All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

02 – 06 February 2026

A regular digest of House of Commons, House of Lords, and higher education sector business.

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, please contact:

Andrea Rezman | appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk

Click on the items in the table of contents to go straight to debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.

Parliamentary business

Work of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) - Science, Innovation and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 3 February from 9:35 am, the House of Commons Education Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry into "Work of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)".

Witnesses included:

- Professor Sir Ian Chapman, CEO at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

Committee members expressed frustration at recent changes to how UKRI categorises and presents its funding. MPs argued that high-level allocations had been published without a clear link to the previous system, leaving universities unable to assess what the changes mean in practice for call volumes, success rates and funding reaching researchers. This uncertainty was said to have been worsened by recent pauses and constraints on new applications across several research councils.

Ian Chapman accepted that major reprioritisation decisions should be accompanied by clearer and more scrutinised information. He agreed that UKRI should be able to explain what happened under the old system, what will happen under the new one, and why, but stopped short of committing to a full line-by-line reconciliation of all funding streams.

Chapman acknowledged that UKRI's recent communications with the sector had been poor and apologised, recognising the operational impact this uncertainty has had on universities' planning, staffing and early-career research pathways. He said UKRI intends to improve transparency through more regular reporting and a clearer published pipeline of future funding opportunities, to allow institutions to plan ahead.

On funding pauses, Chapman said these should be seen as transitional rather than a move away from applicant-led funding. He indicated that the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council pause would be brief while shifting to an always-open route from spring, that the Medical Research Council pause would last until early summer, and that the Economic and Social Research Council was redesigning its schemes, with further detail to follow.

The Committee also examined why universities and researchers are experiencing what feels like cuts despite flat cash budgets. Chapman said rising costs mean UKRI is facing reductions against forecast costs rather than headline cash cuts, but accepted that UKRI does not yet have a complete plan for managing these pressures. This acknowledgement reinforced that further detail is still to come, sustaining uncertainty for the sector.

You can watch the session.

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood (Conservative): (UIN107707) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 15 January 2026 to Question 101957 on Erasmus+ Programme, whether the National Agency will be an arms' length body.

Josh MacAlister: The department has commenced discussions with the British Council with a view to appointing them as the National Agency. The British Council is an arm's-length body of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Fees and Charges

Uma Kumaran (Labour) (Stratford and Bow): (107587) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of differential university tuition fees based on the Teaching Excellence Framework on further education access for students from the most financially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Josh MacAlister: Maximum fee limits for all higher education (HE) providers will increase from £9,535 to £9,790 in the 2026/27 academic year, and from £9,790 to £10,050 in the 2027/28 academic year. We will then legislate, when parliamentary time allows, to increase tuition fee caps automatically for future academic years.

In return for the increased investment that we are asking students to make, we expect the HE sector to deliver the very best outcomes both for those students and for the country. To achieve this, we will link future inflationary fee uplifts to judgements on HE providers' quality and restrict fee income where high quality cannot be demonstrated.

The Office for Students (OfS) will consider a wide range of metrics when determining quality judgements. All HE providers registered with the OfS that intend to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the OfS.

Grouped Questions: 107586

Source

Department for Education: Students: Finance

Roz Savage (Liberal Democrats): (UIN107639) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the current student maintenance support system in light of sustained increases in rent, food, and energy costs; and what steps it is taking to ensure that student finance reflects real-world living expenses across all regions, including for students studying at rural institutions.

Josh MacAlister: To help higher education students with cost-of-living pressures, we are future-proofing maintenance loans by increasing them in-line with forecast inflation every year and reintroducing targeted means-tested maintenance grants of up to £1,000 per year from 2028/29. This year, we increased maximum maintenance loans by 3.1%, to £10,544 for students living away from home studying outside London, £13,762 for students living away from home studying in London, and £8,877 for students living at home.

Kathryn Mitchell, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Derby, will bring together sector experts and chair the Higher Education Access and Participation Task and Finish Group. Its remit includes developing options to address regional disparities in access for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are also working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to encourage universities to work with their local authorities on strategic approaches to meeting student housing needs.

Grouped Questions: 107637, 107638

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood (Conservative): (UIN107708) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 15 January 2026 to Question 101957 on Erasmus+ Programme, what estimate she has made of the potential cost to the public purse of participating in Erasmus+ in (a) 2026-27 and (b) 2027-28.

Josh MacAlister: We have now concluded negotiations with the European Commission on the UK's association to Erasmus+ in 2027. This commitment covers the 2027/28 academic year. Any participation in Erasmus+ into the next Multiannual

Financial Framework needs to be agreed in future and be based on a fair and balanced contribution.

We have secured significantly improved financial terms compared to default arrangements, ensuring a fairer balance between the UK's contribution to the EU and the number of UK participants who receive funding. We negotiated a 30% discount, securing participation for 2027 at a cost of approximately £570 million, saving UK taxpayers around £240 million while securing the benefits of participation for young people in the UK and across the EU.

The UK will receive most of that money back to distribute amongst UK beneficiaries. UK participants can compete for grants from an approximate £1 billion central pot directly managed by the European Commission.

Our experience of associating in 2027 will inform any future participation in Erasmus+ under the next Multiannual Financial Framework from 2028/2034.

We will report to Parliament the costs arising from participation, including costs related to the implementation of the programme, in its annual accounts.

Source

Department for Education: Education: Exports and Overseas Students

Callum Anderson (Labour): (UIN107861) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what criteria will be used to select education providers eligible for international expansion support.

Josh MacAlister: Through the UK's International Education Strategy, we are backing UK providers, at all levels, to deliver British education overseas in new and expanding markets, while driving growth at home.

Sector stakeholders will be central to the successful delivery of the new International Education Strategy. The reformed Education Sector Action Group (ESAG), chaired by Ministers, will bring together industry, government, and representative bodies from across the education sector to tackle key concerns and identify opportunities for partnerships. Each representative will lead on an action plan, published within the first 100 days of appointment to ESAG, outlining how their members will support delivery of the strategy.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students

James McMurdock (Independent): (UIN107655) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her Department's press release entitled Strategy to boost UK education abroad in major £40bn growth drive, published on 20 January 2026, what estimate her Department has made of the expected numbers of international students when targets are removed.

Josh MacAlister: The new International Education Strategy has confirmed the government's continued commitment to welcome international students who meet the requirements to study in the UK. They join one of the world's most vibrant, diverse and inclusive learning communities, form lifelong friendships and professional networks, and earn qualifications respected around the globe. Higher education providers in the UK received an estimated £12.1 billion in tuition fee income from international students in the 2023/24 academic year, which supported the provision of places for domestic students and research and development.

Future international student numbers are inherently uncertain. The international student market is highly competitive, and inflows depend on a range of factors, including recruitment strategies from international competitors, exchange rates and other economic variables. The International Education Strategy will continue to support the sustainable recruitment of high-quality international students to the UK's world-class higher education institutions from a diverse range of countries.

Grouped Questions: 107654

Source

Department for Education: Education: Exports and Overseas Students

Callum Anderson (Labour): (UIN107862) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what reporting requirements UK providers will have for international education initiatives.

Josh MacAlister: Sector stakeholders will be central to the successful delivery of the new International Education Strategy. The reformed Education Sector Action Group (ESAG), chaired by Ministers, will bring together industry, government, and representative bodies from across the education sector to tackle key concerns and identify opportunities for partnerships. Each representative will lead on an action plan, published within the first 100 days of appointment to ESAG, outlining how their members will support delivery of the strategy.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Wendy Morton (Conservative): (UIN107689) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate has she made of the number of places that will be available for a) young British nationals and b) young EU nationals in each of the next five years under the new Erasmus scheme; and what assessment has she made of the expected regional allocation and breakdown of places.

Josh MacAlister: We have now concluded negotiations with the European Commission on the UK's association to Erasmus+ in 2027. This commitment covers the 2027/28 academic year. Any participation in Erasmus+ into the next Multiannual Financial Framework from 2028/34 will need to be agreed in the future and be based on a fair and balanced contribution.

We expect that over 100,000 people could benefit from mobility and partnership opportunities from participation in 2027.

We will have detailed information on the UK's Erasmus+ beneficiaries after our first year of participation.

Source

Department for Education: Education: Exports and Overseas Students

Callum Anderson (Labour): (UIN107863) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of international education programmes on local employment.

Josh MacAlister: The new UK's International Education Strategy sets a clear ambition to grow the value of education exports to £40 billion a year by 2030.

We are backing UK providers, at all levels, to deliver British education overseas in new and expanding markets, while driving growth at home.

By expanding overseas, our universities, colleges and education providers from all regions can diversify income, strengthen global partnerships and give millions more students access to a world-class UK education on their doorstep, all whilst boosting growth at home.

The new strategy urges UK providers to take advantage of the UK's unique position and meet rising global demand for high-quality education.

Grouped Questions: 107860

Source

Department for Education: Students: Housing

Will Stone (Labour): (UIN107194) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the Renters' Right Act on independent students who require accommodation between June and September.

Josh MacAlister: This government recognises that independent students including care leavers, care experienced students and estranged students may require additional support to access higher education.

As announced in the Post-16 Education and Skills white paper, we will increase student loan support in line with inflation and re-introduce targeted maintenance grants. We will also provide extra support for care leavers, ensuring all are automatically eligible to receive maximum student loan support, irrespective of their household income or living circumstances. In addition, care leavers will continue to receive a £2000 non-repayable bursary, to support with their living expenses.

We will work in collaboration with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and relevant external stakeholders to monitor the impacts of the Renters' Rights Act and explore the accommodation needs of independent students studying in higher education. The department will soon be publishing a Statement of Expectations for the higher education sector, which will urge higher education providers to plan strategically for the supply of suitable accommodation for their students and include guidance on how providers can support the needs of vulnerable students.

Grouped Questions: 107193

Source

Department for Education: Mature Students: Finance

Gideon Amos (Liberal Democrats): (UIN108971) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that mature students who wish to retrain as doctors are able to access available financial support; and what assessment her Department has made of the extent to which those mature students who previously had a student loan that is now fully repaid are eligible to access that financial support.

Josh MacAlister: The government is committed to ensuring the country develops the skills needed to break down barriers to opportunity and so is introducing the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE). This will launch in the 2026/27 academic year for learners up to aged 60 studying courses that start on or after 1 January 2027.

The LLE will remove the Equivalent Level Qualification rules meaning more people can train, retrain and upskill flexibly. Also under the LLE, a priority additional entitlement will be available to support graduates who study a second degree in certain courses, including medicine. Courses eligible for priority additional entitlement funding have been chosen based on their alignment to the government's Industrial Strategy and the UK's priority skills needs.

Medical students taking a second degree using the LLE will also be able to access standard maintenance support for those years not covered by the NHS bursary.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: China

Alicia Kearns (Conservative): (UIN106338) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department issues guidance on membership of the Chinese Communist Party being a declarable interest for university senior staff and trustees.

Josh MacAlister: Education is a devolved matter, and this response outlines the information for England only.

Higher education (HE) providers are independent and autonomous bodies, and as such are responsible for designing and implementing their own policies.

As the independent regulator, it is the role of the Office for Students to monitor and assess registered universities' compliance with its conditions of registration, including those relating to good governance, and to take regulatory action where they have been breached. This includes that higher education providers must uphold public interest governance principles, which encompasses management of conflicts of interest.

We are clear that foreign interference in the HE sector is unacceptable, and whilst there are a range of existing requirements on universities to protect against it, we believe more should be done to support providers to proportionately mitigate risk.

We set out our considerations in the 'Future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act' policy paper published in June 2025, and are taking steps to share good practice, raise awareness and develop new responses where necessary.

Source

Department for Education: Graduates: Employment

James McMurdock (Independent): (UIN108147) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to introduce interventions to help reduce graduate underemployment.

Josh MacAlister: Research suggests the majority of graduates are expected to earn a positive financial return from higher education (HE) over their lifetime.

The latest HE Statistics Agency data shows that 71.4% of UK-domiciled graduates from 2022/23 in employment were in high-skilled roles 15 months after graduation. This is down slightly from 2021/22, but consistent with 2019/20.

Whilst employment rates for graduates remain higher than for non-graduates, we recognise that those leaving HE face challenges and are taking a number of steps to ensure those leaving HE are ready for work.

The Office for Students can take regulatory action against HE providers which don't meet its minimum requirement that 60% of students should progress into graduate employment or further study.

Planned reforms to the Strategic Priorities Grant will ensure high-cost subject funding is better targeted towards priority provision that supports skills needs and the Industrial Strategy.

Government plans to expand the availability of occupation-focused higher technical qualifications which aim to provide students with the skills employers need.

Government has also issued guidance setting out expectations that HE providers play a pivotal role in Local Skills Improvement Plans, strengthening collaboration with strategic authorities, employers and other skills providers to meet the needs of their local economy.

Grouped Questions: 108143, 108145

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Elsie Blundell (Labour): (UIN105336) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the level of interest rates on student loans.

Josh MacAlister: Student loans are subject to interest to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree.

Interest rates do not impact monthly repayments made by student loan borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not on interest rates or the amount borrowed. Outstanding debt, including interest built up, is cancelled after the loan term ends (or in case of death or disability) at no detriment to the borrower.

A full equality impact assessment of how the student loan reforms may affect graduates under Plan 5, was produced and published in February 2022 and can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Fees and Charges

Anna Dixon (Labour): (UIN105417) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to extend the period by which UK nationals and family members living in (a) the EEA and (b) Switzerland at the end of the transition period will be eligible for home fee status, tuition fee and maintenance support to courses starting beyond 1st January 2028.

Josh MacAlister: UK nationals and their children living in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland who wish to study in the UK will be eligible for automatic home fee status and student support for courses starting up to seven years from the end of the transition period.

The seven-year period ensures that eligible UK nationals and their children whose normal place of residence is in the EEA or Switzerland will still be able to access home fee status and student financial support in England immediately on their return to the UK.

From 1 January 2028, UK nationals and their children must normally have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for three years immediately before the start of their course to qualify for automatic home fee status and student support. There are no plans to extend this period.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Neil O'Brien (Conservative): (UIN105349) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to his Answer of 12 January 2026 to WPQ 101070, of the over 100,000 people that the Government estimates could benefit from mobility and partnership opportunities from Erasmus+ participation in 2027-8, how many he expects to be UK students.

Josh MacAlister: Erasmus+ is open to learners, trainees and staff in higher education, further education, vocational education and training, schools, adult education, youth programmes and sport programmes. The department will have detailed information on the UK's Erasmus+ beneficiaries after our first year of participation.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Rupert Lowe (Independent): (UIN98197) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department collects data on loan write-off rates broken down by borrower residency status at the time of issuing the loan.

Josh MacAlister: We are resolute in our commitment to protecting public money in higher education and are taking firm action to address serious concerns about exploitation of the student funding system.

Eligibility for student finance is not based solely on nationality, but on a person's immigration status and residency. To be eligible, a student must be ordinarily resident in England and be settled or have a recognised connection with the UK. Students must also have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and/or the British Overseas Territories) for the three years prior to the first day of the first academic year of their course.

There are exceptions to these requirements for some individuals. For example, there is an exception to the requirement to be settled for those who are covered by the EU Withdrawal Agreement.

To qualify for support, applicants must provide the Student Loans Company (SLC) with evidence of their eligibility. This includes evidence of their identity, immigration status and ordinary residence.

SLC have robust procedures in place to check student finance eligibility, including data-sharing with Home Office and HM Passport Office. When required, the SLC will contact the Home Office to confirm an applicant's immigration status and ordinary residence.

Nationality is an optional field when creating a student finance account, however, it is mandatory for the full application for support to be processed. Nationality will always be checked as part of verifying a person's identity and where appropriate as part of verifying their immigration status. Applications that are incomplete for any of SLC's identity, immigration status or residence history checks are not approved for student finance.

A student does not qualify for student finance if they have shown themselves by their conduct to be ‘unfitted' to receive support, such as providing falsified documents. Depending on the nature of being found unfitted, the student's details may be added to the Credit Industry Fraud Avoidance System (CIFAS) database. SLC does record details of students who have been made ineligible for student finance. However, the data is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The department does not hold the data in a format that can provide information on investigations that are currently open into incorrect residency claims for student finance.

SLC has advised the department that it has strengthened its integration with Home Office systems for the purposes of establishing eligibility for student finance.

Table 1: Number of cases of misrepresentation in student finance applications have been identified in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Investigations (All fraud types)	Fraud type: residency	Fraud type: migrant worker
2020/21	1,240	9	6
2021/22	1,737	10	78
2022/23	2,431	5	225
2023/24	2,734	21	134
2024/25	2,231	8	301

Table 1 shows data for undergraduate applications which have been found to warrant sanctions for false evidence on application. Applications with residency fraud have failed checks for UK nationals, Irish citizens or ‘settled status' in the UK to verify information on the following eligibility criteria: their home is in England, they've been continuously living in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man for three years before the first day of the first academic year (apart from temporary absences such as holidays). Applications with migrant worker fraud have failed checks or submitted false evidence to claim migrant worker status and access student finance. From 2022 onwards the number of cases linked to migrant worker students increased, initially due to a law enforcement referral and then due to collective and increased focus on fraud.

Table 2: Value and volume of income-contingent repayment loans due for repayment from Student Finance England (SFE) borrowers who were domiciled in England at the time of the loan whose income is not verified, as a proportion of the total loan book as at 10/12/2025.

Value of all loans in repayment	£226,756,961,551
Value of loans where income could not be verified	£12,801,872,323
Proportion of loan values where income was not verified	5.65%
Volume of all loans in repayment	5,666,186
Volume of loans where income was not verified	376,410
Proportion of loan volume where income was not verified	6.64%

Table 2 shows the value and volume of all SFE income-contingent repayment loans for students who were domiciled in England at the time of the loan whose income was not verified, as a proportion of the total loan book. The main reasons for income which is not verified is that they have been matched by HMRC but have no employment details recorded or they have moved overseas and are no longer part of the UK tax system. SLC proactively attempt to trace and contact all borrowers whose income is not verified to correctly classify the situation and take the required action.

The department does not hold the data to provide accurate loan write-off rates (the proportion of loans which have been written off) in the form requested. Due to the way in which the data is held, analysts in the department would not be able to provide this information you have requested without exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold.

Table 3 shows the number of full-time undergraduate students who were domiciled in England who received their first loan payment whilst they were under the age of 18 in each of the last ten years.

Academic Year	Number of borrowers
2015	536
2016	521
2017	470
2018	460
2019	435
2020	428
2021	455
2022	484
2023	518
2024	475
Total	4,782

Grouped Questions: 98186, 98187, 98189, 98190, 98191, 98192, 98193, 98196

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Liz Jarvis (Liberal Democrats): (UIN108031) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will review the three-year freeze on the salary threshold for student loan repayments announced in the 2025 Budget.

Josh MacAlister: The income threshold above which repayments are required for Plan 2 loans will remain at its 2026/27 financial year level of £29,385 up to April 2030, and will increase annually with the Retail Price Index thereafter. This change will help to ensure the system remains sustainable in the long term and is able to continue benefitting future generations of students.

Borrowers remain protected as repayments are determined by income, not the amount borrowed. If a borrower's salary remains the same, their monthly repayments will also stay the same. Lower-earning graduates will continue to be protected, with any outstanding loan and interest written off at the end of the loan term.

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Science: Research

Angus MacDonald (Liberal Democrats): (UIN108569) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the impact of pharmaceutical and medical device R&D site closures on the trends in the levels of UK's scientific research capacity since 2010.

Kanishka Narayan: The Government has made no formal assessment of the impact of pharmaceutical and medical device R&D site closures on trends in the UK's scientific research capacity since 2010.

The Government does monitor the health of the UK life sciences sector, including R&D performed by UK businesses. Office for National Statistics data shows £9.3 billion of pharmaceutical R&D was performed by UK businesses in 2024, accounting for almost 17% of all R&D undertaken by UK businesses.

We are actively working with industry to boost the UK's competitiveness and significantly grow the volume of private sector R&D and manufacturing in the UK over the next decade. For instance, the up to £520 million Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund and the pilot £50m Transformational R&D Investment Fund, which are supporting companies like UCB to invest in innovative early manufacturing in the UK.

Source

Department of Health and Social Care: Health Professions: Training

Afzal Khan (Labour): (UIN106187) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether British citizens who have graduated from medical schools outside of the UK will be prioritised for medical training places in the Medical Training (Prioritisation) Bill.

Karin Smyth: The Medical Training (Prioritisation) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 13 January 2026. The bill delivers the Government's commitment in the 10-Year

Health Plan for England, published in July 2025, to prioritise United Kingdom medical graduates for foundation training, and to prioritise UK medical graduates and other doctors who have worked in the National Health Service for a significant period for specialty training

Under the bill, British citizens who have graduated from medical schools outside of the UK will not be prioritised for foundation training places, and a graduate from a medical school in the UK or Ireland will not be prioritised if they spent the majority of their time studying outside the British Islands.

For specialty training places starting in 2026, NHS experience is being represented by immigration status, as people with a settled immigration status are more likely to have worked in the NHS for longer. The effect of this is that British citizens and those with certain other immigration status will be prioritised. For specialty training posts starting from 2027 onwards, this provision will not apply automatically. Instead, it will be possible to make regulations to specify additional groups who will be prioritised, where they are likely to have significant experience working as a doctor either in the NHS in England, Scotland, or Wales or in health and social care in Northern Ireland, or by reference to their immigration status.

Source

Ministry of Defence: Unmanned Air Systems: Higher Education

James Cartlidge (Conservative): (UIN107730) To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to his Department's press release entitled Cutting-edge drone degree to train military forces of the future unveiled, published on 21 January, whether he plans to create new roles within the armed forces that will specifically require an undergraduate drone degree.

Alistair Carns: The New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE) is a pilot project that is seeking to fuse civilian and military experience to enhance our collective expertise in uncrewed systems. It is offering twenty places for their new undergraduate drone degree, with 15 places allocated to civilian students and five military personnel, specifically from the Army. The Army will promote the undergraduate drone degree through its routine internal communication channels, while NMITE will lead its own civilian recruitment activity Military personnel who are sponsored by Defence to undertake undergraduate level learning are usually expected to continue serving for the duration of their commitment, so there are no retention specific targets connected to this degree.

All of the career opportunities in the Armed Forces or complimentary organisations will be open to those who complete the NMITE degree. There are also other employment opportunities in Defence including through civil servant employment.

The programme supports the Army's broader requirement to upskill its workforce in robotics and autonomous systems, informed by lessons from Ukraine. Every unit will require both specialist and generalist personnel able to integrate, adapt and sustain rapidly evolving drone systems. Work is already under way to formalise the role of drone technology specialists across the Army, and the other Services, building on the existing expertise within the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the Uncrewed Aircraft Systems Group.

The Army is also reviewing its force structure to ensure it has the right balance of personnel with the technical skills needed to operate effectively in an environment where drones play an increasingly central role. This may include the creation of new roles where such specialist skills are essential.

NMITE intends to expand overall student numbers from the second year. The Army plans to continue sponsoring five personnel on the full three-year programme in each remaining year of the current Parliament, while also increasing participation through shorter modular elements.

In the longer term, there is a vision to replicate this model in additional UK locations where there is a strong cluster of military, academia, and the drone industry.

Grouped Questions: 107719, 107722, 107723, 107724, 107725, 107726, 107728, 107729

Source

Department for Education: Further Education and Higher Education: Finance

Jim Shannon (Democratic Unionist Party): (UIN108631) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of further and higher education funding.

Josh MacAlister: The department has increased investment in 16-19 education by £400 million in the 2025/26 financial year. From the Spending Review, we will invest nearly £800 million extra in 2026/27, including and fully consolidating the £190 million boost to 2025/26 funding provided in May.

The department is investing in education and skills training for adults through the Adult Skills Fund (ASF), spending £1.4 billion in the 2025/26 academic year. The ASF fully funds or co-funds skills provision for eligible adults aged 19 and above from pre-entry to level 3, to support adults to gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

To support long-term stability in higher education, the department is increasing maximum tuition fees in line with inflation, by 2.71% in 2026/27 and 2.68% in 2027/28, in addition to the 3.1% increase delivered for the current academic year. The government provides £1.31 billion in Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) funding for the 2025/26 academic year to support teaching, high cost subjects and disadvantaged students, and we are working with the Office for Students to reform the SPG to better target priority skills needs and access and participation.-term stability in higher education, the department is increasing maximum tuition fees in line with inflation, by 2.71% in 2026/27 and 2.68% in 2027/28, in addition to the 3.1% increase delivered for the current academic year. The government provides £1.31 billion in Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) funding for the 2025/26 academic year to support teaching, high-cost subjects and disadvantaged students, and we are working with the Office for Students to reform the SPG to better target priority skills needs and access and participation.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Mohammad Yasin (Labour): (UIN108730) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what consideration she has given to linking Plan 2 student loan interest rates to inflation only.

Josh MacAlister: Plan 2 student loans were designed and implemented by previous governments. Students in England starting degrees under this government have different arrangements.

Plan 2 loans interest rates are applied at the Retail Price Index (RPI) only, then variable up to RPI +3% depending on earnings. Interest rates do not impact monthly repayments made by student loan borrowers, which stay at a constant rate of 9% above an earnings threshold to protect lower earners. If a borrower's salary remains the same, their monthly repayments will also stay the same. Any outstanding loan and interest is written off at the end of the loan term, and debt is never passed on to family members or descendants.

Grouped Questions: 108729

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Calum Miller (Liberal Democrats): (UIN105972) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of freezing student loan repayment thresholds and interest rates from 2027 on the total amount repaid over the lifetime of a loan, broken down by graduate income decile.

Josh MacAlister (Labour): It was announced at the Autumn Budget that the repayment and interest thresholds for Plan 2 student loans will be frozen from the 2026/27 financial year until April 2030, when they will increase annually by inflation.

The department produced the following analysis regarding the impact of freezing the repayment and interest thresholds:

Average lifetime repayments (2024/25 financial year prices)

		Baseline (£)	Post- policy (£)	Impact	
				£	%
Entire cohort	Average	27,000	28,300	1,300	5
Lifetime graduate earnings decile	1	2,000	2,000	0	0
	2	4,300	4,700	400	9
	3	7,700	8,100	400	5
	4	11,600	13,000	1,400	12
	5	16,900	18,500	1,600	9
	6	23,100	25,200	2,100	9
	7	31,300	33,600	2,300	7
	8	41,200	43,500	2,300	6

9	54,500	56,100	1,600	3
10	59,100	59,500	400	1

No freeze has been announced relating to interest rates.

The department will release an equalities impact assessment, including the impact on lifetime repayments, alongside other borrower impacts for the Plan 2 repayment threshold and interest threshold freeze announced at the Autumn Budget. Published results may differ from those provided due to model and data updates.

Source

Sector news

Open letter from Ian Chapman to research and innovation community

UKRI Chief Executive outlined changes to UKRI investment approach, addressing concerns about research funding and the financial position of STFC. Please read the statement below.

Dear research and innovation community,

In recent days there has been concern and speculation about the levels of investment for curiosity driven and applied research. At the same time details of a significant programme of savings that are required to put the Science and Technologies Facilities Council (STFC)'s finances on a sustainable footing have become public.

I know that periods of change and uncertainty are unsettling and so I wanted to write directly to you and be as clear as possible about what is happening.

The new approach UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is taking to deliver its mission (to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth) means that simple year-on-year comparisons of investment levels are not possible.

I understand the desire for certainty over budgets and want to assure you that we are working to provide this as quickly as possible. I also appreciate that the hard decisions UKRI is making will result in negative outcomes for some. That is an unfortunate reality, of which we are acutely aware, but we cannot avoid.

The fact that you are so passionate about your specific endeavours is precisely what makes you good at it; without that passion the UK would not have its prominent international position. I know just how acutely you feel these investment choices, precisely because I've felt exactly that disappointment myself when projects I've been involved with have not been funded. However, you, and the public we serve, should expect UKRI to make hard choices, to be decisive, and to support research and innovation which delivers the biggest impact against our mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth and that includes making sure that the long term nature of curiosity driven research is not only protected but can grow as the economy grows.

The overall budget rises

I want to be clear that in this Spending Review (SR) period (2026 to 2030) UKRI's overall budget for research and innovation is rising. That is a privileged position at a time of constrained public finances, and we should recognise it represents a vote of confidence in the research and innovation community from the government.

As a result of UKRI's allocations, the overall level of funding available for universities, researchers and innovators increases to almost £10 billion a year by the end of the SR period. At the same time as this vote of confidence, we have had clear direction from government that we need to focus and do fewer things better. This includes more clearly aligning with national and societal priorities to ensure public money is invested to deliver outcomes for the nation and its people.

What we are changing and why

In response we are changing to focus our investment across three ‘buckets': curiosity-driven research; strategic government and societal priorities; and supporting innovative companies to start and scale. All underpinned by investment in infrastructure, facilities and skills. UKRI has always funded these three areas but has not been as clear as it needs to be on what goes where and what outcomes are expected.

To deliver this investment effectively UKRI is changing. Many programmes will still be delivered through the councils, as the domain and subject matter experts. However, where multiple councils have a significant interest in a field, like artificial intelligence, we will bring teams together and have one UKRI-wide targeted programme, instead of running multiple programmes from within several councils. This type of change of course was one of the clear aims when UKRI was first proposed.

It is one reason why like-for-like comparisons are not possible. However, across all buckets, the overall investment available to universities across block grants and competitive funding opportunities will increase across the SR period.

I want to emphasise that support for curiosity driven research is protected across the SR period, comprising around 50% of our investment, with the other half of our budget supporting applied research and innovative companies. This proportion is not a change, it is reflection of the position over the past years.

Curiosity-driven research is vital to the health of the sector and is a priority for UKRI and the government because this is where the truly transformational discoveries and novel ideas are most likely to arise. Funding for this will grow as the economy allows.

What that means now

To meet these goals, we are in a review period to develop implementation. We expect to have fully transitioned to the new model by the start of the 2027 and 2028 financial year.

Speed is imperative to deliver against our mission, so we need to move quickly.

UKRI is a complex organisation, and we deliver many programmes across the seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England with both our direct allocation and with money from other government departments. Moving to a new model, including creating new cross-council programmes and those aligned to national priorities, is a significant organisational change.

You may be aware of recent pauses to some programmes. For our curiosity-driven research programmes, headroom in funding will increase, as existing commitments continue to wind down and you can expect to see new opportunities opening later this year. To repeat the point: levels of funding for curiosity-driven research will remain stable across this SR period and are reflective of recent years.

In the strategic government and societal priorities bucket, or the 'applied' bucket, which will be designed to deliver nearer term outcomes, we will largely (but not exclusively) align programmes with the eight Industrial Strategy Sector Plans. We are scoping new programmes that will deliver across applied research and support for innovative companies, and new activity will begin to launch from spring this year.

I have been clear since joining UKRI that doing fewer things better means that tough decisions will be necessary. This is not about choosing between disciplines, one of the best things about UKRI is that we support such a broad range of research and innovation. But it does involve making concerted choice of areas of focus within disciplines.

Making those choices means that some activities will benefit from increased investment, but other areas will unfortunately experience some reductions, and you can expect to see UKRI making more of these decisions in the coming months. I believe that unless we make those choices we will all lose out in the long run because we won't be supporting anything at the critical levels needed to truly succeed.

Situation at STFC

The situation at STFC is unique among the UKRI councils because its cost base has increased significantly due to the type of facilities and services it manages, the research it funds and some projects with higher costs than foreseen.

Over the previous SR period, rising energy costs and unfavourable movements in foreign exchange rates increased STFC's annual costs by over £50 million a year. These unforeseen costs and an ambitious programme from the previous SR have increased the pressure on STFC's budget. Despite a record UKRI settlement for 2026 and 2030 and STFC's core budget holding relatively flat from £835 million to £842 million over this period, a reset is needed as currently STFC's costs will outpace the funding available and would eat into other parts of the UKRI budget.

In order to remain sustainable, STFC must make significant cumulative savings: a decrease of £162 million relative to our forecasts for their operational costs. The £162 million is the total net reduction in STFC's annual costs that they must achieve by the end of the 2029 and 2030 financial year. It is not a £162 million saving in each year of the current SR period. Instead, STFC needs to reshape its cost base over the whole SR period so that their budget is balanced by 2029 and 2030 and key facilities are funded properly and sustainably.

That is not the situation at other councils and we do not anticipate equivalent measures will be necessary outside of STFC.

It is important to understand that the specific measures STFC must take should not be confused with the broader changes taking place across UKRI.

I hope this helps assuage some of the concerns that have been raised. I do not expect everyone in the sector to agree with the choices we are making, but I feel it is important to be transparent about those decisions. I will continue to update the community as we move through these changes.

I firmly believe that these decisions not just benefit the UK research and innovation community in the long term, but our real customer, the UK public, as we deliver on our mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth.

Report sets out how UKRI can set more spin-outs up for success

UK Research and Innovation has published an independent review on relationships between universities and investors, setting out recommendations to strengthen the UK’s research commercialisation system and improve access to finance for spin-outs.

Led by Tony Hickson, Chief Business Officer at Cancer Research UK, the report makes 20 recommendations aimed at universities, policymakers, public funders and investors. It identifies persistent weaknesses in access to finance, particularly at pre-seed and scale-up stages, and highlights regional disparities in investor access outside the “golden triangle”. The review argues for more targeted allocation of capital to address pipeline gaps and priority sectors such as fusion, quantum and the creative industries, while noting that UKRI-backed initiatives, including Research England’s Higher Education Innovation Fund, have delivered strong returns.

A central theme is the need for system-wide collaboration between universities, investors, funders and government. Key proposals include a significant increase in pre-incorporation and pre-seed funding, with UKRI expanding proof-of-concept support to £100 million annually; clearer, contiguous funding pathways linking research council awards with Innovate UK and bodies such as the British Business Bank; accelerated pension reform to unlock institutional capital; and improved access to specialist deep tech finance across regions and priority sectors.

The report highlights a “cultural mismatch” between universities and investors as a recurring barrier. Universities tend to spread early funding across many nascent ideas, while investors prefer to concentrate larger investments in fewer, more developed ventures. This misalignment is seen as a frequent cause of friction. Recommendations include embedding entrepreneurship more systematically within academic careers and curricula, expanding entrepreneurship education for researchers and PhD students, and strengthening institutional support through internal venture teams and seed funds.

The review also raises concerns about spin-outs forming too early or without sufficient investment readiness. While deep-tech development is inherently slow, it recommends streamlining formation by establishing a national task force to reduce time from investor interest to deal completion, and by strengthening early investor engagement in university decision-making.

In its response, UKRI committed to developing a vision structured around seven themes, including expanding proof-of-concept and pre-seed funding, unlocking pension capital, supporting entrepreneurship in universities, promoting clearer IP and equity frameworks, improving investor readiness through shared services and accelerators, aligning interventions with regional strengths, and expanding specialist deep tech training for investors.

You can read the full report.

Student skills investment to boost UK defence industry

The Government has announced an £80 million funding competition to expand higher-education provision linked to defence and national security skills. The funding will support universities, colleges and other higher education providers in England to increase student places and improve facilities for courses aligned with defence industry needs, particularly in engineering and computer science.

The investment forms part of the £182 million Defence Industrial Strategy skills package and will be delivered through the Strategic Priorities Grant. Of the total, £50 million will fund around 2,400 additional student places over six years, while £30 million will be used to upgrade or expand university teaching facilities to increase capacity over the longer term. The announcement was made by Defence Minister Luke Pollard during a visit to the University of Portsmouth.

Although the funding competition will be open to providers in England, the Government stated that students from across the UK would be able to benefit, with discussions ongoing with devolved governments on skills needs and funding options outside England.

The funding will be administered by the Office for Students, with applications expected to open on 10 February 2026 and close on 20 March 2026. Successful bids are likely to be confirmed in May 2026, allowing new provision and student places to begin from the 2026–27 academic year.

As part of the announcement, the Government confirmed plans to establish a Defence Universities Alliance, a UK-wide network intended to strengthen collaboration between universities, the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces and the defence sector. Providers' intent to join the Alliance will be a factor in grant decisions, with the aim of ensuring funded courses align with employment opportunities in defence-related industries.

The announcement also sits alongside wider Government commitments on defence skills, including the establishment of Defence Technical Excellence Colleges and increased defence spending from 2027, as well as reforms set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper.

Universities UK welcomed the funding as supporting universities' role in defence research, innovation and workforce development.

Vivienne Stern, MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

"Universities have a crucial role to play in the nation's defence, and have been identified as a critical part of the security and defence infrastructure of the UK by the Defence Industrial Strategy. The contribution spans research, the development of innovative technology and applications, and providing the skilled graduates needed to protect the UK in a more challenging and changing world. The announcement of this funding from the MOD alongside the development of the Defence Universities Alliance will support the university sector to play its part in this vital work."

You can read the full announcement.