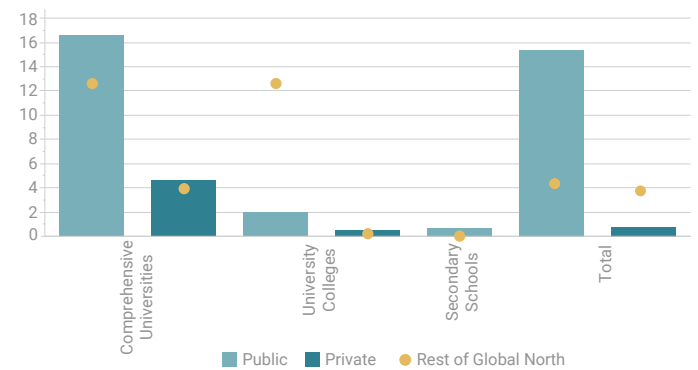


FIGURE 6 – Average institution-size by institution type in the UK and the rest of the Global North, 2018 (Thousands)



Senate House of the University of London, United Kingdom

PART II: HIGHER EDUCATION FINANCING

Public HE spending in the UK rose sharply between 2006 and 2010, before falling in the wake of the Great Financial Crisis. Over the whole 2006 to 2018 period, spending increased by just under 20%, which was substantially behind the rest of Western Europe. Public spending ended the period roughly where it began relative to GDP, at 0.7%, more than 30% behind the regional average. Total expenditures at public universities increased much more quickly than total government spending due to substantial increases in student fee revenues.

FIGURE 7 – Change in real total public spending on higher education in the UK, the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

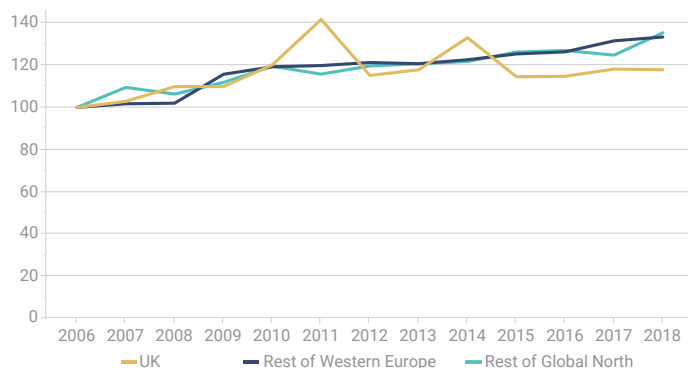


FIGURE 8 – Total public spending on higher education relative to GDP in the UK, the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

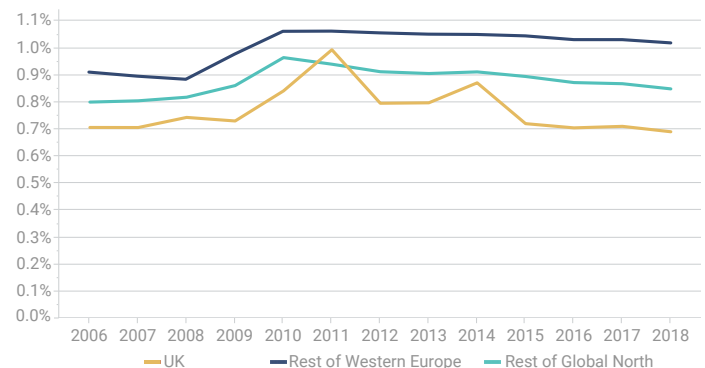


FIGURE 9 – Change in real total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type in the UK and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

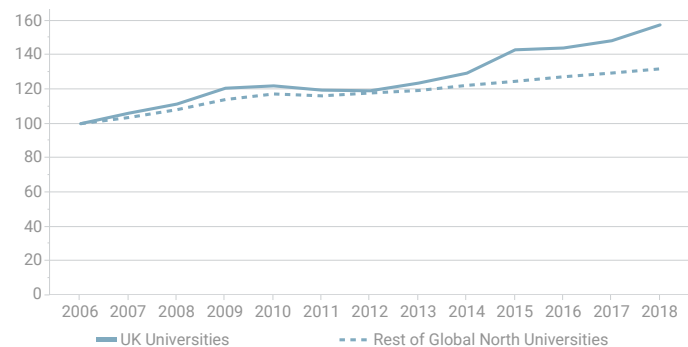


FIGURE 10 – Per-student total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type in real PPP, in the UK and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

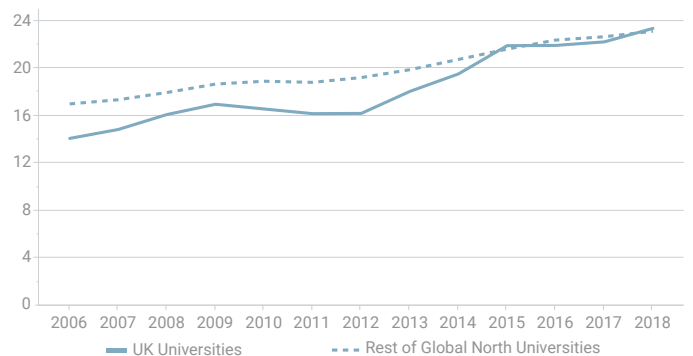
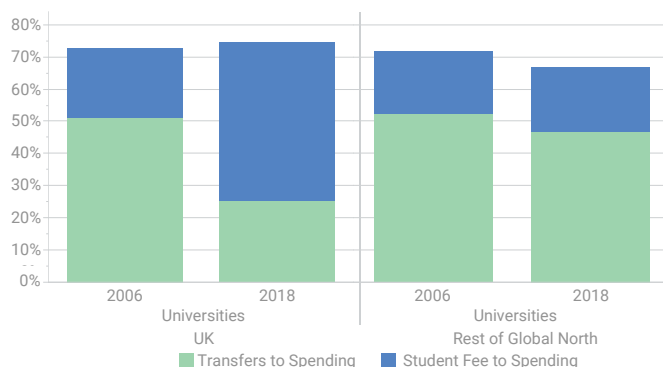


FIGURE 11 – Government transfers relative to total institutional spending of public institutions by institution-type in the UK and the rest of the Global North, 2006 and 2018



PART III: STUDENT FEES

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each take different approaches to student fees, though the policies in England and Northern Ireland are most similar. All students pay at least some fees under a differentiated fee-charging model, except in Scotland many students are exempt from fees – making for a combined inclusive free public and differentiated fee-charging approach. In Wales, some students pay reduced fees through what amount to partial tuition waivers – these also existed in England early in our period of interest but were phased out. Across the UK, public universities received almost USD 10,000 in fee revenues per regular fee-paying student in 2018, almost five-times the 2006 amount. International students typically pay still more elevated differential fees – approximately USD 24,000 in 2018, double the 2006 amount.

FIGURE 13 – Share of students at public institutions under each type of tuition regime in the UK, the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the Global North, 2006 and 2018

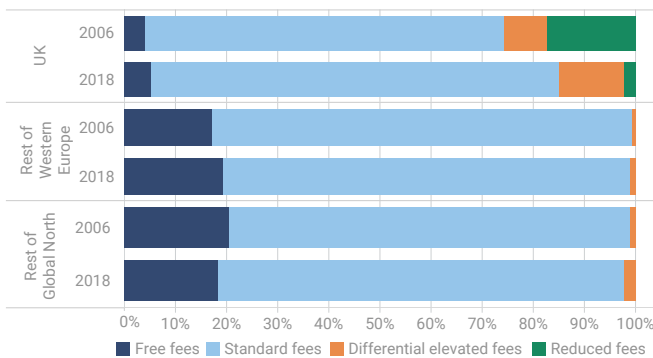


FIGURE 14 – Fee revenues per student paying “regular” rates at public institutions by institution type in PPP, 2006-2018

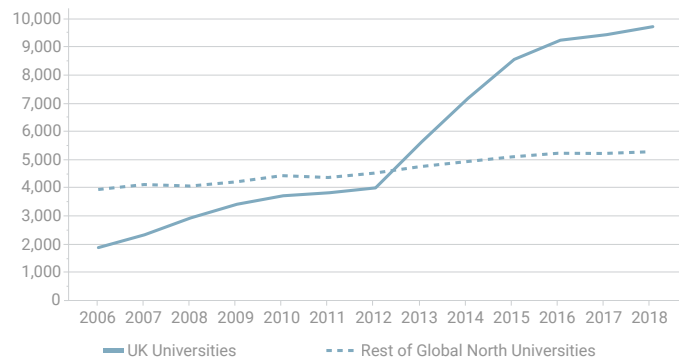
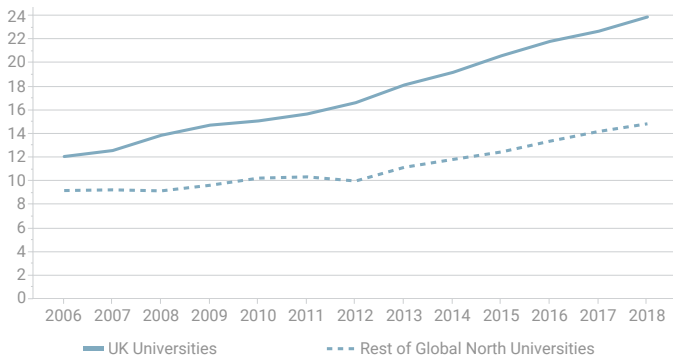


FIGURE 15 – Fee revenues per student paying elevated differential fees at public institutions by institution type in PPP, 2006-2018



PART IV: STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

Government student financial aid in the UK is a mix of loans and grants, with loans dominant in a roughly 12:1 proportion. While both forms of aid disbursed in larger amounts in 2018 than in 2006, loan disbursements more than quadrupled whereas the growth in grants was just 60% - all of which occurred before 2008. In GDP terms, disbursements more than tripled between 2006 and 2018, to just under 0.9%. As of 2016, UK student aid disbursements were the highest in the world relative to GDP.

TABLE 2 – Student financial aid regime, including recipients and amounts disbursed in 2018¹

CATEGORY	PROGRAMS	BASIS OF ALLOCATION	RECIPIENTS	AMOUNTS DISBURSED (USD)
Grants	Country-level higher education grants, bursaries, maintenance and special support grants, disabled students' allowances, midwifery and nursing support grants, discretionary fund support (Scotland), half-fees (Scotland).	Need-based	487,651	1,921,733,047
Loans	Country-level tuition and maintenance loans	Need-based	1,383,317	23,732,558,496

FIGURE 16 – Student financial aid spending or total disbursements to students in financial aid relative to Gross Domestic Product, in the UK, the rest of Western Europe and the rest of the Global North, 2006-2018

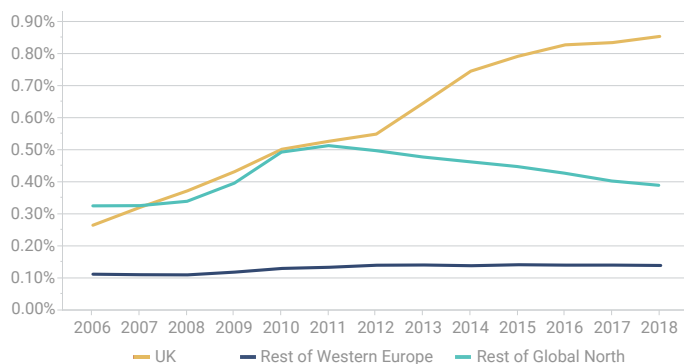


FIGURE 17 – Change in amounts disbursed to students by form of financial aid in the UK and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018 (2006=100)

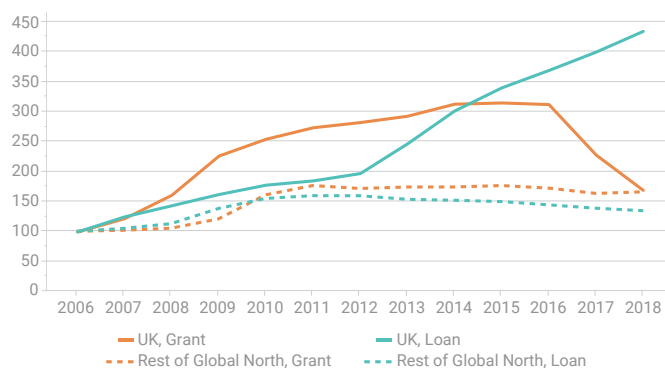


FIGURE 18 – Share of higher education students receiving student financial aid by type in the UK and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018

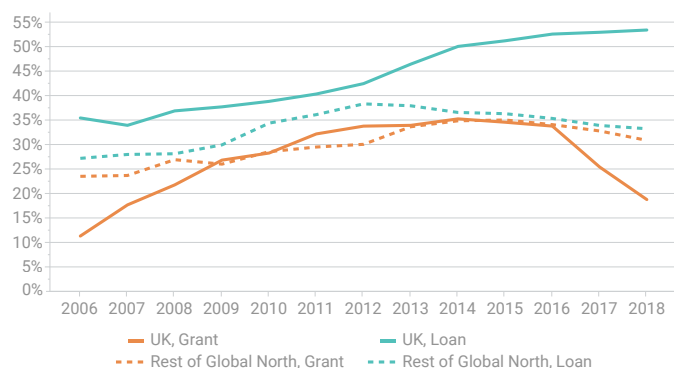
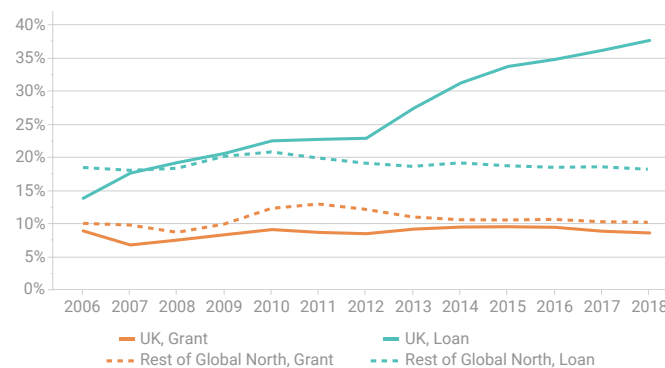


FIGURE 19 – Financial aid per recipient relative to GDP per capita by form of financial aid in the UK and other Global North countries that offer financial aid of this type, 2006-2018



***Note:** For more on methodology and data quality please see [Appendices A and B](#).

¹ Tuition fee grants are tracked as partial tuition exemptions, and therefore excluded from our grants data.