



The All-Party Parliamentary University Group

APPUG meeting on government's proposed reforms within post-18 education

With the forthcoming government response to the Post-18 Education and Funding (Augar) Review, the Lifelong Loan Entitlement consultation and the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill currently going through parliament this is a pivotal time for higher education funding. As we come to the end of the year, this meeting will provide an opportunity to regroup on our priorities for the proposed reforms.

Agenda

5:30pm	Daniel Zeichner MP, Chair, APPUG
c5:35pm	Ed Dorrell, Director, Public First
c5:45pm	Questions, comments for Ed Dorrell
c5:55pm	Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton, Chair, University Alliance
c6:00pm	Professor Malcolm Press, Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University
c5:05pm	Questions, comments, and discussion with university leaders, MPs and peers
6:30pm	Meeting concludes.

Zoom link

Topic: APPG for Universities meeting on the proposed post-18 education reforms
Time: Dec 8, 2021 05:30 PM London
Link: <https://zoom.us/j/93752526515>

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was introduced in the House of Lords on 18 May 2021 and passed its third reading on 25 October 2021. The Bill received its first reading in the House of Commons on 26 October 2021.

The Bill forms the legislative underpinning for reforms set out in the [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#) white paper. It also includes measures to address some of the recommendations of the [Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#) which was published in May 2019.

The Bill is currently going through committee stage, which is due to conclude on 7 December.

Lifelong Loan Entitlement

The Post-16 Education and Skills Bill paves the way for the introduction of a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) from 2025. The aim of the LLE is to allow individuals to study higher level courses more flexibly throughout their lives by increasing provision of higher technical courses as well as allowing existing qualifications to be studied in a more bite-sized way. As it stands, the LLE will provide individuals with loans for the equivalent of four years' full time higher education to be used for eligible courses at levels 4, 5 and 6 at further education colleges of universities.

Quality Assessment of Higher Education

The Bill includes provision to extend Clause 23 ('Assessing the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education') of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The existing legislation, which established the university regulator the Office for Students (OfS), makes reference to the regulator's ability to assess the quality and standards of higher education providers on its register, or applying to be, but does not specify the metrics that might be used.

Clause 20 is a permissive clause that does not formally expand the OfS' powers, but clarifies the levers available to them. It specifically explains that:

- The OfS may take into account student outcomes when assessing quality.
- The outcomes considered could include continuation, completion and progress and could be measured quantitatively or qualitatively.

- A minimum level for these metrics can be determined as and when the OfS feels it is appropriate, but the minimum level does not need to be benchmarked by student characteristics, institution type, subject or any other factor.
- The OfS can make judgements on student outcomes with reference to these minimum levels.

The clause does not require the OfS to use student outcomes data and apply non-benchmarked minimum baselines, but it would legally allow it to, paving the way for significant changes to the way quality is assessed as and when the leadership of the OfS decides. The OfS will shortly consult on proposals on the use of students outcomes data (expected early 2022).

Review of post-18 education and funding

The government plans to publish a response to the Post-18 Education and Funding (Augar) Review before Christmas, **however this has not been confirmed**. It's widely expected it will propose the largest changes to student finance since 2012.

The interim [report](#) published in 2021, confirmed that as part of the government's commitment to introduce further reforms to the HE sector, they will consider "student finance terms and conditions, minimum entry requirements to higher education institutions, the treatment of foundation years and other matters."

A number of reforms to the student finance system have been rumoured in recent months, including:

- Lowering the repayment threshold to £22,000 or £25,000
- Extending the loan term to 35 years
- Reducing the fee cap for undergraduates to £7,500 per year
- Increasing the repayment rate to 10%
- Reintroduction of grants
- Introduction of a form of minimum entry requirement

Since the ONS changed the way student loans are recorded in 2018 there has been an increased focus and debate on the 'RAB charge', the difference between the amount lent to a cohort of students, and the value of their repayments as graduates.

The Treasury have indicated a need to reduce the loan book and the apparent cost to the taxpayer of university courses. This will be one of the driving factors behind any reforms.

APPUG research – young people's motivations, aspirations and views on student finance

In November, the APPUG launched a new report '[Is university worth it? Young people's motivations, aspirations and views on student finance](#)' collates. The research explores prospective students' views of the student finance system and potential reforms as the higher education sector awaits the government response/consultation on changes to post-18 education funding.

Key conclusions for the report include:

- A clear majority of young people think going to university is worth the overall cost (66% compared to 5% that do not)
- Significant gaps exist in the resources available to help prospective students financially plan for university, with many relying on information from family and friends.
- Over three quarters of students think the current interest rate charged on student loans is unfair.
- Less than a quarter (22%) of students agreed there should be a limit on the number of students that can go to university each year.
- Those who had been eligible for free school meals significantly more likely to plan to study at their local university
- Disadvantaged students are more likely to decide on their choice of university based on living costs

Speaker biographies



Ed Dorrell, Director, Public First

Before taking up his role at Public First, Ed was deputy editor of the Times Educational Supplement (TES) for seven years, a role he combined with being comment editor and before that he was news editor for five years.

Previously he was news editor of the Architects' Journal, where he was a well known commentator on planning and regeneration. He has also written for most national papers including the Guardian, the Times, the Telegraph and the Independent. He is known for his sharp policy analysis, his wide ranging network in the media, and his skill at writing and shaping news and opinion from leading politicians, chief executives, high profile individuals, and large and small organisations. He offers high-value counsel and insight on media affairs, public opinion and policy formulation to many of Public First's major clients.

Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton and Chair, University Alliance

Debra Humphris joined University of Brighton in December 2015 from Imperial College in London, where she held the positions of Pro-Rector (Education) and Vice-Provost (Education) between 2012 and 2015. In three years, she effected real change in the college's position on teaching and learning, having developed and implemented the college's first education and student strategy – with extensive consultation and involvement from staff, students, the Students' Union and alumni.



Originally qualifying as a Registered Nurse, Debra spent 20 years in the NHS including Senior Research Fellow at the South Thames Regional Health Authority, and at St George's Hospital Medical School. She achieved her PhD in 1999, which considered the implementation of policy into clinical practice.



Professor Malcolm Press, Vice Chancellor Manchester Metropolitan University

Professor Malcolm Press was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University in 2015, having previously held positions at the Universities of Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester and UCL.

Malcolm is a trustee of WWF-UK, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the British Council, and sits on the Board of the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education. Previously, he has served as president of the British Ecological Society, a trustee of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, a council member of the National Trust, a council member of the Society of Biology, and as a deputy chair for a Research Excellence Framework panel.

Within Greater Manchester, Malcolm sits on the boards of Health Innovation Manchester, Oxford Road Corridor and Manchester Science Partnerships. He is also a member of the North West Business Leadership Team.