



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

1 – 5 May 2023

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

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Parliamentary business

Recess

The House of Commons returned from May Day recess on Tuesday 2 May and rose on Wednesday 3 May for Coronation recess.

The House of Lords rose for Coronation recess on Wednesday 3 May.

Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office - oral questions

On Tuesday 2 May, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, and his ministerial team, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Martyn Day MP (SNP) asked what recent discussions the Secretary of State had had with Cabinet colleagues on association to the EU's Horizon Europe programme.

James Gray MP (Conservative) cited the contribution of Horizon Europe to the UK's leading research into Arctic and Antarctic science and asked for reassurance that this work would continue to be funded, and for negotiations to draw to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Stephen Doughty MP, Shadow Europe Minister, said that thousands of jobs were at risk across the UK at key research institutions, and that the government had been dragging its heels. He asked about the timelines for negotiations on Horizon Europe.

Alyn Smith MP, SNP Spokesperson for Europe, said he was puzzled by the government's approach, highlighting that there was cross-party support for UK universities to be able to re-join Horizon Europe, and for the thousands of associated jobs and millions in funding that came with it. He said that he had spoken to University of Dundee Principal, Professor Ian Gillespie, who had said that he had just come back from Brussels and there was willingness from both the EU and Scotland, adding that the UK needed to also show the same willingness.

Responding on behalf of the government, Leo Docherty MP, Minister for Europe, said that he wouldn't provide a running commentary of negotiations, but that they had optimism and confidence around a fair deal for researchers, businesses and taxpayers.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#) here.

Lords Industry and Regulators Committee ‘the work of the OfS’

On Tuesday 2 May, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee continued their inquiry into ‘the work of the OfS.’

The first session took evidence from Nicola Owen (Deputy Chief Executive Operations at Lancaster University, and Chair at Association of Heads of University Administration), and Erica Conway (Chief Financial Officer at University of Birmingham, and Chair at British Universities Finance Directors Group). Key topics included how the OfS carried out its role, its engagement with higher education providers, the financial sustainability of the higher education sector, and the financial risks universities face.

The second session heard from Mack Marshall (Education Officer at Newcastle University Students’ Union) and Rania Regaieg (Chair of the Board of Trustees, Director and President of the Students’ Union at University of the West of England). Key topics included students’ unions’ experience of engaging with the OfS, how the OfS views the interests of students, and how students view the value of their studies.

You can [watch the session](#) here. A transcript will be made available in due course.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill – Consideration of Lords Message

On Tuesday 2 May, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill returned to the Commons to consider amendments made to the Statutory Tort by the Lords.

The Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho MP, began the session by outlining two government amendments she was bringing forward, which were added to the safeguard amendments Rt Hon Lord Willetts had tabled in the Lords. She welcomed that the Lords had now accepted the tort in principle, saying this was a ‘significant victory’ for freedom of speech on campus, but she recognised that many of her colleagues still had concerns. She wanted to reassure them that the new government amendments would ensure that the tort retained its ‘teeth’ and offered a means of redress for those whose right to free speech had been unlawfully infringed.

Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education, began by criticising the length of parliamentary time the Bill had taken up – 721 days. He then criticised the Minister for rowing back on the compromise reached in the Lords, saying that she had given in to pressure from the Common Sense Group of MPs. He again reiterated Labour’s position that a tort provision was not necessary to tackle this issue and highlighted non-legislative tools already available to help tackle issues such as the Chicago Principles, Universities UK (UUK) guidance, internal processes and several examples of good practice already undertaken by UK institutions. Matt Western also highlighted UUK’s position had remained that the tort should not stand as part of the Bill and the original amendments amounted to a ‘sensible and acceptable compromise’. The Shadow Minister asked why the Minister had not recognised these ‘strong views’ and was invoking tight parliamentary time to push through her ‘regressive motion’.

On the government’s amendment which specified sustained loss as including non-pecuniary loss, Matt Western asked how non-pecuniary loss would be calculated and raised concerns about the costs of litigation for universities, who he said were already facing great financial pressures. In response, the Minister said that calculating loss would be a matter for the courts. On the associated costs, she said that if universities didn’t want to have to spend money on redress, they should “simply uphold freedom of speech”.

On the amendment to allow individuals to seek injunctive relief without completing either of the statutory complaints’ schemes, Matt Western said that Labour did not believe that an injunction was necessary and would complicate the process for all involved. He believed that the amendment created an exemption from the last resort mechanism put in place by the Lords for claims exclusively seeking an injunction, in effect creating a perverse incentive for claimants to bypass the schemes created in the Bill in search of an injunction, including in anticipation of a breach. He then asked the Minister to provide more clarity on when an injunction would be used, and how they would prevent vexatious claims being brought. In response, the Minister said an example where swift redress would be required was if a student had been kicked off their course and they felt that their freedom of speech rights had been impinged on.

The amendments were agreed to, and the Bill will now return to the House of Lords on Wednesday 10 May to consider the new government amendments to the tort.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#) here.

Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology – Oral questions

On Wednesday 3 May, Rt Hon Chloe Smith MP, interim Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology, and her ministerial team, answered questions in the House of Commons.

Dame Diana Johnson MP (Labour) highlighted the importance of Horizon Europe grants for the University of Hull in her constituency. She asked how universities and researchers could plan for the future given the uncertainty. In her reply, the Secretary of State noted the work her department were taking to negotiate and accommodating for the continued delays. She raised comments from Professor Paul Boyle, Vice-Chancellor of Swansea University and Research and Innovation Policy Lead for Universities UK, who acknowledged the seriousness of the government and agreed that it was appropriate to have an alternative plan.

Dr Neil Hudson MP (Conservative) celebrated the scientists and universities in the UK. He noted that the best research was done collaboratively which Horizon Europe facilitated. He asked the Secretary of State to reaffirm her commitment to re-joining Horizon Europe. The Secretary of State reiterated that association with Horizon Europe was the government's preference while outlining that any agreement had to work for taxpayers, researchers, and businesses.

Mary Kelly Foy MP (Labour) raised the Northern Accelerator, led by Durham University, which she said had brought skilled jobs and opportunity to the North East. She asked why the North East only receives 4% of Research England's budget. In his reply, George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research, and Innovation, said that universities in the North East, such as Northumbria University, were increasingly delivering excellent research. He suggested that this would lead to increased funding for the region. He further highlighted the private investment that would benefit the North East.

Mark Pawsey MP (Conservative) asked whether Catapults were the way forward to commercialise the 'great ideas' of academics. George Freeman agreed, noting the £1.9 billion of investment in the Catapult network.

Gregory Campbell MP (DUP) highlighted the success of biomedical sciences, including at Ulster University in Coleraine. He asked whether this could be replicated to ensure the UK was a world leader in biomedical sciences. In his reply, Paul Scully MP, Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy, noted that universities were at the heart

of biomedical sciences and said he hoped to replicate the clustering model around the UK.

Chi Onwurah MP, Shadow Minister for Science, Research, and Digital, said the continued delays to negotiate with Horizon Europe meant Britain had ‘paid the price’ in lost jobs and research. She said the alternative plan ‘short-changed’ scientists. The Shadow Minister asked the Secretary of State to confirm whether funding would be classified as UK science spending, rather than international science spending, in an attempt to meet commitments. The Secretary of State reiterated the government’s work to associate with Horizon Europe and accused the Shadow Minister of being ‘out of step’ with key sector voices.

Chi Onwurah continued by claiming the government was ‘refusing to replace’ EU Regional Development Funds which had reduced funding by £600 million. The Secretary of State described her statement as mischaracterised and said the government was ambitious in its plans for science and research.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#) here.

National Security Bill – Consideration of Lords amendments

On Wednesday 3 May, the National Security Bill returned to the Commons for MPs to consider amendments made during the Bill’s Lords stages. Since the Bill was introduced, there has been widespread criticism of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), for its lack of clarity and potential impact on international research collaboration and associated inward investment.

Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MP, Minister for Security, outlined changes made to the FIRS, which he said made it more focused and targeted. On the primary tier of the FIRS, he said that arrangements to carry out political influence activity would now only be registerable where directed by a foreign power. He cited an example of cultural institutes which he said would not be required to register simply because they receive funding from a foreign power, however, they would be required to register if they were under direction from a foreign power. The Minister said the government would be publishing guidance to support understanding of the scheme and circumstances where an arrangement needed to be registered.

Holly Lynch MP, Shadow Minister for Security, welcomed many of the changes made to the Bill, which she said had reflected the operational expertise of the Lords and had improved the measures overall. On the FIRS, she highlighted concerns that such a

comprehensive section of the Bill had not been tabled until the final stages of the Bill Committee. While Labour had consistently supported the FIRS in principle, she said it still required a degree of fine-tuning. She welcomed that the government would be producing further guidance and said she looked forward to working collaboratively with the Home Office to make sure the FIRS captured what it needed to, without impeding genuine activity and interactions that were benign to national security.

The Bill will now return to the Lords for Peers to consider further amendments made in the Commons.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#) here.

Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill – remaining stages

On Wednesday 3 May, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill passed its Report Stage and Third Reading.

Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Higher Education, spoke to new Clauses 1 and 2 and Amendments 3 and 5. He explained that these amendments sought to (1) introduce parliamentary oversight, (2) provide the sector with as much clarity ahead of the implementation, and (3) to allow for an assessment of the interaction between the Bill and the policy underpinning the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE).

He concluded his remarks by reiterating his party's support for the Bill and highlighting that the amendments sought to futureproof the success of the Bill. He described the addition of Clause 1 as the most important of the tabled amendments which provides a review to guard against unintended effects of the policy, engages parliamentary oversight, and establishes an avenue for all stakeholders to feed into the policy outcome. For this reason, he pressed Clause 1 to a Division.

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education, opened his remarks with Clause 1. The Minister explained that the government intends to launch a technical consultation to specify how funding for wider modules would be determined. However, he said that introducing an ongoing review into primary legislation before the policy had been fully implemented would not be appropriate. For that reason, the government could not support Clause 1.

Regarding Clause 2, which sought to introduce a requirement to publish a revised impact assessment, the Minister assured the House that the government intended to

publish an updated impact assessment for the LLE ahead of the laying of regulations. He said it was not necessary to codify that on the face of primary legislation.

On Amendment 4, which requires any regulations to be laid before the end of September 2024, the Minister explained that due to the complexity of the regulations required, the broader suite of regulations would be laid in mid to late 2024 at the earliest.

The Minister explained that Amendment 3 would require any regulations made under the Act to be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure (active approval by parliament). He stated that the majority of regulations under the Bill would be subject to the affirmative procedure which Clause 2(6) achieves. The Bill also introduces new delegated powers under new paragraphs 1, 1B, 1C and 1F of schedule two to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The Minister clarified that these powers were subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

Munira Wilson MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Education, raised the regulations that specify the number of hours making up a credit. She explained that putting the definition of a credit in the Bill, as proposed in Amendment 2, would give higher education providers confidence that credit values would not be devalued.

In his reply, the Minister said the government did not intend to change the number of learning hours in a credit unless the standards in the sector changed. He noted that regulations on learning hours would have to follow the affirmative resolution procedure, so parliament would always get the chance to debate it.

The House voted against reading Clause 1 a second time. The Bill therefore proceeded to Third Reading.

Matt Western explained that the purpose of the Third Reading is to give the House a chance to debate the contents of a Bill. He described it as an ‘awkward predicament’ that so much of the Bill is yet to be determined by the Minister with the Bill being ‘divorced from the policy it seeks to implement.’

The Shadow Minister concluded his remarks by urging the Minister to engage frequently with the sector, with the opposition, with employers and with non-governmental bodies, such as the Student Loans Company and the Office for Students.

Peter Aldous MP (Conservative) concluded the session by describing the Bill as having the potential to be ‘truly transformational’. He raised outstanding questions regarding the implementation of the Bill and urged to government to address this. He

proceeded to state that the Bill was only one piece of the jigsaw and meaningful lifelong learning should be delivered as part of a coherent post-16 education and skills strategy.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#) here.

Forthcoming business

Recess

The House of Lords and House of Commons will both return from Coronation recess on Tuesday 9 May.

Lords Industry and Regulators Committee ‘the work of the OfS’

On Tuesday 9 May from 10:30am, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will continue their inquiry into ‘the work of the OfS.’ The committee will take evidence from:

- Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive at Office for Students).
- Lord Wharton of Yarm (Chair at Office for Students).

You can [watch the session](#) here.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill – consideration of Commons amendments

In the afternoon of Wednesday 10 May, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will return to the House of Lords for consideration of Commons amendments.

You can [watch the session](#) here.

Horizon Europe – Lords oral question

On Thursday 11 May from 11:00am, the House of Lords will consider ‘plans for the UK to join the Horizon Europe scientific research programme’. The oral question was tabled by Viscount Stansgate (Labour),

You can [watch the session](#) here.

Written Questions

Students: Loans

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to take steps to increase maintenance loans for university students in line with inflation. [UIN 182497]

Robert Halfon: The government reviews the support provided towards students' living costs on an annual basis.

The department has continued to increase maximum loans for living costs each year, with a 2.3% increase for the 2022/23 academic year and a further 2.8% increase for the 2023/24 academic year.

Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs that is lower than the maximum for the 2022/23 academic year and whose household income for the tax year 2022/23 has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have impacted students.

On 11 January 2023, the department announced that student premium funding would be boosted by £15 million. There is now £276 million of student premium funding available this academic year to support students who need additional help. This extra funding will supplement the help universities are already providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes.

The Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS AF) is available to over 900,000 households in Great Britain who do not have a domestic electricity supply and were not eligible to receive support automatically through the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS), providing them with £400 to support them with their energy bills. This includes students who receive their electricity through an intermediary (such as a letting agency or a landlord) who has a commercial electricity supply.

Between October 2022 and March 2023, all households saved money on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee. This was in addition to the £400 energy bills discount for all households. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier were eligible for the energy bills discount.

Together with the higher education sector, we are doing all that we can to support students facing hardship. However, decisions on student finance have to be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of higher education are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university.

Research: North East

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to support the (a) growth and (b) commercialisation of scientific research in the North East. [UIN 182853]

George Freeman: The Government has pledged to increase public investment in R&D outside the Greater Southeast by at least 40% by 2030, and by at least a third over the spending review period.

North East universities received £12 million this year from the Higher Education Innovation Fund, which supports research commercialisation. The Northern Accelerator, a collaboration between North East universities to support spinouts based on their research, received £5 million.

The UK's Catapults de-risk the transition from research to commercial delivery. The 9 centres in the North-East include the Offshore Renewable Catapult in Blyth, Digital Catapult in Sunderland and Satellite Applications Catapult in Country Durham.

Teachers: Workplace Pensions

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of any changes to employer contributions for the Teachers' Pension Scheme on universities. [UIN HL7132]

Baroness Barran: Work on finalising the 2020 valuation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is still ongoing and the department expects to be able to publish the outcome in late summer.

There are several policy decisions and scheme-based assumptions still to be determined that could affect the final outcome, which means it is not possible at this stage to accurately assess the likely impact on scheme employers. Following His

Majesty's Treasury's (HMT) announcement on 30 March 2023 of the government's response to the consultation on the methodology for determining the discount rate to be applied in the valuation of public service schemes, it is expected that the contribution rate for the TPS will need to rise. That is why HMT has committed to continue discussions with the department on the impact for TPS employers in the higher education sector.

The Department is working with HMT and the actuary for the TPS, the Government Actuary's Department, to progress the TPS valuation as quickly as possible. Regular updates will continue to be provided to the groups representing employers and members.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Students

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that university students receive timely (a) referrals for assessment for and (b) diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. [UIN 182215]

Maria Caulfield: We recognise the importance of timely assessment and diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It is the responsibility of integrated care boards (ICBs) to make available appropriate provision to meet the health and care needs of their local population, including for university students, in line with relevant National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. The NICE guideline 'Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management' does not recommend a maximum waiting time standard from referral for an assessment of ADHD, however an assessment should be made as soon as possible.

In a recent Westminster Hall debate, 1 February 2023, I committed to look at how we can improve data on ADHD assessment waiting times, to help improve access to ADHD assessments in a timely way and in line with the NICE guideline.

We are supporting ICBs to expand mental health services through the NHS Long Term Plan, which commits to increasing investment into mental health services by at least £2.3 billion a year by 2023/24 so that an additional two million people can get the support they need.

Health Professions: Training

Wes Streeting: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many UCAS applications there were to AHP courses in each of the last five years. [UIN 182903]

Robert Halfon: The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) publishes figures on the number of applications to subjects allied to medicine.

The latest data covering applications up to the end of the 2022 admissions cycle is available at: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2022>

To access the figures, click on 'Applications & offers' under the 'Sector' heading, then select 'Subject group – HECoS (detailed)' from the drop-down box at the top of the page. The table then shows the number of main scheme applications to '(CAH02) subjects allied to medicine'. To select the full breakdown of subjects allied to medicine in the table, click on the + sign to the left of '(CAH02) subjects allied to medicine'. Note that figures are not available on a consistent basis prior to 2019.

Childcare: Postgraduate Education

Vicky Foxcroft: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on extending the free 30 hours of childcare offer to include parents who are postgraduate students receiving PhD stipends. [UIN 182344]

Claire Coutinho: In the Spring Budget 2023, the government announced a number of transformative reforms to childcare. This includes the expansion of the 30 hours free childcare offer, through which eligible, working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year from when their child is 9 months old to when they start school. This will be rolled out in phases:

From April 2024, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare per week (over 38 weeks a year).

From September 2024, this will be extended to parents of 9 month to 3-year-olds (over 38 weeks a year).

From September 2025, working parents of 9 month to 3-year-olds will be able to access 30 free hours per week (over 38 weeks a year).

To be eligible for this offer, as with the current 30 hours offer, parents will need to earn the equivalent of 16 hours a week of pay at national minimum or living wage and less than £100,000 adjusted net income per year.

The key objective of this measure is to support parental participation in the labour market, which is why this offer is conditional on work. Students who participate in paid work in addition to their studies and meet the income requirements will still be eligible.

There are no plans to extend the eligibility criteria at present. The department recognises the value of parents continuing in education and provides a range of support other than 30 hours for those in further or higher education.

The reforms announced build on the government's current early education entitlements, which includes the universal 15 hour offer for all parents of 3 and 4-year-olds.

Students starting a postgraduate doctoral degree in 2022/23 are eligible to receive a postgraduate doctoral loan of up to £27,892. The loan is intended as a contribution to the cost of study, rather than to specifically cover tuition fees or livings costs.

Further information on the childcare offers available to parents can be found at: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>

Research: Higher Education

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to Table 1c of the Office for National Statistics dataset entitled Research and development expenditure by the UK government, published on 30 March 2023, if she will make an assessment of the reasons for the decrease in net expenditure on R&D by Higher Education Funding Bodies between 2020 and 2021. [UIN 182286]

George Freeman: UK Government investment in Research and Development is subject to changes between years that reflect the profile of long-term investments. The long-term trend is one of growing investment, with UKRI's budget set to increase by 31% between Financial Year (FY) 2017/18 and 2024/25.

FY2020/21 saw significant one-off investments that did not continue to the same degree into FY2021/22. There was a one-time increase in infrastructure investment of £300 million via UKRI's World Class Labs programme which concluded in 2021/22. FY2020/21 also saw a large increase in R&D expenditure for emergency Covid research, including vaccines.

Higher Education Funding Bodies are devolved for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Department cannot make an assessment of their expenditure.

Sector News

The future UK-EU relationship – report

On Saturday 29 April, the Lords European Affairs Committee published a report on the UK-EU relationship. The report is based on an inquiry undertaken between July 2022 and March 2023.

The report examines the overarching state of the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and EU, and how this might be developed in the future, across four themes:

- The overall political, diplomatic, and institutional relationship.
- The foreign policy, defence, and security relationship.
- Energy security and climate change.
- Mobility of people.

The report recommends that the government should work to ensure that barriers to enrolment of EU students at UK universities such as obtaining visas, are minimised.

It recommends that the government explores the possibility of adding a reciprocal element to the Turing scheme, drawing on the experience of Taith scheme introduced by the Welsh government.

It also reiterates the committee’s view that UK association to Horizon Europe and other EU research programmes would be a ‘win-win’ for the UK and the EU.

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

Labour’s university tuition fees stance

On Tuesday 2 May, Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Labour Party, told the BBC’s Radio 4 Today programme that Labour was ‘likely to move on’ from its commitment to scrapping university tuition fees.

The Times also reported that the Labour leader was preparing a speech for later in May in which we would reverse the party’s position on tuition fees.

The article quotes a senior party source: ‘At a time when we’re being so careful about spending commitments, it’s a glaring anomaly that we still haven’t moved on tuition fees. It’s one of the remaining commitments from 2019 that we will be clear we have moved on from.’

You can [read the full Times article](#) here.

Parliamentarians write to UCEA

On Tuesday 2 May, Beth Winter MP (Labour) and 50 other parliamentarians, wrote to Raj Jethwa (Chief Executive of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, UCEA).

The letter calls on UCEA to ‘rethink recommendations to higher education institutions that they cut between 50-100% of staff wages for taking part in a marking and assessment boycott’. It notes that staff ‘deserve to be paid fairly and certainly do not deserve to have their pay docked, simply for taking lawful industrial action short of a strike.’

The group of parliamentarians ‘hope to receive a response as soon as possible confirming that the recommendation for these deductions no longer stands.’

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

HEPI student polling

On Tuesday 2 May, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published detailed political polling of current full-time undergraduate students in the UK. Savanta led the polling of 1,000 students in April 2023.

Key findings include:

- 85% of full-time UK undergraduate students expect to vote at the next general election.
- 28% of students domiciled in England want Labour to commit to abolishing tuition fees in England, 23% want Labour to reduce fees to £6,000, 20% want Labour to back the current system of fees capped at £9,250, 15% want Labour to cut fees to £3,000, 4% want Labour to introduce a graduate tax and 3% want Labour to let the current fees rise with inflation.

- 52% of students think living costs should be covered by targeted grants and top-up loans, while 25% want a mix of grants, loans, and parental contributions.
- 30% of students ‘strongly support’ the recent strikes among higher education staff and a further 37% ‘somewhat support’ them.

You can [read the full polling](#) here.

Alternative options for higher education fees and funding for England – London Economics briefing note

On Wednesday 3 May, London Economics published a briefing note considering the alternative options for higher education fees and funding in England.

Building on previous work for the University of the Arts London in December 2022, the report models several additional alternatives. These alternatives are either fiscally neutral to the Augar response or generate additional cost savings to the Treasury while also being more progressive. By retaining real interest rates, these options include the re-introduction of maintenance grants (in addition to maintenance loans) as well as stepped repayment rates.

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

The value of higher education – TASO report

On Wednesday 3 May, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) published a new report on the value of higher education.

The report focuses on the impact of disadvantaged young people graduating from higher education.

Key findings include:

- Higher education is linked to clear economic benefits for disadvantaged students; however, they consistently earn less than graduates from more advantaged backgrounds – even after considering the university attended or subject choice.

- University graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds appear to benefit from higher levels of measures linked to wellbeing, such as perceived financial prosperity.
- Higher education can increase social and geographical mobility for disadvantaged students.

Following the findings of this report, TASO has commissioned a further investigation of the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset for a more detailed analysis of long-term economic outcomes.

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