All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

09 – 13 March 2026

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

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Parliamentary business

Department for Work and Pensions - Oral Questions

On Monday 9 March, at 2.30pm the Secretary of Department for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Greg Smith MP (Conservative) cited Centre for Social Justice analysis suggesting that 707,000 graduates were out of work and claiming benefits at the end of last year, while arguing that some employers increasingly want apprentices rather than graduates.

In response, Pat McFadden said graduate unemployment is an international issue and linked the government’s approach to increasing support for youth apprenticeships and reversing the decline in apprenticeship starts.

Danny Chambers MP (Liberal Democrat) raised concerns about recent graduates struggling to secure work despite strong degrees and asked whether the government had assessed the impact of artificial intelligence on graduate employment prospects.

The Minister said labour markets are undergoing major structural change driven by technology, and argued that governments must focus on training and helping young people adapt rather than leaving them to navigate the transition alone.

Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrat) also questioned the lack of detail available on the growth and skills levy shortly before its launch, noting that only a small number of courses had been confirmed and that key information had not yet been published.

Paul McFadden acknowledged that information on apprenticeships is often less developed than that available for university routes, and said the government needs to improve this so that apprenticeships are treated with equal esteem.

You can watch the session and read the transcript.

The draft Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 - Third Delegated Legislation Committee Debate

On Tuesday 10 March, the Third Delegated Legislation Committee considered the regulations to raise tuition fees in England. The accompanying explanatory material confirms that this is the parliamentary vehicle for the planned tuition fee uplift, as it would increase the maximum tuition fee limits for undergraduate and accelerated courses in England in the 2026/27 and 2027/28 academic years, including the main full-time cap.

The regulations would preserve the fee limits that currently apply to academic years beginning on or after 1 August 2019 and before 1 August 2026, as well as the separate fee limits for lower-fee foundation years beginning on or after 1 August 2025.

You can read the full details.

Student Loan System – HoL Oral Question

On Tuesday 10 March, there was a House of Lords oral question on the “Student Loan System”, tabled as an oral question by Lord Sikka (Labour).

Lord Sikka opened the debate by asking what plans the Government have for reforming the student loan system. In response for the Government, Baroness Blake of Leeds said the system is complex and that Ministers are looking at ways to make it fairer, while also remaining fiscally responsible. She added that the Government want to support students from all backgrounds and pointed to the introduction of maintenance grants of up to £1,000 a year.

He argued that the current system is unjust, with many graduates facing real rates of interest and repayments while earning below the median wage. He suggested a range of possible reforms, including abolishing tuition fees, charging only nominal interest, reducing the repayment rate, and aligning the repayment threshold with median earnings, and asked which of these options the Government found attractive. Baroness Blake did not endorse any specific proposal, but said there is significant concern about the impact on young people and that the Government’s aim is to make the system fair and affordable, regardless of background.

Lord Naseby (Conservative) asked whether the Government could take the relatively straightforward step of moving from RPI to CPI for the interest rate while considering wider reform. Baroness Blake replied that no decision in this area is simple, and stressed that each element of the system has wider consequences that need to be considered carefully.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (Crossbench) raised the issue of intergenerational fairness, noting that many older generations had attended university free of charge while current graduates face substantial repayment burdens well into later life. She asked whether some form of taxation should instead be considered to provide more collective support for higher education. Baroness Blake did not engage directly with that proposal, but acknowledged the strength of feeling on the issue and said reform would need to proceed in a fair and equitable way.

Lord Mohammed of Tinsley (Liberal Democrat) asked what assessment the Government had made of the long-term impact of frozen repayment thresholds and interest arrangements, particularly for graduates on plan 2 loans. Baroness Blake responded by emphasising again the complexity of the system and said the issue would remain under review as the Government looked for the best solutions to support young people into higher education.

Baroness Barran (Conservative) suggested that, while broader reform is being considered, the Government could improve transparency immediately by publishing the longitudinal educational outcomes data in full, so that prospective students could better judge which institutions and courses are most likely to lead to repayment and positive earnings outcomes. Baroness Blake said she would write to Baroness Barran on that point. She also stressed that any unpaid balance is written off after 30 years and does not pass to family members, and argued that universities need to do more to demonstrate the quality and outcomes of the education they provide.

Lord Woodley (Labour) drew comparisons with Scotland and much of Europe, where tuition fee arrangements are different and average repayment burdens are significantly lower than in England. He asked whether more could be done to support English students. Baroness Blake said comparisons between systems are useful, but noted that tuition fees have long been controversial and that the Government now need to consider the lessons of the last 14 to 15 years while keeping students' needs at the centre.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) raised concerns about unpaid student debt owed by former EU students and asked what steps the Government would take to avoid this increasing in future, including in the event of rejoining Erasmus. Baroness Blake said such implications would need to be considered as policy develops, but did not offer a substantive response on that specific point.

Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat) broadened the debate by asking how the student loan system fits with the Government's wider plans for economic growth and what ministers want from universities and the student population. He argued that the current model risks sending a negative message to prospective students while universities themselves are under financial strain. Baroness Blake responded that the Government should not make simplistic assumptions about employment outcomes from particular courses, but said student destinations and educational quality do matter, and that the Government are determined to link higher education more clearly to growth priorities and future workforce needs.

You can read the full transcript.

Forthcoming business

Easing the repayment terms of Plan 2 student loans – HoL Oral Question

On Tuesday 17 March, there will be a House of Lords oral question on the "Easing the repayment terms of Plan 2 student loans", tabled in by Lord Balfe (Conservative).

You can watch the session.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology - Oral Questions

On Wednesday 17 March, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Liz Kendal, and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant questions include:

- Adam Thompson (Labour): What steps she is taking to increase levels of funding for UK Research and Innovation.
- Sarah Pochin (Reform UK): What assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to the budget of the Science and Technology Facilities Council on research facilities and programmes.

You can watch the session.

Written questions and statements

Department of Health and Social Care: Medicine: Research

Martin Rhodes (Labour) (Glasgow North): (908024) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support higher education institutions with health research.

Zubir Ahmed (Labour) (Glasgow South West): The Department, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is the United Kingdom's largest funder of health and care research training. NIHR delivers a comprehensive research career pathway, from internships and predoctoral fellowships through to research professorships, for the full range of clinical and non-clinical academics, providing the skilled research workforce in universities to lead research. The NIHR invests over £220 million each year in research training programmes.

Furthermore, the Department is working with the devolved administrations, other funders, and wider stakeholders to implement the recommendations from the recent Office for the Strategic Co-ordination of Health Research reports, to ensure there is a comprehensive, clear, and rewarding career pathway for clinical academics in health and care research. This includes the introduction of Clinical Future Leaders Fellowships, which will expand national support for clinical academic careers.

The Department, through the NIHR, invests in centres of excellence and collaborations, services, and facilities to enable and deliver research in England. Collectively these form the NIHR infrastructure. NIHR infrastructure helps to support and deliver research across the National Health Service and wider health and care system, including universities. The NIHR infrastructure supports patients and the public to participate in high quality research. The Department is committed to ensuring that all patients have access to cutting-edge clinical trials and innovative, lifesaving treatments.

By investing in research across public health and social care, NIHR enables universities to address wider determinants of health, support independence, reduce inequalities, and inform local decision-making. Dedicated NIHR programmes and infrastructure work alongside Higher Education Institutions to conduct research in community, local authority, and other non-clinical settings, ensuring evidence is generated where it is most needed and can be translated into meaningful improvements in care and services.

Source

Department of Health and Social Care: Medicine: Students

Claire Young (Liberal Democrats) (Thornbury and Yate): (115020) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the adequacy of clinical placement provision for final year medical students in relation to location and accessibility.

Karin Smyth (Labour) (Bristol South): No such discussions have taken place. NHS England provides funding to National Health Service providers for undergraduate medical placements that are in scope of the NHS Education and Training (E&T) tariffs. The undergraduate medical tariff price includes a nationally mandated sum as well as regional weighting through the Market Forces Factor. The E&T tariff guidance is reviewed and published annually.

From year five of an undergraduate course and year two of a graduate-entry course, eligible medical students can also claim reimbursement towards travel and dual accommodation costs during practice placement through the NHS Bursary scheme.

The 10-Year Health Plan, published on 3 July 2025, committed to reforming the undergraduate and postgraduate medical tariffs. We will ensure the system drives clinical placement activity in the right professions and settings, especially community settings, and that it harnesses innovative approaches like simulated learning.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Calum Miller (Liberal Democrats) (Bicester and Woodstock): (115148) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of changing the (i) interest rate, for example to CPI, for existing student loan borrowers and (ii) maximum period before student loans are written off for existing borrowers on the public finances.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Reducing the interest rate charged to existing student loan borrowers would lead to reduced future repayments due to some borrowers paying off their loans faster, and therefore represent a cost to the public purse.

Increasing the maximum period before student loans are written off for existing borrowers would generate a saving for public finances due to additional repayments being made by borrowers who would otherwise have had their loans written off.

Plan 5 loans were introduced by the previous government for new undergraduate students starting courses from the 2023/24 academic year onwards and, compared to the Plan 2 loans they replaced, combine reduced interest rates with a ten year extension to the loan repayment term and a lower repayment threshold. Impacts were published here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Admissions

Douglas McAllister (Labour) (West Dunbartonshire): (908044) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to meet the target of two-thirds of young people participating in higher-level learning.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): We have set an ambition to have two-thirds (66.7%) of young people participating in higher-level learning, academic, technical, or an apprenticeship, by age 25.

The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out our path to meeting that ambition, by raising the status of further education, strengthening our world-leading higher education sector, and introducing more support and flexibility for learners.

We are delivering these reforms at pace, with rapid progress across funding, policy development and key launches that are already impacting providers and learners:

- We are cracking down on rogue university franchising and in November we published our response to the consultation on Franchising in Higher Education.
- We are delivering on our commitment to expand the TEC programme. In December, we launched applications to become a Wave 2 TEC, and announced CTECs allocations. The national bidding round for Post16 and Construction Skills Capacity Funding in non devolved areas opened in February.

- In January, we launched the tender for technical and vocational subject teaching professional development, laid regulations for Initial Teacher Education reform, and refreshed the Teach in FE campaign.
- We have consulted on Post-16 Level 3 and Below Pathways.
- At Autumn Budget 2025, we announced over £1.5 billion of funding is being made available across the spending review period into the Youth Guarantee and the Growth and Skills Levy. This funds £820 million for the Youth Guarantee, ensuring all young people aged 16-24 years old have access to the support they need to earn and learn.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Artificial Intelligence

Lee Anderson (Reform UK) (Ashfield): (114290) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of AI use on academic integrity.

Olivia Bailey (Labour) (Reading West and Mid Berkshire): The department monitors the emerging impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on education, including risks to academic integrity. Our published policy position on generative AI is evidence-based and sets out clear expectations for schools and colleges on safe, responsible and ethical use.

We work closely with regulators to ensure that academic integrity is protected and that providers have the support they need to prevent and respond to misuse of AI. In 2025 the Joint Council for Qualifications supported by Ofqual updated their guidance for schools on AI use in assessments. This provides clarity for teachers and assessors in identifying and managing potential malpractice and maintaining integrity of assessment. We have also made wider support materials publicly available that help education staff manage risks, promote ethical use, and reinforce robust approaches to detecting and addressing issues.

Source

Department of Health and Social Care: Medicine: Postgraduate Education

Gregory Campbell (Democratic Unionist Party) (East Londonderry): (116709) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what changes have been introduced to postgraduate medical education as a result of the review published in October 2025.

Karin Smyth (Labour) (Bristol South): Phase 1 of the Medical Training Review identified key challenges and areas for improvement across postgraduate medical training, alongside what currently works well. Bottlenecks in postgraduate medical training were identified as a continuing concern for resident doctors and medical graduates. The Medical Training (Prioritisation) Act 2026, which became an Act of Parliament on 5 March 2026, seeks to address these bottlenecks and prioritises United Kingdom medical graduates for foundation training and UK graduates and other doctors with significant experience working in the National Health Service for specialty training.

Phase 2 of the Medical Training Review is already underway and will involve working with a wide range of stakeholders across the UK to design a package of reform.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Rupa Huq (Labour) (Ealing Central and Acton): (116524) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of student loan debt on parents returning to education.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Borrowers will be liable to repay after leaving study once their earnings exceed the earnings threshold, paying 9% of income above that level. Unlike commercial loans, student loans carry significant protections for borrowers and student loan repayments are linked to income, rather than the amount borrowed or interest applied.

If a borrower's income drops below the repayment threshold, or they are not earning, their repayments will stop. Any outstanding loan including interest built up, is cancelled at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower, and debt is never passed on to family members or descendants. This is a deliberate government investment in students and the economy.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Luke Evans (Conservative) (Hinckley and Bosworth): (116604) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with [a] Cabinet colleagues and [b] external bodies on the freezing of the repayment threshold for student loans.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and departmental officials regularly engage with Cabinet colleagues and external bodies on a range of matters, including higher education (HE) finance and funding.

We are determined that the HE funding system should deliver for students, for our economy, and for universities. The government keeps the student finance system under continuous review to ensure that it delivers good value for both students and taxpayers.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Luke Evans (Conservative) (Hinckley and Bosworth): (116601) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the difference in approach in Wales towards freezing Part 2 Student Loan repayment thresholds on equalities in England.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Education is a devolved matter, and therefore it is a matter for the devolved administrations to decide how they wish to develop their higher education systems. It is for the Welsh government to develop their own equalities impact assessment for borrowers in Wales.

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Mathematics: Research

The Viscount Stansgate (Labour): (HL14782) To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of current levels of UK Research and Innovation funding for mathematical sciences research.

The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB (Labour): The Department recognises the mathematical sciences is a key element for the advancement of all areas of science and technology. In 2025-2026, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) committed £25 million to core mathematical sciences, alongside wider support through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), including, Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) in mathematical sciences and related areas.

UKRI's current corporate plan for 2025-2027, published on 25th November 2025, includes the launch of new doctoral training awards to target priority areas, including £1 million for mathematical sciences through EPSRC.

The Government plan to publish a single UKRI Delivery Plan, which will provide an update on UKRI's plans for the 2026-27 financial year.

Grouped Questions: HL14783, HL14784

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: UK Research and Innovation: Business Plans

The Viscount Stansgate (Labour): (HL14783) To ask His Majesty's Government when they expect the revised corporate plan for UK Research and Innovation to be published.

The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB (Labour): The Department recognises the mathematical sciences is a key element for the advancement of all areas of science and technology. In 2025-2026, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) committed £25 million to core mathematical sciences, alongside wider support through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), including, Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) in mathematical sciences and related areas.

UKRI's current corporate plan for 2025-2027, published on 25th November 2025, includes the launch of new doctoral training awards to target priority areas, including £1 million for mathematical sciences through EPSRC.

The Government plan to publish a single UKRI Delivery Plan, which will provide an update on UKRI's plans for the 2026-27 financial year.

Grouped Questions: HL14782, HL14784

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: UK Research and Innovation: Business Plans

The Viscount Stansgate (Labour): (HL14784) To ask His Majesty's Government whether the contribution of the mathematical sciences will be reflected in UK Research and Innovation's revised corporate plan.

The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB (Labour): The Department recognises the mathematical sciences is a key element for the advancement of all areas of science and technology. In 2025-2026, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) committed £25 million to core mathematical sciences, alongside wider support through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), including, Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) in mathematical sciences and related areas.

UKRI's current corporate plan for 2025-2027, published on 25th November 2025, includes the launch of new doctoral training awards to target priority areas, including £1 million for mathematical sciences through EPSRC.

The Government plan to publish a single UKRI Delivery Plan, which will provide an update on UKRI's plans for the 2026-27 financial year.

Grouped Questions: HL14782, HL14783

Source

Cabinet Office: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood (Conservative) (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire): (117006) To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, through what legal mechanism will the UK sign up to the Erasmus+ scheme, and whether it will require UK Parliamentary legislation or authorisation.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Labour) (Torfaen): The legal mechanism for the UK's association to Erasmus+ in 2027 is a decision of the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes which will amend Protocol I of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Once the Specialised Committee decision is adopted, this will be made publicly available on gov.uk.

The Department for Education will also lay a Statutory Instrument to implement personal data processing aspects of the Erasmus+ programme in due course.

Source

Home Office: Visas: Chevening Scholarships Programme

Ayoub Khan (Independent) (Birmingham Perry Barr): (118121) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of creating a dedicated visa category for Chevening scholars to apply for after completing their studies in the UK.

Mike Tapp (Labour) (Dover and Deal): Chevening Scholars are required, under the terms of their scholarship, to return to their home country at the end of their studies. These conditions apply to all scholars and mean they must leave the UK on completion of their course unless they obtain written consent from the scholarship provider to apply for further permission in the UK, including under the Graduate route. The Government has no plans to introduce a dedicated post-study visa for Chevening Scholars.

Grouped Questions: 118120

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Luke Evans (Conservative) (Hinckley and Bosworth): (116560) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what is the evidential basis for her view that graduates will pay back £8 more a month on average due to the freezing of the repayment threshold for student loans.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Monthly repayments for a borrower earning above the repayment threshold in a scenario with no threshold freeze was calculated as £8 lower in the 2027/28 financial year compared to the repayments of the same borrower in a scenario with a freeze. This is calculated as 9% (the repayment rate) of the difference between the frozen threshold and the non-frozen threshold. This figure was based on Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) inflation forecasts from the 2025 Spring Statement.

Following updated OBR economic forecasts released on 3 March 2026 as part of the Spring Statement, this figure has been recalculated and remains £8.

For borrowers earning less than the threshold calculated without a freeze, the increased repayments compared to the freeze scenario will be less than £8, and borrowers earning below the frozen threshold will continue to repay nothing.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme and Turing Scheme: Age

Mike Wood (Conservative) (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire): (116513) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether there is a minimum age to participate in the (a) Turing and (b) Erasmus+ scheme.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Most Erasmus+ activities do not have a specific age limit, except for youth activities which are only available to 18 to 30-year-olds. Erasmus+ is designed for a wide range of participants, including learners, trainees, and staff across higher education (HE), further education, vocational education and training, schools, adult education, youth programmes and sport programmes.

Students can participate in Turing Scheme placements if they are receiving education from an eligible provider from primary school through to HE.

Source

Department for Education: Turing Scheme

Mike Wood (Conservative) (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire): (116512) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Turing scheme will be renewed for (a) 2027-28 and (b) 2028-29.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Guidance on the Turing Scheme for the 2026/27 academic year has been published on GOV.UK, and applications for funding are open until 16 March 2026. The budget for 2026/27 will be confirmed in due course.

The Turing Scheme is a demand led, competitive programme, so providers can shape applications to the needs of their students. We do not set targets for the number of Turing Scheme placements in each year, as this is highly dependent on the numbers of students that individual providers intend to send, where they intend to go and how long for. Instead, we allocate funding to prioritise the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and disabilities.

The UK has agreed in principle to associate with Erasmus+ from 2027, and decisions on the Turing Scheme for 2027/28 will be shared in due course.

Grouped Questions: 116511

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Workplace Pensions

Apsana Begum (Labour) (Poplar and Limehouse): (117425) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many higher education institutions have sought to withdraw staff from the Teachers' Pension Scheme in each of the past four quarters.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The government recognises that the financial environment of the higher education (HE) sector is challenging for both providers and for their staff. We are aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing in order to safeguard their financial sustainability, including in relation to pension arrangements.

As providers are independent, the government does not routinely collect information regarding pay and workforce matters in HE. However, we remain committed to engaging with both HE unions and the employer body to better understand the issues affecting the sector, including the workforce.

Furthermore, we appreciate both the impact of the increased Teachers' Pension Scheme employer contribution rate on providers and that defined benefit pensions are highly valued by staff across the sector. As set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, the government is therefore seeking to better understand concerns within the post-1992 HE sector regarding pension provision.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students

Apsana Begum (Labour) (Poplar and Limehouse): (117424) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the proportion of students who are international students in each of the past five years.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK higher education (HE) sector. These data are shared with the department and include a wide range of information on students in UK higher education providers (HEPs), including their country of domicile.

Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, the proportion of students who are international in UK HE has ranged from 22% in 2020/21, to a peak of 26% in 2022/23. Since this peak, the proportion has decreased year on year, to 24% in 2024/25.

Year on year detailed table available below. Note that data provided is for all UK HE providers. The data source link to the table is: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sb273/figure-9.

Academic Year	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Proportion of total that are International Students	22%	24%	26%	25%	24%

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Business Rates

Damian Hinds (Conservative) (East Hampshire): (116734) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the change in business rates liability for the university sector in 2026/7 relative to 2024/5.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Information about business rates, including changes that will come into effect on 1 April 2026, can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/introduction-to-business-rates.

As universities are independent of government, they are responsible for understanding the potential impact of these changes and ensuring their business models enable them to address emerging risks effectively.

The Office for Students (OfS) is responsible for monitoring the sector's financial sustainability. The department works closely with the OfS to understand the sector's changing financial landscape and level of risk.

While the sector is autonomous, this government is committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading sector so it can deliver for students, taxpayers, workers and the economy. Our decision to raise tuition fees annually in line with inflation, alongside refocusing the OfS on monitoring the sector's financial health, demonstrates this commitment.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Grants

Ben Coleman (Labour) (Chelsea and Fulham): (117203) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will introduce supplementary grants for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as other associated countries provide.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The government are committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university.

The government currently provides three mean-tested dependants' grants that low-income students with childcare and/or caring responsibilities can apply for in addition to the regular package of maintenance and tuition fee loans. These are intended to reflect the greater costs that recipients face when going to university, providing a level playing field for students who face additional barriers to study.

From 2028/29, we will also reintroduce maintenance grants to support full-time students from low-income households studying courses aligned with the government's missions and Industrial Strategy. The grants will provide disadvantaged full-time students with up to £1,000 extra per year, on top of existing maintenance loans, increasing cash for students without increasing their debt.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Alison Taylor (Labour) (Paisley and Renfrewshire North): (116833) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to provide financial provision to respond to potential legal challenges by students who did not fully understand the implications for repayment of interest for their student loans.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

Given the inherited fiscal situation, the government is making tough but necessary decisions to protect both taxpayers and students. The government continuously reviews student finance to ensure it remains fair, sustainable, and supportive of students from all backgrounds.

Prospective students have access to a wide range of information across a range of platforms before they submit their loan application. Student loan terms and conditions make clear that the conditions of the loan may change in line with the relevant regulations and students sign these terms and conditions before any money is paid to them. Having access to this information early in the process enables prospective borrowers to seek independent advice if they feel they do not understand aspects of the student loan process, or to better understand the longer-term commitment of a student loan.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Anna Dixon (Labour) (Shipley): (117215) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of including maintenance loans as part of a student loan on students from lower income backgrounds.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): We have future-proofed our maintenance offer by confirming that we will increase maintenance loans in line with forecast inflation every academic year. This will provide students with long-term financial certainty on the support they will receive while studying and ensure that students from the lowest income families receive the largest year-on-year cash increases in support. Maximum loans for living costs for undergraduate students will increase by 2.71% for the 2026/27 academic year.

From 2028/29, maintenance grants will support full-time students from low-income households studying courses aligned with the government's missions. The grants will provide disadvantaged full-time students with up to £1,000 extra per year on top of existing maintenance loans, increasing cash for students without increasing their debt.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Ben Coleman (Labour) (Chelsea and Fulham): (117202) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Department will take to ensure the Erasmus+ programme reaches less advantaged young people who are in further education or apprenticeships.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): This iteration of Erasmus+ has a strong focus on inclusion, with diversity and inclusion set as a core priority. The UK's association will support this commitment, continuing the ambition set by the Turing Scheme to prioritise mobilities involving participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The EU allocates dedicated budgets to support ‘people with fewer opportunities' to take part in mobility activities, including those facing financial, social or health-related barriers. Grant rates are set out in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide for each year of the programme.

The department is working closely with all relevant sectors to maximise take up, particularly among disadvantaged groups. A UK National Agency will be appointed to administer the programme, with a dedicated website and guidance issued well-ahead of the 2027 funding call. Alongside this, there will also be a broad range of sector outreach activities to increase awareness and engagement, such as webinars and targeted communications to eligible organisations.

Grouped Questions: 117200, 117201

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Finance

Alison Taylor (Labour) (Paisley and Renfrewshire North): (116834) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help protect the UK University sector from a potential loss of income from overseas students.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The government welcomes international students who meet the requirements to study in the UK. The Immigration White Paper, published in May 2025, sets out a balanced approach that helps the government achieve our manifesto commitment on reducing net migration while maintaining the UK's global competitiveness.

The Office for Students (OfS) has identified a reliance on international student fee income as a risk to English providers' financial sustainability. It has been clear that providers will need to change their business models to protect their financial health as a response to this risk and others. As higher education (HE) providers are independent from government, they are responsible for managing their finances.

To support the English HE sector, the government has increased tuition fee caps in line with inflation and has asked the OfS to focus on financial sustainability. The financial sustainability of providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved administrations.

Source

Department of Health and Social Care: Allied Health Professions

The Lord Shinkwin (Conservative): (HL14884) To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to protect the workforce pipeline for small and vulnerable allied health professions from the risk of university programme closures or reductions.

The Baroness Merron (Labour): The Department of Health and Social Care works closely with the Department for Education to support the availability of a diverse range of training routes into health and care careers. While the Government is committed to ensuring sustainable training pathways for small and vulnerable healthcare professions, higher education institutions are independent providers and are responsible for making their own decisions about course delivery and viability.

NHS England has a focussed programme for small and vulnerable professions, including Allied Health Professions. This programme helps maintain and strengthen training and education pathways for pre-registration learners, including apprenticeship routes, to support a national strategic approach to placement capacity and to build awareness of healthcare careers.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance

Rachael Maskell (Labour) (York Central): (117320) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the effectiveness of tuition fee-based funding model for higher education.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Around £10.8 billion in tuition fee loans administered by the Student Loans Company were paid directly to higher education providers in the 2024/25 financial year.

To provide long-term funding certainty for the sector, so that it can focus on reform, we will increase tuition fee caps for all higher education providers in line with forecast inflation of 2.71% in 2026/27 and 2.68% in 2027/28 and then legislate when parliamentary time allows to increase tuition fee caps automatically for future years.

We expect the sector to demonstrate that, in return for the increased investment that we are asking students to make, they deliver the best outcomes for those students and the country.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Investment

Rachael Maskell (Labour) (York Central): (117319) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate she has made of the financial return to the economy of public investment in higher education.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): Research by London Economics estimates that teaching and learning activities provided by the UK higher education (HE) sector generated £94.8 billion, which was equivalent to an average £13 return for every £1 of public investment in 2021/22. The combined research and knowledge exchange activities of UK universities generated a total economic impact of approximately £62.84 billion. This equates to an average of £9.90 for every £1 invested. Spending by UK HE providers also produces indirect effects, positively impacting the economy.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance

Rachael Maskell (Labour) (York Central): (117321) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much and what proportion of university fee income is derived from international students in each of the last five years.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK higher education (HE) sector. These data are shared with the department and includes a wide range of information on UK higher education providers (HEPs), including the income they receive through tuition fees.

Between 2019/20 and 2023/24, the proportion of HE tuition fee income that is attributed to international students in UK HE has steadily increased from 39% in 2019/20 to 47% in 2023/24.

The below table shows international tuition fee income as a proportion of total tuition fee income for UK HEPs:

Academic year	**2019/20**	**2020/21**	**2021/22**	**2022/23**	**2023/24**
International tuition fee income as a proportion of total tuition fee income (sector)	39% (£8.2 billion)	39% (£8.8 billion)	43% (£10.4 billion)	46% (£12.1 billion)	47% (£12.7 billion)

HESA university finance data returns for the 2024/25 academic year are not complete therefore have not been included.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Redundancy

Rachael Maskell (Labour) (York Central): (117322) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of redundancies in higher education in the last year.

Josh MacAlister (Labour) (Whitehaven and Workington): The government greatly values the hard work of staff across the higher education (HE) sector who continue to deliver for students and universities during what is a challenging period.

We are aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing to safeguard their financial sustainability.

Given that universities are independent, the government does not have a role in intervening with specific providers in pay and staffing matters, nor does it collect specific data on redundancies within HE.

We encourage providers to work constructively with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent and expertise, and provide stability for the workforce and the institution.

We are committed to putting our world-leading universities onto a secure financial footing so they can face the challenges of the next decade. Our decision to raise tuition fees annually in line with inflation, alongside refocusing the Office for Students on monitoring the sector's financial health, demonstrates this commitment.

Source

Sector news

First V Levels subjects revealed as part of landmark reforms

The government has announced the first subjects for new post-16 qualifications called V Levels, which are due to be introduced from 2027. The initial V Levels will be in education, finance and digital, and are intended to sit alongside A Levels and T Levels as qualifications equivalent in size to one A Level. According to the announcement, they are designed to give students more flexibility to combine academic and vocational study.

The announcement also sets out wider reforms to the post-16 system. Alongside V Levels, the government says it will introduce a one-year Further Study pathway for students not yet ready to move beyond GCSE-level study, and a two-year Occupational pathway for students aiming to progress directly into work or an apprenticeship. The first subjects for these routes will include Education and Early Years, Digital, and Catering and Hospitality.

In addition, the government says T Levels will be expanded into new subject areas such as Sports, Fitness and Exercise Science and Care Services, while changes will also be made to T Level content, assessment and industry placements. It has also launched a consultation on new qualifications for students who need more support before resitting GCSE English or maths.

The announcement states that the reforms are supported by nearly £800 million of additional funding for 16 to 19 education in 2026-27, and that average per-student funding will rise from £6,762 in 2025/26 to £6,874 in the following academic year. It also says that some existing Level 3 qualifications, including certain BTECs, will lose funding approval in areas where T Levels are already available, with V Levels intended to replace them in relevant subject areas.

Chief Executive of UUK, Vivienne Stern MBE, said:

There is no single route into university and students should feel confident that when they get there, their previous qualifications will equip them with the academic and practical skills needed to go on to enter and thrive in the workforce.

We look forward to working with the government to ensure V Levels open doors for young people.

Through our Future Jobs programme, universities across the UK are listening to business leaders to ensure their offering continues to deliver real opportunity and prepares young people for the jobs of tomorrow.

You can read the full announcement.

Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom

The Westminster government's social cohesion action plan includes a dedicated higher education section promising **"stronger protections" against extremism on campus**. The Office for Students (OfS) is set to become a recognised whistleblowing body for staff concerned about Prevent compliance, and there will be new guidance on external speakers and events as well as a "Campus Cohesion Charter" to be co-designed with students.

You can read the full announcement.

Call for evidence: Artificial Intelligence, business and the future of the workforce

Call for Evidence - Committees - UK Parliament

New charter to support women in research: open letter to research funders

New charter to support women in research: open letter to research funders - GOV.UK

UK Research and Innovation - Research Capital Investment Fund (RCIF) allocations

Research Capital Investment Fund (RCIF) allocations – UKRI

Building a future tech sector that works for everyone - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Women In Tech Taskforce are seeking evidence on the interventions needed to help build a tech sector that works for everyone.

This call for evidence seeks evidence on the impact of emerging technologies on women's participation, progression, and leadership in tech.

Insights gathered will help the Women in Tech Taskforce to design, scope, and deliver what works and what needs to change, as the sector evolves.

You can read the full announcement.

Student loans: new inquiry on repayment terms and the taxation of graduates launches

The Treasury Committee launched a new inquiry into student loans and the broader taxation of graduates.

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, students now leave university with more than £50,000 in student loan debt. From the April after they graduate, borrowers make loan repayments of 9% of their earnings above £28,470. At her 2025 Budget, the Chancellor announced this threshold would be frozen for three years from April 2027.

MPs are seeking evidence on graduates' repayment terms, including the extent to which they are reasonable and proportionate in the broader context of graduates' marginal tax rates. This will be used to inform the Committee's views on whether people are being treated fairly once they leave higher education.

The Committee is also enabling anyone over the age of 16 to contribute their experiences directly to the inquiry through an online survey. Questions include whether they would take out the loan today if given the option and whether repayments are having a material impact on their financial planning.

This inquiry will not look at the funding of universities or the administration of individual student loans.

You can read the full announcement.

US international student slump providing opportunities for UK universities

The decline in international student enrolments in the USA will accelerate in 2026, providing opportunities for the UK higher education sector, a British Council report has found.

In 2025, international student enrolments in the US fell by 17,000. This is comparable to the change during the first year of President Trump's first term, when enrolments by international students fell by 16,000.

In the US President's second year of his first term (2018) a further 20,000 fewer international students enrolled in US higher education (37,296 in total). The report authors predict a similar impact in 2026.

The drop in international student enrolments in the US has been most pronounced from India and China, although inbound mobility from other key markets in northeast Asia and the Middle East is also falling significantly.

UK universities stand to gain from the decline in international students choosing the US as a study destination, with more opportunities to recruit high-quality international students from a diverse range of countries, one of the key objectives of the Government's recently announced International Education Strategy.

UK higher education could benefit from several regions, particularly South Asia. Through the first three quarters of 2025, the UK issued 26,000 more student visas to South Asian nationals than in the same period in 2024, far outpacing growth in other regions.

In Bangladesh and Nepal, the UK issued roughly twice as many student visas in 2025 than the year before. In Pakistan, issuance of UK student visas is at an all-time high, and in India there is substantial room for further growth in 2026.

The report outlines that South Asia will be the most important growth market for UK education in 2026. Student mobility from the region will rebound as issuance of UK student visas to applicants in the region picks up.

Researchers also point to a growing trend among international students, with young people choosing to stay at home, with many enrolling in UK Transnational Education (TNE) programmes in their own countries.

Since 2019, China's Ministry of Education has approved TNE programmes or institutes with higher education institutes (HEIs) from 36 countries covering Europe, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas.

UK HEIs are well-positioned to benefit from greater policy support for TNE in China. Since 2019, the UK has ranked second among all countries in approvals of new TNE offerings and first by a significant margin in the number of new joint education institutes.

This overall trend suggests that the pool of international students in major English-speaking host destination countries may be shrinking, as many students who are discouraged from studying in the USA opt to stay home or remain in their own region.

The findings come from the British Council's annual Five Trends report, which spotlights shifts in the international education landscape and forecasts future trends.

You can read the full report.

New tighter controls of subcontractual courses - Office for Students (OfS)

The Office for Students has announced new regulatory requirements for subcontractual higher education courses, where a lead provider contracts another organisation to deliver some or all of a course on its behalf. The changes follow consultation and are intended to strengthen oversight, improve transparency and protect both students and public money after what the regulator describes as rapid recent growth in these arrangements.

Under a new ongoing condition of registration, condition E10, any non-exempt lead provider with, or expecting to have, 100 or more students on relevant subcontractual courses in an academic year will be required to publish the share of tuition fee income it retains, set out its rationale for using subcontracted delivery, identify and address risks to students and taxpayers, and maintain a source of information explaining how these partnerships are overseen. The new condition will apply from 31 March 2026.

The OfS notes that some arrangements are exempt, including where the delivery partner is, for example, a state-funded school, FE corporation, local authority, NHS body, government department, or a provider with its own degree-awarding powers. The rules will also not apply to transnational education. The announcement also links the changes to the Department for Education's forthcoming requirement for delivery partners with at least 300 students to register with the OfS.

Government 'flying blind' on regional growth without proper data, MPs warn

A new report from the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee urges the Government to take a more rigorous, data-driven approach to assess innovation policy. This approach would ensure public funds encourage the development of regional innovation clusters and stimulate private investment.

Innovation sits at the heart of the Government's mission for economic growth. Its prioritisation of R&D spending, and its "unashamedly place-based" Industrial Strategy offers an opportunity to deliver innovation-led regional growth- a priority that successive Governments have pursued unsuccessfully.

However, the report finds "major shortfalls" in the availability and sharing of innovation data, particularly regional data. Without clear metrics and measurements regarding investment, outputs and local impact, it is "impossible" for the Government and UKRI to evaluate existing policies, identify improvements and ensure money is allocated in a targeted way to drive regional growth.

While the committee welcomed the Government's agreement to publish departmental R&D spending plans and outturn data, to remedy this lack of data it recommends that these include regional and cluster-level breakdowns. The report also calls for the government and UKRI to publish annual reports on how public R&D supports regional innovation, and for UKRI to develop measurable, consistent performance metrics rather than high-level objectives.

The report finds that untapped potential for innovation-driven activity through the UK's geographic cluster system can only be unlocked with a more data-driven approach. This is because clusters emerge through sustained investment, infrastructure and skills concentration, which is only possible through a rigorous and data-led approach to policy and funding.

The government should therefore make the mapping, monitoring and support of clusters a core pillar of its Industrial Strategy, establishing a national framework for cluster development and publishing annual performance data.

The committee also highlights barriers to accessing public R&D funding that face innovators outside traditional hotspots. To support regional innovators more effectively, the government should establish a portal matching innovators to funding and Innovate UK should set clear targets and metrics for increasing engagement across the UK.

Further data gaps exist regarding the commercialisation of innovations, in areas such as university spinouts which are key to ensuring the UK's research base contributes to economic growth. To remedy this, the government should accelerate delivery of its University Spinout Dashboard, ensuring it includes standardised data on metrics such as institutional support and regional outcomes.

You can read the full report.

UK research infrastructure better reflects national priorities – but university maintenance lags - NAO

In its new report, the NAO evaluates the relationship between the sponsors and funders of research in the UK, and how those bodies are working to provide the infrastructure needed to fulfil the needs of government, researchers and industry.

The Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) is responsible for two thirds of the government's R&D spending. It sponsors UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), to invest in research and innovation on behalf of government. UKRI spent £1.2 billion on research infrastructure in 2024-25.

The NAO finds improvements in DSIT's approach since it last reported on this subject.[1] It says DSIT is starting to do more to ensure that UKRI spends money in line with policy ambitions, including on six 'frontier technologies' such as AI, cybersecurity and quantum technologies. UKRI has introduced a more consistent and professional approach to funding research infrastructure. DSIT and UKRI have worked well, at speed, to establish the National Quantum Computing Centre.

But there are some key projects causing concern.

Notably, progress on a new national supercomputer[2] has been too slow, and the UK has fallen behind international competitors in this area, the report says. The current supercomputer, ARCHER2, will close thirteen months before its replacement is ready.

Elsewhere, the NAO has found business cases have often been too optimistic, leading to projects being scaled back subsequently, including the upgrade to the John Innes Centre. The project to upgrade the FAAM Airborne Laboratory had spent £46 million of its £49 million budget before UKRI decided to stop providing funding to operate the aircraft. This means it will not fly again, although UKRI believes most of the scientific instruments developed as part of the upgrade project could be used for other purposes.

The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) operates some of UKRI's largest research facilities. It estimated in 2023 that 45% of its estate is in an unacceptable condition, with a maintenance backlog of £360 million.

In the university sector, financial sustainability issues are leading to the deterioration of research infrastructure. Research England estimates that universities are spending £1.8 billion annually on maintaining research infrastructure (with £758 million of that spent entirely on maintenance). It also estimates that £5.6 billion would be needed to return all university-owned infrastructure to a fully operational condition.

The report makes a number of recommendations overall, including that UKRI should adopt a portfolio approach to the management of its research infrastructure estate to support national priorities.

You can read the full report.