



# Social Contribution of London's Universities

Summary from report on Qualitative Research

05/05/75

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# Summary

- Participants in this research perceive London Higher Education to make a social contribution – but London HEIs are seen to demonstrate different social contributions in different ways.
- The audience (people in London who interact with University) breaks down into qualitative **lifestage and attitudinal** groups; who are aware of different social contributions.
- Most of this audience is **open to a story about London's difference** and are interested by the idea.
- However, the majority who took part in this research do not tend to think spontaneously about the wide range of University activities, nor do they think of the social contributions that these activities might make, when considering Higher Education in general.
- There is particularly low awareness of **community liaison, business relationships, and knowledge transfer**.
- For communicators like London Higher, there is an opportunity to raise awareness of these ideas and **explain to people all the other things a University does, beyond educating students**.

# 1. Background & project details

# London Higher's remit

London Higher represents a group of 42 Higher Education Institutions in London.

London Higher conducted a quantitative survey last year which revealed that there were gaps in awareness, across the public as a whole, about the wider **social contribution of Higher Education in London.**

“Universities as institutions offering more than education, is a perception held by few among the population.”

YouGov report

# Research objectives

London Higher's hypothesis is that London education offers a wide range of specific social benefits; and that London's institutions contribute to London's life in a range of ways.

Qualitative research was commissioned to benchmark public perceptions of the social contribution of London's HE, in order to provide insight and inspiration for a developing strategy for Higher Education in London.

Research objectives were:

**To explore people's understanding/opinions of the different activities of the HE sector, looking into a specified selection of areas of impact across society**

**To highlight any gaps in perceptions of HEI activity in different communities**

**To suggest ways in which HEI providers can have a positive social impact on communities in the future, suggesting ways forward for HE providers and policymakers**

**To test findings from the online survey**

# Caveats on the use of qualitative research

Group discussions and depth interviews were carried out in Spring 2009 (see next slides for details). In total we spoke with c.65 participants in sessions lasting around 2 hours (shorter for in-depth interviews)

Qualitative research **does not provide statistically representative findings** or evidence of majority views on any of the issues discussed.

Rather, the discussion format gives participants a chance to discuss issues in depth and for analysts to identify what needs and worldviews may lie behind opinion. This type of research is ideal for identifying 'white space' or opportunities for communication.

# Sample: Group discussions

Group	Location (by Underground Zone)	Lifestage	Participation in HEI services in last year	Demographic
1	Inner London	55+, retired and semi-retired	Large amount	ABC1
2	Inner London	60+, retired	Some	C2DE
3	Outer London	19-25, pre-family	Some	C2DE
4	Inner London	19-25, pre-family	None	C2DE
5	Outer London	26-40, with young family	Large amount	C2DE

# Sample: Group discussions

Group	Location	Lifestage	Participation in HEI services in last year	Demographic
6	Inner London	26-40, young family, inc. people recently made redundant	Some	ABC1
7	Outer London	40-60 mix of family at home and empty nesters	Some	ABC1
8	Inner London	40-60 mix of family at home and empty nesters	Large amount	C2DE
9*	Inner London (4 x depth interviews)	18-30, people with physical disabilities, including pre-family & family	None	ABC1
10	Outer (2 x paired depths)	18-30 people with learning disabilities, including pre-family and/or family	Some	C2DE

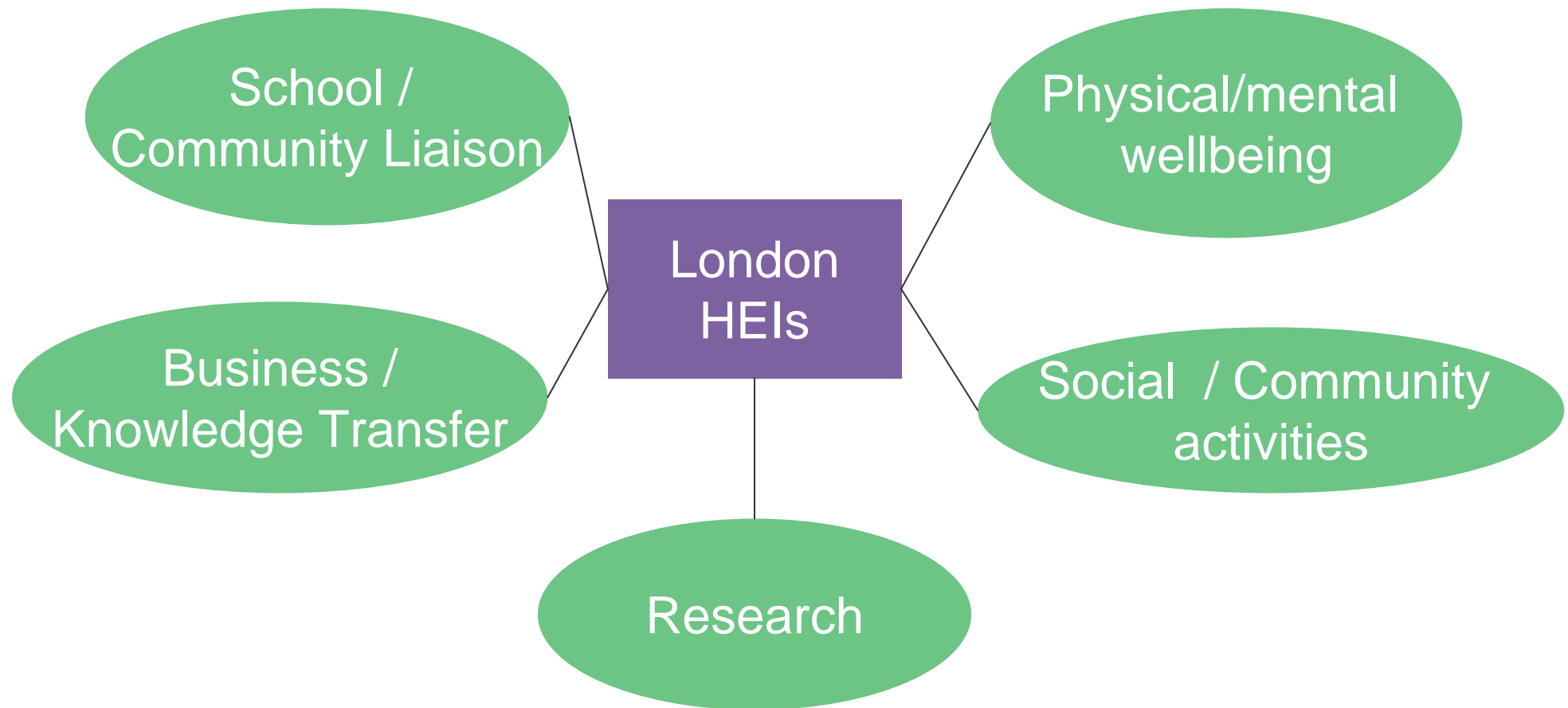
# Stakeholder interviews

Five stakeholder depth interviews were also conducted among Higher Education practitioners with a range of responsibilities involving social contribution of Universities. These interviews were used to inform and refine questions we planned to pose to the public. Individuals included those in HEIs and other sector bodies with responsibility for:

- Artistic and Cultural development
- Corporate Affairs
- Research and Enterprise
- Widening Participation
- Sports

# Topic coverage

*After gathering spontaneous views of London's Universities and what individuals wanted from a University in London, we probed on awareness of Universities' social activity in the following areas.*



## 2. How London's Universities are perceived

## HEI's are classed more by 'type' than locality

Participants spontaneously note differences between 'types' of Universities, but other differences seem more marked than London / non-London.

For instance:-

- **Research led vs Teaching led**  
**Campus vs inner city**
- **Post-92 vs Pre-92** (often considered simply in terms of history or name of institution)
- **Locally focused vs internationally focused** (relating to research or WP agendas perceived to drive forward different institutions)

**There was no spontaneous mention of a 'London difference' that relates to perceptions of all London Universities**

# London's Universities do make a social contribution

Overall, London's Universities are seen to make social contribution in the following areas

- **Creating a more skilled British workforce** (a long term societal impact)
- **Building a multi-cultural society** (a medium term impact, likely to be regional to London)
- **Creating more jobs and improving local amenities** (local impacts, felt in the short term)

**However urban and suburban Universities are imagined to provide these benefits in differing measure.**

# Central London HEI's are thought to drive academic excellence and cultural value

Perceived to be more likely to be research-focused (outer London research-focused Universities tend to be overlooked): making a contribution to academic excellence

Contributing to London's artistic and cultural scene

Multi-cultural and academic space where 'the most talented people in the world can meet'

Busy and up to date, full of hectic people getting the most out of life

But little mention of relationship with business or government

NB: HEIs which are not famous research led institutions, in central London, are felt to offer some of the disadvantages of London life without necessarily contributing to those benefits.

**I was at the British Museum and thought about the cultural and intellectual transfers with the University of London**

55+ retired and semi-retired, inner London

**A different atmosphere between them and the outer Universities, more academic and a more open feeling of something going on.**

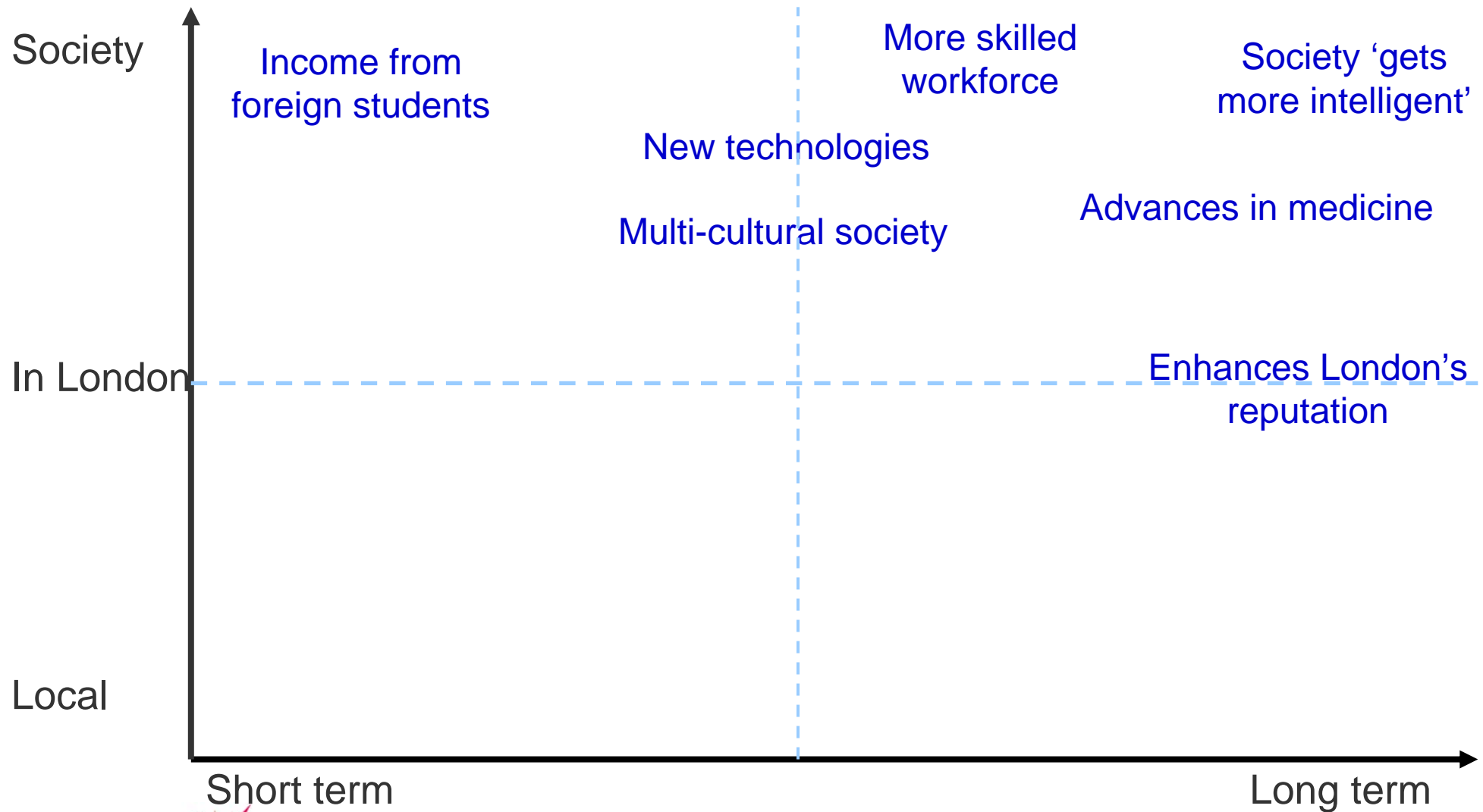
60+ retired, inner London

**You're travelling a long way to get to a football pitch or something, there's no campus.**

20-40 with young family, outer London

**They are renowned, but even the ones that aren't renowned are more expensive –**  
19-25 pre-family, inner London

# In summary, central London unis are imagined to offer long term and societal benefits



# Perceptions of 'outer London Universities'

Locally-focused, working with schools

Visible presence improves area for locals

For local people as well as regional people; educating Britons (not focusing on foreign students) thus increasing country's skill base.

Sporting facilities, part time courses, all felt to be more accessible to local community

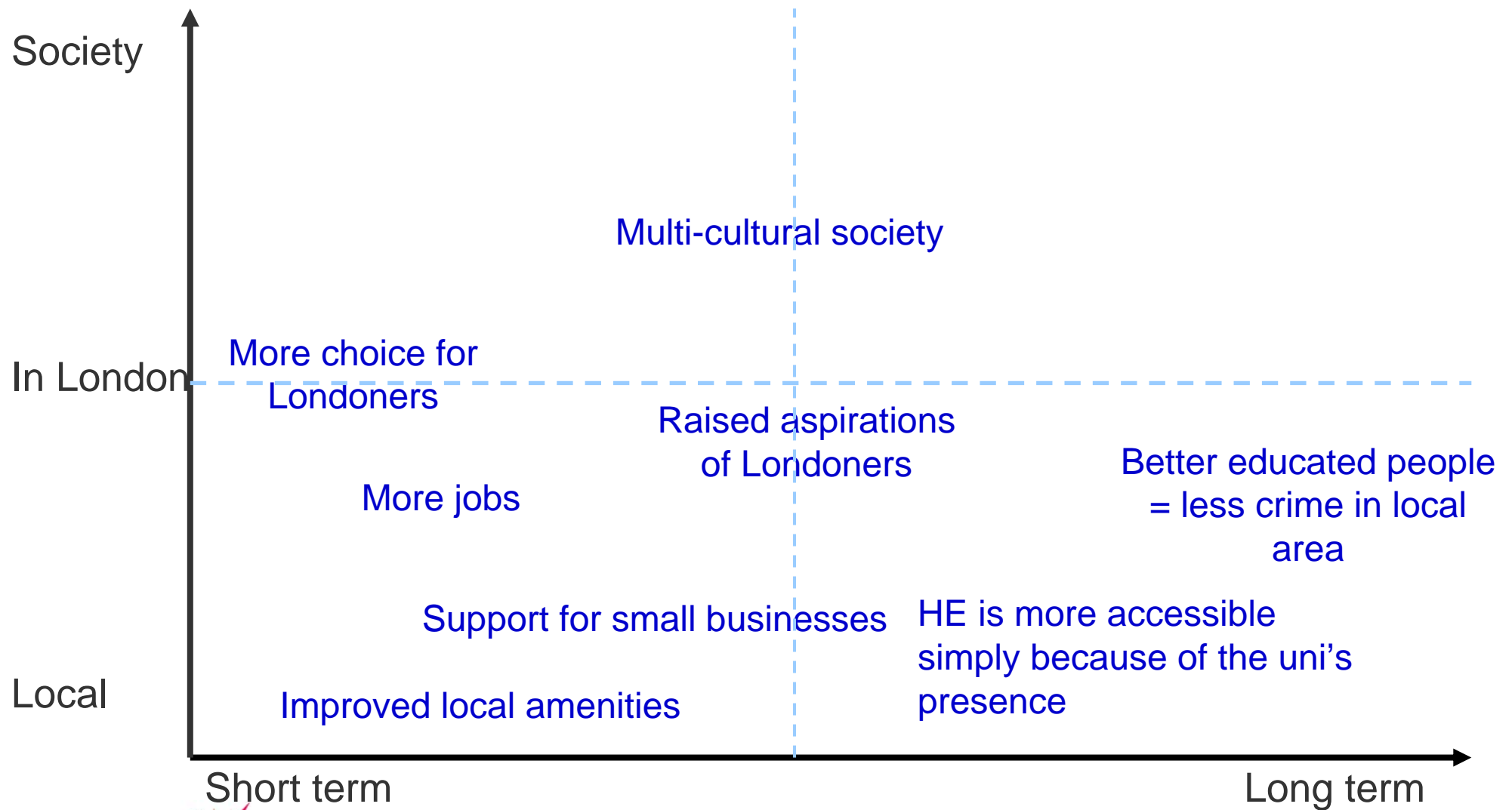
Flexibility to cater for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, diverse group in terms of age and lifestyle.

Again, little mention of longer-term relationships with business.

**The suburbs have a campus feeling  
and can include the local community  
more and offer facilities.**

60+ retired, inner London

# Outer London unis are imagined to offer concrete local benefits



### 3. What Londoners want from Universities

# Feeling 'connected' to a University is not just about official participation

Some **full time** students perceive themselves to have 'none' or 'some' connection with HE : the HEI is evidently only a small part of their life.

I just do my course and go out in the evening, I don't think about the University apart from that.

19-25, pre-family, none, C2DE

Other individuals with **friends/relations working at a University** feel connected, though have no formal academic connection.

I've got a daughter who's a mature student doing a degree ...and I'm quite involved with things that happen there.

40--60, family & empty nesters, some, ABC1

Some **part-time** students feel they have 'lots' of connection: the University symbolises retraining, a new life.

I go to University and I attend evening lectures that are put on.

20-40, young family, some, ABC1

But across all audiences, little consensus about what Universities are supposed to do (whether London's Universities, or any Universities)

**They're just businesses:** A significant minority in each group argue Universities are purely run as businesses and should have no social remit.

**They should provide services to local community:** a minority opinion

**They enrich society:** some feel that Universities do help instigate social change, largely through education – but also believed that there is no way of measuring this impact.

**Their role is to educate people:** For the vast majority, education was seen to be the main focus of Universities and in most groups, there was also an argument that Universities should have no social role beyond this.

**Without a consensus on what the social contribution of University should be, all participants found it hard to agree on how to judge the effectiveness of that social contribution.**

# Many are unaware of public funding for University

*“What?! You mean I’m paying twice – I’m a student and I pay my fees and loans, and I have to pay through my taxes too?”*

26-40, young family, large amount,  
C2DE

**Which may explain why most participants do not automatically assume that Universities ought to make a social contribution...**

**...they assume that Universities are self-funding and autonomous rather than having any responsibility to the public realm.**

Audiences break down into different attitudinal groupings.

Each group is interested in hearing about different aspects of London HE's social contribution.

# 1: Young full-time students – broad educationalists

Focused on two things:

Personal development:

Take part in different aspects of University life for career benefit

Social awareness

Keen for University to remain socially focused not commercial



*“We have societies where you can, one of my friends does it, you can go to schools and mentor young people. And that’s set up through the Uni”*

19-25, pre-family, some, C2DE



Join in with mentoring / volunteering, but tend to associate this with personal development not with the University’s social remit

Tell us that Universities have an important role to play in the community

*Interested in hearing about...*

Activities which benefit students but also wider society, linked to the idea that London’s Universities are plugged in to ‘real life’ rather than a separate, ivory tower education.

Widening participation and schools’ liaison.

## 2: Young full-time students – outcome driven

Focused on completing their University course but disengaged with all other aspects of University life.

*“University is all about the education, the grades and all that, that’s what I want to go there for... I just literally go there to get my course”*

19-25, pre-family, some, C2DE



Narrower view of what University’s role should be

*Interested in hearing about...*

The way that Universities are funded.

Social contributions of Universities on a local London level which can also bring concrete benefits to individual students.

E.g. stories about Universities working with local landlords for affordable housing, or getting involved with local government to make life better for residents (who are also local students).

# 3: Young workers – little involvement

## Little engagement with their local University

- Way in only through current student friends, or family
- And their knowledge is limited to what these contacts know and have told them (e.g. library and sports facilities)
- Though a few also recall secondary school visits from local Universities

### *Interested in hearing about...*

Links between local Universities and local schools, and how schoolchildren benefit.

Specific local benefits to residents which wouldn't be there if a University did not exist – taxpayer funded cheap social and sports activities, for instance.

Education which fits in with the lifestyle of workers in a convenient way.

## 4: Career builders – juggling time

Usually part-time students, attending University to further their career

- Includes **professionals**, whose course fees have been paid by their company
- Also **mature foreign students** (completing MBAs for example)
- Can also include **parents of young children**

This group tend to be the least engaged.

*Interested in hearing about...*

Proactive help from Universities to help them juggle their lives in order to get an education: (e.g. creches, sandwich courses).

The way that a London education fits you for a London job.

## 5: Career changers - idealistic

- Knowledgeable about, and supportive of, University's social agenda
  - Have spent considerable time researching courses prior to enrolling – their way in is through education
  - However, often too busy (with family commitments or full time jobs) to engage fully with University life
  - NB – some can also be parents.

*Interested in hearing about...*

Long term social benefits of University presence in London.

## 6: Second generation parents

- Parents of current University students
  - Gain knowledge about University activities through their children
  - Usually alumni themselves
  - Not engaged personally with Universities but some of the strongest advocates - feel they have an important role in society
  - BUT- mostly unaware of social role of University outside intellectual / educational benefits e.g. Research, Schools Liaison, and Arts/Cultural wellbeing.

*Interested in hearing about...*

Long term social benefits of University such as volunteering, knowledge transfer and business activities

How University have evolved since their day: interested in the idea of a 21<sup>st</sup> century institution with links to business and schools.

## 7: Hobbyists – open-minded

- Retired or semi-retired people who are participating in University to follow an intellectual interest
  - Actively search for information about University activities
  - However, they also tell us that Universities often miss the opportunity to include them in the life of the University.

*“I went to the website just, I think, for childminding, enquired at my local health centre, and the local council as well”*

*60+, retired*

*Interested in hearing about ...*

The ‘University outside the University’ – how Universities can spread knowledge through society.

## 8: Left out?

- Older people
  - With the exception of “hobbyists” and parents, older people have little contact with University and little knowledge of its social impacts.
  - Some are pursuing courses but many feel that they are simply buying a service rather than being ‘part of’ a University.
- Those with learning disabilities
  - Depth interviews found that those with learning disabilities are also left out when it comes to University.
  - They know little about what Universities offer and feel that they have never been encouraged to find out – even those who have been through FE.

## 4. Awareness of different social contributions

# Limited awareness of the range of HEI activity

Across all the different segments and typologies, none are aware of the full range of things Universities do

*E.g. Awareness of community sport facilities does not necessarily lead to awareness of schools liaison or volunteering*



**Provision does not always lead to perception.  
Education remains the most widely known social contribution**

# Beyond education we concentrated on five core themes: 1-3

## 1. Schools liaison

Participants felt strongly that all Universities should have some kind of school liaison presence in every school. There was more awareness of Universities liaison with schools among young people and parents than other audiences BUT not all knew about it.

## 2. Physical and mental wellbeing

Participants found the concept of Universities adding to society's physical and mental wellbeing hard to grasp. When discussing concrete examples such as sports facilities and cultural events, there was general agreement that society benefits from Universities making these things available to the local or London-wide population. However participants were often unaware that some facilities they think of as public, are in fact part of Universities, so may not attribute the value of the social benefits back to HE.

## 3. Business / employment / knowledge transfer

Business links were one of the areas least known about by participants. For example, **no-one** knew about business start-up advice, and only some knew about other areas of knowledge transfer. Employment benefits were most widely talked about; Universities benefit employees of the Universities and provide employees to businesses.

# Beyond education we concentrated on five core themes: 4-5

## 4. Community liaison

It was felt that Universities should interact more with communities, and that communities stand to gain a lot from Universities. However participants had little concrete understanding of what this might involve.

## 5. Research benefits to society

Participants tended to focus on advancements in health provision (e.g. medicine etc). A few also talked about new technologies and business development.

# Different audiences broadly aware of different contributions

<i>Theme</i> →	Schools	Community	Wellbeing	Business	Research
<i>Audience</i> ↓					
Young students	✓		✓	✓	✓
'Outcome' students		✓			✓
Young workers	✓		✓		
Career builders				✓	✓
Career changers			✓		✓
2 <sup>nd</sup> gen parents	✓		✓		✓
Hobbyists			✓		✓
Older / with disabilities					

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Ipsos MORI

**Hothouse**

