



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

09 – 13 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

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Parliamentary business

Business of the House

On Thursday 12 February, during Business of the House questions, MPs raised concerns relating to student finance and the financial pressures facing universities.

Bobby Dean MP (Liberal Democrat) highlighted what he described as substantial and unilateral changes to the student loans system since its introduction. He argued that the abolition of maintenance grants has resulted in poorer students graduating with higher levels of debt, while inflation-linked interest rates have increased overall repayment burdens. He also pointed to repeated freezes in repayment thresholds, including at the most recent Budget, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates will add around £3,000 on average to graduates' debt. He contended that these changes have altered the original terms under which students borrowed and called for a debate in Government time on reforms to the student loans repayment system.

Responding, **Sir Alan Campbell** emphasised the importance of maintaining access to higher education while placing the sector on a secure financial footing. He stated that the Government is seeking to balance value for money for taxpayers with fairness for students and graduates. He noted that the repayment threshold is being lifted this year to protect lower earners, acknowledged the concerns raised, and encouraged the Member to raise the issue further in a forthcoming Westminster Hall debate on 25 February.

Mary Glendon MP (Labour) raised concerns about the impact of rising employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme on post-1992 universities. She warned that increased costs are placing significant financial pressure on institutions and may lead to cost-cutting measures affecting staff pay and pension provision. Citing representations from staff at Northumbria University, she asked that her concerns be relayed to the Minister for Skills and requested an update to Parliament on the steps the Government will take to address the issue.

In response, **Sir Alan Campbell** described the matter as important and confirmed that he would ensure her concerns are shared with the relevant Minister. He also offered to facilitate a meeting with the Minister and indicated his willingness to support her further in raising the issue.

You [can read the full transcript](#).

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Alex Burghart (Conservative): (UIN109183) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2026 to Question 105698 on Erasmus+ Programme, what estimate her Department has made of the number of inbound EU students who will study in the UK.

Josh MacAlister: The UK has agreed to associate to Erasmus+ in 2027 on terms that represent a fair balance between the UK's contribution and the benefits the programme offers.

We have agreed a 30% discount compared to the default terms in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, as well as a review of the UK's participation in the programme ten months after our association, including data concerning demand for funding in the UK.

In 2018/19, there were approximately 31,000 inbound higher education (HE) student mobilities via the Erasmus+ programme. There were approximately 16,000 outbound HE student mobilities in the same year. The department expects there will be a greater number of HE mobilities on reassociation, given the expansion of the programme.

In real terms, the Erasmus+ budget for 2027 is 50% higher than in 2019. Due to this increased budget, we expect that over 100,000 people could benefit from mobility and partnership opportunities from participation in 2027 across all sectors.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Joe Robertson (Conservative): (UIN109386) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of applying an interest rate of RPI plus 3% to Plan 2 student loans for graduates earning over £50,270 on the disposable income of those graduates.

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 debit is never passed on to family members or descendants.

[Source](#)

Department for Business and Trade: STEM Subjects: Employment

Catherine Fookes (Labour): (UIN109721) To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps he is taking to help protect STEM jobs in Wales.

Chris McDonald: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy is protecting and expanding STEM jobs in Wales by backing future industries and Wales's strengths in advanced manufacturing, digital technologies and life sciences. North Wales will pioneer the UK's first Small Modular Reactor programme, supporting up to 3,000 new jobs. Two Welsh AI Growth Zones are unlocking more than 8,000 technology roles across the country, while the UK Government's £500 million investment in an electric arc furnace at Port Talbot, and continued support for the compound semiconductor cluster, further strengthens Wales's industrial and STEM employment base.

[Source](#)

Department for Education: Universities: Finance

Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrats): (UIN109864) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2026 to Question 101938, for what reasons are meetings between her Department and commercial lenders on the higher education sector are kept confidential.

Josh MacAlister: As set out in our response on 29 January 2026, the department meets with a variety of stakeholders, including commercial lenders, to hear their views on the higher education sector. Where individual providers experience financial difficulties, the department engages with them to understand the pressures they face. This has included meeting commercial lenders to hear their position.

The department keeps records of its engagements with external stakeholders, including meetings with commercial lenders. However, any discussions relating to the financial position of providers would be commercially sensitive and therefore inappropriate to discuss publicly.

As My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills told the Education Select Committee in November 2025, the government does not intervene in the interests of providers. However, if a provider was at risk of unplanned closure, the department would work with the OfS, the provider and other government departments to ensure students' and taxpayers' best interests were protected. This might involve supporting the transfer of students, exploring potential partnerships, or addressing relevant operational issues, such as how student loan payments are administered.

Higher education providers are independent from government and as such must continue to make the necessary and appropriate financial decisions to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Grouped Questions: 109861, 109862, 109863

[Source](#)

Department for Work and Pensions: Employment Schemes: Young People

Susan Murray (Liberal Democrats): (UIN109870) To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will set out how his Department will ensure that jobs under the Jobs Guarantee scheme are additional, including whether they represent newly created roles or existing vacancies.

Andrew Western: Eligible young people participating in the scheme are likely to have multiple barriers and complex needs which may have prevented them from securing employment. The scheme will break the cycle of unemployment by guaranteeing meaningful paid employment opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach.

It is a requirement of the Jobs Guarantee scheme that jobs created or sourced under the scheme do not cause existing employees or contractors to be displaced, dismissed, or to have their hours reduced.

[Source](#)

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Alison Bennett (Liberal Democrats): (UIN109716) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has assessed the potential merits of waiving interest on student loans for people who withdraw from university due to health conditions or other mitigating circumstances.

Josh MacAlister: Students may defer or withdraw from their studies for different reasons including due to health conditions and other mitigating circumstances. Interest will continue to accrue even if a student suspends or withdraws from their course, but current students on Plan 5 loans will only accrue Retail Price Index level interest, without the additional rates of Plan 2.

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 income drops below the repayment threshold, or they are not earning, their repayments will stop.

Any outstanding loan will be cancelled if the borrower becomes disabled and permanently unfit for work, and debt is never passed on to family members or descendants.

Grouped Questions: 109715

Source

Sector news

Future Universities - UUK

UUK launched Future Universities, a national conversation about how universities can secure a brighter future for the next generation.

Universities are essential to the nation's prosperity and there can be no national renewal without strong universities.

Future Universities will see the sector listening to those who rely on universities – businesses, communities and students – with their needs informing how the sector should evolve to play its fullest part in national renewal.

Future Jobs is the first major part of the Future Universities work created to ensure graduates are able to get great jobs by strengthening the vital link between universities and employers. With increasing questions about whether degrees lead to 'good jobs', it is essential to find solutions that support business to access the skills they need now and in the future, and in the process tackle the challenges graduates are facing in the jobs market.

Future Jobs: what is it?

Universities play a central role in building a skilled workforce and supporting the ideas and innovation that fuel national growth.

Future Jobs begins with a UK wide business listening exercise. By bringing employers, sector bodies and local partners together with universities, it will gather real insight into the skills and opportunities the economy needs next.

Insights from these discussions will feed into the Future Jobs roadmap, a focused set of practical actions designed to better match graduate skills to employer demand and support businesses to innovate, scale and create high quality jobs in every part of the UK.

Future Jobs is about matching the skills needs of employers with the graduates universities produce, enhancing the essential role universities play in delivering good jobs and supporting economic growth.

You [can read the full announcement](#).

Government vows to “unlock opportunities for young people across the country” ahead of National Apprenticeship Week

The Government outlined a series of measures aimed at improving access to apprenticeships for young people across the country. These include piloting a “clearing-style” system that would redirect applicants who narrowly miss out on their preferred apprenticeship into other suitable roles in their area. There will also be an online platform consolidating information on apprenticeship opportunities, including data on earnings and career progression, to help young people make informed choices.

The Government said these changes, supported by the Growth and Skills Levy, are intended to support the creation of around **50,000** additional apprenticeship places and contribute to its ambition that two-thirds of young people progress into higher-level learning or quality apprenticeships. The announcement also referenced wider efforts to modernise the skills system and help employers, particularly smaller businesses, build a stronger pipeline of trained workers.

You [can read the full statement](#).

This National Apprenticeships Week, universities commit to tackling challenges facing the graduate job market, as new poll reveals public thinks they could do more - UUK

As National Apprenticeships Week begins under the shadow of the rampant rise of AI and a stagnant economy, there are growing concerns about what the future looks like for graduates and increasing emphasis on apprenticeships as another route to employment. In response, universities are today [launching a national conversation with employers](#) to hear about the skills and experience that graduates will need to give them resilience over their careers.

The move comes as a poll commissioned by Universities UK (UUK) found that seven out of 10 people think universities could do more to help the country succeed.

Overwhelmingly, the public (86%) also felt that the country’s future prosperity will depend on its ability to make the most of the skills and talent of the entire population. 73% believe the UK’s ability to make scientific discoveries and inventions

will be vital to our future prosperity, while 74% think universities have an important role to play.

In response, Universities UK (UUK) is embarking on a nationwide conversation about the future role of universities.

Major long-term factors like the emergence of AI, global insecurity and the pressing need for regional economic growth all mean that what the country needs from its universities is changing. UUK is launching *Future Universities* to hear how the higher education sector should evolve to meet these changing needs. This will see the sector challenging itself, asking difficult questions, and working with businesses and investors, students and local communities to find the answers.

It will begin by confronting concerns about graduate employability, working with employers to focus on future jobs, before looking at how universities can go even further in boosting communities, driving growth through innovation and meeting the future needs of students.

This spring, events with major employers and SMEs will be taking place across the UK, including:

- Glasgow
- Newcastle
- Cardiff
- Derby
- London
- Exeter
- Southampton
- Leicester, and
- Kent

These will see employers and higher education providers collaborating to understand how universities can do more to meet future skills needs so that more graduates get great jobs and businesses can grow faster.

The conversations with employers will inform a 'Future Jobs Roadmap' to be launched this summer, containing practical and actionable solutions for universities, employers and governments to improve graduate employability.

Professor Malcolm Press CBE, President of Universities UK said:

"It is understandably an uncertain time for people at the moment. From rapid advancements in AI, to a shifting global order, or the urgent need to grow the economy in every part of the country, the world is changing and the UK must be

ready to lead, not follow. Universities have a vital role to play in shaping a brighter future, and there is no national renewal without strong universities.

"But universities also recognise that we must continue to evolve to meet the country's needs and to play our full part possible in building long term prosperity. Over the months ahead, universities across the country will be engaging to listen, to learn, and to go further in supporting businesses with the skills and innovation they need to grow and, crucially, ensure more graduates are able to access high quality jobs."

You [can read the full announcement](#).

Protecting UK higher education from foreign interference - DfE

The Government has published detailed guidance to help UK higher education providers identify, manage and report risks of foreign interference in their activities. The document defines foreign interference as covert, coercive or deceptive activity conducted by, or on behalf of, a foreign state with the aim of influencing decisions, research, debate or institutional governance. It distinguishes this from legitimate international engagement, emphasising that the vast majority of global partnerships, research collaborations and student exchanges are lawful and beneficial. The purpose of the guidance is not to deter international collaboration, but to ensure that institutions are alert to malign activity that could undermine academic freedom, freedom of speech, research integrity or institutional autonomy.

The guidance explains that universities may be targeted because of their global reputation, research expertise, influence on public policy and concentration of international staff and students. It outlines potential areas of vulnerability, including research partnerships in sensitive subject areas, attempts to shape academic publications or event content, pressure relating to staffing decisions, intimidation of students or academics, and efforts to gain access to sensitive data or emerging technologies. It notes that interference may begin as apparently legitimate engagement before becoming coercive, for example through implicit threats, reputational pressure or financial leverage.

Institutions are encouraged to embed foreign interference risk within existing governance, compliance and risk-management frameworks rather than treating it as a standalone issue. The guidance advises senior leaders to ensure clear reporting routes, internal escalation mechanisms and oversight at governing-body level. Staff and students are encouraged to report concerns where interactions feel intimidating, unusually secretive, or linked to potential negative consequences for non-

compliance. The document stresses proportionality, warning against discrimination or suspicion based solely on nationality.

The Government signposts a range of existing support mechanisms. Security advice is available through the National Protective Security Authority, including tailored guidance for the research and education sector. Cyber security resources are available from the National Cyber Security Centre. In England, regulatory expectations relating to free speech and governance are overseen by the Office for Students, which has published advice on managing international partnerships alongside free speech duties. Students who believe their free speech rights have been infringed may ultimately escalate complaints to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator after exhausting internal procedures.

The guidance also sits alongside broader national security legislation and transparency measures, including the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme, which requires certain arrangements with foreign powers to be declared. The overall approach presented is one of risk awareness and resilience: maintaining the UK's openness and global engagement in higher education while strengthening safeguards against coercive or covert foreign state activity.

You [can read the full announcement](#).

A New Frontier: higher education and diversifying the talent pipeline for London's emerging industries – London Higher report

'A New Frontier: higher education and diversifying the talent pipeline for London's emerging industries', launched on 11 February 2026 at Queen Mary University of London, presents the first systematic analysis of how London's universities support inclusive access to careers in innovation-focused industries such as life sciences, artificial intelligence and green technology. These are sectors earmarked for growth in both the Mayor's London Growth Plan and the Government's Industrial Strategy.

The report shows that a diverse range of over 30 higher education providers already deliver impactful widening participation initiatives aligned to frontier innovation sectors. However, the provision is unevenly distributed, concentrated in central and West London. Those living and studying in outer boroughs face limited exposure to frontier innovation careers.

The report recommends:

- London stakeholders adopt a strategic approach to identifying gaps in inclusive talent activity for the frontier innovation sector and monitoring the impact of interventions. This could be done using the pathways and talent map that this report creates, as a common framework for guiding collaboration
- Policymakers stimulate regional coordination via a dedicated Inclusive Talent Challenge Fund. This would meet the government's own stated aims of aligning its funding for the HE sector more closely with growth and opportunity.
- All partners in London's skills ecosystem adopt the frontier innovation pathways and talent framework put forward in this report as a tool for strategic collaboration and tracking impact.
- London's higher education sector pools provision of careers advice and guidance and other widening participation programmes, to extend support to outer London, drive efficiency, and build on the good work already being done.

You [can read the full report.](#)

