

Rebuilding the Universities after the Great War: Ex-Service Students, Scholarships and the Reconstruction of Student Life in England

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Abstract

This article examines a transformative moment in the history of British higher education. After the First World War, student numbers were boosted by the arrival of large numbers of ex-servicemen. Their access to university was facilitated by the government-funded Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Service Students, which provided grants to nearly 28,000 students between 1918 and 1923. The article offers the first sustained historical analysis of the workings and impact of this programme, which constituted a major development in state support for individual students. Our study contextualizes these measures by showing how the war was memorialized at universities and by tracing the changing nature of student life – covering themes such as gender relations and the activities of student societies. Material from case-study institutions in London and the North East of England is used to add specific depth to discussions of the national picture. As a whole, the article makes an original contribution to the wider literature on the First World War's impact on British society.

I

The impact of the Great War was felt strongly at British and Irish universities. As the student periodical of University College London declared in 1919, 'A shadow was thrown over the whole earth, and nowhere did it fall more darkly than on the universities.'¹ Student numbers

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¹ 'Editorial', *University College Magazine*, 1/1 (Dec. 1919), p. 1.

fell as young men volunteered – and after 1916 were conscripted – to fight, while university buildings were appropriated for the war effort.² In August and September 1914, a debate raged in the letters pages of *The Times* about the wartime role of universities: college heads asserted that their institutions would remain open, whereas other contributors sought to exert pressure on all physically fit undergraduates ‘to show the path of duty to their fellow countrymen’ by enlisting immediately.³

Sheldon Rothblatt has described the Great War as ‘a watershed in university-State relations’.⁴ The conflict’s impact on higher education in Britain, France and the United States has been stressed by Tomás Irish, who argues that ‘few institutions’ were as profoundly impacted by the war as universities.⁵ As he notes, governments realized the significance of research and higher education to the national war effort, making the Great War a scientific conflict as well as a military one. The war years and immediate post-war period saw the establishment of institutions and bodies that would shape the university and college sector for many years, including the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (1915), the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (1918), the University Grants Committee (1919) and the Association of University Teachers (1919). Rather than tracing such institutional developments, this article shows how government policy and changes in the student body related to one another. As such, it offers a fresh perspective on a wider development that has been acknowledged in recent scholarship: the war’s role in ‘eroding barriers between the Universities and the rest of society’.⁶

In the years following the Armistice, a large number of ex-servicemen entered higher education. Overall, nearly 17,000 ex-service students attended university institutions in Britain and Ireland during the 1919–20 session, constituting nearly half of the student population.⁷ The generation of ex-servicemen was central to shaping student social service

² Jay Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, VII: *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 3–26; Negley Harte, John North and Georgina Brewis, *The World of UCL* (rev. edn; London, 2018), pp. 153–7.

³ Cyprian Bridge, ‘Universities and the war’, *The Times*, 5 Sept. 1914. See also idem, ‘Fill up the ranks!’, *The Times*, 29 Aug. 1914; A. E. Shipley, ‘Universities and the war’, *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1914; W. Durnford and H. J. Edwards, ‘Cambridge University and the war’, *The Times*, 3 Sept. 1914; T. B. Strong, ‘Universities and the war’, *The Times*, 7 Sept. 1914. On the context of this debate, see Tomás Irish, *The University at War, 1914–25: Britain, France, and the United States* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 23–4.

⁴ Sheldon Rothblatt, ‘The diversification of higher education in England’, in Konrad Jarausch (ed.), *The Transformation of Higher Learning 1860–1930: Expansion, Diversification, Social Opening and Professionalization in England, Germany, Russia and the United States* (Stuttgart, 1982), pp. 131–48, at p. 148.

⁵ Irish, *University at War*, p. 3. See also Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish, ‘Introduction: the academic world in the era of the Great War’, in Chagnon and Irish (eds), *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (London, 2018), pp. 1–18.

⁶ John Taylor, *The Impact of the First World War on British Universities: Emerging from the Shadows* (London, 2018), p. 271.

⁷ The total student population was 36,424. See University Grants Committee, *Returns from Universities and University Colleges in Receipt of Treasury Grant, 1919–20* (London, 1921), p. 2.

in the 1920s and important in forging a national student movement.⁸ Yet academic work on the post-war generation of students remains curiously limited.⁹ While it has been noted that ‘an immediate influx of students after the war’ was ‘boosted by the scholarships for ex-servicemen’, there has been no systematic examination of this phenomenon.¹⁰ The ex-service scheme was the first time that the government provided grants to individual students beyond the field of teacher education, and the volume of awards was unprecedented in British higher education. David Fowler has acknowledged that these measures effected a ‘staggering social transformation in the British university system’.¹¹ Our article constitutes the first major attempt to analyse the origins, workings and consequences of this scheme.

We argue that the introduction of grants for ex-servicemen was a major development in the provision of state funding for students’ higher education. In order to appraise and contextualize this initiative, the article first covers the conflict’s immediate impact on universities. It then traces the genesis and provision of grants for ex-servicemen. The final sections focus on university life itself. As we will show, the war generation’s presence on university campuses raised questions about the conflict’s local memorialization. Moreover, members of this cohort played a major role in the reconstruction of student life.

Our inquiry is multi-layered, covering higher education policy and developments within the universities themselves. The literature on British higher education tends to divide into broader surveys on the one hand and institutional histories on the other, with Oxford and Cambridge attracting particular attention. By contrast, we combine a discussion of national developments with examples from specific institutions in London and the North East of England. With regard to London, our focus is on University College London (hereafter referred to under its present-day acronym UCL) and the London Day Training College (LDTTC, now the UCL Institute of Education). In the North East, we consider the University of Durham, including one of its constituent bodies in Newcastle, Armstrong College. These examples have been chosen to reflect the diversity of

⁸ Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880–1980* (Basingstoke, 2014), esp. pp. 51–65.

⁹ For exceptions, see Daniel Laqua, ‘Activism in the “Students’ League of Nations”: international student politics and the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants, 1919–1939’, *English Historical Review*, 132/556 (2017), pp. 605–37; Tara Windsor, ‘“The domain of the young as the generation of the future”: student agency and Anglo-German exchange after the Great War’, in Chagnon and Irish (eds), *The Academic World*, pp. 163–87; Brewis, *Social History of Student Volunteering*.

¹⁰ Keith Vernon, *Universities and the State in England, 1850–1939* (Oxford, 2004), p. 190. Carol Dyhouse has produced important work on the history of student funding, but as the ex-service scheme was only available to men, it does not feature in the relevant section of her book on women students: Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870–1939* (London, 1995), pp. 27–33. Subsequent surveys do not cover the scheme either – see, for example, Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (London, 2006); Robert Anderson, *British Universities Past and Present* (London, 2006); Taylor, *Impact of the First World War*.

¹¹ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920–c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Modern Movement* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 10.

England's higher education sector. London merits detailed attention as an important site of learning, and we deliberately examine a multi-faculty institution alongside a body that delivered specialized training. Durham offers particularly rich material because, on the one hand, it sought to emulate the model of the ancient universities, and, on the other hand, its Newcastle-based colleges shared many features with the civic universities that sprang up in several British cities during the nineteenth century. Our approach thus offers both breadth and specificity. Placing individual cases within their wider national context, it enables us to draw broader conclusions on the role of higher education in post-war reconstruction. As such, the article sheds fresh light on the making of post-war Britain.

II

How did the war affect universities and their students? In order to identify broader patterns and commonalities, it is necessary to outline the distinct features of our selected institutions. Having been founded in 1826, UCL was the largest college of the University of London. Offering a broad range of courses across six faculties, it had 849 full-time and 1,357 part-time students on the eve of the Great War.¹² The London Day Training College was established in 1902, with the mission to train the teachers for London's expanding school system. The LDTC was created by the London County Council in conjunction with the University of London, and its emergence was connected to national developments. Day training colleges had existed since 1890 and reflected a growing role for universities in teacher education; in this respect, these colleges served as 'the ancestors for the modern university departments of education'.¹³ Moreover, in the wake of the 1902 Balfour Act, local education authorities became actively involved in teacher training and established colleges for this purpose: between 1902 and the outbreak of the Great War, twenty-two such bodies had been founded.¹⁴ By 1914, the LDTC had over 300 students, most of whom studied for a 'four-year course', comprising three years of study at one of the colleges of the University of London, followed by one year of postgraduate training.¹⁵

Although founded six years after UCL, the University of Durham received its Royal Charter four years earlier, in 1832. With its collegiate structure, Durham was modelled after the universities of Oxford and Cambridge – indeed, Robert Anderson has suggested that 'it appealed initially as an Oxbridge for the Northern gentry'.¹⁶ Well into the twentieth

¹² Board of Education, *Reports from those Universities and University Colleges which are in Receipt of Grant from the Board of Education, 1913–14*, II (London, 1915), p. 13.

¹³ Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex*, p. 19. See also Vernon, *Universities and the State*, pp. 127–9.

¹⁴ Harry Judge, Michael Lemosse, Lynn Paine and Michael Sedlak, *The University and the Teachers: France, the United States, England* (Wallingford, 1994), p. 171.

¹⁵ In 1932, the London Day Training College became a central venture of the University of London and acquired a new name, the Institute of Education. It merged with UCL in 2014.

¹⁶ Anderson, *British Universities*, p. 73.

century, higher education in the city of Durham focused on theology, usually with just a few hundred students. Larger numbers attended the university's colleges in nearby Newcastle upon Tyne: in 1913, there were 220 students at the College of Medicine (part of the university from 1852) and 722 students at Armstrong College (founded in 1871).¹⁷ In several respects, Armstrong resembled the 'redbrick' universities that had emerged in the nineteenth century and that, as William Whyte has put it, 'were expected to produce a very different sort of education, to a very different type of student, in a very different kind of environment'.¹⁸ Armstrong's focus was on mining and sciences. As a civic institution, it had been established in association with local business elites and depended on donations from the latter.¹⁹

After the outbreak of war, student numbers declined sharply across Britain, although academic teaching continued. Over 2,800 members of UCL and over 2,500 Durham members served during the war. At the time, the term 'members' covered students, former students, academic staff and other employees, and it included several hundred younger men who had been students or staff members in the decade preceding its outbreak. A high proportion never returned; at least 301 UCL members and 325 Durham members fell.²⁰ The LDTC's situation was somewhat different, linked to its focus on professional training. Teacher shortages meant that timetables were revised to accommodate more time in schools and women trainees were posted to boys' schools for the first time. Yet at the LDTC too, many male students engaged in wartime service. By 1916, only sixteen men remained out of 211 students; a total of three staff members and thirty-seven students died during the conflict.

Over 25 per cent of the full-time student population at both Armstrong College and UCL were women, and among part-time students at UCL, women actually outnumbered men.²¹ Women students contributed to the war effort in manifold ways, as exemplified by UCL's creation of a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) in 1914. Members served in the VAD's St. Pancras-based Ambulance Squad, and some nursed in military hospitals in France. Other women students supported the war effort in munition factories and canteens or by joining a 600-strong group of University of London students who worked on the land during vacations. Meanwhile, at Armstrong College, the fact that some women had left for

¹⁷ Board of Education, *Reports, 1913–14*, I, pp. 135 and 174. The two Newcastle-based colleges merged in 1937 and gained independence as the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1963.

¹⁸ William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities* (Oxford, 2015), p. 134.

¹⁹ However, financial support from local industry was inconsistent, and Sanderson has noted the difficulties caused by a lack of enthusiasm among potential donors: Michael Sanderson, *The Universities and British Industry 1850–1970* (London, 1972), pp. 74–5.

²⁰ Harte, North and Brewis, *World of UCL*, p. 156; C. E. Whiting, *The University of Durham 1832–1932* (London, 1932), p. 222.

²¹ By contrast, the College of Medicine in Newcastle only had thirteen women students on the eve of the war. For these different numbers, see Board of Education, *Reports, 1913–14*, I, pp. 135 and 174; Board of Education, *Reports, 1913–14*, II, p. 13.

wartime service was repeatedly noted in the student press.²² Munitions work was one major destination, which also reflected the prominence of the armaments industry within the North East economy. In December 1916, Armstrong's student magazine announced that a female Armstrong graduate had been killed while serving with the Scottish Women's Medical Unit and had thus become 'the first of our women to give her life in the service of her country'.²³

Universities supported the war effort beyond the service of their members, with the research activities of many academic departments being directed to the war effort. There were also implications for teaching. For instance, UCL welcomed and supported over 120 Belgian refugee students in 1915. Later in the war, the college hosted the London branch of the Khaki University of Canada, a YMCA-supported scheme of higher education for members of the Canadian armed forces serving overseas; over 1,500 took such courses at UCL. Moreover, parts of UCL and several colleges and halls at Durham were appropriated for use as military hospitals. In Newcastle, some of Armstrong's buildings were requisitioned at forty-eight hours' notice: they became the premises for the newly established Northern General Hospital, which provided medical care for 10,000 wounded soldiers. Staff and students with ties to the Medical College played an active role in the hospital's work. Some students found themselves invalided back to their old college in its new guise as hospital.²⁴ Meanwhile, lectures and classes had to be housed elsewhere in Newcastle and various local institutions 'placed their premises at the disposal of the ejected wanderers'.²⁵ By contrast, the LDTC successfully resisted War Office attempts to requisition the buildings for office use, although its premises did provide a temporary home for several other training colleges.²⁶

Following the Armistice, demobilization led to a sharp increase in the student population: both contemporaneous sources and historical accounts refer to a 'flood' or 'influx' of ex-servicemen.²⁷ Many of those who had suspended their studies returned to their alma mater, while others commenced university courses for the first time. By 1922, the overall number of university students in England and Wales had almost doubled

²² 'De Virginibus', *The Northerner*, 15/1 (Dec. 1915), p. 4; 'De Virginibus', *The Northerner*, 16/2 (March 1916), p. 29; 'Editorial', *The Northerner*, 17/2 (March 1917), p. 29.

²³ 'Editorial', *The Northerner*, 17/1 (Dec. 1916), p. 3.

²⁴ See, for instance, the case of former engineering student Henry Clifford Stroud: 'Stroud, Henry Clifford', *Universities at War* website, <<http://memorial.ncl.ac.uk/explore/stroud-henry-clifford>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

²⁵ 'Newcastle notes', *Durham University Journal*, 21/11 (Feb. 1915), p. 231. See also Norman McCord, *Newcastle University: Past, Present and Future* (London, 2006), p. 31.

²⁶ This summary of the LDTC's features draws on Richard Aldrich, *The Institute of Education 1902–2002: A Centenary History* (London, 2002), pp. 57–61.

²⁷ Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1921–1922* (London, 1923), p. 7; Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', p. 23.

from the pre-war figures.²⁸ UCL's Provost described 1919–20 as an *annus mirabilis* in the history of UK universities, and noted that 400 applicants had to be turned away from UCL for lack of space.²⁹ At the LDTC, over 900 students enrolled on courses for 1921–2, three times the pre-war numbers.³⁰

This broader picture must not obscure significant regional variations. By 1921, the University of Durham's student body counted 1,100 students, of whom 900 were based at the Newcastle colleges – no major difference compared to the pre-war years.³¹ This relative stagnation is attributable to specific local constraints. Armstrong College had been poorly compensated by the War Office. Moreover, financial support from business proved elusive as parts of the Tyneside economy struggled after the war: arms manufacturing experienced an immediate decline, later to be followed by problems in the shipbuilding and mining sectors.³² Armstrong College thus found it difficult to accommodate large numbers of new students. Makeshift classrooms had to be set up in auxiliary army huts, some of which remained in use until after the Second World War. An article in *The Northerner* – the college's student magazine – remarked that 'we shall be bulging out of our classrooms and sitting on the window-sills'.³³ Yet space was an issue elsewhere, too: the growth in student numbers at UCL triggered concerns about overcrowding and teaching capacity.³⁴

One nationwide development was the social broadening of the student body. New funding arrangements enabled a wider range of young people to complete secondary schooling and attend university.³⁵ Various private scholarships for ex-servicemen or their children were established across UK universities and colleges, often in memory of a lost son or father. Of these, the Lord Kitchener Scholarship scheme was by far the largest.³⁶ The main measure, however, that boosted student numbers derived from a state initiative: in December 1918, the Board of Education announced the creation of a scheme providing university grants for 'ex-officers and men

²⁸ In the 1913–14 academic year, 12,038 full-time students were enrolled at universities in England and Wales; by 1919–20, this number had risen to 22,302. University Grants Committee, *Returns from Universities and University Colleges*, p. 2.

²⁹ 'Provost's report on the session 1919–1920', *UCL Calendar 1920* (London, 1920), p. xcvi.

³⁰ Aldrich, *Centenary History*, p. 60.

³¹ Nigel Watson, *The Durham Difference: The Story of Durham University* (London, 2007), p. 34.

³² A. W. Purdue, *Newcastle: The Biography* (Stroud, 2012), pp. 270–2.

³³ 'Editorial', *The Northerner*, 19/2 (March 1919), p. 38.

³⁴ 'Provost's report on the session 1919–1920'.

³⁵ There were several pre-war precedents. The Education Act of 1902 gave local authorities the power to offer scholarships for higher education, and by 1911, 464 such grants were awarded each year in England. They were unevenly distributed across the country and benefited more boys than girls. Board of Education, *Interim Report of the Consultative Committee on Scholarships for Higher Education* (London, 1916), p. 33. From 1909, the Board of Education provided grants to students on recognized courses who were preparing to become teachers, provided they signed an undertaking promising to teach for a set period of years.

³⁶ Stephen Heathorn, *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain: Remembrance, Representation and Appropriation* (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 53–4.

of British nationality who served during the War in the Navy, Military, or Air Forces of the Crown', using grant-making regulations under the Fisher Education Act.³⁷ It is the development and workings of this scheme that will be the focus of the next two sections of the article.

III

To understand the introduction of the grants scheme for ex-service students, it is vital to trace ideas and plans that were discussed before and during the war. In 1913, the Board of Education had established a consultative committee to examine the question of scholarships for higher education; sittings were suspended on the outbreak of war but then resumed, owing to the urgency of planning for post-war reconstruction. The interim report contrasted government support for university education in England and Wales unfavourably with Germany and recommended a new scholarship scheme, though this was not introduced until after the war.³⁸ Enjoying great international prestige, German universities had traditionally been a point of reference in British debates on higher education. Keith Vernon has suggested that 'Germany's steadily encroaching economic, imperial and military presence' in the early twentieth century meant that 'the message was brought home with ever more insistence'.³⁹ The conflict lent further urgency to such comparisons.

Another stimulus for discussions about scholarship provision came from the field of adult education. Founded in 1903, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was a pioneering force in this field. Its activities ranged from excursions and exhibitions to summer schools, with university tutorial classes at the very heart of its work.⁴⁰ These classes were delivered by academics, with financial backing from universities and public authorities. From the outset, educational reformers at the University of Oxford were strongly involved in the WEA.⁴¹ The low number of undergraduates during the war raised further questions about educational provision and access to higher education, both at Oxford and elsewhere. In July 1916, leading figures from Oxford and the WEA held a conference at Balliol College which addressed 'the future of education

³⁷ Board of Education, *Board of Education Grant Regulations, No. 5, Made by the Board of Education Under Section 44 of the Education Act, 1918* (London, 1919). See also *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1918-1919* (London, 1920), pp. 82-4.

³⁸ Board of Education, *Interim Report*, p. 71.

³⁹ Vernon, *Universities and the State*, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT, 2010), p. 265.

⁴¹ David Alfred, 'Alfred Mansbridge', in Peter Jarvis (ed.), *Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult and Continuing Education* (2nd edn; London, 2001), pp. 15-30; Lawrence Goldman, 'The first students in the Workers' Educational Association: individual enlightenment and collective advance', in Stephen K. Roberts (ed.), *A Ministry of Enthusiasm: Centenary Essays on the Workers' Educational Association* (London, 2003), pp. 41-58.

and in particular adult education' and inspired subsequent interventions on the question of educational reform.⁴²

The wartime government's interest in such matters remained muted until Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December 1916. Two of Lloyd George's decisions – both of them implemented shortly after he entered office – proved particularly influential for the developments discussed in our article. The first one was the appointment of H. A. L. Fisher as President of the Board of Education. Fisher was a historian and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield; his background in higher education was noted approvingly in university circles. Moreover, he was 'a warm sympathiser of the [adult education] movement from his days in Sheffield'.⁴³ To contemporary observers, Fisher's appointment thus seemed to signal a wider commitment to educational reform.⁴⁴ A second measure that shaped subsequent educational initiatives was Lloyd George's move to reconstitute the Reconstruction Committee, later known as the Ministry of Reconstruction. While this body had a 'dauntingly wide remit', it maintained an Educational Panel that tackled the more specific question of 'educational reconstruction'.⁴⁵ In November 1919, an inquiry by this panel produced a document commonly known as the '1919 Report', a key document in the history of adult education. The historian R. H. Tawney embodied continuities in the debate about scholarships and educational access: he was an active member of the WEA, had served on the Board of Education's consultative committee in 1913 and contributed to the inquiry that generated the 1919 Report.

In preparing its recommendations for 1919, the committee's second interim report (1918) examined education in the army, including cases of higher-level education in the forces. It noted that widespread university extension teaching was carried out under the YMCA Universities Committee, which included representatives from every British university.⁴⁶ Moreover, the interim report highlighted the Overseas Sailor and Soldier Scholarships Scheme, which funded members of overseas forces, principally from the Dominions, to study at British universities or schools of technology. The report also acknowledged a pilot scheme under the Army Council that enabled officers judged unfit for military service to be attached to certain educational institutions.⁴⁷ The committee argued that such programmes were capable of immediate further development, and called for 'a national scheme on a bold scale' to help officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks take higher education courses – a

⁴² F. J. Taylor, 'The making of the 1919 report', *Studies in Adult Education*, 8/2 (1976), pp. 134–48, at p. 135.

⁴³ D. W. Dean, 'H. A. L. Fisher, reconstruction and the development of the 1918 Education Act', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 18/3 (1970), pp. 259–76, at p. 267.

⁴⁴ See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴⁵ Taylor, 'The making of the 1919 report', p. 136.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Reconstruction, *Second Interim Report of the Adult Education Committee: Education in the Army* (London, 1918), para. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 7. With thanks to Nigel Todd for drawing this aspect to our attention.

scheme described as being ‘in the national interest’.⁴⁸ These considerations illustrate the importance attributed to university education as a factor in post-war reconstruction.

It is not clear how far the decision to implement an ex-service scholarship scheme was influenced by this interim report of 1918, but the wartime experiments were important models. The timing is also revealing, as the decision was made on 6 December 1918 – just a week before the General Election in which men who had seen active service could vote from the age of nineteen, rather than the usual age of majority. Lloyd George’s War Cabinet sanctioned a comprehensive programme ‘granting financial assistance to those ex-service men who desired to secure, and were likely to benefit by, further training for their civil careers, but who could not themselves meet the whole of the expenditure involved, and whose parents could not afford to do so’.⁴⁹ The initiative was couched in a language of duty and responsibility towards those who had served their nation, but perhaps a greater motivating factor was the likelihood of post-war skills shortages in the ‘higher walks of commercial, industrial and professional life’. Although the scheme was hailed as the ‘most concentrated endowment of higher education by means of maintenance allowances which this or any other country has ever known’, the expenditure – around £8 million in England and Wales – was considered ‘exceptional’ and justified only by the dire ‘needs of the country after the war’. It was not intended to provide a precedent for greater government subsidy of the costs of higher education.⁵⁰

IV

The Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Service Students provided financial assistance to ex-servicemen, covering tuition fees and living costs during their studies. Initially conceived as a temporary measure, the Board of Education extended it in 1920. The scheme’s bounds were set widely to include university and college degrees as well as technical, professional and commercial courses. Between 1918 and 1923, 27,772 ex-service students in England and Wales received grants.⁵¹ The Scottish Education Department awarded 5,848 grants to ex-service students, and a separate programme was administered by the Ministry of Labour in Ireland.⁵² In England and Wales, the scheme was overseen by the Board of Education, with local advisory boards in each major university centre,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 13.

⁴⁹ Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1921–1922* (London, 1923), p. 5.

⁵⁰ The scheme was managed separately in Scotland, where it cost around £1.3 million.

⁵¹ Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1922–1923* (London, 1924), p. 142.

⁵² ‘Higher Education and Training in Ireland for Demobilised Officers and Men’, 11 March 1919. The National Archives, UK (hereafter: TNA), ED 47/2, *Report of the Committee of Council on Education in Scotland, 1924–1925* (London, 1925), p. 25.

and Education Officers were appointed to each office.⁵³ The scheme was well received by the press.⁵⁴ Concerns were primarily linked to initial delays with its implementation: in May 1919, the *Daily Mail* reported the frustrations of ‘two corporals’ from Derbyshire who were waiting for news about their applications.⁵⁵ One month later, questions were raised in parliament about the programme’s slow implementation.⁵⁶

The Board of Education did not treat the initiative as a form of compensation or reward for war service: rather, it was seen as a means to aid the reconstruction of post-war life.⁵⁷ As a result, grants were only available to those ex-service officers ‘of suitable educational attainments or promise’ who were ‘unable to defray the expenses of their education’.⁵⁸ The awards were, therefore, both means-tested and dependent on satisfactory academic progress. Assistance was refused in 2,771 cases. Approximately 2,000 grants were cancelled due to ‘unsatisfactory attendance, conduct or progress’ and 150 were stopped because of changing financial circumstances.⁵⁹ Some ex-service students found academic study challenging due to a ‘long period of absence from study and civil life’.⁶⁰ Around 3,000 students terminated their course before completion, usually due to finding employment. Overall, the majority of those in receipt of the grant completed their studies within three or four years.⁶¹

By providing funds to students who could not afford tuition fees and maintenance costs, the scheme widened the social composition of the student body. Although only around 2 per cent of the age group attended university or university colleges during the interwar period, this population was more diverse than before the war. Increasing numbers of lower middle-class and working-class students studied for degrees after 1918.⁶² An indication of the class basis of the ex-service cohort is contained in the overall statistics: under half of award recipients had served as officers during the war; some 60 per cent had been non-commissioned officers and ‘other ranks’. H. A. L. Fisher claimed boldly that the students were drawn almost exclusively from families to whom the

⁵³ ‘Training of ex-officers and men of like educational standing in preparation for civil life, association of H.M. inspectors with the work of advice and selection’ (c.1918–1919), 3. TNA, ED 47/1. Main offices were set up in Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Birmingham, Exeter, Cambridge and London while sub-offices opened in Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Oxford, Bristol and Bangor.

⁵⁴ ‘Ex-service officers and men: the higher education scheme’, *Manchester Guardian*, 20 Jan. 1919; ‘Professions and the officer’, *The Times*, 12 May 1919.

⁵⁵ ‘Four months’ delay’, *Daily Mail*, 6 May 1919.

⁵⁶ ‘Ex-service students (grants)’, House of Commons Debate, 30 June 1919, Hansard, vol. 117, cc 645–6W.

⁵⁷ ‘Training of ex-service men in educational institutions, provisional notes on advice and selection’ (1919). TNA, ED 47/1.

⁵⁸ Statutory Rules and Orders, 1920, No. 161. Education, England and Wales. Board of Education (Ex-Service Students, Higher Education) Regulations, 1920.

⁵⁹ Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1922–1923*, p. 142.

⁶⁰ Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1921–1922*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1922–1923*, p. 142.

⁶² Anderson, *British Universities*, pp. 116–20.

idea of university education ‘would have seemed foreign, if not fantastic’.⁶³ More conservatively, the Board of Education estimated that around 25 per cent of the grant holders would not otherwise have been able to attend university.⁶⁴ Research published in 1925 concluded that the ex-service scheme had allowed more students from elementary school backgrounds to reach university in England than was usual.⁶⁵

While a full evaluation of the programme was never conducted, in 1923 the Board of Education published a ‘condensed record’ of some 18,000 grant recipients.⁶⁶ It noted that the scheme had created new opportunities for students with war disabilities to enjoy ‘economically independent careers’. A significant proportion of grant holders had found work in some form of public service: 23 per cent had become school teachers, 4 per cent taught in higher education and 12 per cent worked for hospitals or other public institutions.⁶⁷

While the ex-service scheme contributed to the social broadening of higher education, its provisions only covered male students. At the time, women constituted around a quarter of the overall student population. Female undergraduates had been admitted to University of London degrees since 1878, but they could not graduate from Oxford until 1920 or from Cambridge until 1948.⁶⁸ Despite their myriad contributions to the war effort, women were considered ineligible for ex-service grants.⁶⁹ Although some Board of Education officials did not object in principle to women’s inclusion, the definition of women’s ‘service’ was problematic. The diversity of women’s service – both overseas and on the home front – was considered incomparable to men who had served in the armed forces. Hilton Young – Fisher’s Parliamentary Private Secretary – thought that ‘some very sharp line will have to be drawn in order to define what women can be considered to have rendered [in] services comparable to those of the soldiers and sailors’.⁷⁰ By contrast, ex-servicewomen were eligible for another post-war government scheme, which provided free passage to the colonies and dominions of the British empire.⁷¹

The exclusion of women did trigger some debate. In July 1919, Edith Helen Vane-Tempest-Stewart – Marchioness of Londonderry and founder of the Women’s Legion – called for ‘the extension to ex-service women of the financial assistance and privileges granted to officers and

⁶³ H. A. L. Fisher, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (Oxford, 1940), p. 115.

⁶⁴ Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1921–1922*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ G. S. M. Ellis, *The Poor Student and the University* (London, 1925), p. 21.

⁶⁶ Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1921–1922*, p. 8.

⁶⁷ Data from classified returns of 9,400 students, *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁸ University Grants Committee, *Returns from Universities and University Colleges*, p. 4; Dyhouse, *Students*, p. ix.

⁶⁹ On women’s wartime service, including the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, see Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907–1948* (Abingdon, 2006), pp. 39–81.

⁷⁰ Hilton Young, Board of Education Minutes, 16 Aug. 1919. TNA, ED 47/4.

⁷¹ Lucy Noakes, ‘From war service to domestic service: ex-servicewomen and the Free Passage Scheme 1919–22’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22/1 (2007), pp. 1–27.

men'.⁷² The Board of Education, however, deemed it 'not desirable at the present time to propose the extension to women'.⁷³ Some women nonetheless sought funding, only to have their applications denied.⁷⁴ In November 1919, the issue of grants for ex-servicewomen was raised again, this time in the House of Commons. A question by John Hills – MP for the City of Durham and himself an army major during the war – suggested that claims of members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps or VADs could be treated on a par with those of ex-servicemen. Given the low numbers of eligible women, Hills asked whether the grants scheme might cover ex-servicewomen. The Board of Education, however, described the funds as 'insufficient to allow of such an extension'.⁷⁵

Further debate revolved around conscientious objectors and their eligibility. In November 1919, T. W. Price, Assistant Secretary of the WEA, wrote to the Board on behalf of one of its members, whose son had served in the non-combatant corps during the war. He had been a student at the LDTC when the Military Services Act introduced conscription in Britain in 1916. He was granted exemption on religious grounds in July 1916. However, he was court-martialled in December that year for refusing to handle explosives and placed in the Home Office Scheme for the remainder of the conflict.⁷⁶ This case brought the question of conscientious objectors to the attention of the Board of Education. While the scheme was open to those who had served in the non-combatant corps – regardless of whether they had objected to combat service – it did not consider those who had been court-martialled as having satisfied the 'service' requirement.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding its limitations, the ex-service scheme had a wide reach. Students in receipt of a grant between 1918 and 1923 took approved courses at over 300 institutions in England and Wales, and also at some overseas institutions. The most popular programmes for ex-service students were in the field of engineering and technology, followed closely by teacher training.⁷⁸ Taken together, the largest number of grants (1,857) went to recipients at the various colleges of the University of London, signalling its growing importance during and after the Great War. However, in 1919–20, the University of Liverpool hosted almost as many grant recipients as the ancient universities. There were also significant numbers of ex-service students in Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds. At both of our largest case-study institutions, grant recipients

⁷² The Marchioness of Londonderry to the Board of Education, 24 July 1919. TNA, ED 47/4.

⁷³ Hilton Young to the Marchioness of Londonderry, 15 Aug. 1919. TNA, ED 47/4.

⁷⁴ Board of Education Minutes, 16 Aug. 1919. TNA, ED 47/4.

⁷⁵ Questions and Answers, House of Commons, 25 Nov. 1919. TNA, ED 47/5.

⁷⁶ T. W. Price to S. H. Wood, 3 Nov. 1919. TNA, ED 47/4.

⁷⁷ Board of Education Minutes, 6 Nov. 1919. TNA, ED 47/4. On conscientious objectors, see, for example, Lois Bibbings, *Telling Tales About Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service during the First World War* (Manchester, 2011); Cyril Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: The Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001).

⁷⁸ Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the Year 1919–1920* (London, 1921), p. 83.

amounted to a large share of full-time male undergraduates: 57 per cent at Armstrong College and 43 per cent at UCL.⁷⁹ A breakdown of the awards made to students at the universities and university colleges by 1920 features in Figure 1, which excludes 4,620 students studying to be teachers at training colleges, including the LDTC.

Many universities made further provisions for war veterans, for instance shortened courses and the opportunity to drop a subject. At Oxford, for example, war service counted towards the university's residence requirement.⁸⁰ Charles Judd, an ex-service student who became the first honorary secretary of the National Union of Students (NUS), was granted a war concession, meaning that he did not need to pass in Latin to graduate.⁸¹ Judd took the 'four-year' course, including a BA Arts at UCL and professional training at the LDTC. Like students on similar courses, Judd received an annual maintenance allowance of £120 and was eligible to apply for occasional book grants of £5. These grants were quite widespread, as evidenced by hundreds of student letters that have been preserved in university archives.⁸²

Despite initial concerns about the pressures for universities, the response to the arrival of ex-service students was largely positive. *The Times* wrote approvingly of the experiment, concluding that initial misgivings about whether such students would submit to university discipline were unfounded, and suggesting that their keenness to learn was having a positive impact on the whole student body.⁸³ At the LDTC, the return of men from France was praised for reinvigorating both the social and academic life of the college.⁸⁴ In 1920, Theodore Morison – Principal of Armstrong College – noted that 'the scheme . . . is fulfilling its primary purpose of replenishing the supply of well educated and well trained men for the higher walks of commercial, industrial and professional life'.⁸⁵ He went on to comment on the positive effect that ex-service students were having on undergraduate life. According to evidence provided by the universities, the Board of Education triumphantly reported in 1921 that 'the presence of older men who had been through the difficulties, anxieties and responsibilities of war was having a marked and very wholesome effect on the younger generation of students by adding an intensity and seriousness to undergraduate life'.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Calculations based on numbers of scholarship recipients and enrolled students. See Board of Education, *Report . . . for the Year 1919–1920*, p. 84; University Grants Committee, *Returns from Universities and University Colleges*, p. 4; *University College Calendar 1920–21* (London, 1920), p. 384.

⁸⁰ Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', p. 23.

⁸¹ Charles Judd, student record card, IE/1/STU, UCL Special Collections. With thanks to Kathryn Hannan for her help with the LDTC archive.

⁸² See, for example, IE/STU/C/31, UCL Special Collections.

⁸³ 'Keeness at Oxford', *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1919.

⁸⁴ 'The Men Return', *Londinian* (Easter, 1919), p. 6.

⁸⁵ T. Morison to the Board of Education, 20 July 1920. TNA, ED 47/16.

⁸⁶ 'Higher Education of Ex-Service Students', p. 7.

| Institution | No. of students in receipt of award |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Total | 12,426 |
| Cambridge University | 1,726 |
| Oxford University | 1,519 |
| University of Liverpool | 1,475 |
| University of Birmingham | 801 |
| Victoria University of Manchester | 705 |
| University of Leeds | 694 |
| King's College, London | 619 |
| Imperial College of Science and Technology, London | 492 |
| Nottingham University College | 466 |
| University College, London | 465 |
| Manchester College of Technology | 454 |
| University of Sheffield | 447 |
| Aberystwyth, University College of Wales | 439 |
| Cardiff University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire | 353 |
| Armstrong College, Newcastle upon Tyne | 350 |
| Bristol Merchant Venturers Technical College | 275 |
| London School of Economics and Political Science | 243 |
| University of Bristol | 224 |
| Bangor University College of North Wales | 210 |
| East London College | 177 |
| Southampton University College | 142 |
| London University School of Journalism | 104 |
| Reading University College | 46 |

Figure 1 Awards made to students in universities and university colleges by 1920.
Source: Board of Education, *Report of the Board of Education for the year 1919–1920* (London, 1921), p. 83.

However, the mixing of older war veterans with school leavers was not without tensions. David Fowler has referred to the presence of ‘three generations’ at universities in the early 1920s: the war generation, the post-war generation who had been at school during the war and the pre-war generation of lecturers and dons. As he notes with regard to Cambridge, the student body was ‘severely fractured: by age, war experience, and temperament’, for the younger students largely ignored the older ones, whom they viewed as too earnest and diligent.⁸⁷ A look at our case-study institutions reveals a similarly complex picture. At Armstrong College, Morison, like other university leaders, found it difficult to understand ‘the temper of an ex-service student body’.⁸⁸ The average age of ex-service students was higher than that of other students. More than 10 per cent of grant recipients were married, some with children, and thus eligible to claim support for their dependents.⁸⁹ A debate at Durham Union Society in autumn 1919 highlighted anxieties about ‘the presence of so many married undergraduates in the University’. A motion expressing ‘apprehension’ about this matter was ultimately defeated, with speakers criticizing the rejection of married students – mostly ex-servicemen – as ‘unpatriotic’.⁹⁰ At UCL, there were indications of divisions, too. For example, a mock election held in February 1921 saw a student standing as the ‘ex-service’ candidate – he came in second place to the winning ‘Coalition-Unionist’.⁹¹ Such examples highlight the need for a closer examination of student life after the war. To this end, we will first consider the way in which the conflict was commemorated and then investigate the revival of student life between 1919 and 1923.

V

Tomás Irish has described university campuses as ‘melancholy places’ in the early 1920s.⁹² Staff and students were regularly reminded of those who had not returned from war, as universities and colleges honoured the fallen through commemorative albums and permanent memorials. The percentage of those killed who came from the universities was higher than the death rate of the British armed forces in general, reflecting the high proportion of university-educated officers.⁹³ At both UCL and Durham,

⁸⁷ Fowler, *Youth Culture*, p. 40.

⁸⁸ Ernest Marsden Bettenson, *The University of Newcastle upon Tyne: A Historical Introduction, 1834–1971* (Newcastle, 1971), p. 41.

⁸⁹ Statutory Rules and Orders, 1920, No. 161. Education, England and Wales. Board of Education (Ex-Service Students, Higher Education) Regulations, 1920.

⁹⁰ Durham Union Society, Programme Michaelmas Term, 1919. Durham University Special Collections, UND/GE1/AB3; Bertie Dockerill, ‘“Forgotten voices”: the debating societies of Durham and Liverpool, 1900–1939’, in Jodi Burkett (ed.), *Students in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2018), pp. 101–28, at p. 114.

⁹¹ Debate held on 17 Feb. 1921, ‘Minute Book of UCL Debating Society 1908–1926’, MS Add 78, UCL Record Office.

⁹² Irish, *University at War*, p. 161.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

around 12 per cent of those who served died.⁹⁴ From the outbreak of war, there was a strong impulse to collect information about those serving in the forces, which ‘spoke of the sense of rupture in the life of the university community’.⁹⁵ A Christmas card sent to every serving member of UCL in 1915 was one attempt to maintain these bonds. Early in the war, the Provost of UCL began collecting photographs of staff and students killed in action, which later formed the basis for a commemorative album and a display of portraits in the college’s cloisters.⁹⁶ The images were mostly studio portraits of students or former students in uniform, some taken in the field with men posing outside their tents. Such photographic memorials were relatively rare in universities.⁹⁷ Catherine Moriarty argues that collections of photographs served to remind people ‘of the humanity of the dead’; and we might read the UCL display in the 1920s as a temporary shrine.⁹⁸

Lists of those who had been killed in action were a regular feature of university and college publications from the start of the conflict. At the end of the war most colleges tried to compile comprehensive lists of those who had served and those who had died.⁹⁹ The University of London, for example, published a 255-page *War List* in May 1918 of all teachers, graduates and matriculated students who were serving or had served in the armed forces.¹⁰⁰ Durham published a supposedly ‘definitive’ war roll in 1920 and *The Northerner* issued its roll of honour in 1922.¹⁰¹ Given the complexity of compiling the rolls and the partial information available, however, such lists were rarely, if ever, definitive.¹⁰² At UCL, for example, a broad approach to inclusion was taken, which had the effect of bolstering the numbers, with the roll of honour including a female nurse, and several members who died while on civilian war service or in accidents, and deaths continued to be counted well into 1919. At LTDC, the war memorial included the names of two students who had not actually died.¹⁰³

Permanent war memorials were more of a challenge, and, as in the wider country, economic reality curtailed some of the loftier aspirations.¹⁰⁴ In 1917, UCL established a committee to prepare a joint war memorial for the college, medical school and hospital. In 1919, it announced its

⁹⁴ The death rate was higher at certain universities. At Oxford, it rose to 20 per cent, according to Laurence W. B. Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History* (Oxford, 2016), p. 431. John Taylor speaks of 18 per cent at Cambridge, 17 per cent at Manchester and Glasgow and 15 per cent at Edinburgh: Taylor, *Impact of the First World War*, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Irish, *University at War*, p. 157.

⁹⁶ Raymond Wilson Chambers (ed.), *UCL Roll of Honour* (London, 1921).

⁹⁷ Known examples include memorials at Glasgow School of Art and Trinity College Dublin.

⁹⁸ Catherine Moriarty, ‘“Though in a picture only”: portrait photography and the commemoration of the First World War’, in Gail Braybon (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–18* (New York, 2004), pp. 30–47, at p. 40.

⁹⁹ Irish, *University at War*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁰ *University of London War List* (London, 1918).

¹⁰¹ ‘Armstrong College Roll of Honour’, *The Northerner*, 22/2 (Jan. 1922), pp. 67–70.

¹⁰² See, for example, Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, p. 18.

¹⁰³ With thanks to Barry Blades for this information.

¹⁰⁴ See also examples in Irish, *University at War*, p. 158.

intention to raise £30,000, which was to be used for the construction of a Great Hall as well as memorial tablets and a men's hall of residence in Ealing.¹⁰⁵ At Armstrong College, the Board of Professors set the even more ambitious target of raising £40,000, as 'we must not forget to show our gratitude to the many who will not return', aiming to build a new library with these funds.¹⁰⁶ It was not until April 1923 that a 'handsome marble tablet' commemorating 223 students and former students was unveiled 'in a conspicuous place' at the main college entrance.¹⁰⁷ The new library was eventually built in 1926 as part of wider reconstruction and expansion at Armstrong College.¹⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, it took several years for schemes to come to fruition, and in many cases the retrenchment of the early 1920s meant that plans had to be modified, scaled back or quietly dropped. It was pragmatic to create memorials that also functioned as necessary university expansion or reconstruction. These delays could cause frustration. In February 1920 Durham's student magazine, *The Sphinx*, bemoaned the delays to the university's war memorial, urging 'away with this dilly dallying' and proposing a new union building as a more fitting memorial.¹⁰⁹ However, in Durham, as in other collegiate universities, there was to be no university memorial. Individual colleges created their own war memorials, which were generally situated in college chapels: 'Each college mourned their own', as Jay Winter wrote of Oxford.¹¹⁰ In March 1924, for example, the Bishop of Durham dedicated the memorial at St Chad's College, a wooden tablet decorated with gold in the style of a fifteenth-century reredos.¹¹¹ At UCL, memorial tablets were unveiled in the Slade School of Art and the Medical School on Armistice Day 1921. Meetings were held in the 'temporary' Great Hall from 1920, but its refitting and reopening was delayed until the College celebrated its centenary in 1926. Set in international comparison, however, the delays were minor. Memorials in the United States were more elaborate and therefore took longer to build: neither Cornell's nor Harvard's memorials were completed until 1931.¹¹²

Universities and colleges also developed rituals by which the war dead were remembered. On 11 May 1919, a Services Dinner was held at Durham for sixty ex-servicemen, including students from England, Scotland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who had served in the Army, alongside a member of the French Red Cross. While the tongue-in-cheek menu served up 'Cox Tale Soup', 'Fray Bentos' and 'Toot Sweet' pudding, the event was an opportunity to mark the 'noble spirit' of Durham's 'sons'. A toast was raised to 'Our Fallen Comrades' and 'drunk

¹⁰⁵ Harte, North and Brewis, *World of UCL*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ 'Armstrong College war memorial', *The Northerner*, 19/2 (March 1919), pp. 39–40.

¹⁰⁷ 'Armstrong College memorial', *Evening Chronicle*, 23 April 1923.

¹⁰⁸ Whiting, *The University of Durham*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁹ 'Editorial', *The Sphinx*, 8/2 (Feb. 1920), p. 19.

¹¹⁰ Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', p. 22.

¹¹¹ 'St Chad's College memorial', *Durham County Advertiser*, 7 March 1924.

¹¹² Irish, *University at War*, p. 161.

in silence', to honour those who had not returned.¹¹³ At UCL, staff and students gathered in front of the portico for an annual Armistice Day event that included the public reading of the Roll of Honour. Moreover, UCL students faced everyday reminders of the war dead for as long as the Cloisters displayed photographs of the fallen. Such examples highlight the 'diverse remembering landscape' that characterized the period.¹¹⁴

VI

The need to remember and commemorate the dead did not mean that post-war university life was altogether solemn. Social activities such as dances and rags emerged as prominent features of interwar university life.¹¹⁵ Moreover, observers noted 'the enormous multiplication of [student] societies'.¹¹⁶ This development was spearheaded by ex-service students, as examples from our case-study institutions illustrate. By the early 1920s, Armstrong College and UCL each had more than thirty student societies, as well as a range of sports teams and clubs. Notably, in November 1920, a University College and Hospital Ex-Service Students' Association was formed to 'unite all students who had served in the forces to carry on in College that spirit of comradeship and *esprit des corps* which exists in the Services'.¹¹⁷ In 1921, *The Northerner* acknowledged the distinct contribution made by ex-service students to the revival of student life:

This session will always stand out in College history with a certain individuality of its own. It has witnessed . . . the complete re-establishment of all student activities so rudely interrupted by the war. All men and women now owe a deep debt of gratitude to that select band of enthusiasts, mostly men of pre-war academic experience, who have given so generously of their time, energy, and knowledge for the common service.¹¹⁸

Societies allowed students to build social contacts yet, according to a contributor to *The Northerner*, they also facilitated the 'free interchange of ideas'.¹¹⁹ With universities hosting 'men of every shade of opinion in religion, political and artistic thought', it was 'the aim of the societies to provide a means of bringing these into the light of informed criticism'. At UCL, the proponent of a 'Practical Idealists' Association' made a similar point. Noting the plethora of new societies, he warned students against remaining within like-minded groups of peers and emphasized the value

¹¹³ 'Durham University news', *Durham University Journal*, 22/3 (July 1919), p. 77.

¹¹⁴ Moriarty, 'Though in a picture only', p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Dyhouse, *Students*, pp. 190–6; idem, *No Distinction of Sex*, pp. 211–15; Brewis, *Social History of Student Volunteering*, pp. 68–9 and 83–6.

¹¹⁶ Walter Seton, 'Before the war – and after', *University College Magazine*, 3/2 (March 1924), p. 62.

¹¹⁷ 'University College and Hospital Ex-Service Students' Association', *University College Magazine*, 1/5 (March 1921), p. 265.

¹¹⁸ J. M. Footitt, 'Editorial', *The Northerner*, 21/5 (June 1921), p. 155.

¹¹⁹ 'College societies and their purposes (mainly for freshers)', *The Northerner*, 21/1 (Nov. 1920), p. 7.

of open-minded exchange: ‘In the welter of conflicting opinions, schemes and societies, we feel a fundamental unity, a Will to Serve, a noble primary impulse.’ Unity would emerge ‘when people of such opposed outlook meet and discuss in a friendly and informal way’ which, in turn, would herald ‘the great Spirit of the Age . . . and it alone can bring about the reconstruction we need’.¹²⁰

This emphasis on hearing different views helps to explain the revival of the debating societies at Durham, Armstrong College, the LDTC and UCL. Bertie Dockerill has noted that ‘the initial post-war debates at both Liverpool and Durham were characterised by high-minded idealism, altered political priorities, spirited enthusiasm, and record attendances’.¹²¹ Moreover, several new or revived societies at Armstrong College focused on current affairs. Students established a Political Society, while members of the Historical Society contemplated contemporary questions such as ‘Present Problems with Democracy’.¹²² A newly established Toynbee Society continued the work of the pre-war settlement movement alongside other charitable activities.¹²³ Meanwhile, UCL students participated in various political activities under the auspices of the University of London Union, which had been set up in 1921 and whose first president, Ifor Evans, was an LDTC student and ex-serviceman.

Several societies championed the rebuilding of international bonds in the wake of the war. At UCL, a new German Society was formed in the first full session after the war and in February 1920, Lord Robert Cecil addressed a meeting of over 2,000 students in London, leading to the establishment of a University of London League of Nations Union (LNU) branch.¹²⁴ Armstrong College also had an LNU branch whose activities involved collaborative ventures with the Historical Society and the Christian Union.¹²⁵ Moreover, the Durham Union Society attracted large audiences for its debates on issues relating to war debt, disarmament, the League of Nations, nationalism and internationalism.¹²⁶ This commitment to internationalism was part of the wider landscape of student activism in the 1920s – not only in Britain but also elsewhere in Europe.¹²⁷

The case of Durham student James Horstead (1898–1989) illustrates the manifold extracurricular activities that members of the war generation engaged in. Horstead had served in the Royal Garrison Artillery and

¹²⁰ F. T. Peirce, ‘The Practical Idealists’ Association’, *University College Magazine*, 1/6 (June 1921), p. 347.

¹²¹ Dockerill, ‘Forgotten voices’, p. 114.

¹²² A. E. Kirtley, ‘Historical Society’, *The Northerner*, 19/3 (July 1919), p. 80.

¹²³ Francis Binks, ‘Toynbee Society’, *The Northerner* 20/2 (March 1920), p. 64.

¹²⁴ ‘League of Nations meeting’, *University College Magazine*, 1/2 (March 1920), p. 85. The LNU’s role in interwar British society has been reappraised in Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c. 1918–1948* (Manchester, 2011).

¹²⁵ G. W. Mackay, ‘League of Nations Union: Armstrong College Branch’, *The Northerner*, 21/2 (Dec. 1920), p. 78; idem, ‘The League of Nations Union’, *The Northerner*, 21/4 (March 1921), p. 151.

¹²⁶ Dockerill, ‘Forgotten voices’, p. 114.

¹²⁷ Laqua, ‘Activism in the “Students’ League of Nations”’, p. 606.

fought at Passchendaele in 1917. In 1919, he arrived at St Chad's College, Durham, where he took up a maths scholarship. Horstead threw himself into college life, becoming an active member of the cricket, rugby and rowing teams. He was heavily involved in student politics – serving as president of the Union Society – and in the Student Christian Movement, carrying out missionary work in nearby Gateshead and Stockton. *The Sphinx* reported that 'there is no form of undergraduate activity in which he is not interested' and emphasized his service on student representative bodies.¹²⁸ After graduating with a double First, Horstead was ordained in 1924 and became Principal of Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, which was affiliated to Durham University. He went on to become Archbishop of West Africa.

Shifting gender dynamics were another significant effect of both the war and the subsequent arrival of new cohorts of students. Prior to 1914, student societies and student magazines tended to be segregated along gender lines.¹²⁹ The situation changed during the war years, as women temporarily outnumbered men in the lecture theatres and maintained a range of extracurricular activities.¹³⁰ Some of them were disheartened when male students resumed their dominant position after the war. In 1920, a female contributor to Armstrong's student magazine expressed her misgivings at this apparent reversal of fortunes:

The *Northerner*, too, is passing into the hands of the men, who have far outnumbered the woman as contributors to this number, at any rate. Why should this be? Cannot the women who managed to carry on a whole *Northerner* during the war write at least a fair share now.¹³¹

In terms of gender relations at universities, the interwar period presents us with an ambivalent picture. The 1920s and 1930s saw the development of more mixed spaces and greater cooperation between men and women on campus.¹³² Yet the immediate post-war years hardly amounted to a period of unequivocal progress. Carol Dyhouse has recorded several examples of resentment displayed by returning men who thought that women had taken over 'their university', and has argued that in some ways sexual divisions deepened after 1918.¹³³ At UCL, the outdated 'passing in rule', which required an additional character reference for women students, was finally abandoned in 1919, but it is clear from a cartoon in the *University College Magazine* satirizing the supposed five types of 'flapper' that

¹²⁸ 'Man of mark, J.L.C. Horstead B.A. (Univ.)', *The Sphinx*, 8/7 (March 1922), p. 110.

¹²⁹ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 470; Christine Myers, *University Coeducation in the Victorian Era: Inclusion in the United States and the United Kingdom* (New York, 2010), p. 3.

¹³⁰ 'Newcastle notes', *Durham University Journal*, 21/16 (Dec. 1916), p. 358.

¹³¹ 'De Virginibus', *The Northerner*, 20/2 (March 1920), p. 38.

¹³² Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 208; Brewis, *Social History of Student Volunteering*, p. 73; Sonja Levsen, 'Constructing elite identities: university students and the consequences of the Great War in Britain and Germany', *Past and Present*, 198 (2008), pp. 147–83, at p. 164.

¹³³ Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?*, p. 241.

women remained a curiosity on campus.¹³⁴ In 1920, ex-service students were closely involved in an attempt to curtail the admission of women for medical training at University College Hospital.¹³⁵

With regard to social spaces, the situation was ambivalent, too. As early as 1918, student leaders at UCL decided to create a joint common room, yet space constraints meant that it took several years before a 'mixed lounge' opened.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, Armstrong College continued to maintain separate men's and women's common rooms. Even after the opening of the new Newcastle students' union building in October 1924, men and women only shared the Dining Room and 'Bun Room'. The Women's Union was confined to the north-west wing and the 'remainder of the building is for the use of men'.¹³⁷ That said, the new building provided the Newcastle colleges with space for meetings, debates and dances, as well as offices for societies, the Athletic Union and the Students' Representative Council (SRC).¹³⁸

Both Armstrong College and UCL continued to have separate union societies for men and women. However, other bodies allowed for greater cooperation between student leaders of both sexes. At Armstrong, the SRC comprised male and female representatives from the faculties and societies. In turn, Armstrong's SRC sent two male and two female delegates to the Durham University SRC.¹³⁹ In 1923, it was decided that each faculty should also elect a male and female SRC representative, but the low numbers of female students in Pure Science, Engineering and Agriculture meant that no women were returned and the SRC remained male-dominated.¹⁴⁰ At UCL, proposals for greater collaboration between the all-male Union Society and the Women's Union Society had been put on hold during the war. In 1919, however, 'another generation of students brought to the solution of the problem a sympathy and understanding born of wider experiences and riper years', when they established the mixed-sex Inter-Union Standing Committee.¹⁴¹ Apart from coordinating activities between the two union societies, the Inter-Union Committee represented UCL at the University of London Union and the NUS.

The intersection between different levels of student activism is exemplified by the case of Violet Anderson, who had been a successful Botany student at UCL. In 1921–2, she served as President of the UCL Women's Union Society and was a moving force on the Inter-Union

¹³⁴ Harte, North and Brewis, *World of UCL*, p. 152; 'UCL flappers', insert in *University College Union Magazine*, 7/5 (March 1918).

¹³⁵ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 141.

¹³⁶ V. R. Bairamain, 'Does the Union Society need reform?', *University College Magazine*, 1/6 (June 1921), p. 307.

¹³⁷ 'S.R.C. notes', *The Northerner*, 25/2 (Jan. 1925), p. 53; 'The University Union at Newcastle-upon-Tyne', *The University*, No. 6 (Winter 1925), p. 18.

¹³⁸ NUS, 'Opening of the union', *The University*, No. 6 (Winter 1925), p. 20.

¹³⁹ 'S.R.C. notes', *The Northerner*, 20/2 (March 1920), p. 61.

¹⁴⁰ 'S.R.C. notes', *The Northerner*, 24/3 (Nov. 1923), p. 30.

¹⁴¹ Violet E. Anderson, 'In search of El Dorado', *University College Magazine*, 2/4 (Dec. 1922), p. 160; Harte, North and Brewis, *World of UCL*, p. 151.

Committee. Moreover, in the preceding academic year, she had travelled to Prague, attending a congress of the International Confederation of Students that brought together representatives from national unions of students. British engagement with the International Confederation proved important as it precipitated the formation of the NUS in England and Wales.¹⁴²

The formation of the NUS in 1922 was the crowning achievement of the ex-service student generation.¹⁴³ If the trend for cross-institutional collaboration by senior leaders (marked by the formation of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals) and university lecturers (in the development of the Association of University Teachers between 1917 and 1919) was a specifically wartime phenomenon, then the NUS had a distinctly post-war flavour. Its first president was King's College student Ivison Macadam, who had served in the City of Edinburgh Royal Engineers, where he earned an OBE for his service in the North Russian Expeditionary Force. Shaped by his wartime experiences, Macadam supported the international work of the student movement, and the early NUS made student tours and exchanges a priority.¹⁴⁴ A second important figure was Charles Judd, President of the LDTC Union Society in 1922–3 and – as previously noted – a recipient of a grant for ex-servicemen. In 1923, Judd became the first Honorary Secretary of the newly formed NUS – a capacity in which, according to his student record card, 'he . . . not only displayed quite remarkable energy and tact, but has done work of international importance in bringing together in brotherly association University students all over Europe'.¹⁴⁵ After graduation, Judd served as the Secretary of the British Universities League of Nations Society between 1924 and 1929.¹⁴⁶

When members of the war generation began to leave the universities, it affected student life. In 1922, contributors to *The Northerner* deplored the lack of 'College Spirit' among younger students and commented on the departure of the ex-service generation in this context.¹⁴⁷ These concerns highlight a wider point: for the ex-service students, an active contribution to the work of student societies could be construed as another form of service. The reconstruction of student life certainly reflected the vigour and organizational capabilities of this generation.

¹⁴² J. L. Lush and Violet L. Anderson, 'Prague', *University College Magazine*, 1/6 (June 1921), p. 301.

¹⁴³ Ivison S. Macadam, *Youth in the Universities: A Paper on National and International Students' Organisations* (London, 1922).

¹⁴⁴ Brewis, *Social History of Student Volunteering*, pp. 61–2; Mike Day, *National Union of Students 1922–2012* (London, 2012), p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Judd, student record card.

¹⁴⁶ Derek Heater, *Peace Through Education: The Contribution of the Council for Education in World Citizenship* (London, 1984), p. 53.

¹⁴⁷ 'What's wrong with the societies?', *The Northerner*, 22/4 (May 1922), p. 153.

VII

In his 2015 address to the Royal Historical Society, Peter Mandler argued that ‘access to higher education was umbilically connected to rising aspirations and attainments in secondary education, and thus implicated in the democratic discourse that governed secondary education’.¹⁴⁸ Mandler’s discussion concentrated on the period from the 1960s onwards. At first sight, the measures adopted in the aftermath of the Great War seem to contrast with such later developments: after all, the post-war Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Service Students was less framed in terms of democratic rights than it was rooted in ideas of ‘nationhood’ and ‘service’. Yet, while based on seemingly traditional categories, the initiative created major participatory opportunities. H. A. L. Fisher himself later suggested that when the history of education in England came to be written, ‘no single step will be found to have contributed more effectively to the spread of the university idea’ than the ex-service scheme.¹⁴⁹ It is ironic, then, that most historians have neglected this important programme.

Significantly, the grants scheme paved the way for a wider rethinking of student financing. Writing after the closure of the programme in 1925, for instance, Lord Haldane advocated an increase in educational spending to help pave a ‘firm and reliable high road’ that would lead from secondary schools to the universities.¹⁵⁰ Seen from this angle, the scheme reflected a growing recognition that the wider social value of a university education might justify greater state funding for individual students. In the same period, government funding for universities was being increased through the new University Grants Committee. Furthermore, from 1920, Fisher’s introduction of State Scholarships created opportunities for pupils from grant-aided secondary schools, albeit on a much smaller scale, benefiting from lessons learnt through the ex-service scheme. After a brief suspension, the number of scholarships awarded was increased on several occasions and by 1935, 360 were given annually.¹⁵¹ The biggest growth, however, was in local education authority grants to higher education students, which by 1935 had grown from the pre-war level of 1,200 to over 10,000.¹⁵² After the Second World War, another government ex-service scheme resulted in 83,000 awards over five years.¹⁵³ When considered within this wider context, it is clear that the period between 1918 and 1923

¹⁴⁸ Peter Mandler, ‘Educating the nation: II. Universities’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (2015), pp. 1–26, at p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher, *Unfinished Autobiography*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁰ Viscount Haldane, ‘Foreword’, in Ellis (ed.), *Poor Student*, p. vii.

¹⁵¹ Board of Education, *Education in 1936: Being the Report of the Board of Education and the Statistics for Public Education for England and Wales* (London, 1937), p. 2. In 1935–6, the scheme was widened to include pupils at all secondary schools in England and Wales.

¹⁵² Ellis, *Poor Student*, p. 43; Board of Education, *Education in 1936*, p. 172. In 1935, the total number supported at universities, university colleges or training colleges was 9,146 and a further 1,375 grants were made to students at art schools or technical colleges. See also Dyhouse, *Students*, pp. 3–33.

¹⁵³ Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London, 1988), p. 62.

yielded important stimuli and insights for later efforts associated with the expansion of higher education.

The developments that have been discussed in this article were not only important for the history of higher education: they also highlight the social and cultural legacies of the Great War. Themes that dominate the substantial literature on the latter subject include the memorialization of conflict as well as concerns about its consequences for post-war society.¹⁵⁴ In discussing the war's centenary, military historian Gary Sheffield has warned against 'airbrushing those who came back out of our commemoration of the First World War'.¹⁵⁵ In the existing research on British ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen, the principal strands of inquiry have focused on those who bore physical reminders of the conflict and on organizations that promoted veterans' interests.¹⁵⁶ Our article has revealed a different dimension: it has shown how the arrival of veterans at universities formed part of their wider integration into post-war society. As active academic citizens, ex-service students were pivotal to reconstructing higher education and to building a national student movement in Britain.

¹⁵⁴ To cite just three influential examples: Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Memory: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995); Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fears of brutalization in post-First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75/3 (2003), pp. 557–89.

¹⁵⁵ Gary Sheffield, 'The end of the First World War', *History Extra* (podcast, 5 Nov. 2018), section at 36'46", available via <<https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/armistice-first-world-war-gary-sheffield/>> [accessed 5 Dec. 2018].

¹⁵⁶ For research that focuses on British veterans or explores comparative dimensions, see Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley, CA, 2001); Pieter Verstraete, Martina Salvante and Julie Anderson, 'Commemorating the disabled soldier: 1914–1940', *First World War Studies*, 6/1 (2015), pp. 1–7 [introduction to themed journal issue]; Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy: British Veterans, Politics, and Society, 1921–1939* (Westport, CT, 2001); Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman (eds), *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism* (Basingstoke, 2013); David Swift and Oliver Wilkinson (eds), *Veterans of the First World War: Ex-Servicemen and Ex-Servicewomen in Britain and Ireland* (Abingdon, 2019).