



London's big four universities go on £4bn 'Premier League' spending spree

Jonathan Prynne and Anna Davis

LONDON'S top universities have embarked on an estimated £4billion investment drive to secure their global "Premier League" status and catch up with Oxford and Cambridge.

In the latest move, LSE has been given the green light by Westminster council for a £120 million redevelopment – the biggest in its history – of its campus near Aldwych, with a dramatic new

cluster of buildings designed by architect Lord Rogers's practice.

It follows equally ambitious "land grab" expansion programmes unveiled by Imperial, King's College and UCL.

Academic experts said the flurry of announcements by the "big four" was partly down to the lifting of the cap on the number of students each university can take following the introduction of tuition fees.

The most popular universities are

able to take on unlimited numbers of students because the taxpayer no longer pays their fees.

The LSE's new core will be made up of two blocks of six and 13 storeys, replacing four ageing buildings on Houghton Street.

LSE's director of estates Julian Robinson said: "This is a major milestone in our ambitious programme of improving facilities and accommodation.

"We are a world-class university and

the Centre Buildings Redevelopment will provide a new building and public spaces which will reflect this. Its sustainable design will complement and enhance our surroundings while still being uniquely identifiable as LSE."

Demolition begins this summer, and completion is scheduled for late 2018.

It comes days after King's College secured a 50-year lease on Bush House on Aldwych, the former headquarters of the BBC World Service.

The Strand institution's chairman, the Duke of Wellington, described the move as "a once in a generation opportunity".

He said: "Our campus on the Strand has for too long had inadequate and cramped teaching space.

"This acquisition of Bush House will transform our original campus, which dates back to 1829."

In December last year, UCL revealed it is building a second campus called UCL East on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The first phase alone will cost around £400 million.

And even that is dwarfed by the £3 billion investment going into Imperial West, on 25 acres of derelict land at White City.

Professor Alan Smithers, director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham, said this is an "unprecedented" time of expansion for London universities.

He said: "In football the Premier League enabled some football clubs to grow away from the teams in other leagues. The new university funding system enables the top universities to grow away from others. Universities



Vision: how the LSE campus could look after the £120 million development

like UCL, King's and Imperial are like the Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham of the Premier League."

London has more top universities than any other city in the world, according to the Times Higher Educa-

'Universities such as UCL, King's and Imperial are like the Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham'

Professor Alan Smithers

tion world university rankings. Imperial College is the highest ranked London university, in ninth place. University College London came 22nd, LSE was in 34th and King's College London came in 40th.

Oxford and Cambridge came third and fifth. @annadavis @jonprynne