

# BSA 43 | Higher Education

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# Introduction

The higher education system in Britain has undergone remarkable change since the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey began in 1983. At that time, university education was a minority pursuit, with only around 6% of school leavers attending (Hansard, 1983). By 2025, this proportion had risen to more than one third (36%) of those aged 18, with over 2 million domestic students currently enrolled at UK universities (Bolton, 2026). This increase in student numbers has been accompanied by a steady expansion of the university sector in the post-war era, with the development of new colleges of advanced technology in the 1950s and 1960s, and the conversion of former polytechnics and creation of ‘modern universities’ following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Higher education has transformed from a minority pursuit to something that now directly affects a large cross-section of the population.

The expansion of higher education in the UK was built on two tenets: one, that a larger university sector was necessary to support the needs of a growing ‘knowledge economy’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016); and two, that increased university attendance can promote social mobility (Milburn, 2012). In addition, in recent decades, having a degree has become a requirement in many parts of the labour market, with occupations such as teaching (Gov UK, 2025), nursing (BBC, 2009) and journalism (Thurman et al., 2016) now becoming graduate professions.

However, this expansion has come with a cost, which has increasingly been placed on students. Since their introduction in England by New Labour in 1998, students have had to pay an ever-higher level of tuition fees for attending university. When fees were introduced, they were set at a rate of £1,000 per year. From 2004, universities were allowed to charge ‘top-up’ fees of up to £3,000 per year and, after the Browne Review in 2012 (Browne et al., 2012), fees increased markedly to up to £9,000 per year. In 2025-2026, English students are paying up to £9,535 per year (Gov UK, 2026a). During this period, students have also seen the scrapping of maintenance grants from the 2016/2017 academic year (Hubble and Bolton, 2017). Further, student loan repayment thresholds (the salary level above which graduates are required to start paying back their loans) have been frozen multiple times

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and not updated in line with inflation, with the government recently announcing they will be frozen for three years from 2027 onwards (Shearing, 2026). Meanwhile, above-inflation interest rates have been charged on those loans since 2010 (Lewis, 2026). Controversy surrounding the latter change has generated public discussion around whether the burden now placed on some graduates is too great.

In addition, the perceived economic value of higher education for graduates is increasingly being called into question. Graduate-level vacancies in the job market have shrunk (Partridge, 2026), partly linked to the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), meaning many graduates are finding it difficult to find roles that match their skillsets. Meanwhile, unlike other developed nations, the UK has seen its 'graduate premium' (the additional earnings graduates can expect to receive as a result of gaining their qualification) fall over the last two decades (Burn-Murdoch, 2026).

It is not only students that face a challenging financial economic situation. Many universities are struggling financially, with nearly half facing budget deficits in 2025-2026 (Office for Students, 2025). Numerous universities have been forced to implement course consolidation and closures as well as reductions in research investment (Packer, 2025; Universities UK, 2025). In response, universities have increasingly relied on the recruitment of international students as a way to cross-subsidise domestic students (Kett and Ashford, 2024). This has, in turn, contributed to higher levels of immigration, at least in the short term, and led to calls for universities to open campuses abroad rather than invite more foreign students to Britain (Murray, 2026).

Whether in relation to the growing costs faced by graduates, the decline in the economic worth of a degree or the financial difficulties faced by universities and their reliance on foreign students, there are now significant questions being raised in the UK about the continued value of a university education, both to students and to wider society. This chapter will examine current and past attitudes towards higher education, in order to answer the following three questions:

- Do we still want a significant proportion of young people to go on to university and obtain a degree?

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- Do we still perceive a university education to be beneficial to graduates?
  - Do we still think that students should pay (and if so, what do we think is a fair price)?

The chapter will also evaluate how attitudes towards higher education vary by age, education and political party support, and whether attitudes on this topic have become more polarised. Given their direct experience with the sector, do graduates have different views compared with those who do not have a degree regarding the merits of a university education and who should be responsible for paying for it? Do views on the latter question vary between older and more recent graduates, given the different ways in which they were required to pay for their higher education? And, given the ideological differences between the political left and right on the appropriate role and responsibilities of the State and their differing policies with regards to higher education, do we see a divide among supporters of different parties regarding the appropriate size of the university sector and how it should be funded?

Due to the differing higher education systems across the four nations of the UK and variations in their evolution, in attempting to answer the above questions, we focus solely on the views of those living in England.

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# Bloated or just right? Attitudes towards the size of the university sector

The university sector in Britain has undergone considerable expansion over the past few decades. The opportunities for young people to study for a degree have increased markedly over time, and these expanded opportunities have in turn led to a large number of university graduates in the job market. However, in recent years, evidence has pointed to a potential glut, with many university leavers struggling to find suitable employment. Analysis has suggested there are around 700,000 university graduates aged 16 to 64 currently out of work and receiving benefits, an increase of over 200,000 since 2019 (Rose, 2026).

In addition, many universities currently find themselves in a difficult financial situation, driven by a real-term cut in funding, as tuition fees have failed to keep up with inflation in recent years. This, in turn, has led to an increased reliance on international students who pay higher fees than their domestic counterparts, with foreign undergraduate students paying between £11,000 and £38,000 per annum (British Council, 2024).

## Opportunities for higher education

Given these recent challenges, we might expect to see a public reaction against the current size of the higher education sector. Since it began in 1983, BSA has regularly included the following question:

***Do you feel that opportunities for young people in Britain to go on to higher education - to a university or college - should be increased or reduced?***

***Increased a lot***

***Increased a little***

**About right**

**Reduced a little**

**Reduced a lot**

Table 1 shows how attitudes have changed since the question was first asked over four decades ago.

**Table 1: Attitudes towards opportunities for young people to go on to higher education (1983-2025) (selected years, England only)**

Opportunities for young people to go on to higher education...	1983	1987	1993	1999	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Should be increased</b>	44	52	48	43	50	33	37
<b>Are at the right level</b>	49	43	47	48	37	47	46
<b>Should be reduced</b>	5	3	3	4	10	17	15
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	1495	2402	1260	920	2767	2690	1796
	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2025</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Should be increased</b>	39	41	35	46	39	43	37
<b>Are at the right level</b>	46	45	46	38	47	44	41
<b>Should be reduced</b>	13	13	16	14	12	11	18
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	2775	2626	913	1854	1626	2617	850

Source: British Social Attitudes

Support for expanding opportunities for young people to go on to higher education remained consistently above 40% for the two decades between 1983 and 2003, fluctuating slightly above and below the proportion who felt

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that opportunities were at 'the right level'. This changed markedly when 'top-up' tuition fees of £3,000 per year were introduced in 2004, with the proportion who felt opportunities should be increased dropping from 50% to 33%, and the proportion who felt they should be reduced increasing from 10% to 17%.

In the following decade, between 2004 and 2014, attitudes reached something of a new equilibrium. Support for expanding opportunities fluctuated between 33% and 46%, while support for reducing them shifted between 12% and 17%. These fluctuations led Paterson and Ormston (2014), on the last occasion attitudes to higher education were considered as part of the BSA series, to conclude that it was not possible to say definitively that the public had reacted against university expansion.

But what about more recent data? Do they provide any more concrete evidence of a shift in public sentiment? Since 2014, we have asked the same question twice, once in 2017 and again in our latest survey. The data yielded provide mixed evidence of a reaction to university expansion. Today, 18% of people say that opportunities for young people to go on to higher education should be reduced either 'a little' or 'a lot' – the highest proportion selecting this response since the question was first asked, and an increase of seven percentage points since 2017. On the other hand, the combined proportion who feel opportunities should be either reduced or are at the right level (59%) is unchanged from 2014. The degree of fluctuation in attitudes and lack of a clear trend mean it is still difficult to conclude that there has been a permanent public reaction against university expansion.

But has there been a reaction among graduates, many of whom may have experienced directly challenges in the labour market, which non-graduates may have only read about in the media? On this question, there is, again, lack of evidence of a clear impact. There is no significant difference between graduates and non-graduates regarding the size of the university sector, with similar proportions of those with a degree (40%) and those without (37%) thinking opportunities for young people to go on to higher education should be increased.

## The right number of graduates?

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However, assessments of the size of the university sector do not only encompass the opportunities for young people to access it, but also relate to whether it is producing the right amount of graduates for the number of jobs available. Given the difficulties faced by graduates in finding work and by universities with regards to their funding, we might expect the public to feel that there are now too many recent graduates. To assess this, we have asked the following question since 2014:

***Thinking about the size of the current British job market, would you say there are too many recent university graduates, about the right number or not enough?***

- 1 Too many recent university graduates***
- 2 About the right number of recent university graduates***
- 3 Not enough recent university graduates***

As shown in Table 2, views on this question are more or less split; around four in 10 people feel there are either ‘too many’ recent university graduates or ‘about the right amount’, while around one in 10 feel there are ‘not enough’. It is noteworthy that a larger proportion of people believe there are too many recent graduates (42%), than responded to our previous question that opportunities for young people to go to university should be reduced (18%). This suggests that many people continue to distinguish between the value university education can have for individuals and the impact of the overall number of graduates on the economy.

Interestingly, responses regarding the number of graduates in the jobs market are virtually unchanged since the question was first asked in 2014, providing no evidence of a public reaction to university expansion that is grounded in recent graduate experiences of the labour market.

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**Table 2: Attitudes towards the proportion of graduates in the job market (2014-2025) (England only)**

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	<b>2014</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Too many recent graduates</b>	43	42
<b>About the right number of recent graduates</b>	38	39
<b>Not enough recent university graduates</b>	13	10
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>1626</i>	<i>850</i>

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*Source: British Social Attitudes*

When responses to this question are broken down by level of education however, in contrast to the question on opportunities, those with a degree are less positive about the number of graduates in the economy, compared with those without a degree. As shown in Table 3, around half (49%) of those with a degree think that there are too many recent university graduates in the economy, compared with 40% of those without a degree. This might perhaps be explained by the former group's more direct experience or observations of the current graduate job market.

**Table 3: Views on number of recent university graduates in the current British job market by level of education by highest educational qualification (England only)**

	Degree	No degree
	%	%
<b>Too many</b>	49	40
<b>About right</b>	37	41
<b>Not enough</b>	8	11
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	358	466

Source: British Social Attitudes

## The views of different party supporters

We might also expect the two questions considered so far to reveal divisions between those on the political right and left. On the political right, both the Conservatives and Reform UK have proposed a reduction in the size and scope of the university sector, arguing that higher education needs significant reform, with too many students currently at university and too many ‘sub-standard’ courses that leave graduates worse off (Conservative Party, 2026a). Building on this argument, the Conservatives say they would reduce university places by 100,000 and stop government funding for ‘dead-end’ courses, while Reform stated in their 2024 manifesto that they would restrict undergraduate numbers to well below current levels and enforce minimum entry standards (Reform UK, 2024). Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, meanwhile, have not outlined any plans to decrease the size or scope of the higher education sector.

In general, there is a broad alignment between a party’s policy position and the views of its supporters. On both of the questions reviewed so far, supporters of the Conservatives and of Reform are the least favourable

towards the higher education sector. As shown in Table 4, 33% of Conservative supporters and 23% of Reform backers think opportunities for young people to go onto higher education should be reduced, compared with 13% of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters and 11% of Green Party supporters.

**Table 4: Views on higher education opportunities by party political support (England only, 2017 and 2025)**

<b>% who feel opportunities for young people in Britain to go on to higher education should be reduced ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2025</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Conservative</b>	17	33
<b>Reform UK/UKIP</b>	17	23
<b>Labour</b>	8	13
<b>Lib Dem</b>	20	13
<b>Green</b>	11	11
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>CON: 870; UKIP: 56; LAB: 998; LIB DEM: 159; GREEN: 52</i>	<i>CON: 137; REF: 147; LAB: 215; LIB DEM: 95; GREEN: 71</i>

Source: British Social Attitudes 2025

By undertaking an equivalent analysis for responses collected in 2017, we can assess how the views of different party supporters have evolved over time and whether supporters of different parties have become more polarised. Caution must be applied, however, to data for UKIP and Green Party supporters in 2017, of which there were fewer than 100 in each case.

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As shown in Table 4, the most marked change in attitudes in this period has been among Conservative Party supporters, one third of whom now support opportunities being reduced, an increase of 16 percentage points since 2017. While support for this view has increased less markedly among supporters of most other political parties, the proportion of Liberal Democrat supporters who take this view has conversely dropped by seven points - from 20% to 13%. If we were to group Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party supporters together as parties of the 'left', and Conservatives and Reform/UKIP as parties of the 'right', we see a clearer division between right and left on this question in the 2025 results than we did in 2017.

The right-left divide is also evident in attitudes towards the current number of graduates. Over half (55%) of Conservative and half (50%) of Reform supporters think there are too many recent graduates in the economy, compared with 40% and 43% of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters and just 33% of those who back the Green Party. That around four in ten Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters feel there are too many recent graduates perhaps suggests a greater appetite for higher education reform than their party leaderships may currently anticipate.

## Increased numbers of international students

Finally, the expansion of the university sector in the UK has been accompanied by a large increase in the number of international students choosing to study at UK universities. This has created a tension in public policy between the income foreign students generate for universities and the wider economy, and the impacts large numbers of students can have on local housing and resourcing (and net migration figures more broadly). To assess where the public stands on universities' rights to attract foreign students, the following question was introduced on the latest BSA survey:

***When British universities are free to accept as many students from abroad as they want, this delivers more income for universities to spend on research and teaching. However, large numbers of foreign students may put pressure on local housing and resources and encourage universities to focus on courses which recruit higher paying students from abroad.***

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***Which of the following comes closest to your view?***

***1 Universities should be free to recruit as many students from abroad as they want***

***2 The government should set limits on the number of students universities can recruit from abroad***

Around two-thirds of people in England (67%) say that the government should set limits on the number of foreign students universities can recruit, while under one third (29%) feel universities should be able to recruit as many students from abroad as they want. Overall caps or limits on foreign students have not been proposed by the current government. Instead, they have scrapped a previous target for increasing the total number of international students, outlined plans to encourage universities to open campuses abroad and promised to implement ‘toughened compliance standards’ with recruitment caps and licence revocations applied to universities that fail to meet these standards (Murray, 2026). However, considering current attitudes, it appears that the public wants the government to go further on this.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their policies on immigration, support for limiting international students is higher among supporters of parties on the right. A clear majority of Reform (85%) and Conservative Party (74%) supporters think the government should set limits on international recruitment. That being said, over half of the supporters of left-wing parties back such a limit too, with 56%, 55% and 57% of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Party supporters respectively saying limits should be set on the number of students universities can recruit from abroad. While an overall cap on international students may not be the current government’s policy, our data provide at least some evidence that such a cap might garner cross-party support.

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# Higher Education: still a worthwhile endeavour?

The preceding decades have not only witnessed an expansion in the size of the university sector, but also, as outlined in the introduction, increases to the costs of studying for a degree. Although tuition fees are not demanded upfront and are only repaid once a graduate's income reaches a certain threshold, graduates can still accrue significant levels of debt, and there has been public discussion about the financial burden placed on some graduates, who will effectively face a higher tax rate, compared with others in society, for a substantial part of their working lives (Morton, 2026).

In tandem, in recent years, the perceived economic value of a university education has been brought into question. Many graduates have struggled to find jobs that align with their qualifications, often resulting in underemployment. There has also been a decline in the 'graduate premium'. Typically, graduates can be expected to earn more over the lifetime, compared with non-graduates, however this income difference has slowly weakened with time. While in 1999, the average UK graduate earned 80% more compared with non-graduates, by 2022 this had fallen to 45%, even before accounting for student loans (Burn-Murdoch, 2026).

The increased costs of attending university, combined with the reduced economic value of a degree, might lead us to expect the public to have become less convinced that going to university is beneficial for graduates. To determine whether this is the case, we asked respondents how much they agree or disagree with the following three statements:

***In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't***

***The cost of going to university leaves many students with debts that they can't afford to repay***

***A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes***

Table 5 shows how responses to these questions have evolved, since they were introduced two decades ago.

**Table 5: Attitudes towards whether a university education is worthwhile (England only) 2005 - 2025**

	2005	2010	2013	2018	2025
<b>% Agree strongly / Agree</b>	%	%	%	%	%
In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't	50	51	47	46	36
The cost of going to university leaves many students with debts that they can't afford to repay	74	75	69	71	65
A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes	14	20	18	18	34
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	1518	773	1640	1966	850

Source: *British Social Attitudes*

Clearly, the perception that higher education is a worthwhile endeavour, while still supported by a majority, has declined over the past two decades. In response to our latest survey, 34% agree that, 'a university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes', whereas prior to this the figure had never been more than 20%. People also appear to be increasingly skeptical that graduates end up financially better off. At 36%, the proportion who agree that, 'in the long run, people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't', has dropped by 10 percentage points since 2018, and is at the lowest level on record.

These results align with a separate question that asked whether, 'thinking about the cost of a university education nowadays', a degree represents 'good

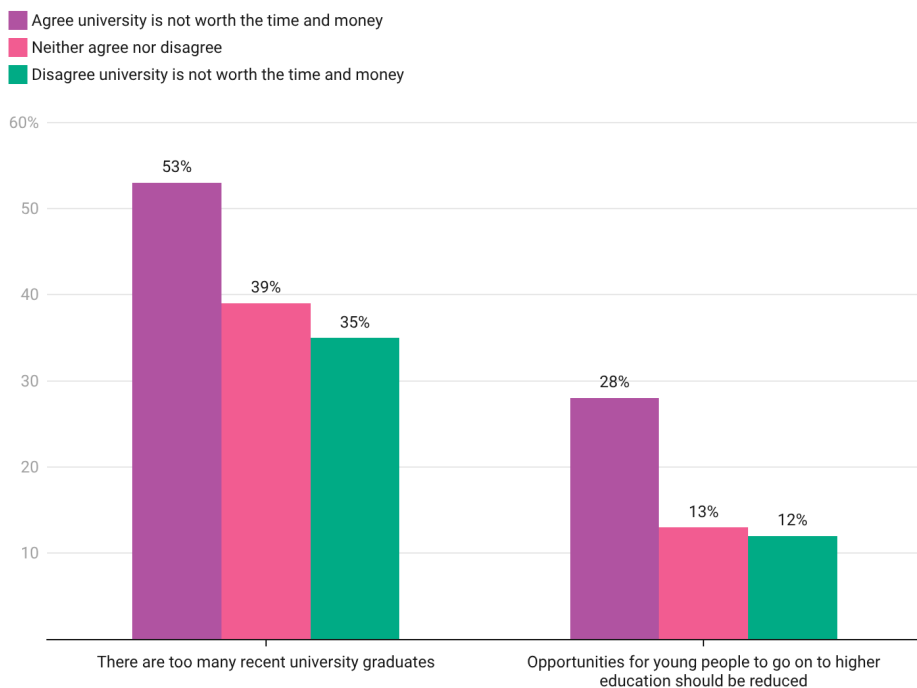
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value for money'. As many as 77% say that it does not, compared with just 17% who say that it does. This represents an increase from the 51% who thought that a degree did not represent good value for money, when the question was last asked in 2014. While a university education has been seen as a traditional route to good job prospects and a more financially secure future, the public appears to be becoming less convinced that this promise is being fulfilled.

Interestingly, however, scepticism about the merits of higher education do not appear to be grounded in any increased concern about the debts incurred by graduates being unpayable, as shown in Table 5. True, around two-thirds of people (65%) agree that, 'the cost of going to university leaves many students with debts that they can't afford to repay', but this figure is lower than that recorded in 2005 (74%) shortly after top-up fees were introduced that were less than a third of the value of fees students currently pay. It may be that when people are conceptualising whether university is 'worth the time and money' or if it makes people a 'lot better off financially', they are thinking less about the size of student debt and whether it is repayable - and more about other relevant factors, such as whether graduates can find professional roles in the job market and at what salary.

As might be expected, people's perceptions of whether a university degree is worthwhile relate to how they feel about the current size of the university sector and number of graduates. As shown in Figure 1, those who agree that university 'isn't worth the time and money' are significantly more likely to believe there are too many university graduates (53%) than those who disagree with this statement (35%). Similarly, those who agree that university education isn't worthwhile are also more likely (28%) than those who disagree (12%) to think that opportunities for young people to go on to higher education should be reduced.

**Figure 1: Attitudes towards the proportion of graduates in the economy and opportunities for young people to go on to higher education by views on whether a university education is worthwhile**



Source: British Social Attitudes, 2025 · Created with Datawrapper

The data on which Figure 1 is based can be found in the appendix of this report (table 9).

Given the relationship between perceptions of the merits of a university education and perceptions of the graduate job market and the size of the higher education sector, improving perceptions of the benefits of a university education is likely to depend upon universities offering the right number of places and producing the right number of graduates for the jobs available.

## The views of graduates and non-graduates

While the perception of university education as being beneficial for graduates may have declined, it is worth examining whether the views of those who have and have not been to university differ on this matter. While we have seen that those with a university degree are more likely to feel there are too many graduates in the job market (49%, compared with 40% of those without a degree), graduates are still, in fact, more likely than those without a degree to

be convinced of the financial benefit of studying at university. While 46% of graduates agree that people who go to university end up being 'a lot better off financially than those who don't', only 32% of those without a degree do so.

It is perhaps this more positive view on the financial benefits of university among graduates that result in this group also being more likely than their less qualified counterparts to view higher education as being 'worthwhile'. As shown in Table 6, as many as 36% of graduates disagree that, 'a university education isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes', compared with just 17% of those without a degree.

**Table 6: Views on the worth of a university education by level of education (England only)**

‘A university education just isn’t worth the amount of time and money it usually takes’	Degree	No degree
	%	%
Agree/agree strongly	27	39
Neither agree nor disagree	36	43
Disagree/disagree strongly	36	17
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	358	466

*Source: British Social Attitudes*

As a whole, graduates seem to be largely more optimistic about higher education than those with fewer educational qualifications. However, given the very disparate experiences of graduates in the years following leaving university, especially in recent times, it is worth analysing whether views among graduates differ depending on their financial situations. Those who have graduated from university but failed to reap the financial rewards - for example, due to debt, underemployment or a low graduate salary - might be expected to be less positive towards higher education. Indeed, when we break

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down attitudes among graduates by whether they are ‘living comfortably’ or ‘struggling’ on their present income, we do see some differences in views.

In line with what we might expect, those graduates who are struggling financially are more likely to question the value of a university education. As shown in Table 7, while 44% of graduates living comfortably disagree that university isn’t worth the time and money, just 30% of graduates who are struggling do so. On this basis, it is worth reflecting that not all graduates are the same, and that graduates’ assessments of the worth or otherwise of obtaining their degree may be influenced by how far that degree has helped them achieve financial stability. That being said, even those with a degree who are financially struggling are still more positive about a university education than those who do not have a degree, indicating that financial benefits are not the only aspect affecting people’s views on this question.

**Table 7: Views of graduates on the idea that ‘a university education just isn’t worth the amount of time and money it usually takes’, by self-assessed financial situation, in England**

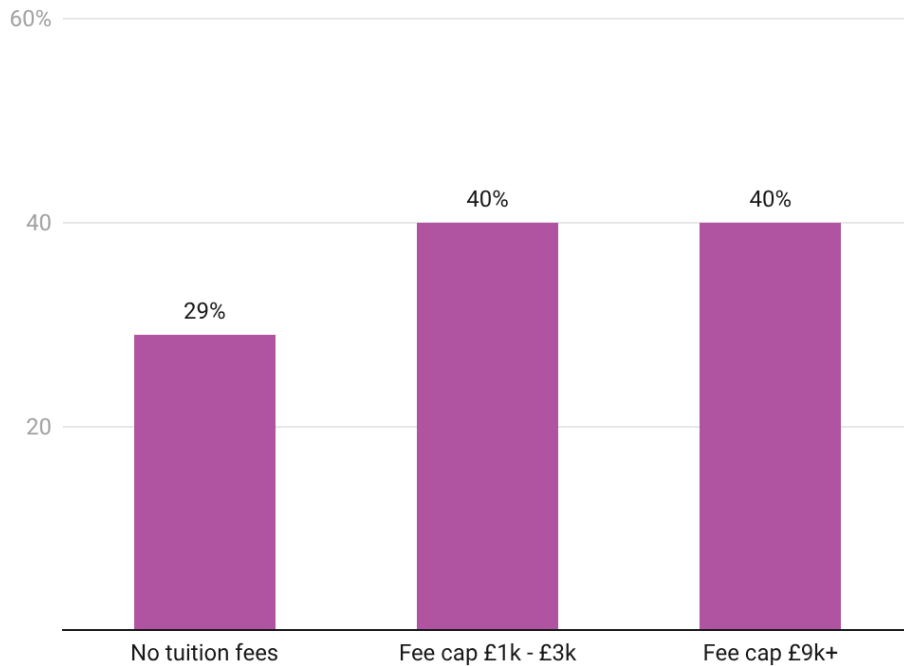
	Self-assessed financial situation		
	Living comfortably/ Really comfortably	Neither comfortable nor struggling	Struggling/Really struggling on present income
	%	%	%
<b>Agree/agree strongly</b>	22	34	27
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	33	39	37
<b>Disagree/disagree strongly</b>	44	28	30
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>172</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>75</i>

*Source: British Social Attitudes; Given the low base size of those struggling / really struggling on their present income caution should be exercised in interpreting these results*

*Base: those with a degree*

However, given the changes in the costs involved in attending university seen across the last few decades, we might also expect views on the value of university to vary according to the regime that was in place when a student attended university. Figure 2 shows the proportion of those who agree that a university education ‘just isn’t worth the amount of time and money it usually takes’ among the public as a whole, divided by tuition fee cohort – the only question in relation to which any significant differences were observed.

**Figure 2: % agree 'a university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes', by fee cohort, in England**



Cohorts are defined as follows: 'No tuition fees': aged 46 and over; 'Fee cap £1k-£3k': ages 32-45; 'Fee cap £9k +': ages 16 – 31.

Source: British Social Attitudes, 2025 • Created with Datawrapper

The data on which Figure 2 is based can be found in the appendix of this report (table 13).

Those who turned 18 in the era of free university tuition are less likely (29%) to agree that a university education 'just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes' than those who would have been liable to pay tuition fees should they have gone to university (40%). The cost of tuition appears to have an effect on whether people view a university education to be worth the effort, though it is interesting that those who have lived under the higher tuition fee cap of £9,000+ p.a. are no more likely to think this (40%) than those who lived under the lower, pre-2012 tuition fee caps (40%).

Restricting our analysis to graduates only makes little difference to the pattern of response. As with the wider population, the only question where we see a statistically significance difference is on whether a university education is worthwhile. Only 18% of those who attained their degree under the system

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where there were no tuition fees think that a ‘university education just isn’t worth the amount of time and money it usually takes’, compared with 35% of degree holders liable for fees of £9,000+ and 33% of those who studied with a fee cap of between £1,000 and £3,000.

## The views of supporters of different political parties

We saw previously that supporters of parties on the right were more negative about the current size of the university sector, compared with supporters of parties on the left, reflecting the policy positions of their respective parties. When analysing attitudes towards the value of university by political party support, we encounter a broadly similar pattern. As shown in Table 8, supporters of Reform and the Conservatives are less likely to disagree that university is not worth ‘the amount of time and money it usually takes’ – 22% of Conservative and just 11% of Reform supporters express this view, compared with 31%, 32% and 50% of Labour Party, Green Party and Liberal Democrat supporters respectively. It is noteworthy, however, that around one third of Labour and Green Party supporters agree with this statement, suggesting that belief in the value of university is not universally held by those who support parties on the left.

There is mixed evidence, however, when we consider the question as to whether views have become more politically polarised. The gap between the proportions of Conservative and Labour Party supporters who disagree with the statement has trebled, from three percentage points in 2018 to nine points now, although the proportion of both groups who agree with the statement is still more or less the same. Given small sample sizes, caution needs to be applied to data relating to Green Party and Liberal Democrat supporters in 2025.

**Table 8: Views on the idea ‘a university education just isn’t worth the amount of time and money it uses’ by party support (England only), 2018 and 2025**

	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Reform / UKIP</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Lib Dem</b>
	%	%	%	%
<b>2018</b>				
Agree/agree strongly	20	‡	17	8
Neither agree nor disagree	29	‡	31	27
Disagree/disagree strongly	46	‡	49	61
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	646	33	695	138
<b>2025</b>				
Agree/agree strongly	35	42	34	20
Neither agree nor disagree	41	45	33	27
Disagree/disagree strongly	22	11	31	50
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	137	147	215	95

Source: British Social Attitudes

‡ = data suppressed due to base of fewer than 50 cases

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# Fees: Who should pay for tuition and how much?

Tuition fees have been a feature of university education in the UK for over a quarter of a century, but, as outlined above, their level and conditions of repayment have changed markedly since they were first introduced. But what proportion of students and families, if any, does the public think should pay for the costs of higher education? Since 2004, we have regularly asked respondents the following question, to gauge opinion on this matter:

***We will now ask you to think about university or college students or their families paying towards the costs of their tuition, either while they are studying or after they have finished.***

***Which of the following comes closest to what you think about that?***

***1 All students or their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition***

***2 Some students or their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition, depending on their circumstances***

***3 No students or their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition***

Table 9 shows how attitudes have evolved over the past two decades. Despite increases in the tuition fee cap, attitudes towards who should pay for the costs of tuition have remained fairly stable. A majority of people have always felt that at least 'some students or their families' should pay towards the costs of their tuition. When 'top-up' fees were first introduced in 2004, around three-quarters (77%) thought that either 'all' (11%) or 'some' (66%) students should pay. This proportion fluctuated but remained consistently above 70% between 2004 and 2017; however, it has now dropped to 69% - the lowest level on record. At 27%, the proportion who think that 'no students or families should pay' is also the highest on record, and has increased by eight

percentage points from 2012 when the new cap of £9,000 p.a. was first introduced. There are also some signs of polarisation on this question; the proportion who select the middle option that ‘some’ students and their families should pay is at its lowest (54%), and has dropped by 10 percentage points since 2017. Therefore, although a majority still support the idea of at least some students contributing towards the costs of their tuition, the latest data show at least some small signs of a reaction against how the current tuition fee system works.

**Table 9: Attitudes towards what proportion of students or their families should contribute to tuition fees, in England, 2004-2025**

Who should pay towards tuition costs?	2004	2005	2007	2010	2012
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	11	9	8	13	12
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	66	67	66	70	68
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	22	22	25	16	19
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	2690	1796	2626	913	1854
	2013	2015	2017	2025	
	%	%	%	%	
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	11	15	10	15	
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	67	62	64	54	
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	21	22	25	27	
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	925	925	2617	850	

Source: British Social Attitudes

## Who is less supportive of tuition fees?

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The argument sometimes made by advocates for tuition fees is that those who attend university and receive the benefits of doing so should be the ones who pay for their tuition (Mayor and Chisholm, 2026). As they will be the ones incurring the costs directly under a tuition fee system, one might expect graduates to be less keen on the policy than those who do not attend university. In fact, the views of those with and without a degree are not significantly different on this question (for instance, 28% of those with a degree think that all students or their families should pay, compared with 27% of those without a degree).

Views on tuition fee policy do not therefore relate to level of education. But is there any evidence of a cleavage between those on the political left and right? If we examine the approaches of the five major political parties, it is the Greens whose policies stand out. They have promised to scrap university tuition fees for all university students (Green Party, 2024). In contrast, the other major political parties plan to maintain the structure of the existing system, while making tweaks to how it operates. Labour are planning to re-introduce maintenance grants for low-income students and has pledged to conduct a review of the student loan system (Shearing and Holt, 2025). The Liberal Democrats want to reverse the threshold freeze and design a fairer interest rate structure, along with writing off loans for key public sector workers after 10 years (Liberal Democrats, 2026). The Conservatives would cap interest rates on 'Plan 2' loans at Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the current Retail Price Index (RPI) (Conservatives, 2026b), while Reform have stated that they would scrap interest on student loans and extend the repayment period (Reform UK, 2024).

Given this context, how then do attitudes towards the principle of paying tuition fees differ by political party support? The data required to answer this question are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Attitudes towards what proportion of students or their families should contribute to tuition fees, by political party support, in England**

	Conservative	Reform	Labour	Lib Dem	Green
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	24	20	13	6	4
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	54	46	55	73	49
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	20	28	31	19	45
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>71</i>

Source: British Social Attitudes 2025

Interestingly, on the question of tuition fees, we do not see a clear division between supporters of parties of the left and the right. Conservative (78%) and Liberal Democrat (79%) supporters are the most likely to think that either ‘all’ or ‘some’ students and their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition. In contrast, the proportions of Reform (67%) and Labour (68%) supporters who think this are generally aligned. Views are broadly similar to those elicited when the question was last asked in 2017, when 82% of Conservative, 70% of Labour and 73% of Liberal Democrat supporters favoured at least some students or their families paying. As might be expected given their party’s policy, Green Party supporters are the most in favour (45%) of ‘no students or families’ being responsible for paying tuition, but the proportion of Labour (31%) and Reform (28%) supporters who think this is somewhat similar. There is cross-party support, therefore, for at least some students paying towards the cost of their tuition, but it is interesting that a free tuition system would garner similar levels of support among supporters of an insurgent right-wing party like Reform, as it would among supporters of a traditional left-wing party like Labour.

Finally, given the evolution of the higher education system over time, do we see any differences by age in attitudes towards tuition fees? Those who

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turned 18 under the free tuition fee system are more likely (74%) to believe that either 'all' or 'some' students and their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition, compared with 69% of those who were, or would have been, liable for £9,000+ fees and 59% of those liable for fees between £1,000 and £3,000. The gap is even starker if we focus solely on graduates within these groups. As many as 84% of those who have a degree and would not have incurred tuition fees to obtain it believe all or some students should pay for the costs of their tuition, compared with just 59% of those with degrees who would have been liable to pay tuition fees. Enthusiasm for students bearing the costs of tuition is being driven, therefore, at least partly by those who would not have had personal experience in incurring them.

## How much should students pay?

The issue with tuition fees is not solely about who should be responsible for paying the costs of tuition but also, if students are to be liable for at least some of the costs, how much they should be expected to pay. To explore this issue in greater detail than had been done previously, we introduced the following two questions on our latest survey:

***What do you think should be the maximum amount per year that students or their families are asked to pay towards university or college tuition - or should there be no limit to what a university can charge?***

***Amount in £***

***There should be no upper limit***

***It depends – please say on what***

***How much do you think a graduate should be earning a year before they are required to start paying back their student loan?***

***Amount in £ [open numeric box]***

***Should start paying back as soon as they start earning***

***It depends – please say on what***

How do the public's views on what these figures should be compare with the current tuition fee cap of £9,535 p.a. and repayment threshold of £27,295 p.a.?

Table 11 provides a breakdown of responses to the question on the maximum annual tuition fee. It demonstrates that the proportion who think this should be lower than the current cap (61%) is markedly larger than the proportion who think the cap should either be higher or that there should be no cap at all (27%). Over two in five (44%) believe the cap should be set at below £3,000 as it was prior to 2012, while 16% believe it should be set at a level between £3,000 and the current cap of £9,535. Interestingly, around one in five (22%) believe there should be no upper limit at all – which was the recommendation of the Browne Review in 2012 (Browne et al., 2012) - which was not implemented by the then government.

**Table 11: Views on maximum amount per year students or families should be asked to pay towards university**

	2025
	%
£0	28
£1 - £3,000	16
£3,001 - £9,534	16
£9,535 +	5
There should be no upper limit	22
It depends	3
Don't know / Prefer not to say	9
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>818</i>

Source: *British Social Attitudes 2025*

Those who said 'No students or their families should pay towards the costs of their tuition' at the first question have been classified as '£0'

The tuition fee cap may therefore be higher than the public would set it, but what about the repayment threshold after which graduates are required to start paying back their loans? This currently differs depending on when the graduate studied for their degree, but the current threshold for those undertaking a degree in England and a ‘Plan 2’ loan is £27,295 per year (Gov UK, 2026b). How does this figure compare with where the public thinks the threshold should be set?

The data obtained in response to this question are presented in Table 12.

**Table 12: Views on the salary repayment threshold after which graduates should be required to pay back their student loan, in England**

	2025
	%
Should start paying back as soon as they start to earn	33
0 - £27,295	15
£27,295 +	40
It depends	2
Don't know / Prefer not to say	9
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	834

Source: British Social Attitudes 2025

On the question of an ideal repayment threshold, attitudes are more aligned with the current system, than was the case for the amount of tuition fees to be paid. While four in ten (40%) people feel that the salary threshold should be set higher than the current £27,295 p.a., almost a half (48%) feel the threshold should either be set lower (15%), or that graduates should start paying back as soon as they start to earn (33%). All respondents were asked the question about repayment thresholds, including those who felt that no

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students should pay towards the cost of tuition. As might be expected, the latter group are more likely to set the repayment threshold higher than others. Almost six in ten (59%) of those who think no students or families should pay for the costs of their tuition set the threshold at over £27,295, compared with 14% of those who feel that all students and families should pay. In summary, the public may feel that the tuition fee cap should be somewhat lower than its current level, but the salary threshold is pretty much where the public thinks it should be.

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# Conclusions

Universities and graduates currently face a range of related challenges. Many universities are in financial trouble, while graduates are facing significant levels of student debt, underemployment and a reduced 'graduate premium'. These challenges have not gone unnoticed by the public, which is now less convinced than it once was that a university education is beneficial for graduates. Fewer people now believe that graduates are better off financially in the long run, and a larger share than ever before say a degree is not worth the time and money it usually takes. However, these sentiments have not yet translated into a concrete reaction against the size of the university sector. Although support for reducing opportunities to go on to university is comparatively high, a majority still feel opportunities are either at the right level or should be increased. Meanwhile, perceptions of the current number of graduates in the job market are more or less unchanged from where they were a decade ago.

On tuition fees, while there is still majority support for students and their families contributing towards the cost of tuition, this support has weakened and there is some sign of views becoming more polarised. Moreover, a majority favour a tuition fee cap lower than the level at which it is currently set. Meanwhile, despite universities' reliance on international students and the income they generate, there is strong public support for a cap on international student numbers.

Any government seeking to address the issues faced by graduates and universities faces significant challenges. Firstly, they will need to balance universities' reliance on income from international students with public support for a cap on numbers. Secondly, they will need to harness the majority support for at least some students paying tuition fees to design a system that both sustainably funds universities while being seen as good value for money by both students and the taxpayer. Finally, and perhaps most difficult, if they are to reverse the sense that university education is no longer worthwhile, they will need to create the economic conditions whereby graduates feel there has been a financial benefit to having gone to university,

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and therefore that studying for a degree is worth the time and effort. These are all difficult, though not intractable, problems, and although attitudes may have become less positive towards the value of a university education they are not overwhelmingly negative, with a majority still in favour of opportunities for young people to go on to higher education being increased or kept at their current level. However, until the significant issues facing the higher education system and students are addressed, it is unlikely public opinion towards higher education will become more favourable any time soon.

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## Appendix

**Table 1: Views on higher education opportunities (1983-2025, England only)**

	1983	1987	1993	1999	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Increased a lot</b>	22	29	33	24	26	14	15
<b>Increased a little</b>	22	23	15	19	24	19	21
<b>Are at the right level</b>	49	43	47	48	37	47	46
<b>Reduced a little</b>	4	2	2	4	8	13	12
<b>Reduced a lot</b>	1	1	1	1	2	4	3
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	1495	2402	1260	920	2767	2690	1796
	2006	2007	2010	2012	2014	2017	2025
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Increased a lot</b>	18	18	16	26	17	19	18
<b>Increased a little</b>	21	22	20	20	22	24	19
<b>Are at the right level</b>	46	45	46	38	47	44	41
<b>Reduced a little</b>	11	10	12	11	9	9	11
<b>Reduced a lot</b>	2	2	4	3	3	2	7
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	2775	2626	913	1854	1626	2617	850

**Table 2: Views on size of the university sector by education level (2025, England only)**

	<b>Degree</b>	<b>No degree</b>
	%	%
<b>Increased a lot</b>	18	19
<b>Increased a little</b>	22	18
<b>About right</b>	38	43
<b>Reduced a little</b>	15	9
<b>Reduced a lot</b>	5	8
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>466</i>

**Table 3: Views on higher education opportunities by party support (England only, 2017 and 2025)**

	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Reform UK / UKIP</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>Green</b>
<b>2017</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Increased a lot	11	23	25	19	23
Increased a little	15	16	29	20	26
About right	54	42	36	41	40
Reduced a little	14	9	6	18	9
Reduced a lot	3	9	1	1	2
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>870</i>	<i>56 (UKIP)</i>	<i>998</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>52</i>
<b>2025</b>	%	%	%	%	%
Increased a lot	11	15	20	20	32
Increased a little	6	15	25	22	16
About right	48	41	40	43	37
Reduced a little	20	15	11	10	3
Reduced a lot	13	8	2	3	8
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>147 (Ref)</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>71</i>

**Table 4: Views on number of recent university graduates in the current British job market by party support (England only, 2025)**

	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Reform UK</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>Green</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
Too many recent university graduates	55	50	40	43	33
About the right number of recent university graduates	32	33	39	50	41
Not enough recent university graduates	7	9	13	2	12
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>71</i>

**Table 5: Views on whether universities should limit recruitment of students from abroad (2025, England only)**

	%
Universities should be free to recruit as many students from abroad as they want	29
The government should set limits on the number of students universities can recruit from abroad	67
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>1337</i>

**Table 6: Views on whether universities should limit recruitment of students from abroad by party support (2025, England only)**

	Reform	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	Labour	Green
	%	%	%	%	%
Universities should be free to recruit as many students from abroad as they want	13	25	43	40	42
The government should set limits on the number of students universities can recruit from abroad	85	74	55	56	57
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>339</i>	<i>130</i>

	2005	2010	2013	2018	2025
	%	%	%	%	%

**People who go to university end up a lot better off financially than those who don't**

Agree strongly	8	6	9	6	9
Agree	42	45	38	40	27
Neither agree nor disagree	27	27	27	28	39
Disagree	18	17	19	19	18
Disagree strongly	1	2	2	3	5

**The cost of going to university leaves many students with debts they can't afford to repay**

Agree strongly	19	18	19	20	26
Agree	55	57	50	51	39
Neither agree nor disagree	13	13	14	15	22
Disagree	10	8	10	9	8
Disagree strongly	0	1	1	1	2

**A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes**

Agree strongly	2	3	4	3	12
Agree	13	18	14	15	22
Neither agree nor disagree	29	27	28	31	40
Disagree	42	40	34	35	17
Disagree strongly	10	8	13	11	5
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>1518</i>	<i>773</i>	<i>1640</i>	<i>1966</i>	<i>850</i>

**Table 8: Views on, when thinking about the current cost of a university degree, whether it represents good value for money (2014 and 2025, England only)**

	2014	2025
	%	%
<b>Yes</b>	28	17
<b>No</b>	51	77
<b>It depends on the degree</b>	18	2
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	1626	850

**Table 9: Views on the size of the graduate job market and size of the university sector by views towards statement 'A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes' (2025, England only)**

	Views on number of graduates in the current job market			Views on whether opportunities for young people to attend university should be increased or reduced					<i>Unweighted bases</i>
	Too many	About the right number	Not enough	Increased a lot	Increased a little	About right	Reduced a little	Reduced a lot	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
<b>Agree strongly</b>	52	34	11	24	12	27	12	20	96
<b>Agree</b>	53	34	9	13	23	37	16	9	170
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	39	40	13	17	20	48	9	4	337
<b>Disagree</b>	38	47	6	20	18	46	11	3	176
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	25	56	14	26	24	43	3	3	46

**Table 10: Views on statement 'In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't' by level of education (England only, 2025)**

	Degree	No degree
	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	8	10
<b>Agree</b>	38	22
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	35	41
<b>Disagree</b>	15	20
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	3	5
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>466</i>

**Table 11: Views on statement 'A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes' by level of education (England only, 2025)**

	<b>Degree</b>	<b>No degree</b>
	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	10	14
<b>Agree</b>	17	25
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	36	43
<b>Disagree</b>	28	13
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	8	4
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>466</i>

**Table 12: Views among degree holders on statement 'A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes'**

**by subjective financial situation (England only, 2025)**

	<b>Living really comfortably on present income</b>	<b>Living comfortably on present income</b>	<b>Neither comfortable nor struggling on present income</b>	<b>Struggling on present income</b>	<b>Really struggling on present income</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	‡	6	11	14	‡
<b>Agree</b>	‡	14	23	9	‡
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	‡	32	39	38	‡
<b>Disagree</b>	‡	33	25	21	‡
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	‡	13	3	10	‡
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>15</i>

‡ = data suppressed due to base of fewer than 50 cases

**Table 13: Attitudes towards the value of higher education by tuition fee cohort (England only, 2025)**

	No tuition fees	Fee cap c. £1,000-£3,000	Fee cap £9,000 +
	%	%	%
<b>A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes</b>			
Agree strongly	9	17	15
Agree	20	22	25
Neither agree nor disagree	43	37	37
Disagree	20	14	15
Disagree strongly	6	5	6
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>218</i>	<i>150</i>

**Table 14: Attitudes among degree holders towards the value of higher education by tuition fee cohort (England only, 2025)**

	<b>No tuition fees</b>	<b>Fee cap c. £1,000-£3,000</b>	<b>Fee cap £9,000 +</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes</b>			
Agree strongly	5	15	11
Agree	13	18	24
Neither agree nor disagree	41	31	34
Disagree	33	24	22
Disagree strongly	7	9	10
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>71</i>

**Table 15: Views on statement 'A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes' by party support (England only), 2018 and 2025**

	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Reform / UKIP</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Lib Dem</b>	<b>Green</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>2018</b>					
Agree strongly	2	‡	3	1	‡
Agree	17	‡	13	7	‡
Neither agree nor disagree	29	‡	31	27	‡
Disagree	37	‡	36	48	‡
Disagree strongly	9	‡	13	14	‡
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>646</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>695</i>	<i>138</i>	<i>49</i>
<b>2025</b>					
Agree strongly	11	21	8	7	10
Agree	24	21	26	13	26
Neither agree nor disagree	41	45	33	27	29
Disagree	19	9	25	35	26
Disagree strongly	3	2	6	16	7
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>95</i>	<i>71</i>

‡ = data suppressed due to base of fewer than 50 cases

**Table 16: Views on liability for tuition fees by level of education (England only, 2025)**

	Degree	No degree
	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	14	16
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	56	54
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	28	27
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	358	466

**Table 17: Views on liability for tuition fees by party support (England only, 2017)**

	Conservative	Ukip	Labour	Lib Dem	Green
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	15	14	7	8	3
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	67	49	63	65	65
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	17	37	30	26	32
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	870	56	998	159	52

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**Table 18: Views on liability for tuition fees by tuition fee cohort (England only, 2025)**

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	<b>No tuition fees</b>	<b>Fee cap c. £1,000-£3,000</b>	<b>Fee cap £9,000 +</b>
	%	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	14	16	18
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	61	43	51
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	23	37	27
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>218</i>	<i>150</i>

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**Table 19: Views among degree holders on liability for tuition fees by tuition fee cohort (England only, 2025)**

	No tuition fees	Fee cap c. £1,000-£3,000	Fee cap £9,000 +
	%	%	%
<b>All students/families should pay</b>	13	18	11
<b>Some students/families should pay</b>	71	43	48
<b>No students/families should pay</b>	16	36	40
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	168	118	71

**Table 20: Views on statement 'A university education just isn't worth the amount of time and money it usually takes' by age group**

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	15	17	17	10	13	5	7	8
<b>Agree</b>	26	26	19	29	21	16	12	19
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	31	37	42	31	42	52	58	43
<b>Disagree</b>	18	13	15	14	17	21	21	25
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	8	3	5	11	5	6	1	4
<b>Don't know</b>	3	4	3	4	2		1	2
<b>Prefer not to answer</b>				1				
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	54	152	153	116	77	81	79	136

**Table 21: Views on statement 'In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't', by age group**

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	25	10	5	8	7	17	4	1
<b>Agree</b>	28	20	26	33	20	34	27	31
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	19	49	37	26	49	35	52	44
<b>Disagree</b>	23	14	22	24	10	11	16	21
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	1	5	7	4	13	3		2
<b>Don't know</b>	3	2	3	4	2		1	1
<b>Prefer not to answer</b>				1				
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>136</i>

**Table 22: Views on statement 'The cost of going to university leaves many students with debts that they can't afford to repay', by age group**

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	30	32	34	23	35	17	11	16
<b>Agree</b>	29	28	39	41	42	44	37	53
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	15	25	16	15	19	29	37	26
<b>Disagree</b>	20	7	8	10	2	4	14	2
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	3	5		7		5		0
<b>Don't know</b>	3	4	3	4	2	1	1	2
<b>Prefer not to answer</b>				1				
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	54	152	153	116	77	81	79	136

**Table 23: Views on maximum amount per year students or families should be asked to pay towards university, by age group (BSA 2025, England only)**

	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-59</b>	<b>60-64</b>	<b>65-69</b>	<b>70+</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>£0</b>	32	30	36	38	22	14	19	20
<b>£1 - £3000</b>	23	21	19	19	13	18	5	8
<b>£3001 - £9524</b>	16	18	13	16	16	24	24	13
<b>£9525 - £50000</b>	3	4	6	4	12	5	3	7
<b>There should be no upper limit</b>	15	22	20	14	32	24	32	26
<b>Dont know</b>	4	5	4	9	2	12	13	21
<b>It depends</b>	7	0	2	0	4	4	3	4
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>133</i>

**Table 24: Views on statement 'In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't', by level of education (England only, 2005 - 2025)**

	2025		2018		2005	
	Degree	No degree	Degree	No degree	Degree	No degree
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	8	10	9	5	8	8
<b>Agree</b>	38	22	46	38	49	40
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	35	41	26	30	18	29
<b>Disagree</b>	15	20	17	21	24	16
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	3	5	1	4	1	1
<b>Don't know</b>	0	1	1	1	0	4
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	0	0	1	1	0	1
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>358</i>	<i>466</i>	<i>546</i>	<i>1004</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>1268</i>

**Table 25 - Views on statement 'In the long run people who go to university end up being a lot better off financially than those who don't', by party political support (England only, 2005 - 2025)**

	2005				
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Green Party	Reform UK/UKIP
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	5	10	6	NA	NA
<b>Agree</b>	43	45	45	NA	NA
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	24	25	29	NA	NA
<b>Disagree</b>	21	14	18	NA	NA
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	2	1	1	NA	NA
<b>Don't know</b>	3	3	2	NA	NA
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	2	1	0	NA	NA
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>606</i>	<i>217</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>-</i>
	2018				
	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Green Party	Reform UK/UKIP
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	5	7	6	NA	NA
<b>Agree</b>	39	43	55	NA	NA
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	29	29	26	NA	NA
<b>Disagree</b>	21	16	10	NA	NA

<b>Disagree strongly</b>	3	2	1	NA	NA
<b>Don't know</b>	2	1	0	NA	NA
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	1	1	1	NA	NA
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	646	695	138	49	33
	<b>2025</b>				
	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>Green Party</b>	<b>Reform UK</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Agree strongly</b>	7	15	17	15	5
<b>Agree</b>	26	28	39	24	22
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	41	36	31	36	40
<b>Disagree</b>	24	16	8	20	21
<b>Disagree strongly</b>	2	2	3	4	10
<b>Don't know</b>	1	2	3	1	2
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Unweighted bases</i>	137	215	95	71	147

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