



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

09 – 13 June 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Innovation showcase, Innovation, growth and the regions - Science and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 10 June, the HoC Science and Technology Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Innovation showcase, Innovation, growth and the regions”.

Witnesses included:

- Luke Savage (Chief Technology Officer and Co-founder at Tribol Braking
- Professor Dame Jessica Corner (Executive Chair, Research England at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI))
- Dean Cook (Executive Director, Place and Global, Innovate UK at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI))
- The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB (Minister for Science at Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)
- Holly Yates (Director for Science, Research and Innovation at Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)
- Oliver St John (Deputy Director of Innovation Ecosystem at Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

Luke Savage opened by describing Tribol Braking’s development as a spinout from the University of Exeter, supported by Innovate UK’s ICURe programme. He praised the programme for helping commercialise university IP but warned that Innovate UK funding has become increasingly limited and competitive. He recommended greater investment and a reformed, two-stage grant application process that includes face-to-face interviews for consortia.

Professor Dame Jessica Corner explained that Research England is working to rebalance R&D investment geographically. She reported that in 2023, 50% of UKRI funding was awarded outside the Southeast, up from 47% in 2021. She stressed the key role universities play in regional innovation and noted the recent launch of a national spinout registry, tracking over 1,600 spinouts, with early data showing spinouts now increasingly emerging from a broader range of institutions.

Dean Cook outlined Innovate UK’s place agenda, which includes Launchpads, accelerators, and a network of 400 regional growth advisors. Around 60% of Innovate UK business funding now goes to firms outside the Southeast. He acknowledged concerns about regional disparities in advisor support, such as in Devon, and said this

would be reviewed. Cook also confirmed efforts to reduce bureaucracy - application cycle times have dropped 32% - and stated that a strategy refresh would be published later in 2025.

The Committee questioned Innovate UK's transparency and impact measurement. Cook cited the Impact Evaluations Framework and real-time publishing of grant data, but agreed more could be done, including improving access to datasets. He confirmed Innovate UK had supported a range of regional innovation events, including Tech Weeks in Birmingham and London.

On research infrastructure, Professor Corner said that catapult centres were generally located in existing cluster areas, but UKRI was now examining how to more strategically locate infrastructure to stimulate new regional growth. She emphasised the importance of local innovation partnerships, especially in areas without devolved mayors, to ensure funding aligned with local strengths.

Lord Vallance confirmed that regional innovation is a key objective of government policy, and that it would feature prominently in the forthcoming Industrial Strategy. He noted that UKRI is progressing toward the government's target of a 40% increase in funding outside the Greater Southeast, currently at 27%, and that £500 million had been allocated to strategic regional authorities.

On the balance of research funding, Lord Vallance stated that current UKRI spend is split approximately 50% blue sky research, 20% mission-driven, and 30% industrial growth, with greater emphasis now being placed on return on investment. He said transparency on these allocations and their outcomes was crucial, and public-private leverage should guide mission and growth spending.

The session also covered scale-up infrastructure, with concern that many regional businesses cannot grow locally due to lack of investment and capacity. Lord Vallance noted the government's interest in supporting AI Growth Zones and confirmed the AI Energy Council was working across departments to address power and grid constraints.

He also discussed investor readiness, backing proposals to link this to technology readiness levels, and pointed to schemes such as the Science and Technology Venture Capital Fellowship.

Lord Vallance acknowledged the negative impact of cuts to Overseas Development Aid (ODA) on international science partnerships, and confirmed DSIT is working with the Foreign Office to mitigate this. On defence innovation, he said UKRI already directs £350 million toward defence-related R&D, and DSIT works closely with the new UK Defence Innovation Organisation and NSIF to align R&D with procurement.

On university competitiveness, Steve Race MP warned that changes - such as high visa fees (reportedly 17 times higher than in competitor countries) and a proposed levy on international students—would be difficult for universities to absorb, given their central role in the UK's R&D ecosystem. He asked whether the department had assessed the impact of the 9% levy on international students mentioned in the Immigration Whitepaper (later clarified as 6%).

Lord Vallance responded by stressing that the figure was “a model in an appendix, not a proposal.” He acknowledged the essential role of overseas students and researchers in UK R&D and outlined four key pressures facing universities: Over-reliance on international student income, Domestic tuition fees not rising in real terms, Gaps in full economic costing for research and Inflationary pressures.

He also welcomed measures in the Immigration White Paper to streamline global talent visa routes, noting that schemes like those used by ARIA were working efficiently, with processing times as short as two to six weeks. He confirmed that the department would continue to monitor the situation.

The session concluded with a shared recognition of the importance of better regional support, stronger university-industry-government collaboration, and the need for long-term, strategic planning to deliver innovation-led growth across all parts of the UK.

You can [watch the session](#).

Spending Review 2025

On 11 Wednesday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP announced the budgets for departments in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2025.

During the debate following the announcement, Helen Hayes MP (Labour) highlighted the crucial role universities play in the local economy, generating jobs, improving skills, and boosting life chances. She expressed concern that a number of universities are at the brink of insolvency and stressed the urgent need for support. She called on the Chancellor to confirm that she would work with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that no town or city has to face the devastating consequences of a university going bust. Hayes also referred to the sector's call for a transformation fund to help universities reform and secure a sustainable future, urging the Government to provide the assistance necessary to protect this vital part of the economy and ensure a strong future for higher education institutions.

In response, Rachel Reeves pointed out the government's commitment to research and development, highlighting the £86 billion investment in this area, much of which is channelled through universities and research institutes. While she did not give a direct commitment to a transformation fund, the Chancellor of the Exchequer assured the House that the Education Secretary or a relevant Minister would meet with Helen Hayes to discuss the wider allocation from the spending review and how it can support universities and the vital work they do.

You can read the [full spending review](#) and the [transcript](#), as well as [UUK's response to the CSR](#).

Forthcoming business

Department for Education- Oral Questions

On Monday 16 June, at 2.00pm the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP will answer oral questions in the House of Commons. Relevant questions include:

- Jack Rankin MP (Conservative): What assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of StandWithUs UK's Voice of Students 2024-2025 report on antisemitism on university campuses (904587)
- Greg Smith MP (Conservative): What assessment her department has made of the potential impact of changes to funding for Level 7 apprenticeships on people aged 22 and over.

You can find a [list of questions here](#).

Innovation showcase - Science and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 17 June, the HoC Science and Technology Committee will hear oral evidence as part of their inquiry into "Innovation showcase".

Witnesses include:

- Lord Willetts (Chair, Regulatory Innovation Office)
- Dr Scott Steedman (CBE, Director-General of Standards, BSI)
- Doug Brion (Founder and CEO, Matta)
- Chris Vann (COO, Autolus Therapeutics)

You can [watch the session](#).

Written questions and statements

Overseas Students: Visas

Tom Hayes (Labour): (UIN54216) To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether he has had discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on visa applications for students attending English as a Foreign Language (EFL) schools.

Gareth Thomas: As the Minister for Exports, I regularly meet with ministerial counterparts to discuss DBT's interests with regards to International Education. I am due to have a meeting with the Minister for Migration shortly to discuss these interests, including that of English Language Teaching (ELT) schools.

Personal Independence Payment: Students

Alex Sobel (Labour): (UIN54340) To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 20 May 2025 to Question 51421 on Students: Personal Independence Payment, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of consulting with students who receive Personal Independence Payment.

Stephen Timms: The Pathways to Work Green Paper set out a range of proposals to reform health and disability benefits and employment support and opened a public consultation on certain reforms. The consultation welcomes all views, and we hope that a wide range of voices, including students, will respond before it closes on the 30 June 2025.

We are also running a programme of accessible public events to further facilitate input. The series of both virtual and in-person events across the country, will help us to hear from people directly.

We are continuing to facilitate other ways to involve stakeholders and disabled people in our reforms. In addition to the consultation itself, we will establish 'collaboration committees' that bring groups, including disabled people and other experts, together for specific work areas.

Our wider review of the PIP assessment, led by myself, will also bring together a range of experts, stakeholders and people with lived experience. Throughout the review, we will work closely with disabled people, the organisations that support them and others, to ensure that the voices of those who go through

the PIP assessment and those with expertise in the system are embedded in the review.

Learning Disability: Disability Aids

Ian Byrne (Labour): (UIN54020) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of removing spelling and grammar software from Disabled Students' Allowance funding on student retention rates at universities.

Janet Daby: The department engaged with disability experts who support disabled students to gather their feedback and insights on the decision to remove non-specialist spelling and grammar software from Disabled Students' Allowance funding.

The department's review of non-specialist spelling and grammar software found that the required functionality to meet students' disability-related support needs was available to students in free to access software. We do not expect that this change will affect students' retention rates or employment prospects.

Grouped Questions: 54019

Department for Education: Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act 2023

Patrick Hurley (Labour): (UIN 54988) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when secondary legislation for the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act 2023 will be laid before Parliament.

Janet Daby: The government is committed to delivering the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) in the 2026/27 academic year for courses starting from 1 January 2027. We shall share further details and plans for LLE delivery alongside the multi-year spending review in June, including information on maintenance loans, supplementary grants, priority courses and additional entitlement, and information on the expansion and regulation of modular funding, together with the Office for Students. Parliamentary time allowing, the department plans to lay the secondary legislation necessary for the LLE, including that made under powers in the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act 2023 in 2026.

Universities: Libraries

Manuela Perteghella (Liberal Democrats): (UIN 56549) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to (a) reform e-lending rules and (b) enable digital interlibrary loans for university libraries.

Janet Daby: Universities are autonomous institutions and therefore operate independently from government. As such, the responsibility for enabling digital interlibrary loans for university libraries rests with the individual institutions themselves. It is within their purview to develop and implement policies that best meet the needs of their students and faculty. The government supports the autonomy of these institutions and encourages them to collaborate and innovate in the provision of digital resources and services.

Apprentices: Standards

Matt Vickers (Conservative): (UIN 54928) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the causes of the recent improvement in the apprenticeship achievement rate.

Janet Daby: The apprenticeship achievement rate for apprenticeship standards increased by 6 percentage points to 60.5% for the 2023/24 academic year.

There are a range of drivers of non-achievement, and the department worked in partnership with providers, employers and apprentices to understand and directly address these.

The Apprenticeship Accountability Framework has supported and challenged providers to take proactive steps to improve the quality of their provision. Where performance falls short, the framework enables targeted challenge and intervention. As a result, most providers with an Accountability Framework Improvement Plan significantly improved their achievement rates between 2021/22 and 2023/24.

In addition, the support and guidance available to employers and apprentices has been enhanced and the department has worked with the Learning and Work Institute to produce a number of guides to support apprentices' on-programme experience, including a line manager guide to apprenticeships.

The department has also introduced tools to provide timely feedback on quality and reasons for withdrawal so that we can continue to drive forward progress in the coming years, in partnership with the sector.

Further Education: Milton Keynes

Callum Anderson (Labour): (UIN 55713) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support colleges in Milton Keynes to utilise new technologies to (a) tackle workload and (b) improve outcomes.

Janet Daby: The department has promised to take up a new era in technology, to back our teachers and deliver better life chances for students across the country.

We are investing millions of pounds in further evidence generation on the safe and effective use of EdTech in colleges. The Edtech Impact Testbed Pilot, announced at Education World Forum, aims to explore how technology can address significant challenges in the education sector. This pilot will test Edtech products and practices already in use in schools and colleges. The goal is to generate evidence of the impact on improving staff workload, pupil outcomes, and inclusivity. The expression of interest for this pilot will launch shortly on Citizen Space and colleges will be able to apply to get involved. The website where colleges can express their interest is available at: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/>.

In addition, we plan to publish support materials for teachers and leaders to help them with the safe and effective use of artificial intelligence (AI), so dedicated professionals working in education can spend more time doing what they do best and what they enjoy, face to face engagement with students.

The department also provides funding for Jisc, who operate the UK's ultra-fast national research and education network 'Janet', one of the most secure and powerful data networks in the world. This central funding allows colleges to connect on Janet and benefit from a good level of connectivity and cyber security, ensuring that the foundations for technology infrastructure are in place for colleges to be able to harness the opportunities that technology presents.

Department for Education: Overseas Students

Adam Jogee (Labour): (UIN 55702) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the link between trends in the number of international students and the number of courses at universities.

Janet Daby: This government's position on international students is clear. We are committed to a United Kingdom that is outward looking and welcomes international students who make a positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, our economy and society as a whole.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes data on student enrolments across UK HE providers.

Counts of student enrolments in UK HE providers by permanent address are published in Table 1 of HESA's Student Data and can be accessed here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-1>.

Apprentices: Planning

Kevin Hollinrake (Conservative): (UIN 54912) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many level 7 Chartered Town Planning Apprenticeships have been (a) started and (b) completed in each year for which data is available.

Janet Daby: The number of starts and achievements on level 7 'Chartered Town Planner' apprenticeship courses in England can be found in the 'Apprenticeships' accredited official statistics publication, which is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/588ac458-07a8-46d4-2dfe-08dd9f6d0ac9>.

The link above includes data published in March 2025. The data set includes full-year figures from 2019/20 to 2023/24, and figures from August 2024 to January 2025 for the 2024/25 academic year.

Students: Fees and Charges

Patrick Hurley (Labour): (UIN 54989) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made contribution of the part-time student premium to the Government's opportunity mission.

Janet Daby: The department is determined to break down barriers to opportunity by supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background, where they live and their personal circumstances. Part-time student premium funding allocated through the Strategic Priorities Grant, is an important part of delivering on this vision and our Opportunity Mission.

This funding is allocated to higher education providers in England which are on the Office for Students (OfS)' Approved (fee cap) register, to support them to provide part-time courses for students. This recognises that the flexibility part-time courses offer is important, especially for older learners and those from underrepresented groups.

This is why my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education's recent guidance to the OfS explicitly directs the OfS to retain the per-student funding rates for the student premiums, including the part-time student premium, where affordable. Funding allocations for individual higher education providers for the forthcoming academic year will be published by the OfS in due course.

Higher Education: Taxation

Ben Obese-Jecty (Conservative): (UIN 55416) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a levy on higher education provider income from international students.

Janet Daby: The immigration white paper sets out a series of measures that will achieve a reduction in net migration, while maintaining the UK's globally competitive offer to international students and making a significant contribution to growth by boosting our skills base.

This includes the commitment to explore the introduction of a levy on higher education provider income from international students, with proceeds to be reinvested in the domestic higher education and skills system. We will set out more details around the levy in due course.

Universities: Finance

Adam Jogee (Labour): (UIN 55668) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps she has taken to support universities with funding challenges.

Janet Daby: To support universities in stabilising their financial positions, the Office for Students (OfS) will continue dedicating significant resources to ensuring the sector's financial sustainability. The department has appointed Professor Edward Peck as the substantive Chair of the OfS, where he will play a key role in strengthening this commitment while also expanding opportunities in higher education (HE).

Additionally, we have made the difficult decision to increase tuition fee limits by 3.1% for the 2025/26 academic year, aligning with inflation.

The department will outline its plans for HE reform in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, set to be published this summer.

Grouped Questions: 55357

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Technology

Ben Obese-Jecty (Conservative): (UIN 55211) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to p.20 of the Plan for Change, CP 1210, published on 5 December 2024, what steps he is taking to support the diffusion of technologies.

Feryal Clark: The Chancellor, Business Secretary and I asked the Government Chief Scientific Adviser and National Technology Adviser to carry out a Review of the barriers to the adoption of transformative digital technologies. The Review has almost concluded, and the findings and recommendations are feeding into the Government's Industrial Strategy White Paper and sector plans. The Industrial Strategy will take a holistic view across innovation, skills, regulation, finance and other policy enablers and barriers to improving the diffusion of technology and hence business productivity.

Employment Tribunals Service: Disclosure of Information

Pippa Heylings (Liberal Democrats): (UIN 56951) To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent the misuse of non-disclosure agreements in employment tribunal settlements.

Justin Madders: The Government has been clear that NDAs should not be misused by employers to conceal misconduct. There are already legal limitations on the use of NDAs. For example, an NDA cannot prevent a worker from whistleblowing, require a worker to cover up iniquity, or prevent a worker from doing anything that may be required by law.

We recognise that misuse of NDAs is an important issue which warrants further consideration and are actively looking at all options.

Home Office: Visas: Graduates

Maureen Burke (Labour): (UIN 57000) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of allowing consideration of extenuating circumstances in decisions on Graduate visa applications.

Seema Malhotra: The Graduate route is an unsponsored route with streamlined requirements, of which a fundamental element is the need to have successfully completed an eligible course of study. UKVI have the ability to exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis where there are exceptionally compelling and compassionate circumstances.

Home Office: Visas: Graduates

The Lord Weir of Ballyholme: (HL7869) To ask His Majesty's Government, as a part of the changes announced in the white paper Restoring control over the immigration system, published on 12 May, whether they will review the salary threshold to qualify for a regulated qualifications framework level 6 for graduate route jobs, and whether that threshold will have flexibility to take account of regional variations in graduate starter salaries.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Hanson of Flint: Following the proposes set out in the Immigration White paper, the Home Office will ask the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to undertake a thorough review of salary requirements (including discounts) to ensure that employers are no longer incentivised to recruit from abroad rather than train at home.

The Government will set out further details in the near future.

Further details can be found in the technical annex of the White Paper published here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper

UK Research and Innovation: Expenditure

The Lord Nash (Conservative): (HL7681) To ask His Majesty's Government, with reference to page 20 of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)'s Annual Report and Accounts 2023–24, whether the decision to increase expenditure by £181 million through reprofiling quality-related funding complied with the departmental expenditure limit control rules and ringfence restrictions in the Consolidated Budgeting Guidance 2023–24; and if not, whether Treasury consent was obtained in line with paragraph 2.52 of that guidance.

The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB: The reprofiling of quality-related funding payments to higher education institutions in 2023-24 complied fully with DSIT's departmental expenditure limit control rules and Consolidated Budgeting Guidance. No payments

in advance of need were made and spending across the DSIT portfolio remained within departmental control totals despite the reprofile, which is designed to ensure effective utilisation of R&D budgets within and across financial years.

Sector news

Government announces £86 billion investment in R&D between 2025 and 2029

On Monday 09 June, the Government has confirmed a major £86 billion investment in R&D between 2025 and 2029 ahead of this year's Spending Review - a strong signal of the UK's ambition to back innovation, drive economic growth, and support research excellence across the country.

Key details include:

- £86 billion to fund everything from new drug treatments and longer lasting batteries to new AI breakthroughs to generate billions for the UK economy and drive our Plan for Change
- includes up to £500 million for regions across the UK, with local leaders part of decision making

The announcement comes ahead of next week's Spending Review, where the Chancellor will make clear that investing in Britain's renewal will deliver change for working people and their communities

Chancellor Rachel Reeves will announce a transformative £86 billion in the Spending Review to turbo-charge our fastest growing sectors, from tech and life sciences, to advanced manufacturing and defence, as part of the government's plan to invest in Britain's renewal through our Modern Industrial Strategy.

Britain will boost its world-leading status in research and innovation with a bumper funding package worth more than £22.5 billion a year in 2029/2030. From exploring new drug treatments and longer lasting batteries, to new AI breakthroughs, the package will drive new jobs and economic growth as well as ensuring the UK leads the way in pioneering the technologies of the future.

You can [read the full press release](#).

Responding to the government's £86 billion funding announcement for R&D – Universities UK

“The government has made a smart investment in one of the UK's greatest strengths. The UK has a real opportunity to sow the seeds of long term growth, benefiting all parts of the UK - with universities spread right across the country working with industry and public sector bodies to turn discoveries into economic success. They stand ready to double down with government, building stronger links with sectors of the economy where we have real room to grow.

This might feel remote, or that it only benefits the tech bros, but I've seen universities turning kit and equipment over to companies to help them fix problems, and be more productive; I've seen them spinning out new enterprises based on fundamental research, and investing in them to help them grow. This creates good jobs and attracts investment everywhere from Swansea to Aberdeen, from Barrow to Plymouth.

Universities will put their shoulder to the wheel behind the government's belief in the power of research and innovation.”

- **Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive of Universities UK**

Tooling up: building a new economic mission for higher education – Post 18 Project report

On Monday 9 June, a report by The Post-18 Project asserts that to drive national economic growth and tackle regional inequality, England's higher education (HE) system must undergo a strategic shift. The authors argue that universities, colleges and specialist providers need to align more closely with an industrial strategy focused on productivity, skills and regional development, rather than primarily serving student preferences.

The key findings and proposals include:

Current misalignment:

The HE sector excels globally but remains “structurally disconnected” from skills policy, industry needs and regional economies. Funding and regulation lack mechanisms to steer provision towards national economic goals.

Outdated economic paradigm:

Since the 1980s, UK economic growth has leaned on market-driven approaches -

deregulation, student choice, light-touch oversight - that have produced uneven outcomes in productivity and regional development, particularly post-2008.

Major funding and regional risks:

While university expansion funded through tuition-fee loans enabled growth, it also led to overproduction of popular, low-cost subjects at the expense of regional discipline mix and under-served areas, risking system instability.

Labour's new industrial strategy:

With the draft *Invest 2035* strategy, government champions place-based growth via sector clusters. But universities are largely missing from its core, necessitating better integration.

The report urges HE to treat higher education, apprenticeships, and technical training as one cohesive system. It highlights **five strategic priorities** for the upcoming post-16 and HE white paper:

- Strengthening regional data and insight – build regional growth “insight centres.”
- Brokerage between education and employers – convene HE, FE, apprenticeships & employers via regional tables.
- Tempers competition – consider moderate caps on student number growth, with priority-based ‘growth cases’.
- Blur academic/vocational divide – create a single qualification framework that allows flex between classroom and workplace learning.
- Finance transformation – explore private finance options and transparent public funding signals

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

Leave to Achieve: How universities can contribute to social mobility in their regions – SMF report

On Tuesday 04 June, the Social Market Foundation (SMF) published a new report calling on universities to take a more active role in supporting social mobility in their local communities - moving beyond traditional access targets to a broader, place-based mission that boosts opportunity and outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Key details include:

- The report finds that over half of the UK's lowest-mobility areas are within reach of a university – yet local young people often do not benefit from nearby higher education institutions

- SMF argues that universities should act not only as educators, but also as local employers and civic anchors – working in partnership with schools, colleges and local authorities to raise attainment and create new pathways into higher education and employment
- Case studies highlight best practice, including guaranteed offers for local students, targeted scholarships, and internal staff mobility programmes.

The report calls for a new approach to widening participation – one that is regionally coordinated, long-term, and embedded in local economic planning.

SMF proposes a framework for action, encouraging universities to:

- partner with local schools and colleges to raise attainment and widen entry routes
- hire and support local talent through inclusive employment practices
- embed themselves in civic and economic life to strengthen local opportunity

The recommendations come as the sector awaits further details on post-18 education reform, with growing pressure for universities to demonstrate impact beyond admissions and league tables.

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

Cambridge and Manchester partnership to boost UK innovation and growth gets government backing

Cambridge will join forces with Manchester as part of a pioneering collaboration to harness the combined strengths of both universities and cities – and boost innovation and growth for the whole of the UK

This pioneering initiative brings together the combined strengths of Cambridge and Manchester to create something that is truly groundbreaking. - Professor Deborah Prentice, Vice-Chancellor

The Cambridge x Manchester Innovation Partnership – the first trans-UK innovation collaboration of its kind – will receive £4.8m of funding from Research England over three years, it has been announced. With further investment from the two universities, the total funding for the partnership will be £6m. The initiative aims to strengthen research networks, accelerate scale-up growth, drive private sector investment into R&D, and attract new foreign direct investment.

You can [read the full press release](#).

Higher education finances and funding in England - House of Commons Library research briefing

The House of Commons Library published Research Briefing, offering a detailed overview of how higher education (HE) in England is funded - including current challenges, financial sustainability concerns, and potential reforms.

Key details include:

Strained finances: HE providers are under increasing pressure due to shrinking government grants and tuition fee caps that haven't kept pace with inflation. Rising costs—such as staff pay, energy bills, and maintenance—compound these challenges. In May 2025, the Office for Students projected that 72% of providers could face a deficit by 2025–26, with 43% already expecting a deficit in 2024–25.

Impact on provision: Financial strain has prompted universities to announce redundancies, close courses, curb research investment, and defer essential maintenance.

Over-reliance on international fees: With growing dependency on income from overseas students, warnings have been issued about the risks if international enrolment plateaus or falls.

Funding breakdown and trends:

- In 2023/24, English HE providers recorded total income of £44.6 billion.
- Real income grew nearly threefold since the mid-1990s, while student numbers increased by 85% and academic staff by 115%
- The income mix has shifted significantly: tuition fees now account for over 50% of total income (up from 24% in 2005/06), while direct government grants have dropped from 39% to just 11% over the same period

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) proposes two main avenues to improve HE funding:

- Raise the undergraduate tuition fee cap.
- Increase public funding through teaching and research grants

More significant reforms to the higher education funding model have also been proposed and modelled by the consultancy London Economics as part of [work commissioned by the University of the Arts London, the University and College Union, and in a collection of essays published by the Higher Education Policy Institute.](#)

These include:

- A specific tax paid by graduates
- A graduate employer levy paid by organisations that employ graduates
- A reformed student loan repayment system, with stepped repayments that mean higher-earning graduates make repayments at a higher rate than lower earners

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

The impact of socioeconomic background on the student experience - Unite Students report

Unite Students published a new report examining how students from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience university life outside the classroom. Drawing on data from over 8,000 applicants and students, the report reveals that while the majority describe their experience as positive, stark disparities remain for those from less advantaged backgrounds.

Three-quarters of students rated their overall university experience positively. However, applicants from lower socioeconomic groups (C2DE) consistently reported lower levels of confidence, wellbeing, and satisfaction than their more affluent peers (ABC1). Financial strain was a major concern - 44% of C2DE students said money worries negatively affected their mental health, compared to 35% of ABC1 students.

The research also highlights that students from marginalised groups, including LGBTQ+ and care-experienced applicants, face additional barriers. These students expressed lower confidence in budgeting, independent living, and forming social connections. Trans and care-experienced students also reported some of the lowest wellbeing and resilience scores across all groups surveyed.

Although resilience levels were broadly high across the student population, the report finds that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often start university with lower confidence in their ability to succeed. Around half of all students said they felt anxious about “fitting in,” a figure that rose significantly among LGBTQ+, female, and neurodiverse respondents.

Unite recommends a series of practical interventions. These include more tailored financial support, inclusive wellbeing services, and community-building activities that reflect the diversity of the student body. The report calls on universities and accommodation providers to take a more inclusive, data-informed approach to supporting students - particularly those who are most at risk of isolation or disadvantage.

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

Journalism bodies write to Education Secretary on funding cuts

On Tuesday 10 June, five leading journalism organisations—NCTJ, AJE UK, BJTC, MeCCSA, and the PPA—published a joint letter sent to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, calling for the reversal of planned cuts to Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) funding for journalism courses in higher education.

The letter highlights concerns that removing this funding will damage the pipeline of talent entering the industry, reduce diversity, and weaken access to high-quality, ethical journalism training. It argues that the decision sends a damaging signal about the government's support for journalism at a time when trust in news and the fight against misinformation are increasingly critical.

The organisations point to evidence showing that 81 per cent of working journalists hold a qualification, with the majority trained through NCTJ-accredited university courses—many of which rely on SPG support. They warn that without this funding, access to training will be restricted, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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

Office for Students publishes Annual TRAC Data 2023–24

On Tuesday 10 June, the Office for Students (OfS), in collaboration with UKRI, the Scottish Funding Council, HEFCW and Northern Ireland's Department for the Economy, released the sector-wide Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) data for the academic year 2023–24

The TRAC dataset provides a comprehensive breakdown of the full economic costs across teaching, research, and administrative activities in higher education institutions (HEIs) across England and Northern Ireland. Key findings from the summary report include:

- **Sector-wide financial deficit:** Institutions collectively recorded a £2.77 billion deficit, recovering 93.7 % of full economic costs—down from a £1.93 billion deficit and 98.6 % cost recovery in 2022–23
- **Rising expenditure:** Total sector costs increased from £19.14 billion to £20.78 billion, driven largely by staff costs, operational expenses, and growing contributions to USS pension deficits
- **Incomplete coverage:** Data submission covered 128 HEIs, ensuring broad but not total sector inclusion

Analysed by TRAC peer group, the figures highlight significant variability in financial performance and cost recovery across institutions - underlying persistent concerns around financial sustainability.

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

DfE confirms reduced Turing Scheme budget for 2025–26

On Wednesday 11 June, the Department for Education published updated guidance for the 2025–26 Turing Scheme and confirmed a reduced budget of £78 million for the next round of the UK’s international mobility programme. This represents a significant drop from the “up to £110 million” allocation in 2024–25, of which £105.4 million was ultimately distributed.

The Turing Scheme provides funding for placements abroad in higher education, further education, and schools, supporting global opportunities for UK-registered students. The 2025–26 round will fund placements taking place between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026, lasting from two weeks to 12 months.

Despite the reduced budget, the scheme continues to prioritise widening access and inclusion:

- HE students can receive daily grants ranging from £12 to £19, rising to £16 - £23 for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with SEND.
- Additional support is available for travel, visas, and preparation.
- Providers receive organisational support funding to manage placements.

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

Student Academic Experience Survey 2025 - Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute report

On Thursday 12 June, Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) released the 2025 edition of the Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES), based on responses from over 10,000 full-time undergraduate students across the UK. The findings highlight the continued impact of the cost-of-living crisis on student life, study habits, and perceptions of value.

A key theme of this year's survey is the sharp rise in term-time employment. Nearly seven in ten students (68%) now work during term, up from 56% in 2024 and 42% in 2020. This has coincided with a drop in independent study time—from an average of 13.6 hours a week last year to 11.6 in 2025. Total weekly workload, combining study and employment, has fallen slightly to 39.8 hours, down from 41.7.

Perceptions of value for money continue to decline:

- Only 37% of students rate their course as “good” or “very good” value for money, down from 39% in 2024.
- 11% of respondents said they would not attend university if given the choice again—up from 6% last year.

Despite financial pressures, some measures have improved. More students (26%) say their experience exceeded expectations, up from 22% last year. Turnaround on assessment feedback has also improved significantly, with 61% of students reporting that assignments are returned within two weeks—up from 45% in 2024.

The survey included a new focus on mental health support. Two in five students (40%) believe universities should offer comprehensive mental health services, including for complex conditions. The data also explores how well students feel known by staff: on average, students said four staff members were familiar with their name and progress.

Results varied by student background:

- T-level and International Baccalaureate entrants reported the highest levels of satisfaction and value.
- International students were more likely to say their experience exceeded expectations (35% compared to 23% of UK students), but only 49% would choose the same course again.

Advance HE's Chief Executive Alison Johns noted the "striking increase" in students balancing paid work with studies, stressing the need for institutions to adapt both academic and support services. HEPI Director Nick Hillman added that today's students show remarkable resilience, but warned the student experience is now "completely different from what many policymakers remember."

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

Inquiry into the barriers young carers face in accessing higher education, employment, and training – APPG for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers

On Thursday 12 June, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers launched a new inquiry into the barriers young carers face in accessing higher education, employment, and training. The inquiry is supported by the charity Carers Trust and aims to build a stronger evidence base on how unpaid caring responsibilities affect young people's life opportunities.

The inquiry follows growing concern over the scale and impact of youth caring. Evidence submitted to the APPG shows that thousands of young people—some as young as five—regularly provide over 50 hours of unpaid care each week. These responsibilities are linked to poorer school attendance, lower academic attainment, and reduced participation in further and higher education.

According to Carers Trust, young carers are significantly less likely to achieve top A-level grades and are at greater risk of being not in education, employment, or training (NEET). The charity also reported a 43% drop in UCAS applications from students self-identifying as carers between 2023 and 2024.

The inquiry will explore:

- The educational impact of unpaid caring on attendance, attainment, and exclusion
- Barriers to accessing higher education, apprenticeships, and employment
- The effectiveness of current support, including financial aid, flexible study options, and identification in schools

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

Education Committee opens inquiry into university finances

On Thursday 12 June, the House of Commons Education Committee issued a call for evidence as part of its new inquiry “Universities on the brink? Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students”

The Committee aims to examine the mounting financial pressures on UK universities, citing recent warnings from the Office for Students (OfS) about sector-wide fragility. Officials stress that many institutions are struggling with stagnant tuition fees, rising operational costs, and an overreliance on international student recruitment, which is vulnerable to immigration policy shifts .

Committee Chair Helen Hayes MP commented:

“We have taken stock of the changing landscape in higher education and the perfect storm of problems universities are facing... tuition fees having barely increased in a decade, pressure on research funding and government immigration policy which is leading to the number of international students falling”

The inquiry seeks written submissions from universities, students, financial bodies, and other stakeholders, focusing on:

- How universities are managing financial sustainability in the face of cost inflation and flat fee regimes
- The impact of declining international student numbers on university budgets and stability
- Options for funding reform, including variable tuition pricing, grant enhancements, or new revenue models

You can [read the full inquiry](#), to which UUK will be making a submission.

Responding to the Spending Review - Universities UK

“The Chancellor is right to be proud of our world-leading universities which, by providing the skilled workforce and R&D that industry needs, will underpin renewal in every part of the country. The spending review has cemented the importance of R&D funding to national growth, but this must translate into support for universities more generally if they are to ensure their stability in extremely difficult circumstances.

Universities can go even further in driving economic growth and expanding opportunity, and we look forward to working with government to achieve the sustainable funding settlement that requires.”

- Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive of UUK

Home Office releases monthly visa application data – May 2025

On Thursday 12 June, the Home Office published figures for entry clearance visa applications made in May 2025, providing insight into UK-bound travel trends for purposes such as study, work, family, and youth mobility

Key highlights include:

- **Seasonal Worker visas increased** from 37,000 to 40,000 following a May data correction
- **Temporary work routes remain strong**, with significant demand from sectors such as health, agriculture, and care.
- **Study visa applications** reflect recent declines: following stricter dependants’ rules introduced in January 2024, main applicant numbers are down (e.g., April 2025 saw 14,800 main and just 1,000 dependant applications)
- **Youth Mobility and Skilled Worker routes** continue steady, though Skilled Worker applications and dependants have fallen from last year’s highs

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