The British Academy

Cold spots: Mapping inequality in SHAPE provision in UK higher education

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The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving well-being – today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Professor Margot Finn FBA, Dr Molly Morgan Jones, Hannah Walz and Tayla Wright.

The British Academy's policy work is enabled by funding from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The policy insights and advice that emerge from Academy policy work are independent from government.

Contents

Executive summary

What and where students can study in UK higher education is changing. Cuts to university courses and departments are exacerbating inequality in access to SHAPE subjects (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy). Many parts of the UK are becoming subject cold spots - areas with no provision in a subject within a commutable distance.

More than half of all young UK students study locally, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly likely to study close to home. Yet in many regions, students risk losing access to vital SHAPE subjects. Loss of regional provision reduces student choice and deepens barriers to opportunity, especially for the most disadvantaged students.

The rise of subject cold spots highlights fault-lines in our university system. Decisions to cut courses are often a reaction to short-term projections of student demand, with quick fixes coming at the cost of strategic vision and longer-term viability. But leaving what is taught in our universities solely up to market forces undermines resilient subject provision and economic strategy, with lasting consequences for students and for universities' ability to serve a public good.

In 2024, the British Academy launched the Mapping SHAPE project. The project investigates how subject provision is changing, how regional access has changed over time, and what this means for students, staff and universities' ability to generate economic, social, intellectual and cultural impact. The project also looks to solutions. Both SHAPE and STEM subjects are vulnerable under the present system. What needs to change to secure more sustainable regional subject provision? How could government and the sector work together to reduce regional inequalities and ensure access is protected across the UK?

Key findings

Access to SHAPE subjects across UK higher education is highly unequal and becoming more so, with cold spots emerging across many UK regions.

- Large parts of the UK – often rural, coastal or historically underserved regions – are already cold spots for provision in many SHAPE subjects, with no provision within a commutable distance of <60km.
- Students in North, East and South West England, as well as large parts of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, now face far fewer options locally.
- Cold spots are emerging in courses with below-average entry tariffs (students' qualifications on entry). Cuts to lower-tariff provision – courses often offered at teaching-focused institutions serving less mobile, commuter and disadvantaged students – are limiting access to many SHAPE subjects. Given strong links between socioeconomic background and prior attainment, cuts to lower-tariff provision directly impacts opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

The biggest cold spots in provision are in Modern Foreign Languages.

- Provision in Modern Foreign Languages has nearly halved since 2011/12.
- French and German single honours degrees are declining sharply, with cold spots in all four UK nations.
- Progress made in expanding provision of non-European languages is being reversed. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, six providers withdrew Asian languages such as Mandarin, Japanese and Korean.

Provision of subjects like Linguistics, Anthropology, Classics, and Theology and Religious Studies is vulnerable in many UK regions.

- Subjects like Classics and Anthropology see widening regional divisions in provision, with concentration in major cities and particularly London and the South East.
- Provision in Linguistics largely depends on joint honours programmes offered with other vulnerable SHAPE subjects, raising significant concerns for the future sustainability of the discipline.

More SHAPE subjects – including English Studies, History and Drama – are at risk if trends continue.

- Rapid declines in young UK student numbers in English Studies, History, Celtic Studies and Drama point to new subject areas at risk.
- Since 2011/12, English Language and Literature enrolments have decreased by almost 50%. History and Drama have each declined 29%.
- Provision in some SHAPE subjects – Business and Management, Law, and Sociology – has increased since 2011/12. But with decisions about continued provision often relying on unpredictable patterns of student recruitment and market demand, few subject areas are guaranteed resilient regional provision in the long-term.

Implications

Cold spots represent a significant access issue, removing opportunity. More than half of young UK students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – study within 90km of their home address: almost a third study within 30km. Cold spots, particularly in historically underserved regions, impact these students most acutely.

Shrinking access to SHAPE will also have wider economic and societal impact, including on:

- Skills and growth: SHAPE graduates fuel public services, creative industries, civil society, policymaking, diplomacy and global business.
- Research pipeline: The loss of SHAPE departments not only undermines the researcher pipeline, but also erodes specialist expertise in the academic workforce, which is vital for sustaining the UK's research strength.
- Our ability to face the challenges of tomorrow: Understanding cultures, histories, languages, behaviours, laws and institutions through studying SHAPE subjects is vital to tackling the most complex national and global problems of our age.

Recommendations

To secure fair, equitable and robust provision across the UK, government and the sector should work together to:

- Monitor and protect at-risk subjects: Sector regulators should monitor subject-level provision through an 'at risk' regional subject register and 'at risk' subject premium.
- Build regional partnerships to safeguard provision: Universities in each UK nation and region should work together to explore opportunities for collaboration in teaching, research and relevant services. This could include co-developing digital resources and expanding remote provision to aid access in remote and rural areas.
- Encourage more collaboration and less competition between universities: The Government should issue clear guidance on how far higher education providers can collaborate to safeguard regional subject provision, such as sharing key services, without breaching competition law.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of young people across the UK will begin their undergraduate studies this autumn. This marks the end of a long process: months spent weighing up options, making careful choices, and anxiously awaiting results day. Meanwhile, next year's applicants are already looking ahead – browsing prospectuses, attending open days, and starting to make their own choices about what and where to study. For many young people, staying close to home will be a big part of that decision. More than half study at a university within 90km of their home address. Almost a third study at a university within 30km.[1]

But the choices available to students are changing. What young people can study and where is increasingly shaped by factors beyond their control. Over the past two decades, universities have increasingly determined course offerings in response to market forces, with financial viability often tied to shifting patterns of student demand. Now, as the higher education sector across the UK faces an ongoing financial crisis, many institutions are cutting courses. This is already compromising choices. Should this crisis continue - or worsen - the opportunities available to students could be reduced further still.

1.1 The context

In late 2024, in response to a growing crisis in UK higher education, the British Academy launched the Mapping SHAPE project to understand the changing landscape of provision.

UK universities continue to face the worst financial challenges in their history. With more than half of all providers reporting deepening deficits, many have announced cuts to courses and departmental closures. Those in the SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) are among the hardest hit. But the causes are structural and systemic, and the consequences are broadening.

As the national academy for the humanities and social sciences, the British Academy monitors and champions the health and vibrancy of the SHAPE disciplines. We seek to understand and strengthen pathways into the study of SHAPE subjects – enabling more learners to access SHAPE knowledge and skills, so that our society and economy can benefit. This commitment means we also explore what students can study and where, as well as investigating where barriers to access may be emerging or deepening.

As increasing numbers of universities announce closures – in towns and cities, in rural and coastal areas, and across all four nations – the landscape of SHAPE provision is on course for further change. We set out to better understand the impact on the future of SHAPE in higher education. Over half of all UK undergraduates currently study a SHAPE subject.[2] How far will cuts to SHAPE provision impact young people's ability to access these subjects in our universities in future?

We also sought to place this transformation in context. As we explore in chapter two, universities have weathered complex and compounding challenges in recent years, including the UK's departure from the European Union, a global pandemic, and shifting geopolitical tides. We have also seen major policy changes enacted across the different higher education systems operating in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In light of these transformations, how far has young people's access to SHAPE subjects changed over time?

1 56% of UK-domiciled first-year first-degree undergraduates aged <21 studied at a HE provider located ≤90km from the postcode district of a student's permanent home address prior to entry in 2023/24. 45% studied at a provider located ≤60km away, with 31% studying at a provider located ≤30km away. Data from HESA Student Record 2015/16-2023/24 © Jisc 2025. This data excludes provision from distance-learning providers (e.g. The Open University).

2 57% of UK-domiciled first-year first-degree undergraduates <21 years old studied a SHAPE subject in 2023/24. This figure rises to 59% when including mature students. HESA Student Record Full Person Equivalent © Jisc 2025.

Most of all, we wanted to know if the current crisis in UK higher education was leading to the emergence of SHAPE subject cold spots, areas with no provision of a given subject within a commutable distance, particularly with many students staying local to attend university. Disadvantaged students are more likely to study close to home compared to their peers. These students are also more likely to access higher education through courses offered at lower UCAS tariff levels (students' qualifications on entry), given strong links between socioeconomic background and prior attainment. This makes provision across tariff levels within a commutable distance a real issue for access. How far is regional access to SHAPE at different tariff levels across all four UK nations changing – and to what extent is it becoming more unequal?

1.2 The project

Mapping SHAPE sets out to answer these questions. To do so, we used data that universities and other higher education institutions – hereon referred to as 'providers' – report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to build interactive maps that track and visualise changes in undergraduate provision for young UK-domiciled students. In addition, the maps allow us to track the emergence of cold spots – areas of no provision within a commutable distance of 60km – across UK higher education. Our methodology is set out in chapter three.

HESA provider data is an annual release. As data for new academic years become available, we will continue to monitor changes to provision in our universities by updating our mapping tools to understand and respond to emerging trends.

In chapter four, we set out key findings from these trends in SHAPE provision in UK higher education. Using data from thousands of courses at hundreds of universities over more than a decade, we explore trends and patterns in SHAPE subject provision from 2011/12 (the year before there was a major increase to tuition fees in England and Wales) until 2023/24, the most recent academic year for which data is available.

The findings are sobering. SHAPE provision across UK higher education is highly unequal – and getting more so. What a young person can study varies dramatically based on where they live and their ability to relocate – two factors that are highly correlated with their socioeconomic background. Cold spots in provision are emerging across many disciplines, from Modern Foreign Languages to Anthropology, Linguistics to Classics, and more.

Not all SHAPE subjects are seeing cold spots emerge. Some – like Business and Management, Law, and Sociology – have seen the spread of regional provision expand since 2011/12. Nevertheless, the data points to subjects at risk of becoming future cold spots – particularly those with declining student numbers, such as English, History, and Drama. With more closures announced during the 2024/2025 academic year there is good reason to expect current trends will persist. Without intervention, regional inequalities in provision will likely get worse.

1.3 The implications

Solving the growing crisis of regional access to SHAPE provision will not be easy. Cold spots in SHAPE subject provision raise broader questions about the future of UK higher education. How is the absence of a sustainable funding model affecting students' opportunities and access to university? To what extent should decisions about what is taught in universities be left to market forces alone? And what does the withdrawal of SHAPE provision tell us about the need for a more proactive, strategic and collaborative approach to enable the core functions of our universities - teaching and research - to survive?

Universities – and the SHAPE disciplines – serve a public good. SHAPE subjects equip students with essential skills, sustain major growth sectors in the UK economy, help us understand the world we live in – and imagine ways to improve it. Tackling the diverse and complex challenges our society faces requires deep understanding of cultures, histories, geographies, languages, institutions, economies, behaviours, laws and beliefs – all of which sit at the heart of SHAPE. With so much at stake, there is an urgent need to act as this crisis begins to accelerate.

Reductions in SHAPE provision across UK regions carry broader societal and economic consequences. Closures limit the skills students can develop, affect teaching, research and support jobs, and undermine the sustainability of research itself. When courses close and departments are lost, we risk breaking the pipeline of future research talent among students and the specialist staff that sustain the UK's world-leading research base.

Fair and equitable access to SHAPE subjects matters. Regional disparities in provision inevitably limit what students can study and where. The ability to access these vibrant and vital disciplines should not depend on where a student lives, or their ability to move far from home for undergraduate study.

Challenges with regional SHAPE provision reflect wider structural risks facing our higher education system as a whole. Decisions about course closures at individual providers are often shaped by recruitment trends. But relying on student demand and market forces to shape what is taught and researched in our universities is a high-risk strategy – not least because students' choices are often constrained by factors beyond their control. Declining take-up of Languages degrees, for instance, may well reflect reduced access to Languages in schools due to teacher shortages, particularly at schools in deprived areas. Seen through this lens, falling demand for courses may look less like a test of consumer appetite in a pure 'market' than a symptom of deepening youth inequality; a system where not all young people have the opportunities that they should, and where stubborn barriers to opportunity remain.

These are not just challenges for SHAPE subjects. Both SHAPE and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects are vulnerable in a system where provision is left to the market. Both SHAPE and STEM disciplines face cuts in our universities in the current financial climate. Once subject expertise, teaching capacity and research infrastructure are lost, they are difficult to rebuild. Without intervention, there is a real risk that the UK may look back and ask: 'How did we allow this to happen?'

Mapping SHAPE urges a shift in perspective. Hundreds of individual course closures amount to a systemic issue when viewed in aggregate. There is much at stake if the future of subject-level provision in UK universities is left entirely up to the market. As the Academy has consistently argued, a wholly market-driven approach to education risks creating perverse incentives, encouraging short-term decisions over strategic stewardship. It also overlooks the reality that no market operates in isolation from public discourse, political priorities, or media narratives about value. This has lasting consequences for universities' ability to serve a public good.

1.4 The solutions

In chapter five, we consider the policy implications of this research and explore potential solutions. The findings make a powerful case for a more strategic approach to subject provision from government and from the sector, rather than an approach based solely on student choice, market demand and short-term priorities. Across the sector, there are increasing calls for a wholesale shift in how we fund and regulate higher education to ensure it continues to serve a public good. This means moving away from an emphasis on competition and towards greater collaboration between institutions, supported by increased strategic stewardship from government. Such an approach could help secure fair regional access to SHAPE subjects, while enabling universities to continue making powerful contributions to economic growth and to addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

It could involve enabling institutions across different UK regions to work together to ensure broad and resilient regional spread of subject provision – relieved of barriers meant to protect competition but which instead prevent the kinds of collaboration that might help to safeguard provision. It may also require sector regulators to play a more active role in monitoring subject-level provision by region, identifying 'at risk' subjects and areas, or introducing mechanisms that incentivise protecting disciplinary health, including through inter-provider collaboration.

Above all, Mapping SHAPE shows the importance of taking subject provision and student access seriously. It is vital to understand what is at stake for the future of disciplines in our universities – and what we stand to lose without action. We must recognise the value of both SHAPE and STEM subjects, celebrating the breadth of knowledge and skills taught and researched in our universities and seek funding and regulatory models that will sustain them for future generations. In doing so, we can set both SHAPE and the wider university sector on a firmer footing. Moreover, we can ensure young people – whatever their background and wherever they live – continue to have the opportunity to access and benefit from them in the years to come.

CHAPTER 2

Context: universities in flux

2.1 The system context

Why are universities cutting provision?

There is no single root cause of the financial crisis currently facing universities. The combined effects of domestic political change, geopolitical upheaval and a global pandemic have all left their mark. The UK's four nations all operate their own higher education systems, governed by distinct funding and regulatory arrangements. Each faces its own set of financial and structural challenges.

UK higher education functions – albeit to varying degrees across the four nations – as a 'quasi-market'.[3] Universities are autonomous institutions and private organisations. They are free to decide what they teach and which courses to offer, responding to shifting patterns of student demand. This is particularly the case in England, where 80% of the UK's higher education providers are located.

In recent years, successive UK governments have sought to embed market principles more deeply into the English higher education system through reforms to its funding and regulatory regime. These reforms have had direct and indirect implications across the UK.[4]

Key milestones include:

- The introduction of loan-backed tuition fees in 2012, alongside a significant reduction in core grant funding. The Coalition Government's White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System, framed these reforms as a way to make higher education more financially sustainable, while using competition to drive quality and improve student choice. It emphasised the need to reduce 'micro-management imposed on the higher education sector … which has held institutions back from responding to student demand'.[5]
- The removal of student number controls in 2015/16. This was designed to expand access to higher education while increasing competition between providers and making universities more responsive to student demand.[6]
- The creation of a regulatory framework through the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) in 2017. This reform split responsibility for teaching and research across two separate bodies. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which had previously overseen both functions, was abolished. In its place, the Office for Students (OfS) was created as a market regulator focused on protecting the 'student interest', primarily through a consumer rights framework. Meanwhile, Research England was established within the newly formed UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to oversee research funding. This separation removed the integrated oversight HEFCE once provided. Notably, no public body now has the responsibility for monitoring and ensuring subject-level provision in English universities, leaving gaps in strategic oversight – particularly in relation to regional or disciplinary needs.

Market-mechanisms also shape provision in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, albeit in different ways:

3 Independent Review of the Office for Students (2024), Fit for the future: Higher education regulation towards 2035, p. 9.
4 For instance, changes to the sector funding regime in England have often set important precedents for the rest of the UK, precipitating similar (though not identical) changes in Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, raising tuition fees to £3,000 per annum in England and Northern Ireland in 2006 and in Wales in 2007, though the tuition fee cap in Northern Ireland now remains substantially the equivalent in England and Wales.
5 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (June 2011), Higher education: Students at the heart of the system, p. 2.
6 HM Treasury (December 2013), Autumn Statement 2013, p. 7.

- Wales and Northern Ireland operate loan-backed tuition fee models similar to England's, though fees are substantially lower in Northern Ireland and Wales offers more generous maintenance support through grants and loans for Welsh undergraduates.[7]
- Scotland maintains a different approach: tuition is free for Scottish-domiciled students studying at Scottish universities, with places funded via a system of number controls managed by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). This creates a different kind of competition between institutions for government-funded student places, which are subject to strategic priorities and subject-level controls set by the SFC. Scottish universities also compete for uncapped fee income generated from the recruitment of students from the rest of the UK and internationally. Funding levels fluctuate annually, with the SFC allocating budgets year-on-year based on available resources, leading to volatility in the unit of resource (the amount of funding available per student).[8]

Nevertheless, while each context varies, there are common symptoms and shared contributing factors across all four systems. These include:

- **A decline in the real-terms value of per-student funding.** The tuition fee cap for full-time domestic students in England was frozen at £9,250 between 2017 and 2024. In Wales the cap was frozen at £9,000 since 2012, with the cap in Northern Ireland set at £3,465 between 2012 and 2023, after which it was raised to £4,710.[9] These frozen caps have eroded the value of tuition fees significantly. Universities now make a substantial loss on domestic undergraduate teaching. The full-time domestic undergraduate tuition fee in England, for instance, is currently worth £5,924 in 2012–13 prices, leaving universities facing a £1.4 billion loss.[10] Any financial benefit to institutions from the one-off tuition fee uplift in line with inflation forecasts in England and Wales, announced in November 2024, is expected to be offset by increased employer National Insurance (NI) contributions.[11] In Scotland, where funding comes from a core teaching grant and a nominal tuition fee paid by the Scottish government on behalf of Scottish students, a recent estimate from Universities Scotland suggests per student funding fell by 39% in real terms between 2014/2015 and 2023/24.[12]
- **Rising sector costs.** Universities face increased expenditure on student-facing services (such as accommodation and pastoral support), staffing (including pensions), and borrowing for major capital projects. With institutional finances heavily dependent on tuition income, universities are under increasing pressure to maintain high student recruitment – especially international students – to cover growing costs.[13] In addition, post-pandemic inflation has driven up day-to-day operating, maintenance and capital costs across the board.[14]
- **Reliance on international student recruitment.** Over the past two decades, UK universities have become increasingly reliant on uncapped fee income from international students to subsidise domestic teaching. But while recruitment rebounded immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers have been below provider forecasts since 2023.[15] This under-recruitment is partly due to changes to the UK visa system affecting international students and dependants, as well as geopolitical and economic challenges in key source

7 The British Academy (2023), Student funding across the United Kingdom: Tuition and maintenance in the four nations and the impact of inflation.
8 Ibid, pp. 6-7.
9 Callender, C. (August 2023), 'Policy divergence: Changes in student funding systems across the UK since 2002/03'. Higher Education Policy Institute.
10 Universities UK (UUK) (2024), Tuition fee rise: What does it mean?.
11 England saw a one-off increase in the tuition fee cap in 2017, rising from £9,000 to £9,250. House of Commons Library (December 2024), 'Tuition fees in England: History, debates and international comparisons'; Times Higher Education (November 2024), 'One-off fee rise "not enough for universities to stand still"'.
12 Universities Scotland (2023), Opportunity and inclusive growth in a time of challenge: Universities Scotland budget case for 2024-25, pp. 10.
13 Wonkhe (February 2025), 'That university debt problem is a big issue off the balance sheet too'.
14 The British Academy (2023), Student funding across the United Kingdom, pp. 5-8.
15 For international students in England see Office for Students (2025), Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England, pp. 3; House of Commons Library (June 2025), 'International students in UK higher education' (accessed 18 July 2025).

countries. The longer-term impacts of the UK's departure from the European Union have also contributed to declining EU student numbers.[16] Though some forecasts suggest small future increases, the OfS has warned that provider recruitment expectations for both domestic and international students for 2026/27 and 2027/28 in England are overly optimistic.[17]

- **Real-terms cuts to domestic research funding.** In recent years, there has been a consistent gap between the cost of conducting research and the funding universities receive to deliver it. Since 2010, Quality-Related (QR) research funding has declined across UK nations – ranging from a 15% fall in England through to a 40% fall in Northern Ireland.[18] The most recent Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) data from the OfS (England) shows a £6.2 billion shortfall between the cost of research and the funding available.[19] The 'recovery rate' (the proportion of research costs covered by grants) continues to fall, prompting universities to use international student fee income to cross-subsidise research activities as costs escalate.[20]

- **Changes to international collaboration patterns.** EU membership provided vital frameworks for the humanities and social sciences in the UK, enabling institutions to attract a diverse international talent pool, collaborate and compete with leading peers across Europe, operate within a single regulatory framework, and access EU funding through mechanisms not available in the UK. The UK's departure from the EU in 2020 significantly reduced these opportunities for UK research and UK-based scholars, limiting both access to funding and avenues for international collaboration. The UK's association to Horizon Europe in 2024 has been a critical step in reviving scientific collaboration. While participation levels remain below those seen under the predecessor programme, Horizon 2020, early signs are encouraging – particularly in securing awards through the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.[21]

The combined effect of these financial challenges means many UK universities now report a worsening – and in some cases critical – financial outlook:

- As of May 2025, the OfS confirmed that 45% of all providers in England were in deficit. Without 'bold and transformative action', OfS modelling suggests that 72% could be in deficit by 2025/26, with 40% having fewer than 30 days of liquidity.[22]

- Statistical releases from Medr, the Welsh funding and regulatory body for tertiary education, show that Welsh higher education institutions recorded a collective operating deficit of £61 million in 2023/24, following an overall surplus in 2022/23.[23]

- Universities in Scotland face a real terms funding cut in the Scottish Government's 2025/26 allocations.[24]

- Universities in Northern Ireland continue to call for a tuition fee uplift in response to ongoing financial challenges.[25]

One of the main ways universities have sought to reduce costs and tackle deficits is by cutting provision. Since 2023, many have scaled back or closed courses and departments to reduce costs. A recent survey by Universities UK (UUK) members found that 55% had 'consolidated'

16 See for instance the Nigerian currency crisis. Home Office (February 2025), 'Why do people come to the UK? Study'. Accredited official statistics.
17 OfS, (May 2025), Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England, pp. 3-4; Justin Woods (May 2025), 'After a dip in 2024, are UK international student visas poised to return to their previous peak?', Higher Education Policy Institute.
18 UUK (June 2025), Transformation and efficiency taskforce: Towards a new era of collaboration, p. 20. It is worth noting that the devolved equivalent of core QR funding in Scotland is the Research Excellence Grant (REG), which is distributed by the Scottish Funding Council.
19 Research Professional (10 June 2025), 'Cash loss on research deepens to £6bn across UK universities'.
20 Hillman, N. (2020), 'From T to R revisited: Cross-subsidies from teaching to research after Augar and the 2.4% R&D target.' Higher Education Policy Institute, Report 127.
21 Research Professional (21 May 2025), 'UK yet to reach former heights in winning Horizon Europe funds'.
22 OfS, Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England, pp. 25, 49-52.
23 Medr (May 2025), 'Sta/Medr/12/2025: Finances of higher education institutions, September 2023 to August 2024'.
24 Universities Scotland (3 April 2025), 'University funding allocations for 2025/26 do not give the sector the financial support needed at a time when it has never been more necessary'.
25 News Letter (9 May 2025), 'University chiefs in NI jointly call on the province's political leaders to back a significant uplift in tuition fees'.

courses, 49% had closed courses, 46% had removed optional modules, and 18% had closed entire departments. 89% of members said they 'would consider course closures in the next three years'.[26]

SHAPE subjects are not the only area impacted by cuts. Many STEM disciplines have also seen worrying reductions in provision. Research from the Royal Society of Chemistry suggests cold spots are emerging for Chemistry at degree-level.[27] While the Mapping SHAPE project focusses on SHAPE subjects – reflecting the British Academy's role as the national academy for the humanities and social sciences – there is a strong case for further research into how the regional spread of STEM provision is also changing as financial pressures worsen.

2.2 The student context

Cuts to provision inevitably reduce capacity in the system and limit student choice. But reduced capacity is only part of the problem. When students choose to go to university, they are not just choosing what to study: they are also choosing where to study. Cuts at a particular provider can mean fewer courses, less choice and reduced opportunities in a given region.

Why does regional provision matter? One reason is the relationship between universities and place. Universities and their departments are important to local areas: they are major employers,[28] engines of economic growth,[29] and key parts of social and cultural infrastructure.[30] Losing courses or departments often means a loss of jobs, expertise and research activity in a local area.

But a more pressing reason why regional disparities and cold spots matter is because of shifting demographics and student behaviours. The undergraduate student body has changed significantly in recent decades. An 18-year-old from the UK starting university in 2025 is more likely to be female, from an ethnic minority background and to have been eligible for free school meals than in previous decades.[31] As this section sets out, they are also more likely to want – or need – to study close to home. A student body that is more diverse but less mobile makes understanding the regional impact of course closures essential.

2.2.1 A more diverse student body

In 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair famously set out the then-government's aspiration for 50% of all young adults to enter higher education in the twenty-first century. In 2023, this target was reached for the first time.[32] In the years since, successive governments have pursued policies to widen participation among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing them with greater opportunities and helping to build a more highly skilled workforce. During this period, the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds starting their first degree has steadily risen.[33]

Beyond this headline figure, there is still significant inequality in university progression. Students from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds remain much less likely than their peers to enter higher education. While the overall proportion of disadvantaged students attending university has risen, progress in closing the gap between young people from POLAR4 Quintile 1 (Q1) areas (those with the lowest rates of higher education participation) and Q5 areas (those with the highest) has stalled in recent years.[34]

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26 UUK, Transformation and efficiency, p. 25. Not all leaders of UK higher education institutions are UUK members. UUK recently released estimates of the impact on income, costs and funding cuts to HE providers including those not among its membership: UUK (June 2025), 'The financial impact of government policy decisions on universities'.
27 Royal Society of Chemistry (July 2025), 'Making the case for Chemistry: Update on our skills and research policy work'.
28 London Economics (2023), The impact of the higher education sector on the UK economy: Summary report for Universities UK, pp. 4-5.
29 UUK (November 2024), Graduate employment and outcomes across regions and industries.
30 The British Academy and the National Civic Impact Accelerator (2024), Universities as social and cultural infrastructure: Roundtable series summary note.
31 See for instance Montacute, R. and Cullinane, C. (2023), 25 years of university access: How fair access to higher education has changed over time, pp. 11, 16, 18.
32 This figure includes mature students up to the age of 30. For students under the age of 19, the figure remains slightly below 50% (46.9%) as of 2022/23. Department for Education, (2025) 'Widening participation in higher education, 2022-23' (accessed 18 July 2025).
33 Montacute and Cullinane, 25 years of university access, p. 4.
34 TASO (August 2024), 'The results are in: What can UCAS data tell us about inequalities in higher education?'.

One of the most enduring disparities lies in regional progression rates. For instance:

- **The London divergence.** Recent research from the Sutton Trust shows that pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) in London are far more likely to attend university than FSM pupils elsewhere. For instance, 35% of FSM pupils from East Ham had completed a degree by age 22, compared to just 10% in Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West.[35]
- **Regional attitudes to higher education.** Research from the UPP Foundation in partnership with Public First explored cultural attitudes to higher education in Doncaster, a Local Authority without a local university but with several nearby universities in the surrounding area. Despite relatively strong prior attainment in the region, Doncaster 'underperforms' in HE progression rates, a product of universities' 'geographical and psychological distance' from many local young people. The study shows how regional traditions of blue-collar employment, cultural expectations around staying local for work, and lack of awareness around graduate jobs continue to inform attitudes to university among Doncaster's young people.[36]
- **Differences between UK nations.** Higher education participation in Wales remains very low compared to the rest of the UK. Data from Universities Wales suggests that only the North East of England has a lower participation rate (33.4%) than Wales (33.8%).[37]

For those young people who do participate in higher education, there is a strong correlation between social background and the choices they make about what and where to study. This includes:

- **Prior academic performance/tariff on entry.** Research by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) has shown that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have a performance gap of more than three grades below their non-disadvantaged peers at ages 16-19. Students who have experienced persistent disadvantage – those eligible for FSM over an extended period – underperform most severely.[38] As a result, these students are more likely to access higher education through providers with lower-average tariff requirements.[39] In response, some universities have introduced contextualised offers, where entry requirements are lowered for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.[40]
- **Subject choice.** Previous research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), commissioned by the British Academy, explored the relationship between subject choice and student characteristics at Level 3 in England. It found that students eligible for free school meals at age 16 were more likely than their peers to study social sciences and arts subjects at A level or equivalent.[41] Just as subject choice at Level 3 is strongly linked to subject choice at degree level, there is also a relationship between degree subject and student characteristics, including socioeconomic disadvantage.[42]

2.2.2 A more local student body

Leaving home and moving away to go to university has long been seen in popular culture as a rite of passage for many young people starting their first degree in the UK. The model of a young student relocating to term-time university residence, often a considerable distance from the family home,

35 Holt-White, E., Cullinane C., and Montacute R., (May 2025), The opportunity index: The geography of opportunity and social mobility in England, The Sutton Trust, p. 6.
36 UPP Foundation (2025), Cold spots and calculated risk: Understanding attitudes to higher education in Doncaster.
37 Universities Wales (2024), Explainer: Welsh participation in higher education, p. 2.
38 Education Policy Institute (2024), Annual report 2024: Disadvantage.
39 Crawford, C., Gregg, P., Macmillan, L., Vignoles A., and Wyness, G. (2016), 'Higher education, career opportunities, and intergenerational inequality', Oxford Review of Economic Policy 32(4), pp. 553-575.
40 UCAS (18 April 2025), 'Blog: What is contextual admissions?'
41 Scott, M., Julius, J., Tang, S. and Lucas, M. (2024), Subject choice trends in post-16 education in England. National Foundation for Educational Research. Commissioned by the British Academy, p. 9.
42 HESA (April 2025), 'What do HE students study? Personal characteristics' (accessed 18 July 2025).

has shaped the expansion of UK higher education since the mid-nineteenth century.[43] The 2019 Augar Review described 'leaving home to go to university' as a 'deep-seated part of the English culture', a distinguishing feature of higher education participation that sets England and other UK systems apart from models in other European countries.[44]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of students living at least temporarily at home in term-time increased sharply.[45] In 2020/21, around 40% of all full-time UK-domiciled students lived at home while studying.[46] Yet an overall trend towards increasingly local participation in higher education predates the pandemic and has continued in the years since. Early research suggests that students are increasingly choosing to study close to home, either as commuter students or attending a residential university close to their registered address:

- Analysis of HESA data by Times Higher Education suggested that 48% of all UK first-degree full-time students attended a university in the same region as their home address in 2022/23.[47]
  Recent UCAS survey data showed that in 2024, 30% of UK-domiciled 18-year-old university applicants planned to live at home during their degree – double the figure from 2015 (15%). Scottish students were more likely than their peers in other UK nations to live at home, while Welsh-domiciled students were the least likely to do so.[48]

2.2.3 Understanding the trends

Getting reliable data on how many students study close to their home address can be difficult. A key barrier is the lack of consistent definitions of 'commuter' students and common frameworks for assessing proximity – such as whether a provider is in the same Travel to Work Area (TTWA) or same local authority.[49]

It is also not clear why the number of students studying locally is rising. Geographical distance has long influenced students' institutional choices, especially among those from low-income backgrounds and certain ethnic minority groups.[50] This trend towards more local participation in higher education, particularly participation by commuter students, may reflect demographic changes in the UK undergraduate body. Research from the Sutton Trust in 2018 showed that:

- State school students are 2.6 times more likely to both live at home and study locally compared to students who attended private schools.
- Nearly one in two students from the least-privileged socio-economic background (NS-SEC 8) live at home and attend university locally.
- Students from some ethnic backgrounds are much more likely to live at home and study locally. 90% of British Bangladeshi and British Pakistani students attended a university less than 91km away from home, with 65.9% and 71.1% respectively living in their parental home.[51]

Data from HESA for 2023/24 shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds remain more likely than their peers to study close to home. 63% of young UK undergraduates from POLAR4 Q1 areas, those with the lowest participation in higher education, attended a higher education provider ≤90km from their registered address, compared to 49% of those from Q5 areas. 52% from Q1 areas

43 For a historical overview see Whyte, W. (2019), Somewhere to live: Why British students study away from home – and why it matters. Higher Education Policy Institute.
44 Independent panel report to the review of post-18 education and funding [The Augar Review] (2018), p. 195.
45 Montacute, R. and Holt-White, E. (February 2021), 'Research brief: Covid-19 and the university experience', The Sutton Trust.
46 Kenyon, S. (November 2024), 'Commuter students: does reducing the need to travel enable more inclusive, equitable participation?', Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 26(3), p. 116.
47 Times Higher Education (28 April 2025), 'Elite universities admit fewer local students as intakes grow'. Note that this data is limited to 'UUK member institutions'. Nevertheless, given the UUK membership contains 141 of the 165 recognised institutions that hold university title and degree awarding status (which includes Further Education colleges), membership is a reasonable proxy for UK universities.
48 Jordan, B. (May 2025), 'How cost of living is influencing UK student mobility', Wonkhe.
49 For discussion of this issue see Wonkhe (March 2025), 'Which universities recruit commuter students?'
50 Gibbons, S. and Vignoles, A. (2012), 'Geography, choice and participation in higher education in England', Regional Science and Urban Economics, 42(1-2), pp. 98-113.
51 Donnelly, M. and Gamsu, S. (2018), Home and away: Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility.

attended a provider ≤60km away, compared to 38% of Q5; 35% from Q1 areas attended a provider ≤30km away, compared to 26% from Q5 areas.[52] With more students from these backgrounds starting degrees year-on-year, increases in local participation may reflect changes in the make-up of the student body. Yet the number of FSM-eligible students actually decreased slightly in 2022/23 for the first time since 2008/9. It therefore seems likely that other factors are also at play.[53]

Financial pressures on students may also be informing a trend towards local participation, particularly rising numbers of commuter students. A recent report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Students identified that student poverty is widespread and worsening, with students working longer hours and rent costs increasing.[54] All these factors are affecting academic experience and wellbeing, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds hit the hardest. Support for students has not kept up with this worsening financial picture. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the real value of student maintenance loans in England fell by £1,500 between 2021 and 2023.[55] Concerns about the cost of living, including housing and transport costs, combined with the real-terms erosion of student maintenance payments, may deter students from significant relocations, particularly into costly term-time residences.[56]

There are considerable implications for UK universities as more young people opt to stay local. Commuter students consistently experience poorer outcomes than their peers. In November 2024, the OfS added commuter students to its Equality of Opportunity Risk Register in recognition of their lower continuation rates compared to students studying away from home.[57]

Regional disparities in SHAPE provision are a critical access issue. Loss of provision in a local area restricts some students' choices more than others. From this starting point, Mapping SHAPE asks how changes in provision, particularly in the SHAPE disciplines, are likely to impact the choices available to the student body of the future. A more localised model of higher education participation makes monitoring, and proactively addressing, regional disparities in provision all the more urgent.

52 Data from HESA Student Record 2015/16-2023/24 © Jisc 2025. This data excludes provision from distance-learning providers (e.g. The Open University).
53 Government Statistical Service (2024), 'Widening participation in higher education'.
54 APPG for Students (July 2025), 'Commission on students in higher education'.
55 Institute for Fiscal Studies (11 January 2023), 'Large real cuts to student financial support to become permanent'.
56 Jordan, 'How cost of living is influencing UK student mobility'; All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Students, 'Commission on Students', p. 6.
57 OfS (January 2024), 'Commuter students'.

CHAPTER 3

Data methodology

3.1 Models

The concept of mapping education provision is well established. Regional inequalities and levels of deprivation, particularly in rural and coastal areas, have long impacted student access to higher education across all subjects.[58] For instance, the OfS has mapped young people's participation in higher education across the UK,[59] while a University of Exeter study into participation rates in regional and coastal areas found South West England to be a 'regional cold spot' for higher education participation.[60]

Recent research has begun to explore subject cold spots as a subject of study. A 2021 report by the University Council of Foreign Languages and the British Academy identified a need 'for ongoing watchfulness at a national level, to identify 'cold spots' in Languages provision if and when they begin to emerge'.[61] More recent research on Language provision in higher education identified cold spots in the North, East and South West of England, particularly for below-average tariff entry.[62]

Recent coverage has explored emerging cold spots in other SHAPE disciplines beyond languages.[63] The Mapping SHAPE project's research helps us explore this changing landscape to build a clearer picture of what students can study and where.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Data sources

This report explores provision for first-year, first degree UK-domiciled students aged 20 and under between 2011/12 and 2023/24 using data reported to HESA. HESA records students registered at a higher education provider in a given academic year. It does not capture application or acceptance data or give a full picture of student demand. We chose to use HESA data for its subject-level granularity and comprehensive coverage of data across the four nations.[64]

3.2.2 Commutability

Our analysis maps regional cold spots in SHAPE subject provision – areas where a student would need to travel more than a commutable distance of 60 kilometres to access a particular SHAPE subject in a given year.

Using commutable distance to assess access to higher education is an established approach. However, it remains an imperfect measure of provision:

- There is no standard definition in the higher education sector. Some research defines commutability by journey time if driving.[65] Others use physical distance.[66]

58 Lipsett, A. (2008), 'Pushing the envelope', The Guardian; Leach, M. (2014), 'Cold spots rebooted', Wonkhe; Department of Health and Social Care (2021), Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2021: health in coastal communities.
59 OfS (2024), 'Young participation by area'.
60 Playford, C. J., Mountford-Zimdars, A., and Benham-Clarke, S. (2023), 'Coast and city, it matters where you live: How geography shapes progression to higher education in England, Social Sciences, 12(11), 610.
61 University Council for Modern Languages (2021), Report on granular trends in modern languages in UCAS admissions data, 2012-18.
62 Muradás-Taylor, B. (2023). 'Undergraduate language programmes in England: A widening participation crisis'. Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 22(3).
63 Times Higher Education (28 February 2024), 'Course closures bring risk of "humanities cold spots"'.
64 UCAS data was also considered for this project, as it is more up to date than HESA data and would have allowed us to track applications and acceptances as well as confirmed student numbers. Nevertheless, using HESA data allows for greater subject granularity. UCAS data more limited in its four nations coverage, particularly for articulating students in the Scottish context. We therefore decided to use HESA data in this project.
65 Maguire, D. and Morris, D. (2018), 'Homeward bound: Defining, understanding and aiding "commuter students"', Higher Education Policy Institute/UPP.
66 OfS (2024), 'Commuter students'.

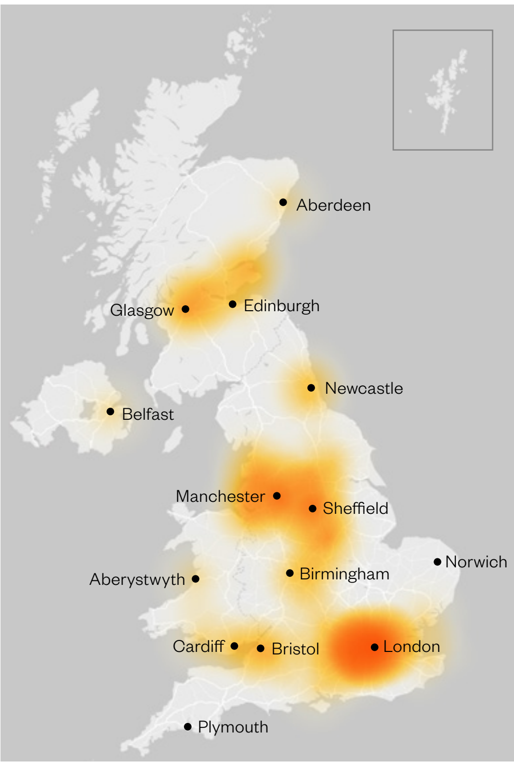
- Research from the Sutton Trust in 2018 defined commutable distance as up to 90km.[67]
- Recent research mapping degree-level language provision in England defined a cold spot as an area more than 60km from a higher education provider. This research used colour bands at 10km intervals beyond 60km, up to 90km, noting that 'many students commute much less than 91 kilometres'.[68]

Data from the Office of National Statistics suggests only around 1.4% of the population commutes more than 60km to work.[69] This, combined with the existing research outlined above, informed our decision to set the measure of commutability at ≤60km.

Nevertheless, we recognise that 60km may not be a realistic commuting distance in many parts of the UK. This measure does not capture all the factors that shape access to places of study, including transport links and cost, and accessibility needs. While this initial threshold provides a starting point for exploring variation in access to SHAPE subjects, further research is needed to better reflect the real-world conditions that influence student decisions and provider capacity.

To map cold spots, we plotted provision for each SHAPE subject within a 60km radius of each higher education provider recorded in the HESA data. The maps use a colour gradient to indicate provision density, as shown in this example (Map 1). Using the interactive dashboard on the Academy's SHAPE Observatory website allows users to see more granular location details.[70]

Map 1: Cold spots mapping example (showing French Studies provision across the UK in 2023/24).



Orange areas have more than one provider within 60km

Yellow areas have only one

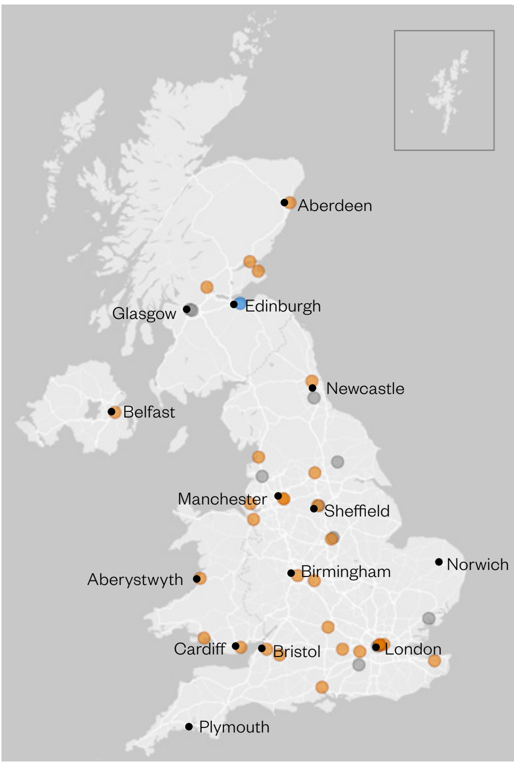
67 Donnelly and Gamsu (2018), Home and away, pp. 10-11.
68 Muradás-Taylor, B. and Taylor, P. (2023), '"Cold spots" in language degree provision in England', The Language Learning Journal, 52(1), pp. 92-103.
69 Office for National Statistics (2022), 'Travel to work, England and Wales: Census 2021'.
70 The British Academy, 'Mapping SHAPE provision in UK higher education'.

3.2.3 Provision

This research shows how provision at individual institutions has changed over time by tracking shifts in student numbers using 'Full Person Equivalent' (FPE) data.

Providers are plotted as coloured bubbles on a UK map. This approach highlights where students were clearly able to study a particular subject in a given year.

Map 2: FPE changes at providers mapping example (showing changes in French Studies across the UK between 2011/12 and 2023/24 by individual provider)



Orange bubbles indicate declining FPE numbers, defined as a reduction of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Grey bubbles indicate stable numbers, defined as a change between 2.5 and -2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Blue bubbles indicate growing FPE numbers, defined as an increase of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Our analysis uses FPE rather than a simple headcount of students undertaking SHAPE degrees.[71] FPE measures how much of a student's study time is allocated to a particular course. For example, an undergraduate student on a single honours course, such as BA History, would count as 1.0 FPE for History. An undergraduate student on a joint honours course, such as BA History and Economics, would be equally split between subjects: 0.5 FPE for History, 0.5 FPE for Economics. This method offers a more accurate picture of subject-level participation than course headcounts, which can obscure the extent of engagement in individual subjects.

3.2.4 Joint honours and tariff analysis

The maps include two additional filters. One allows the exclusion of joint honours degrees (for instance, where Languages are only offered alongside another subject, such as Business Studies or Law). This identifies areas where students' subject choices may be limited by the withdrawal of single honours programmes.

71 HESA, 'Definitions: students' (accessed 13 June 2025).

The second filter excludes institutions with above-average tariff student entries. Tariff is the numerical value UCAS assigns based on students' qualifications and prior attainment. By excluding providers whose students enter with an average tariff above the subject average for a given year, the analysis focusses on provision accessible to students with below-average entry tariffs. This enables us to explore potential cold spots for these students.

Due to differences in tariff calculations between Scotland and the rest of the UK, we adjusted how the average tariff was calculated for some provision offered by Scottish institutions.

- A significant number of students in Scotland enter university with qualifications which do not count towards the UCAS tariff. These are often held by students who enter higher education through articulation, an academic route that begins with a Higher National qualification at college and continues into a university degree. The Commission for Widening Access describes articulation as an important way to widen access, as students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter higher education this way.[72]
- To provide a more accurate picture of provision – particularly for students with lower prior attainment and/or those from disadvantaged backgrounds – we count provision as 'below-average tariff' in cases where a Scottish institution had a higher-than-average proportion of students with qualifications that do not count towards the UCAS tariff in a given subject and given year.

As a result, when filtering provision by tariff, 'below-average tariff' provision in Scotland may include students entering through articulation or with other non-tariff qualifications. These students often share similar characteristics to those accessing below-average tariff provision elsewhere in the UK.

3.3 Data limitations

This project does not claim to provide a complete picture of SHAPE provision. For one, it does not account for factors such as course capacity, staffing, or institutional resources that necessarily shape the nature of provision delivered at a university. For another, we have deliberately restricted our data analysis to that which best answered our research questions while striving to maintain data integrity. For instance, the data included in this project does not reflect provision for mature students aged 21 years and over or students domiciled outside the UK. Unless otherwise specified, all references to FPE numbers or terms like 'young UK students' refer to first-year, first degree UK-domiciled students aged 20 and under. By focussing on this cohort, we can best understand and visualise the options available to the 'typical' UK undergraduate.

In other cases, our analysis was constrained by the data available. While we have made every effort to capture as complete a picture of provision as possible, the project relies on HESA provider data on student FPE. This means our research is only as accurate as the data returns submitted by institutions about provision for a specific subject in a given year. HESA data also has several other limitations, including:

- Inability to differentiate remote and in-person instruction where providers offer both. We have included provision at institutions who offer both distance and in-person learning, such as the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), though we are unable to differentiate remote from in-person provision in our analysis and therefore do not show where remote learners are based. These decisions have been taken to ensure all possible in-person provision is included in our research. As this research explores regional disparities in provision, providers that exclusively offer distance learning.

72 Universities Scotland (2024), 'Working to widen access' (accessed 4 July 2025).

- Inability to show provision at all satellite campuses for multi-campus providers. This research relies on HESA data for information about exact provider location. For providers in rural or remote areas with multiple campuses, such as the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall or UHI in Scotland, provision is shown at the provider's main registered campus (in the case of UHI, this will be Inverness). As it was not possible to obtain verified historic data on student FPE in different SHAPE subjects disaggregated by individual campuses during our time series, we were unable to include provision at satellite campuses in our analysis. This means that, in a small number of cases, areas may appear as cold spots even though there may be provision of SHAPE subjects in that area, despite the important role that satellite campuses play in reaching learners in more rural and remote areas.

Despite these limitations, this project seeks to provide as accurate a depiction of the options available to a 'typical' first-year undergraduate living in the UK as possible. It is intended as a foundation for future research and analysis into regional access for different cohorts of student.

CHAPTER 4

Key findings

How is SHAPE provision changing in our universities?

In this chapter, we present key findings from the Mapping SHAPE data, tracking shifts in SHAPE provision across UK HE from 2011/12 to 2023/24 – a period marked by intensifying financial pressures, market-driven restructuring, and widening inequalities in access. These changes have accelerated during the sector's ongoing funding crisis.

The analysis draws primarily on features of the Mapping SHAPE interactive map, which enables dynamic exploration of changes in subject provision across the UK. This approach demonstrates the tool's value for policy analysis, strategic planning, and sector insight. While selected snapshots from the maps are included throughout the chapter to illustrate our findings, we encourage readers to keep the interactive map open alongside the text.[73] Doing so enables deeper engagement with the data, exploration of specific local or institutional contexts, and direct access to the figures underpinning the trends discussed.

Our analysis in this chapter intentionally focuses on specific case studies that reflect broader, systemic patterns of change. These include:

- The emergence of subject cold spots, where students in particular regions – often rural, coastal and underserved regions– can no longer access certain SHAPE disciplines locally.
- Rapid decline in enrolments in some subjects, driven by changing patterns of demand, which may result in future cold spots and increasing concentration of provision.
- Patterns of uneven growth, where student numbers remain stable or increase, but provision becomes concentrated in particular types of institutions or locations, limiting access for less mobile or more disadvantaged students.

In the first section, we highlight subject cold spots – areas of the UK where certain disciplines are becoming significantly less accessible. Some of the most striking emerging cold spots are in Languages and Area Studies, as well as other humanities disciplines like Classics, Theology and Religious Studies, and social sciences like Linguistics and Anthropology. These subjects are still widely taught in some parts of the UK but are increasingly absent in others – especially at lower tariff providers. The acceleration of closures in these subject areas, combined with a widening gulf in regional access and tariff level, means that provision of these subjects is becoming increasingly scarce.

The second section focuses on 'at risk' subjects – those where, if current trends continue, more cold spots are likely to emerge, even in those with currently high FPE numbers and/or broad regional coverage. This includes subjects in the humanities and arts, like English Studies, History, Celtic Studies and Drama, where longstanding pressures threaten the sustainability of local provision.

Across both sections, we identify structural dynamics affecting the SHAPE landscape. These include a decline in single honours degrees, growing concentration of provision in large, research-intensive universities, and disproportionate financial pressures on teaching-focused institutions – particularly those serving less mobile, commuter and disadvantaged students. These institutions often operate on tighter margins and lower-average entry tariffs, leaving them more exposed to shifts in student demand and rising operational costs.

Taken together, these trends point to a narrowing of student opportunity and a reshaping of SHAPE provision across the UK, with serious implications for diversity, reach and equity of access.

73 The British Academy, 'Mapping SHAPE provision'.

4.1 Cold spots

4.1.1 Languages and Area Studies

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in UK universities – and across the education system as a whole – face long-standing and growing challenges. Despite the clear benefits of language-learning for economic growth, diplomacy, cultural cohesion, research and soft power, the UK suffers from a significant language skills deficit.[74] This deficit is estimated to cost the UK economy £48 billion annually – around 3.5% of GDP.[75] Recent research from the University Council for Languages has highlighted the challenges of ongoing withdrawal of MFL provision in UK universities as a cause for grave concern.[76]

MFL courses have experienced a steep decline in provision since 2011/12; with a reduction across Languages and Area Studies (the wider subject grouping) of 47%. Of the ten SHAPE subjects with the largest percentage decrease in the number of providers offering courses over that period, seven are in Languages and Area Studies. This includes European languages that have been historically popular at A level and Scottish Higher level, such as French, German and Spanish, each of which has seen an average net reduction of 23 providers since 2011/12. Meanwhile, provision of courses in African and Modern Middle Eastern languages has also declined, with remaining courses increasingly concentrated in London and within the Russell Group. A more granular breakdown of changes in provision can be found below.

An important caveat to note is that some institutions with large FPE cohorts do not report their first-degree MFL students under specific language codes (for example, French or Italian) in HESA data. Instead, they report students under the code 'Others in Languages and Area Studies', perhaps reflecting generalist MFL degrees. This means that a small number of providers may be underrepresented in the data.

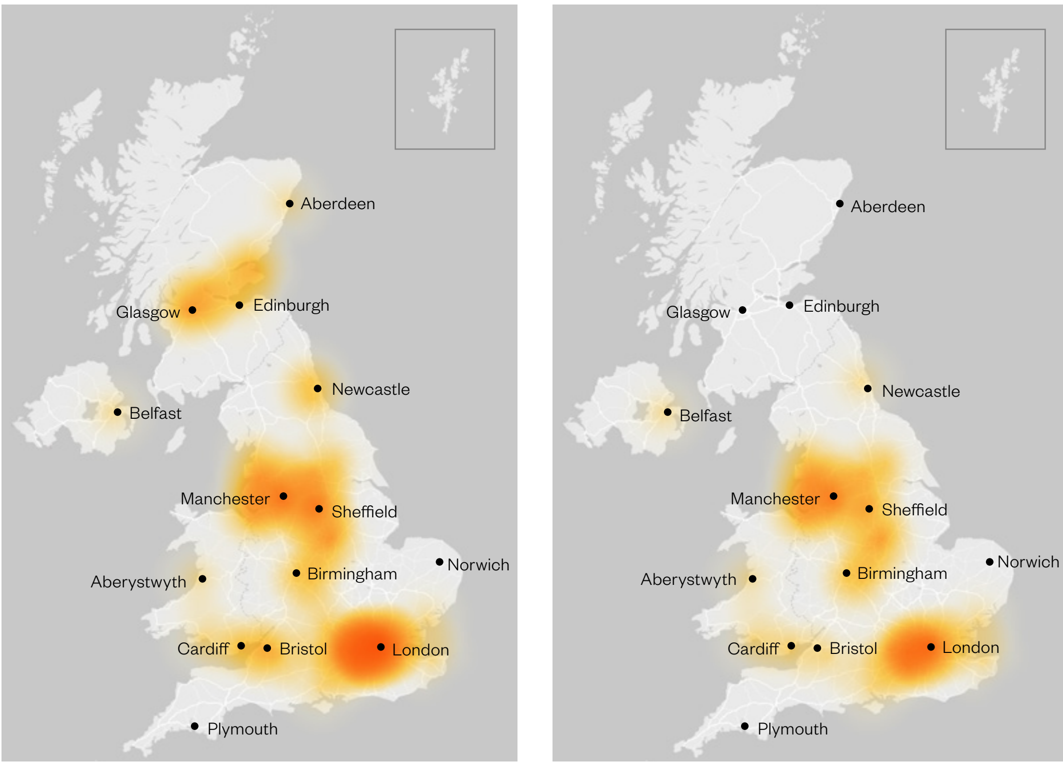
French Studies

French provision is declining across most of the UK, reflecting a long-term downward trend which seems to have accelerated amid the current financial crisis. Between the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years alone, six providers discontinued French courses, the steepest annual drop since 2017. During the same period, student numbers by FPE fell by 16%.

Over the longer term, French is the subject area that has seen the greatest number of provider course closures of any SHAPE subject. Since 2011/12, there has been a net decrease of 26 French degree providers – a 39% reduction – while overall FPE has decreased by 62%, from 1,920 to 720. These sharp declines in both provider numbers and student enrolment signal and increasingly fragile future for the discipline, and the UK's language ability.

74 Forsdick, C. (September 2023), 'The revival of language learning is key to a culturally and linguistically rich future', The British Academy.
75 The British Academy, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society (2019), Languages in the UK: A call to action, p.3.
76 See for example Ayres-Bennett, W. (2024), 'Closures and Restructurings'. University Council for Languages.

Map 3: French Studies provision across the UK in 2023/24, comparison of all tariff levels (left) and below-average tariff level (right)



Orange areas have more than one provider within 60km

Yellow areas have only one

The picture is even more concerning for French provision at the below-average tariff level. Since 2011/12, student numbers at this tariff level have fallen by 49%, including a 9% drop between 2022/23 and 2023/24 alone. Of the six providers to withdraw French degrees in the past year, five were institutions that offered provision at a below-average tariff level. As a result of these trends, Scotland now appears as a cold spot for French at a below-average tariff level (see Map 3).

Single honours French has also shrunk dramatically. In 2011/12, 36 providers offered single honours French; by 2023/24, that number had halved to 18. This means that, unless students are willing or able to study French alongside another subject, they will be unable to study French at degree-level in many parts of the UK. With the exception of Aberystwyth University and Lancaster University, all remaining providers of single honours French are members of the Russell Group, signalling a sharp concentration of provision in a narrow segment of the sector.

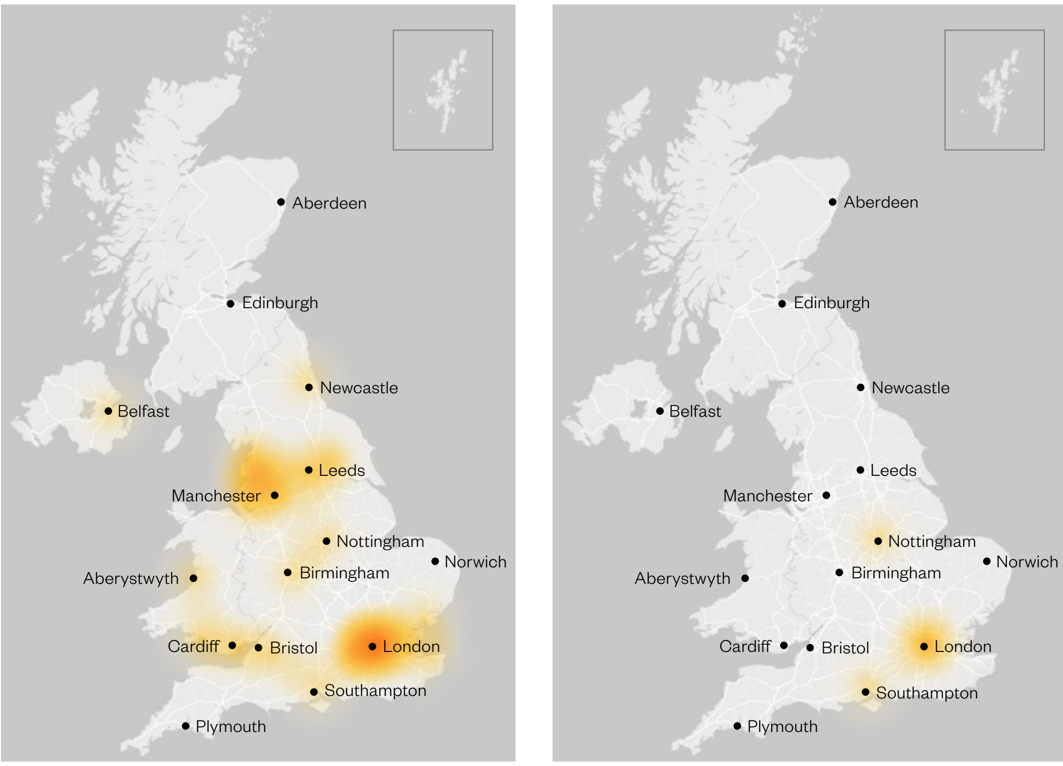
German and Scandinavian Studies

As with French, German provision (alongside Scandinavian Studies) is shrinking in UK higher education.[77] Since 2011/12, this group of subjects has seen a net loss of 20 providers out of 48, the third-largest reduction among all SHAPE subject groups. Over the same period, student numbers have dropped by 68%, equivalent to a loss of 445 students in FPE. This decline has accelerated in recent years: between 2022/23 and 2023/24, student numbers fell by 21%

77 Due to the way courses are coded in HESA returns, it is not possible to separate some subjects from broader subject groupings in this data (e. g. German Studies from Scandinavian languages, Spanish Studies from Portuguese Studies). German is, however, the majority subject in the German and Scandinavian subject grouping; Spanish is the majority subject in the Spanish and Portuguese subject grouping.

Single honours degrees in German and Scandinavian Studies are now increasingly rare. Fewer than a dozen providers offer the option to study single honours German, either as a named degree (such as BA German) or within a single-language pathway (for example, BA Modern Languages, where the language the student studies is German).[78] In Northern Ireland, German can only be studied as part of a BSc in International Business (Major) with German – highlighting the narrowing of options across the UK.[79]

Map 4: German provision for below-average tariff across the UK in 2023/24, comparison of joint and single honours (left) and single honours only (right)



Orange areas have more than one provider within 60km

Yellow areas have only one

Spanish and Portuguese Studies

Since 2011/12, Spanish and Portuguese Studies account for the second-largest number of providers withdrawing courses, with a net loss of 22 providers. Student numbers have fallen 46% over the same period.

For these lower-tariff entries, cold spots have emerged across much of the UK since 2011/12, including the West Midlands, much of the South West, and large sections of the eastern coast of England except for Newcastle. In Scotland, while provision for all tariff levels has grown overall by 34%, only the University of Dundee offers Spanish or Portuguese at a below-average tariff level.

Italian Studies

Student numbers by FPE in Italian remained reasonably stable between 2022/23 and 2023/24, though there was a net loss of one provider. This continues a trend of contraction: between 2021/22 and 2022/23, three providers withdrew, contributing to a total net loss of 12 providers since 2015/16.

78 The Mapping SHAPE dashboards show eight providers on the map. Additional research confirms several providers, including the University of Cambridge, Durham University and the University of Exeter, all offer a single-language pathway in German as part of a Modern Languages degree. As this data captures enrolment in the first year, students at these institutions are coded under 'Others in Languages and Area Studies' in HESA data.

79 Queen's University Belfast, 'International Business (Major) with German' (accessed 17 July 2025).

Longer-term trends are particularly stark in below-average tariff provision. Since 2011/12, student numbers in this group have decreased by 60%, while the number of providers is down 47%. Cardiff University appears to be the only remaining Welsh provider offering courses in Italian, making the subject highly vulnerable to closures in this area.

African and Modern Middle Eastern Studies

Provision in African and Modern Middle Eastern Studies is very limited across UK higher education providers, with only 120 FPE in 2023/24. After a small net growth of four providers between 2011/12 and 2019/20, provision declined by three providers between 2022/23 and 2023/24. Courses in this subject group – including Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew and Swahili – are heavily concentrated in Russell Group institutions in major cities such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Manchester and Leeds, as well as St Andrews and three London providers. There is no reported provision in Wales or Northern Ireland.

Asian Studies

Asian Studies – which includes Mandarin, Korean, Japanese and Sanskrit – has seen a net increase of seven providers and a 14% rise in FPE since 2011/12. However, this growth appears to have reversed in recent years: since 2021/22, provider numbers have fallen by six.

As of 2023/24, there are cold spots in parts of the South of England, including the southern coastline, Wales (outside of Cardiff), and Scotland (outside of Edinburgh and St Andrews). For below-average tariff provision, the picture is even more constrained with additional cold spots across Scotland, much of Yorkshire and the Midlands, and the entirety of South West England.

4.1.2 Linguistics

Linguistics plays a vital, yet often overlooked, role in the modern knowledge economy. As communication becomes increasingly digital and global, this field that sits across the social sciences and humanities equips students with analytical reasoning, data handling and cultural insight – skills in growing demand across sectors, from AI and language technology to law and public policy.[80] Linguistics contributes to areas as varied as speech recognition, curriculum design, inclusive communication strategies and forensic analysis. In this context, it serves as part of the invisible infrastructure that supports innovation, social cohesion and economic resilience.

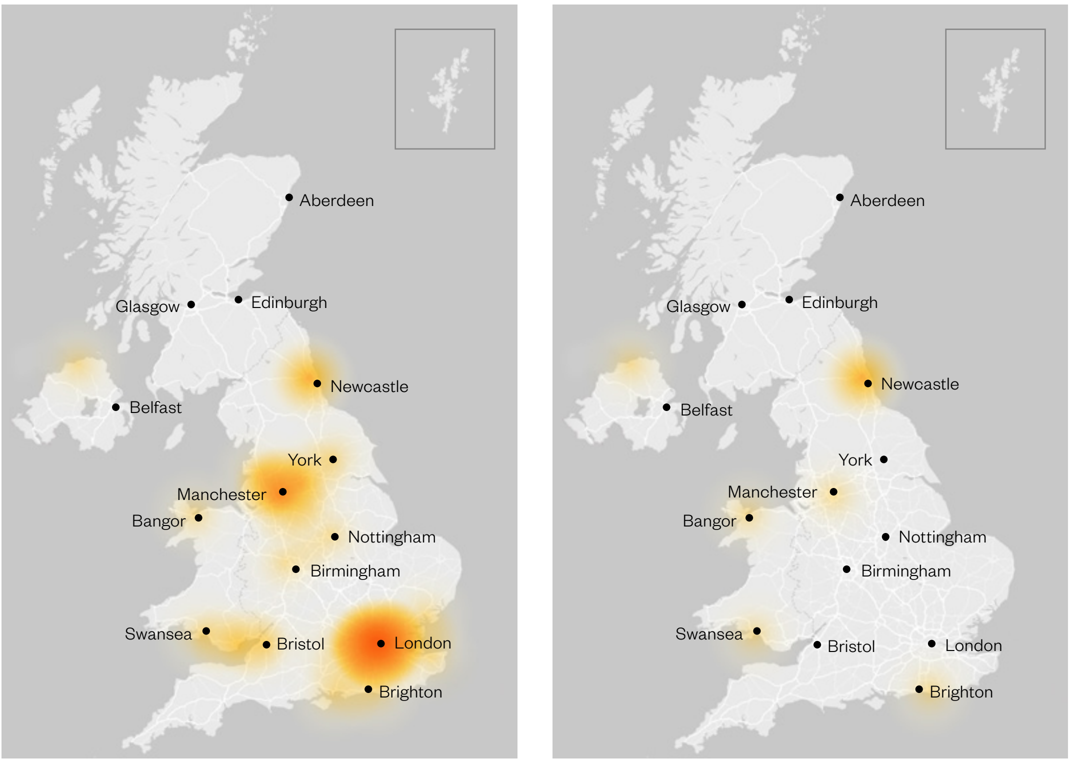
The student cohort remains stable, with 605 FPE in 2023/24 at 39 providers, though provision tends to be small-scale. Regional inequalities remain: South West England is a longstanding cold spot and provision outside of major urban centres provision is limited. Access at lower-tariff levels is becoming increasingly restricted. When excluding providers with predominantly high-tariff intakes, only two institutions remain in the Midlands – both with very low student numbers – with none in Scotland.

A distinctive feature of Linguistics is its high level of dependence on other subjects for continued provision. In 2023/24, 73% of the young UK domiciled students taking it did so through joint or combined programmes. Very few institutions offer single honours Linguistics (Map 5). Occasionally Linguistics is offered as a BSc, for instance Computational Linguistics at the University of Essex or Experimental Linguistics at University College London.[81] But in most cases, Linguistics is taught as a BA and remains highly reliant on the health of other SHAPE disciplines. This makes it particularly vulnerable to wider changes in provision and raises significant concerns for the future sustainability of the discipline.

80 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2021), Quantifying the UK data skill gap – Summary version; British Council (2025), Why your organisation needs cultural intelligence.

81 University of Essex, 'BSc Computational Linguistics' (accessed 17 July 2025); University College London, 'Experimental Linguistics BSc' (accessed 17 July 2025).

Map 5: Linguistics provision for below-average tariff across the UK in 2023/24, comparison of joint and single honours (left) and single honours only (right)



Orange areas have more than one provider within 60km

Yellow areas have only one

4.1.3 Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of humankind. As a discipline, Anthropology helps to explain how the interaction between different societies, cultures and human behaviour, informing effective policymaking in areas such as climate action, healthcare, technology, and education. Anthropology is also increasingly important area of study for criminal and forensic research, including the investigation of historic abuses and war crimes.[82] From robotics to global health and sustainable development, Anthropology offers valuable insight into how human values, identities and behaviours interact with many of the world's most pressing challenges.[83] As such, its uneven distribution and steady decline in provision in UK universities is a cause for concern.

Mapping provision of Anthropology presents some challenges. Changes to subject coding since 2011/12 – particularly how subjects are classified in HESA returns – make trends in student numbers by FPE harder to interpret. In 2014/15, for instance, FPE numbers sharply rose and then returned to previous levels the next year – which is likely due to the re-categorisation of courses in the HESA subject coding from 2015/16 onwards. Since then, FPE has remained relatively stable, falling only slightly from 840 in 2015/16 to 790 in 2023/24.

A close look at provision since 2015/16 reveals important trends. As of 2023/24, Anthropology provision remains highly uneven, with a strong concentration in London and southern England. Outside these areas, provision is limited. Strikingly, there is no undergraduate Anthropology provision in Wales, and just three providers in northern England.

At lower tariff levels, this pattern is particularly acute. In Scotland, only the University of Aberdeen offers Anthropology. In England, just three institutions – Liverpool John Moores University, the University of Birmingham and the University of East Anglia – offer below-average tariff entry outside of London and southern England.

82 The Royal Anthropological Institute, 'What is Forensic Anthropology?'
83 Salmond, A. (22 February 2019), 'What is Anthropology?', The British Academy.

The number of providers peaked at 30 in 2018/19 and 2019/20, before declining to 26 in 2023/24. Student numbers have decreased slightly (a 6% decrease since 2015/16), but this masks a significant reduction in provision at non-Russell Group universities, where numbers are down 32%. There has also been a shift away from single honours Anthropology degrees: in 2015/16, 75% of Anthropology FPE was for single honours compared to just 61% in 2023/24. It is now increasingly common for students to study Anthropology alongside another subject as part of a joint honours programme.

4.1.4 Classics

Classics – the study of ancient history, politics, archaeology, philosophy and literature – has seen an increase in FPE over the past three years, rising from 960 in 2021/22 to 1,190 in 2023/24 – a growth of 24% – following a decade of fluctuations that had resulted in an overall decline. Over a roughly similar period, A level entries for Classical Subjects – which includes Latin, Classical Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History – rose from 4,735 in 2021 to 6,422 in 2025.[84] For part of this period, access to these subjects was supported through the government's Latin Excellence Programme, which provided £4 million to non-selective state schools for Latin teaching. The scheme launched in 2022 but ended in early 2025. A 2020 survey found that Classics was taught in only 3% of state schools at Key Stage 3, compared with 49% of fee-paying schools.[85]

Despite these promising signs of growth in the field, the number and profile of providers remains limited. There are significant cold spots for studying Classics, including Northern Ireland, South West England, many English coastal and rural areas, and much of Wales and Scotland outside of the central belt. This reflects the relatively smaller number of providers offering Classics (26), compared with other subjects of a similar FPE size – for example, Social Policy has 1,105 FPE but is taught at 49 providers with wide regional spread.

In Wales, only Swansea University offers Classics. For many young people in other parts of Wales and western England, studying Classics would require moving or commuting to Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester or Liverpool, a distance of up to 100 miles/160km. Provision may be at risk in a number of institutions in these cities, with only the University of Liverpool (see Map 6) showing growth in student numbers in recent years. For below-average tariff entries, cold spots emerge across all of Scotland and much of northern England.

Serious challenges therefore remain for many prospective students seeking to access Classics degrees in their local area – particularly in Wales and Northern Ireland, and, for below-average tariff entry, in Scotland.

84 The British Academy (2025), SHAPE indicators.
85 BBC News (2025), 'The loss of Latin a "tragedy" for state sector pupils' (accessed 9 July 2025).

Map 6: Provision of Classics in Wales and surrounding areas of England in 2023/24

Orange bubbles indicate declining FPE numbers, defined as a reduction of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Blue bubbles indicate growing FPE numbers, defined as an increase of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

4.1.5 Theology and Religious Studies

Since the 1960s, Theology and Religious Studies – a field concerned with historical and contemporary religions, spiritualities and traditions – has broadened significantly. Once focused primarily on professional training for Christian ministry, it has become increasingly hybrid, with courses now embedded in interdisciplinary programmes that draw on art, culture, philosophy and ethics, sociology, politics, history and languages. This evolution is difficult to capture in available HESA data. The standard coding for Theology and Religious Studies does not reflect the extent to which the subject is now integrated across, and essential to, the broader SHAPE disciplines.

The cold spots map suggests that regional provision for Theology and Religious Studies remains relatively strong, especially given its small FPE cohort size. In 2023/24, there were 47 providers offering courses in the subject – nearly double the number offering Classics, which has twice as many students. This reflects the role of alternate and specialist providers.

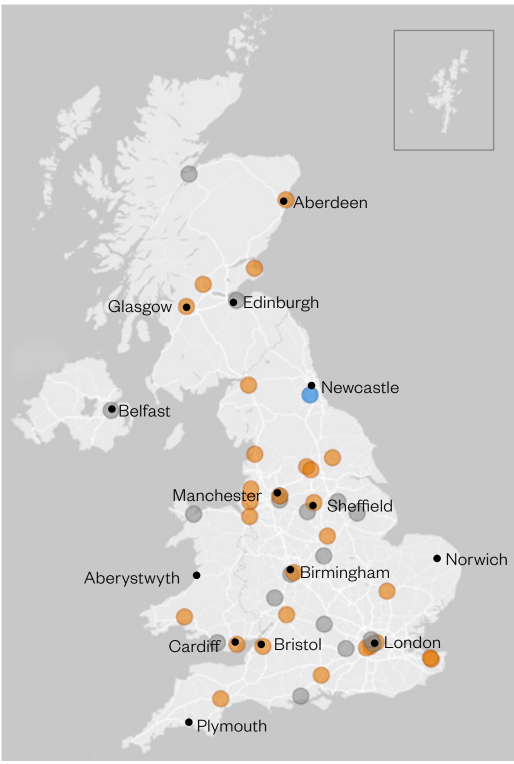
However, the tariff filter reveals considerable gaps in access. Cold spots exist across the North East, South West and East of England, as well as much of Scotland. Provision is extremely limited in Northern Ireland, with only 10 FPE at a single provider.

The joint honours filter also highlights a notable shift in provision. Single honours Theology and Religious Studies appears to be in significant decline, with a net loss of 16 providers offering the subject at any tariff level since 2015/16 – a 35% reduction in eight years.

The field has also experienced a sharp decline in student numbers in recent years, with FPE falling by 44% from 1,195 in 2016/17 to 665 in 2023/24. Since 2011/12, only one provider has seen growth in FPE (see Map 7). A 2019 British Academy study into trends in provision suggested several contributing factors: the introduction of higher tuition fees deterring students, increasing financial pressures on institutions, and the disappearance of bursaries and scholarships.[86]

86 The British Academy (2019), Theology and Religious Studies provision in UK higher education, p. 28.

Map 7: Theology and Religious Studies FPE by providers across the UK in 2023/24



Orange bubbles indicate declining FPE numbers, defined as a reduction of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Grey bubbles indicate stable numbers, defined as a change between 2.5 and -2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Blue bubbles indicate growing FPE numbers, defined as an increase of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

4.2 'At-risk' subjects

In the previous section, we explored subject cold spots – disciplines with the most striking regional disparities in provision, where clear gaps in access are already visible across the UK either across all tariff levels or particularly for below-average tariffs.

In this section, we turn to 'at-risk' subjects: those where significant regional cold spots have not yet fully materialised, but where ongoing declines in enrolment and institutional contraction suggest they are likely to emerge if current trends continue. While national provision may still appear relatively widespread, access is already becoming constrained in certain regions – particularly for students with lower entry qualifications – leaving those areas more vulnerable to future cold spots. Declining enrolment and institutional changes may have a knock-on effect to other sections of the academic pipeline, from teacher training to research careers, compounding emerging trends. This section explores the dynamics shaping subject provision in a system increasingly driven by student demand and financial sustainability.

4.2.1 English Studies

English Studies holds enduring significance in UK higher education, reflecting its longstanding contribution to students, national culture and the academic system.[87] As highlighted in the British Academy's report English Studies provision in UK higher education (2023), the discipline encompasses the critical and creative exploration of language, literature and culture, equipping students with vital skills in analytical reading, effective communication and cultural interpretation. It represents a major part of the humanities, accounting for more than 20% of first-degree undergraduates in the field and demonstrates world-leading research performance across UK institutions.

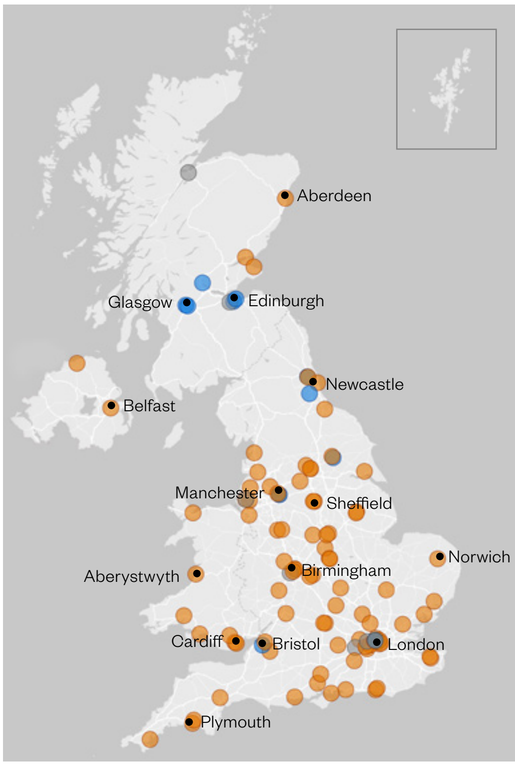
87 The British Academy (2023), English Studies provision in UK higher education.

Yet English Studies is facing significant challenges amid the wider crisis in UK higher education. In the absence of policy intervention, the discipline appears to be reshaping according to market forces, with falling student numbers having a knock-on effect on the disciplines' long-term resilience and on the UK's historic strength in teaching and research in the field. These challenges come into sharper focus when comparing the divergent trajectories of English Language and Literature, and Creative Writing. While English Language and Literature continues to experience long-term decline – with potential cold spots on the horizon – Creative Writing is expanding, albeit unevenly across the country.

English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature has faced longstanding challenges. While the net number of providers has fallen by only two since 2011/12, student numbers have halved over the same period – from 12,285 to 6,210 FPE. Outside a handful of providers in England (largely in the Russell Group), the only providers that have seen student growth are in Scottish institutions (See Map 8). Divergent trends across different institutional groups suggest that other providers may now be at risk.

Map 8: English Language and Literature provision across the UK in 2023/24



Orange bubbles indicate declining FPE numbers, defined as a reduction of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Grey bubbles indicate stable numbers, defined as a change between 2.5 and -2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

Blue bubbles indicate growing FPE numbers, defined as an increase of at least 2.5 FPE between 2011/12 and 2023/24.

English Language and Literature provision remains widespread across the UK. However, if the decline in student numbers continues, courses may begin to close, potentially creating cold spots in coastal and rural areas and in regions with higher concentrations of disadvantaged young people.

These risks are already visible when filtering out providers that are less accessible for students with lower entry grades. In the East of England, provision is now restricted to the University of East Anglia and five smaller providers with very low and decreasing student numbers. In the South West of England, provision is limited and declining outside of Bristol and Bath, with just one provider in Falmouth and two in Plymouth - all with very small and declining student numbers. In Scotland, accessible provision for lower-grade students is concentrated in Aberdeen and Dundee, with additional delivery by UHI.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing has seen a net increase of 28 providers since 2011/12 (from 56 to 84), and student numbers have risen by 17% since 2021/22, recovering from a decline between 2016/17 and 2021/22. This recent recovery is spread across a range of providers, though primarily among post-92 institutions, which now account for 65% of FPE in 2023/24.

Despite this growth, regional disparities continue to persist, especially for students with lower entry grades, reflecting how market forces can lead to uneven growth even in popular disciplines. In Scotland, provision for lower-grade students is limited to three providers. In Wales, there are only two providers. In North East England, just one provider offers lower-tariff entry – and its student numbers are small and declining.

4.2.2 History

History is a vital and popular discipline in UK higher education, valued for its analytical rigour, cultural relevance and wide applicability. Graduate outcomes are strong, with high employment and earnings, and students consistently report high levels of intellectual satisfaction.[88] High enrolment numbers at GCSE and at A level also point to sustained interest in the subject.[89]

Despite this, History has experienced a 29% decline in FPE since 2011/12 – falling from 11,400 to 8,080 – alongside a net reduction of four providers. As with English Language and Literature, this contraction has been sharpest outside the Russell Group, where student numbers have remained relatively stable. The proportion of single honours History degrees has also declined — from 76% to 71% — potentially signalling strategic repositioning by institutions attempting to adapt to fiscal pressure through joint degrees or interdisciplinary offerings.

While provision remains geographically widespread, access is uneven for students with lower-entry grades, who are more likely to come from underrepresented or regionally bound backgrounds. In Scotland, accessible provision for these students was limited in 2023/24 to the University of Strathclyde and UHI. In Northern Ireland, Ulster University was the only lower-tariff entry choice and has seen a 36% drop in FPE since 2011/12. In England, cold spots for lower-tariff entry are emerging in the North East and East of England, where provider numbers are declining. Our analysis suggests that the University of Plymouth was the only lower-tariff option for those in Devon and Cornwall in 2023/24 – though data limitations restrict our ability to see provision for History at the University of Exeter's satellite Penryn campus, which has different entry requirements from its main site.[90]

4.2.3 Celtic Studies (including Irish, Gaelic and Welsh)

Provision of Celtic Studies in UK universities at undergraduate level has historically been concentrated in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with a small amount of coverage in England, for example at the University of Liverpool and the University of Cambridge. Since 2011/12, at least three providers have stopped reporting any FPE in Celtic Studies. FPE for students taking Celtic Studies has fallen by 49%, from 180 in 2011/12 to 95 in 2023/24.

Celtic Studies – which covers provision for Irish, (Scottish) Gaelic, Welsh and non-specific Celtic Studies (see subject coding Appendix) – differs from other Languages degrees in having a high proportion of students reported under 'Other undergraduate' in HESA data, the majority of whom are mature learners. This falls outside the scope of this analysis but is important to acknowledge, as it suggests that the field is an outlier – its overall health appears more robust than the data on first-degree, young undergraduate demand would indicate.

88 Royal Historical Society (October 2024), 'The value of history in UK higher education and society'.
89 The British Academy (2025), SHAPE indicators.
90 University of Exeter (2025), 'BA History – 2026 entry' (accessed 10 July 2025).

In Scotland, the FPE for young first-degree undergraduates in Celtic Studies has remained stable at 20 since 2011/12. In Northern Ireland, FPE has declined at both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. In Wales, Celtic languages, including Welsh, appear increasingly vulnerable. While provision continues in Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea as of 2023/2024, student FPE has fallen to 40 – a 61% decline since 2011.

These trends are particularly concerning given the historic and cultural significance of Celtic languages in the UK and its nations. Degree-level provision plays a critical role in maintaining a teacher pipeline and research base in these languages. Its decline could undermine broader efforts to support UK heritage language learning, including the Welsh government's Cymraeg 2050 initiative, which aims for one million Welsh speakers by 2050.[91]

4.2.4 Drama

Drama occupies a vital space in UK higher education, blending creative expression with critical enquiry and practical skills. It allows students to engage with performance, literature, production and cultural theory, preparing them for diverse careers in the creative industries, education and public engagement. The creative industries alone contributed £124 billion in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy in 2023, equivalent to 5.2% of the GVA of the whole economy.[92] Yet, like other arts-based disciplines, Drama faces structural challenges across the sector.

Since 2011/12, enrolments of young first-degree UK domiciled students have declined 29%, falling from 6,300 to 4,480 FPE, the largest percentage drop among arts subjects in this analysis despite the net increase of five providers. FPE numbers have fallen across the board, including at Russell Group, pre-92 and post-92 institutions. The proportion of single-honour Drama degrees has dropped from 80% to 64%, suggesting a shift toward joint degrees, or institutional responses to pressure to consolidate course offerings.

Although Drama courses remain widespread, access is becoming more uneven, especially for lower-grade students and in specific regions. In Scotland, provision remains strong, with a 25% increase in FPE since 2011/12. In Wales, coverage looks geographically healthy, but FPE has fallen by 52%. In England, provision is increasingly concentrated in London, the South East and South West, while providers elsewhere in the Midlands and northern England have seen a 43% decline in FPE.

These patterns reflect how Drama, like many creative disciplines, is being reshaped by market-dynamics. Without strategic protection or regional coordination, provision is becoming increasingly uneven and reliant on institutional viability. This raises urgent policy questions around sustaining access to creative education, particularly for students who are geographically or socioeconomically less mobile, and for regions that depend on universities for their cultural and civic life.

91 Welsh Government (2017), 'Cymraeg 2050: Welsh language strategy' (accessed 10 July 2025).
92 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (December 2024), 'DCMS Economic Estimates GVA 2023 (provisional) - data tables only'. See 'DCMS sectors economic estimates gross value added 2023 (provisional)', table 2a, MS Excel spreadsheet.

CHAPTER 5

Policy implications and solutions

The data reveals a complex and concerning picture. For some subjects – such as Languages – the situation is critical. For others, we see early warning signs: parts of the UK are at risk of becoming subject cold spots if current trends continue. These cold spots have far-reaching consequences, limiting opportunities for students, weakening pipelines into teaching, research and key growth sectors, damaging local and national economies, and eroding the UK's global reputation for academic excellence.

What can be done to address these challenges? In this chapter, we consider potential policy implications and solutions. What might we need to change to secure more sustainable regional provision of SHAPE subjects? How might government and the sector work together to reduce regional disparities and ensure access is protected across the UK?

A major finding of this research is that cuts to provision due to ongoing financial challenges are exacerbating inequalities in SHAPE subject access. Any attempt to secure sustainable regional provision must therefore begin with action to address the underlying funding model. There can be no resilient subject provision without a financially sustainable higher education system. As long as universities cannot cover the cost of core teaching and research, the situation will continue to deteriorate. Cuts to courses and departments will deepen, and cold spots will inevitably expand, causing further economic, societal and cultural damage.

But this research also highlights the limits of relying on market forces alone to maintain regional subject access. Even if public funding increases – for example through raising the domestic tuition fee cap in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – this would not, in itself, prevent further cold spots from forming. This is because decisions about provision remain shaped by recruitment trends made on an institution-by-institution basis. If trends in student recruitment – some short-term – continue to dictate which courses universities offer, the result will be further losses in disciplines that provide skills essential to local economies and national priorities.

Tackling regional inequalities in access will therefore require a shift in approach from both government and the sector. Over the past two decades, reforms to higher education funding and regulation have prioritised competition and marketisation as a way of improving choice and quality. Yet the emergence of cold spots suggests that this approach has had unintended consequences. Not only have we lost capacity in strategically important fields in many parts of the UK, but many students also now have less choice – and disadvantaged students have fewer options still. At the same time, competition law continues to limit universities' ability to collaborate, even where collaboration to safeguard provision would clearly be in students' interest.[93]

The stakes are high. If we continue to leave regional and subject access to the 'market', we risk long-term damage to equality of opportunity, to local and national skills needs, and to the civic, cultural and research contributions of our universities. A new approach is needed: one that recognises the public value of SHAPE disciplines – and of our universities – and which actively works to ensure their future across all parts of the UK.

93 Enser, J. (May 2025), 'Supporting higher education providers through beneficial collaborations', Competition and Market Authority (CMA) Blog.

5.1 The big picture: student choice in a 'demand'-led system

Cold spots in provision are symptoms of broader structural challenges facing UK higher education. Regional inequalities are worsening in part because of changes in how UK universities are funded, regulated and run – reforms that have left regional subject provision largely to the market.

In all four nations, the direction of travel has been to make higher education more sensitive to student demand and less subject to strategic oversight from government. The consequence is that the sustainability of key subjects – particularly in specific regions – is now determined more by market forces than by policy choices. Access to those subjects is therefore increasingly uneven and at risk.

There are two elements to this demand-led system which are important to consider in turn. The first is the dynamic between student choice and concepts of demand; the second is the impact this dynamic has on the economy and society.

5.1.1 'Demand' and student choice

Higher education in the UK has never operated as a pure market. A wholly-marketised approach assumes that patterns of student demand reflect autonomous consumer choice made where all individuals have the same freedom and ability to make choices about university. It assumes that, if students do not choose to study certain courses, then universities should respond and remove those courses from the market.

Yet students do not make choices in a vacuum. Their choices as 'consumers' are informed and constrained by a range of factors beyond their control. These include their prior academic performance; the subject options and extracurricular opportunities they were offered at school or college; the quality of information, advice and guidance available; cultural expectations around subject choice and higher education pathways; their ability to relocate to access provision, and their personal and financial circumstances. Some students face far more limited choices than others. As highlighted in chapter 2, research consistently shows that socioeconomic background strongly correlates with the type of institution learners attend, the qualifications they enter with, and their tendency to study close to home.

Degree choice is also impacted by the curricular options learners have been offered earlier in the education system. In the case of Languages, falling student numbers reflect persistent challenges in Languages provision throughout the school system. This includes a decline in the number of schools offering Languages at GCSE and A level.[94]

Reduced opportunity to study Languages is due in large part to persistent connected challenges: a vicious cycle of falling numbers of Language graduates, falling MFL teacher recruitment figures, and fewer schools able to offer Languages at GCSE, particularly beyond affluent state and independent schools.[95] Some regions face greater teacher recruitment challenges than others: as the British Council's most recent Language Trends survey in England showed, schools in the East and South West of England are most likely to offer German, for example, whilst schools in London are least likely.[96]

How then should we think about a demand-led system of higher education? A decrease in student numbers on degree courses, for instance, may not be a sign of a market working well, but instead may well be a symptom of problems earlier in the education system where teacher recruitment and 'overloaded' curricula are recognised issues.[97]

94 British Council (2025), Language Trends England 2025, p. 21.
95 FFT Datalab (2016), 'Revisiting how many Languages teachers we need to deliver the EBacc'.
96 British Council (2025), Language Trends England 2025, p. 20.
97 Department for Education (2025) Curriculum and assessment review interim report.

Falling demand reflects a system where not all consumers can make the same choices and where stubborn barriers to opportunity remain. If we conflate falling student numbers with rational consumer demand in a pure market, we risk deepening existing barriers to opportunity in our higher education system.

5.1.2 The consequences of a demand-led system on the UK economy

The second component of understanding a demand-led system is the broader economic and social consequences of leaving the future of subject provision, and wider undergraduate subject choice, up to the market.

The closure of a course at one provider – particularly a course with low student numbers – may reflect a rational commercial decision, especially in the context of growing financial pressures. But hundreds of such decisions across dozens of providers quickly add up to a system-level failure.[98] Without coordination or stewardship, the cumulative effect is a shrinking and increasingly uneven landscape of provision – one that may no longer meet the needs of students, local communities, or the wider economy. Market dynamics mean that courses such as Languages – despite the clear regional and national value of the skills they provide – are often among the first to be cut.

Leaving SHAPE subject provision to market forces will have far-reaching consequences. This includes:

- Economic impact due to the loss of skills. SHAPE graduates bring valuable skills that are in demand across the UK economy. They include critical thinking, research, communication, leadership, creativity, curiosity, and insights into human and social behaviour.[99] These skills are vital not just to the creative industries, but also to sectors such as professional services, health, education and public administration. They add clear, demonstrable value to economic growth – the UK's language deficit alone is estimated to cost the country up to £48 billion annually, around 3.5% of GDP.[100]

- Regional growth and productivity. Universities play a key role in regional economies and the delivery of key public services, not just by educating local learners but by retaining graduate talent. Recent research from the British Academy and London Economics shows that 53% of SHAPE graduates from the 2009/10 cohort were still living in the region of England in which they had studied.[101] This regional retention is especially strong for graduates from modern universities, who are more likely to remain local and contribute directly via the local labour market.[102]

- Public service delivery. SHAPE graduates underpin the UK's public services. In 2023, 77.7% of education professionals, 64% of those in public administration, and 40.8% in health and social work had studied SHAPE subjects. Sustaining SHAPE provision is therefore critical to workforce planning in essential sectors.[103]

- Positive societal change. From tackling misinformation and vaccine hesitancy to issues of global order and disorder to understandings of child literacy and environmental sustainability, SHAPE subjects underpin our community cohesion and cultural understanding at local, national and international levels.

98 See remarks from Lapworth, S., Chief Executive Officer of the Office for Students, in Politics Home (9 March 2025), 'Universities watchdog braces for "Cold Spots" as courses get cut to save money'.
99 The British Academy (2017), The Right Skills.
100 The British Academy et al (2019), Languages in the UK, p. 3.
101 The British Academy (2025) Understanding SHAPE Graduates.
102 Hewitt, R. (2025), 'A place for everything (and everyone)', MillionPlus.
103 The British Academy (2025) Understanding SHAPE Graduates.

- Graduate skills for growth sectors. With more students studying close to home, regional economies are increasingly shaped by the availability of local provision. SHAPE graduates support fast-growing sectors of the economy such as the creative industries, professional and business services, and life sciences, with research showing their skills are highly transferable, adaptable to economic shocks, and well matched to the UK's knowledge and service-based economy.[104]
- Implications for government strategy. The success of the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, with its emphasis on devolution and regional growth, depends on the supply of high-level graduate skills – including those from SHAPE disciplines. All eight of the strategy's identified high-growth sectors (8-IS) require graduate-level education.[105] Between 1997 and 2023, the proportion of SHAPE graduates in these sectors rose from 45.8% to 52.5%.[106]

5.2 The need for a sustainable funding model

Ensuring fair regional access to provision will not be straightforward. The problem is closely tied to the wider financial crisis facing UK universities. Without a sustainable funding model, more universities will be forced to reduce or close courses. This will only deepen the pattern of SHAPE cold spots across the country, as well as cold spots in other subject areas.

The consequences of failing to act on sector finances could be far more severe. Without swift intervention, it seems increasingly likely that some universities will be forced to declare insolvency and exit the market altogether.[107] This would have catastrophic economic and social consequences for the regions they serve.

Universities are major regional employers and economic anchors. They support local supply chains, sustain graduate jobs, and play a critical role in the delivery of public services. Their loss would be felt well beyond the student population. The British Academy continues to call for an urgent review of higher education funding to deliver a sustainable long-term funding model for the sector. Government must recognise universities as vital public assets and invest accordingly – before further permanent damage is done.

5.3 Policy recommendations

Funding is only part of the picture. Addressing the challenge of sustainable regional subject provision– while inevitably bound up in wider funding pressures – will also require a broader shift in how we fund, monitor and regulate higher education to ensure it continues to serve the public good. Across the sector, there is growing momentum behind calls to move away from the emphasis on competition that has shaped recent regulatory and funding reforms. Instead, many are calling for greater collaboration between providers, supported by more strategic stewardship from government and regulators, to ensure that universities, as recipients of public investment, can continue to deliver maximum public benefit for all.[108]

Greater regional collaboration between providers, properly supported by government, will help to prevent further loss in provision, safeguard critical teaching and research capacity, and protect both students' continued access to different subjects as well as the long-term health of SHAPE disciplines. Proactive regional approaches designed to strengthen provision and ensure more equitable access should play a vital role in securing the future of SHAPE across all four nations,

104 The British Academy (2020), Qualified for the Future: Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills, p. 8; UUK (November 2024), Graduate employment and outcomes across regions and industries.
105 Department for Business and Trade (2025), The UK's modern industrial strategy. See also Department for Education and Skills England (2025), Skills England: Skills for growth and opportunity.
106 The British Academy, Understanding SHAPE graduates.
107 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (July 2025), 'Annual report and accounts 2024 to 25', p. 29; Department for Education (July 2025), 'Consolidated annual report and accounts', p. 23; and OfS (July 2025), 'Annual report and accounts', p. 21.
108 UUK (June 2025), Transformation and efficiency taskforce: Towards a new era of collaboration.

enabling universities to continue to make powerful contributions to economic growth and to tackling most pressing problems of our time.

SHAPE disciplines are not the only subject areas at risk. Recent announcements of cuts to STEM courses and departments demonstrate that no discipline is immune from the effects of the financial pressures on the sector. In a system where student recruitment too often dictates whether subjects survive – compounded by frozen tuition fees, rising costs and uneven exposure to risk across different types of institutions – teaching and research across all disciplines are vulnerable. The patterns emerging in regional SHAPE provision may be early warning signs for other disciplines, in England and across the devolved nations, whose futures could also be at risk if left solely to market forces.

There are several potential policies that would support greater collaboration between providers to protect regional provision across SHAPE and STEM subjects. All would be most effective if undertaken as part of a coordinated effort. Each would need to be tailored to the context of the devolved administrations, taking account of the distinct provider landscapes in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- **Subject-level monitoring and an 'at risk' premium**

Sector regulators should monitor subject-level provision and maintain an 'at risk' subject register, broken down by region, alongside a reactive 'at risk' subject premium.

Currently, sector bodies across the UK do not routinely publish data on what learners can study and where. This makes it difficult to identify regional need and to assess patterns of provision at different providers. A commitment by regulators to annually publish data on subject-level provision – broken down by region, tariff level and by student characteristics (such as gender, ethnicity, and domicile) – would be a significant step forward in addressing regional inequalities and barriers to opportunity.

In England, such a step would build on the OfS' recent commitment to monitor commuter student outcomes through its Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.[109] A subject-level 'at risk' register should include appropriate benchmarks for the regional distribution of priority subjects by risk level.

There is precedent. The OfS' predecessor for the regulatory role, HEFCE, maintained monitoring mechanisms for 'Strategically Important or Vulnerable Subjects' (SIVS) in England, including oversight of future subject availability.[110] Since HEFCE's dissolution, no public body has maintained systematic monitoring of subject-level provision or published data on strategically important or vulnerable subjects. The OfS' current monitoring is limited to Key Performance Indicator 8, a top-level metric showing regional subject breadth based on the proportion of subjects taught, which is insufficient for managing risks to subject provision.[111]

It is in students' interest for the OfS – along with Medr in Wales, the Scottish Funding Council and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland – to monitor and publish data on vulnerable provision, in order to safeguard student choice and learners' access to subjects in the years to come. A complementary policy would be an 'at risk' subject premium, targeted at providers where course closures in particular subjects would create regional 'cold spot'. This premium could support providers in retaining staff, covering essential course costs (e.g. equipment, specialist materials, or library resources), and maintaining access – similar to the operation of the Strategic Priorities Grant.

We recognise that, across the UK's four higher education systems, there are restraints on how far regulatory bodies can respond to declining provision. For instance, in the Welsh context, Medr's capacity and autonomy to respond to course closures is limited by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022's requirement that Medr does not prohibit or require the provision

109 OfS, 'Commuter students' (accessed 21 July 2025).
110 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (3 January 2014), 'Strategically important and vulnerable subjects (SIVS)' (accessed 11 July 2025 via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine).
111 OfS, 'Key performance measure 8: Student choice'.

of certain courses at individual institutions.[112] Yet the Tertiary Education and Research Act also requires the Welsh regulator to promote equality of opportunity, widen participation in higher educaiton from learners in under-represented groups, and to 'promote tertiary education and research in a way that contributes to the development of a sustainable and innovative economy in Wales'.[113] Failure to take action to address declining regional access to provision will have real and negative consequences for equality of opportunity and for universities' ability to best serve the public interest and make vital economic contributions.

- **Regional partnerships to deliver shared teaching, research and relevant services**

Providers in each UK nation and region should work together to explore opportunities for collaboration in teaching, research and relevant services. This could include co-developing digital resources and expanding remote provision to aid access in remote and rural areas.

There will be no one-size-fits-all model. Effective regional collaboration will depend on the subject, provider type, local needs, and infrastructure (including transport). To ensure continued access to subject provision for young people – regardless of location or background – we encourage governments, regulator and providers to be flexible, proactive and creative. Collaboration should fully engage relevant subject experts, including national academies, learned societies, and subject associations. These organisations can help ensure collaborations are subject-appropriate and responsive to the needs of learners.

- **Guidance on collaboration and competition law**

The Government should issue clear guidance on how far providers can collaborate to safeguard regional subject provision without breaching competition law.

Universities, as 'undertakings' providing goods and services, are subject to competition law under oversight from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). This has historically limited the scope for collaborative action. Providers may be discouraged from working together in ways that could protect regional provision, including sharing teaching staff, maintaining shared library and database services, jointly procuring equipment, or arranging the transfer of students and staff when a course or department is at risk of closure.

While the CMA has indicated it does not prioritise enforcement where collaboration is clearly in the public interest, both the CMA and legal experts in HE competition law have called for clearer government guidance. This would clarify the extent to which different forms of collaborative action to safeguard provision are permissible under competition law.[114] There is a clear case that many such collaborations are in the student interest, and guidance should be issued as a matter of urgency.

112 Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 (asc 1), § 21.
113 Ibid, § 3, 4, 8.
114 Enser, Supporting higher education; KPMG and Mills & Reeve (July 2025), Radical collaboration: A playbook, p. 39.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and the next phase

This report has set out to examine the growing disparities in SHAPE provision across UK higher education, to situate these trends in their wider context, and to explore how they might be addressed.

The growing fragility of SHAPE provision across the UK is a symptom of wider pressures facing the higher education sector, and a bellwether for subject resilience. The drivers are complex. But, as this research shows, the consequences are increasingly clear: a narrowing of student choice and opportunity, the emergence of subject cold spots, and the risk that important knowledge, insight and ideas may be lost. These trends are unfolding at a time when the skills and capabilities developed through SHAPE disciplines are in strong demand, in the labour market and in society more broadly, to solve complex challenges. These are the attributes which fight misinformation, global disorder and vaccine hesitancy; which support childhood learning, climate adaption behaviours, and good governance; and which underpin cultural understanding, community cohesion and the social contract.

Universities do not operate in isolation. They are publicly supported institutions embedded in place, tasked with helping people and communities thrive. But the idea of there being 'a market' for higher education has come at the expense of development of a coherent framework for ensuring access. Without intervention, regional gaps in provision will likely widen, and opportunities for learners will become increasingly unequal. Providers under financial strain may continue to make commercial decisions that, in aggregate, have severe consequences for the availability of SHAPE subjects across the UK. While the sector has shown considerable adaptability in recent years, it cannot solve these issues alone.

We need a more coordinated approach to ensure sustainable subject provision across all four nations. That will require a cultural and structural shift in how we think about higher education: from the balance between competition and collaboration, to a move from reactive policy to proactive stewardship to support the long-term public value that universities provide. Addressing the challenge of regional provision will inevitably depend on improving the underlying financial resilience of the sector as a matter of urgency.

The policy recommendations outlined in this report are intended as a set of practical efforts to make coordination and collaboration easier. Taken together, they offer a way to improve visibility of provision, target support where it is most needed, and enable collaboration in the public interest. They are not a complete solution. Rather, they offer a route to stabilise provision and prevent further deterioration.

Further ambitious, data-led research will be essential to inform future policy in this area. Only with strong evidence and a willingness to imagine new ways to fund, regulate and champion higher education can we ensure that all learners, wherever they live, are able to access the full and vibrant education they deserve, needed for our economy to grow and our society to thrive.

6.1 Future research

There is now an urgent need for a national conversation about what we want from higher education, and how best to structure and fund the system to deliver it. This may mean rebalancing the current policy framework, with less emphasis on competition and greater scope for collaboration, backed by stronger, more strategic stewardship and support from government.

We are committed to monitoring changing regional provision of SHAPE subjects in our universities as more data becomes available. This includes updated analysis using HESA data for the 2024/2025 academic year when it is published in spring 2026.

The next stage of Mapping SHAPE will explore staffing levels in SHAPE disciplines in UK universities. This will allow us to assess and visualise the relationship between course closures and staff, including their numbers, characteristics and employment conditions. Changing environments for university staff have significant consequences, including for widening access efforts, research activity and excellence, and teaching quality.

This research will be published later in 2025.

6.2 Additional resources

As part of our commitment to monitoring the health of the SHAPE disciplines, the Academy publishes a wide range of interactive tools, data dashboards and reports through our SHAPE Observatory. This includes our SHAPE Indicators, which monitor take-up of SHAPE subjects at GCSE, National 5s, A levels and Highers, as well as research on the careers of SHAPE graduates, the value of SHAPE skills to the UK economy and patterns of post-16 subject choice.

6.3 Feedback

We welcome feedback on this research as well as on future phases of the project. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Ruairí Cullen, the Senior Observatory Lead, at r.cullen@thebritishacademy.ac.uk.

Appendix: subject coding

Anthropology

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Anthropology	(15-01-04) Anthropology	(L6) Anthropology	(L6) Anthropology

Archaeology

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Archaeology	(20-01-03) Archaeology	(V4) Archaeology	(V4) Archaeology

Business and Management

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Accounting	(17-01-08) Accounting	(N4) Accounting	(N4) Accounting
Business and management (non-specific)	(17-01-01) Business and management (non-specific)	(N0) Broadly-based programmes within business and administrative studies	(N0) Broadly-based programmes within business and administrative studies
	(17-01-09) Others in business and management	(N9) Others in business and administrative studies	(N9) Others in business and administrative studies
Business Studies	(17-01-02) Business Studies	(N1) Business Studies	(N1) Business Studies
Finance	(17-01-07) Finance	(N3) Finance	(N3) Finance
Hospitality, tourism, transport and travel	(17-01-06) Tourism, transport and travel	(N8) Hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism and transport	(N8) Hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism and transport
Human resource management	(17-01-05) Human resource management	(N6) Human resource management	(N6) Human resource management
Management Studies	(17-01-04) Management Studies	(N2) Management Studies	(N2) Management Studies
Marketing	(17-01-03) Marketing	(N5) Marketing	(N5) Marketing

Classics

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Classics	(20-01-05) Classics	(Q8) Classical Studies	(Q8) Classical Studies
		(Q4) Ancient Language Studies	(Q4) Ancient Language Studies
		(Q7) Classical Greek Studies	(Q7) Classical Greek Studies
		(Q6) Latin Studies	(Q6) Latin Studies

Development Studies

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Development Studies	(15-01-05) Development Studies	(L8) Development Studies	

Economics

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Economics	(15-02-01) Economics	(L1) Economics	(L1) Economics

Education

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Education	(22-01-01) Education	(X0) Broadly-based programmes within education	(X0) Broadly-based programmes within education
		(X2) Research and study skills in education	(X2) Research and study skills in education
		(X3) Academic Studies in education	(X3) Academic Studies in education
		(X9) Others in education	(X9) Others in education
Teacher-training (first degree)	(22-01-02) Teacher training	(X1) Training teachers	(X1) Training teachers

English Studies

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Creative Writing	(19-01-05) Creative writing	(W8) Imaginative writing	(W8) Imaginative writing
English Language and Literature	(19-01-01) English Studies (non-specific)	(Q3) English Studies	(Q3) English Studies
	(19-01-02) English language	(Q2) Comparative Literary Studies	(Q2) Comparative Literary Studies
	(19-01-06) Others in English Studies		
	(19-01-03) Literature in English		
	(19-01-04) Studies of specific authors		

History

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
History	(20-01-01) History	(V1) History by period	(V1) History by period
	(20-01-04) Heritage Studies	(V2) History by area	(V2) History by area
		(V3) History by topic	(V3) History by topic
		(V0) Broadly-based programmes within historical and philosophical studies	(V0) Broadly-based programmes within historical and philosophical studies
		(V9) Others in historical and philosophical studies	(V9) Others in historical and philosophical studies
		(V7) Heritage Studies	(V7) Heritage Studies

History of Art

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
History of Art	(20-01-02) History of art, architecture and design		

Human and Social Geography

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Human and Social Geography	(26-01-03) Human geography	(L7) Human and social geography	(L7) Human and social geography

Languages and Area Studies

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
African and modern Middle Eastern Studies	(19-04-07) African and Modern Middle Eastern Studies	(T5) African Studies	(T5) African Studies
		(T6) Modern Middle Eastern Studies	(T6) Modern Middle Eastern Studies
American and Australasian Studies	(19-04-08) American and Australasian Studies	(T7) American Studies	(T7) American Studies
		(T8) Australasian Studies	(T8) Australasian Studies
Asian Studies	(19-04-06) Asian Studies	(T1) Chinese Studies	(T1) Chinese Studies
		(T2) Japanese Studies	(T2) Japanese Studies
		(T3) South Asian Studies	(T3) South Asian Studies
		(T4) Other Asian Studies	(T4) Other Asian Studies
Celtic Studies	(19-02-01) Celtic Studies (non-specific)	(Q5) Celtic Studies	(Q5) Celtic Studies
	(19-02-02) Gaelic Studies		
	(19-02-03) Welsh Studies		
	(19-02-04) Others in Celtic Studies		
French Studies	(19-04-01) French Studies	(R1) French Studies	(R1) French Studies
German and Scandinavian Studies	(19-04-02) German and Scandinavian Studies	(R2) German Studies	(R2) German Studies
		(R6) Scandinavian Studies	(R6) Scandinavian Studies
Italian Studies	(19-04-03) Italian Studies	(R3) Italian Studies	(R3) Italian Studies

Others in Language and Area Studies	(19-04-09) Others in language and area studies	(Q0) Broadly-based programmes within languages	(Q0) Broadly-based programmes within languages
		(Q9) Others in linguistics, classics and related subjects	(Q9) Others in linguistics, classics and related subjects
		(R8) European Studies	(R8) European Studies
		(R9) Others in European languages, literature and related subjects	(R9) Others in European languages, literature and related subjects
		(T9) Others in Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian languages, literature and related subjects	(T9) Others in Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian languages, literature and related subjects
Russian and East European Studies	(19-04-05) Slavic Studies	(R7) Russian and East European Studies	(R7) Russian and East European Studies
Spanish and Portuguese Studies	(19-04-04) Iberian Studies	(R4) Spanish Studies	(R4) Spanish Studies
		(R5) Portuguese Studies	(R5) Portuguese Studies

Law

Subject	**CAH code (from 2015/16)**	**JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)**	**JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)**
Law	(16-01-01) Law	(M0) Broadly-based programmes within law	(M0) Broadly-based programmes within law
		(M1) Law by area	(M1) Law by area
		(M2) Law by topic	(M2) Law by topic
		(M9) Others in law	(M9) Others in law

Linguistics

Subject	**CAH code (from 2015/16)**	**JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)**	**JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)**
Linguistics	(19-01-07) Linguistics	(Q1) Linguistics	(Q1) Linguistics

Media, Journalism and Communications

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Information Services	(24-01-01) Information services	(P1) Information services	(P1) Information services
Journalism	(24-01-04) Journalism	(P5) Journalism	(P5) Journalism
Media Studies	(24-01-05) Media Studies	(P0) Broadly-based programmes within mass communications and documentation	(P0) Broadly-based programmes within mass communications and documentation
		(P3) Media Studies	(P3) Media Studies
		(P9) Others in mass communications and documentation	(P9) Others in mass communications and documentation
Publicity Studies	(24-01-02) Publicity Studies	(P2) Publicity Studies	(P2) Publicity Studies
Publishing	(24-01-03) Publishing	(P4) Publishing	(P4) Publishing

Performing Arts

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Dance	(25-02-04) Dance	(W5) Dance	(W5) Dance
Drama	(25-02-03) Drama	(W4) Drama	(W4) Drama
	(25-02-01) Performing arts (non-specific)		
Music	(25-02-02) Music	(W3) Music	(W3) Music

Philosophy

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Philosophy	(20-02-1) Philosophy	(V5) Philosophy	(V5) Philosophy

Politics

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Politics	(15-03-01) Politics	(L2) Politics	(L2) Politics

Psychology

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Psychology	(04-01-01) Psychology (non-specific)	(C8) Psychology	(C8) Psychology
	(04-01-02) Applied psychology		
	(04-01-03) Developmental psychology		
	(04-01-04) Psychology and health		
	(04-01-05) Others in psychology		

Social Policy

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Social policy	(15-01-03) Social policy	(L4) Social policy	(L4) Social policy

Social Sciences (non-specific)

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Social Sciences (non-specific)	(15-01-01) Social sciences (non-specific)	(L0) Broadly-based programmes within social studies	(L0) Broadly-based programmes within social studies
		(L9) Others in social studies	(L9) Others in social studies

Social Work

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Social work	(15-04-01) Social work	(L5) Social work	(L5) Social work
	(15-04-02) Childhood and youth studies		
	(15-04-03) Health studies		

Sociology

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Sociology	(15-01-02) Sociology	(L3) Sociology	(L3) Sociology
	(15-01-06) Cultural Studies		

Theology and Religious Studies

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Theology and Religious Studies	(20-02-02) Theology and Religious Studies	(V6) Theology and Religious Studies	(V6) Theology and Religious Studies

Visual Arts

Subject	CAH code (from 2015/16)	JACS code V3 (from 2012/13)	JACS code V2 (from 2007/8)
Art	(25-01-02) Art	(W1) Fine art	(W1) Fine art
Cinematics and Photography	(25-01-04) Cinematics and photography	(W6) Cinematics and photography	(W6) Cinematics and photography
Design Studies	(25-01-03) Design Studies	(W2) Design Studies	(W2) Design Studies
		(W7) Crafts	(W7) Crafts
Others in creative arts and design	(25-01-01) Creative arts and design (non-specific)	(W0) Broadly-based programmes within creative arts and design	(W0) Broadly-based programmes within creative arts and design
	(25-01-05) Others in creative arts and design	(W9) Others in creative arts and design	(W9) Others in creative arts and design

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Registered charity no. 233176

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Published September 2025

doi.org/10.5871/shape/cold-spots-mapping-inequality

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