



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

10 – 14 February 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Defence – HoC oral questions

On Monday 10 February, the Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon John Healey MP, and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

During topical questions the following exchange took place:

Adam Jogee MP (Labour): The Government are rightly proud of the men and women who work in our defence industry. Will the Minister join me in encouraging excellent universities such as Keele University in Newcastle-under-Lyme to work with our defence sector to create good jobs for local people, boost skills and safeguard our national security?

Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry, Angela Eagle MP: I am more than happy to join my hon. Friend in making those points. He is right that we must fully support defence companies and their personnel, and we must ensure that universities such as Keele, and all others across the further and higher education sectors, welcome defence firms at their careers fairs.

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

Work of the Science Minister – HoC SIT Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 11 February, Minister for Science, Lord Vallance of Balham, gave evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee in a regular ministerial accountability session on the work of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Work of the department

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour) asked how Lord Vallance would assess his first seven months in post. Lord Vallance said he had been pleased to receive a good Spending Review settlement. This reflected the fact that the Government perceived science and technology as an important part of the country's economic growth story. He thought progress had been made on UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Innovate UK, both of which would be announcing new chief executives shortly. He was keen to ensure there was a clear view of the different spending activities undertaken by UKRI. The Regulatory Innovation Office had been set up and had begun to work with

regulators. He hoped a chair would be appointed in the near future. A lot had happened on the structural side of things. The R&D Missions Programme had been implemented and this was very important. He wanted to make the use of science and technology routine within Government. The initial fund consisted of £25 million over the first year, and this would be ramped up significantly in the future.

Global politics

Emily Darlington MP (Labour) said the last few weeks had demonstrated different geopolitical attitudes to science, and asked how DSIT was reacting to this challenge. Lord Vallance said he had laid out five priorities as Science Minister, one of which was international activity. He was very pleased the UK was back in Horizon Europe and had the potential to drive new collaborations through this programme. The European scene was looking good but there were obvious challenges elsewhere in the world, particularly in relation to China. The UK would continue to collaborate in areas of healthcare and climate, but was aware of the need to be careful. The US had always been the UK's biggest science partner and this would continue at a scientist-to-scientist level. There would be significant change under the new US administration and the consequences of this were unknown, but he had no doubt that the UK would continue to work closely with the US on aspects of science.

Darlington asked whether there was an opportunity for the UK to take a lead in areas with which the new US administration was not comfortable. Lord Vallance said a number of new life sciences companies were already working in the UK and he had no doubt that some people would want to come to the UK in the face of changes elsewhere. The UK's health funding was strong through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and Medical Research Council (MRC), and this would not go unnoticed.

Darlington asked whether the UK had the right strategies to attract global talent. Lord Vallance said the UK had always relied on the immigration of top talent and would continue to do so. Systems must be geared to support this and it was important to get the visa system right. The UK needed to continue schemes which attracted global talent.

Economic growth

Onwurah said the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee had heard evidence that it was hard to find a correlation between innovation and economic growth, and asked whether Lord Vallance agreed with this position. Lord Vallance said most of the fastest growing companies in the world were science and technology companies which had innovated in extraordinary ways. He thought the relationship between innovation and economic growth at a national level was very clear. Looking at a local level was interesting. There had been enormous economic growth in Silicon

Valley, but this had also led to significant economic growth elsewhere in the US. Growth ended up being more widely distributed.

Onwurah asked whether growth in the UK's 'golden triangle' generated growth elsewhere in the UK. Lord Vallance said there was a massive concentration of high-end research and development (R&D) in Oxford, Cambridge, and London, but other areas of the UK were also flourishing, including Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Dundee. The Government was keen to harness the full value of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor whilst supporting innovation across the country. He had been speaking with mayoral combined authorities about how to provide greater local control.

Onwurah asked how the value for money of investment in science and technology could be measured across the regions. Lord Vallance said money must be used in the best way to get the maximum effect for the UK. It was crucial to protect and grow basic, curiosity-driven, investigator-led research. This may not bring economic value in the next five years, but was likely to yield longer term returns. Applied research should be aligned with Government ambitions. The UK was very good at start-ups but had failed to scale companies. Money needed to go into supporting this transition. He wanted to be very clear about what money was going towards different areas of spend, as this would make it easier to determine returns.

Steve Race MP (Labour) said public spending was not shared equally around the country, and asked how Lord Vallance would be approaching this issue going forwards. Lord Vallance did not believe that basic, curiosity-driven science would be spread equally around the country, as this tended to happen in specific hotspots. Spend on applied research and company formation should be spread more evenly and appropriately around the country. The UK would do itself a disservice if it did not spread spend across the country, but this must not come at the expense of important clusters.

Darlington asked how Lord Vallance envisioned the role of the regions within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. Lord Vallance said the Corridor was a growth area. Cranfield University was an interesting applied university and there were a number of places along the corridor, such as Milton Keynes, which were creating high quality, well paid jobs of the future. There was a big opportunity around wealth creation across the Corridor.

Funding

Freeman asked how implementation of the UKRI Grant review was going and how much public money should be going towards varying priorities. Lord Vallance said three major reviews of the research grant landscape had taken place, all of which were being implemented by DSIT. UKRI was a long way down the line in relation to

implementation of the Grant review. It was important to implement the most critical parts of reviews rather than trying to do everything at once.

Lord Vallance said DSIT would be looking at spending allocations as part of the next Spending Review process, but things would not change radically. It was important to have a clearer understanding of how spend was resulting in growth and delivering for the Government and the public.

Onwurah asked how it was possible to ensure that funding for curiosity-driven research was not simply given to the same people repeatedly. Lord Vallance said it was absolutely important that curiosity-driven research should take place everywhere, but some research simply had to happen in certain places which had the right facilities or critical mass. Curiosity-driven research would not be spread equally across the country and there would be hotspots.

Darlington said the Labour Party Manifesto had committed to a 10-year R&D settlement, and asked whether this would be set out in the next Spending Review. Lord Vallance said DSIT had done extensive consultation on which areas would most benefit from a 10-year settlement. Too much money was provided in yearly cycles. He wanted to see rollover provision and 10-year funding for certain areas in the next Spending Review.

UKRI reform

Adam Thompson MP (Labour) asked whether a decision on the next chief executive of UKRI had been made, and asked what changes were required. Lord Vallance said an appointment would be announced shortly. He would like to see improved clarity on areas funded by UKRI and wanted to make sure that UKRI looked at the diversity of funding schemes required in the UK. There needed to be greater clarity on return on investment and Innovate UK needed to be focused on the growth mission. Diversity and inclusion were essential for great research and should be an important focus.

Advanced Research and Invention Agency

Thompson asked how the success and value for money of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) could be judged. Lord Vallance thought the UK was right to make ARIA independent. The first programmes were now in play and these looked exciting. There was a new Activation Partners scheme which was about attracting people who could turn ideas into products. Top US venture capital firms had based themselves in the UK specifically to pick up on ARIA. He thought ARIA was already yielding success in terms of inward investment and attracting talent. He had no idea which programmes would succeed. Mr Thompson asked whether ARIA would have an impact on the amount of blue sky research in the UK. Lord Vallance thought more

people from the US were wanting to get involved. ARIA research was not necessarily blue sky, but was instead focused on specific tractable problems. He thought there was a mix between academics and those from industry.

Global talent

Thompson asked whether any progress had been made on visas in terms of bringing talent to the UK. Lord Vallance said a lot of things were happening in this area. The number of people who had applied for the Global Talent visa had increased by 10% over the last year.

Thompson asked whether there was any risk that the focus on global talent would come at the expense of developing home-grown talent. Lord Vallance did not think so. The UK had always relied on domestic talent and international movement and he thought this should continue.

Tax credits

Onwurah asked whether DSIT was looking at extending the zero rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) currently enjoyed by medical and veterinary sciences to other research disciplines. Lord Vallance said it was not. Onwurah asked whether R&D tax credits were successful at driving private sector investment, and whether DSIT was looking at reforming the system to better support R&D whilst preventing fraud. Lord Vallance said the Treasury had been looking hard at this issue as there were concerns that tax credits were being claimed inappropriately. R&D tax credits had been an important part of the system and were a factor in the UK's ability to attract talent, but needed to translate into the sustainable growth of companies.

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

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – HoL third reading

On Tuesday 11 February, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Lords without further amendments. It will now proceed to the House of Commons.

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

DSIT – HoC oral questions

On Wednesday 12 February, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

During topical questions the following exchange took place:

Jas Athwal MP (Labour): In Ilford we have worked with Queen Mary University to launch a new satellite campus to teach medicine and dentistry. Given the growing importance of education in science, engineering, technology and mathematics, what specific steps is the Secretary of State taking to increase educational opportunities in London and across the country?

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP: The Government are working to develop a world-leading science and technology skills base that will drive economic growth and opportunity for all. We are committed to expanding access and participation in science and technology education, and we are partnering with universities to build the skills and workforce across the United Kingdom.

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

Forthcoming business

February recess

On Thursday 13 February, the House of Commons and House of Lords both rose for February recess. Both houses will return on Monday 24 February.

You can [read more about recess dates](#).

Written questions and statements

Universities: Research

Ben Obese-Jecty MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with universities on (a) their sustainability plans and (b) assessments of the sustainability of projects they (i) fund and (ii) otherwise sponsor since July 2024; and with which universities he has had such discussions. [UIN 27688; Grouped Question: 27690]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The Department has regular discussions with businesses and universities on a range of issues, including environmental sustainability. UKRI has close engagement with the Research & Innovation sector within the UK through their Environmental Strategy, as well as the Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice. The concordat aims to help the sector act responsibly to protect and promote the environment, and representation includes universities, research institutes, catapults and funding organisations. Internationally, UKRI is also part of the Heidelberg Agreement. Nine European countries collaborated on developing the agreement, through which research funders take a proactive approach to promoting sustainability in scientific research.

National Apprenticeships Week

Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson MP: This week is National Apprenticeship Week, where we celebrate the life-changing opportunities that apprenticeships offer people up and down this country. I want to update the House on a range of steps this government is taking to introduce the greater flexibility in our apprenticeships system that learn to break down to barriers opportunity and boost economic growth.

First, we have confirmed today that we will be changing the rules relating to achievement of English and maths qualifications as part of an apprenticeship for over 19s. Upskilling in English and maths will continue to remain a key feature of all apprenticeships, and from today we have listened to employers and will be offering more flexibility over when a standalone qualification is required in addition to this.

All apprentices will be required to secure and will be assessed on the job-specific skills English and maths they need, but moving forward employers will have more flexibility over whether adult (19+) apprentices are required to achieve a standalone English and maths qualifications. In future, adult apprentices will be able to complete their

apprenticeship if they have demonstrated they have the skills – including relevant English and maths skills – to be effective in the role without undertaking a standalone English and maths qualification. All 16-18 apprentices will continue to be required and funded to secure up to a Level 2 qualification in English and maths if they do not hold one, consistent with our expectation that all young people should have a meaningful further opportunity to secure a Level 2 qualification in English and maths post-16. This delivers the flexibility that employers have long called for and we expect it to lead to thousands more qualified apprentices in a range of key sectors, including in social care and construction.

Second, we will reduce the minimum duration of apprenticeships to 8 months from August 2025. This new flexibility will mean that employers can make greater use of apprenticeships and learners can be fully trained more quickly. We expect this new flexibility to particularly benefit learners with high levels of prior learning, where the current 12 month requirement means they are not eligible for an apprenticeship; and particular occupations that do not typically work in fixed 12 month training cycles. We will be working closely with Skills England to identify where this new flexibility will have the greatest impact. Today we are announcing that the first shorter apprenticeships to be available to all apprentices will be in priority occupations including Healthcare Support Workers, Dual Fuel Smart Meter Installers, and Production Assistants in the creative industries. We will be setting out more details in due course.

Finally, in our next step towards establishing Skills England as the key driving-force behind this government's growth plans, I am confirming that the new Chair of Skills England will be Phil Smith CBE, with Sir David Bell serving as Vice Chair.

This team will bring together extensive industry experience in digital, tech and innovation, with decades of experience in the education and skills sector. They will work with employers, national, regional and local government, providers, and unions to identify skills shortages and provide strong strategic direction for the skills system ensuring we have the highly skilled workforce needed to deliver our industrial strategy and the government's Plan for Change. I look forward to working with them to deliver the dynamic skills system and economic growth that this country needs to thrive. [UIN HCWS436]

Higher Education: Mathematics

Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with universities on the importance maintaining the provision of maths. [UIN 28208; Grouped Questions: 28206, 28207]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, recognises the critical importance of mathematics provision at universities. English universities are independent, autonomous institutions and are therefore free to choose which courses they run. The quality of these courses is assessed by the Office for Students, the regulator of higher education providers in England. The government acknowledges that robust mathematics education is essential for developing the skills needed in various sectors and for maintaining the UK's competitive edge in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

The government is committed to ensuring the provision of high-quality mathematics education across universities of all tariff levels. Measures include financial incentives to attract talented individuals into teaching key shortage subjects, such as mathematics.

Mature Students: Finance

Adam Thompson MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on financial support available for mature students with caring responsibilities. [UIN 29655]

Minister for Social Security and Disability, Stephen Timms MP: Successive Governments have held the principle that the benefit system does not normally support full-time students. Rather, they are supported by the educational maintenance system. Part-time students can receive Carer's Allowance if they meet the entitlement conditions. Certain students when they have additional daily living costs that are not met by the student finance system may be eligible for Universal Credit (UC) and carer element of UC.

If a student with the consent of the educational establishment ceases the course temporarily to care for someone and they are not eligible for a student grant or loan, they may be eligible for UC for that period.

The Department works very closely with other departments and stakeholders, to help ensure young carers get the help and support they need and deserve. How we can best identify and support young carers to combine study with their caring responsibilities where they can, including taking account of changes in the education system, will form an important strand of our future work.

Higher Education: Sexual Offences

Andrew Rosindell MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with higher education institutions to improve (a) training for staff on and (b) levels of awareness of safeguarding at those institutions. [UIN 28463; Grouped Question: 28462]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: There is no place for sexual misconduct of any kind in higher education (HE) or anywhere else. The department expects university leaders to take positive action to tackle this blight wherever it grows on their campuses. To support universities to stamp out sexual misconduct, the Office for Students has introduced new requirements for preventing, addressing and investigating incidents. These take effect in August 2025. Departmental officials are working with sector bodies to ensure HE providers are prepared to implement the new measures that will establish, amongst other things, regulatory requirements for preventative training, reporting mechanisms and providing support to students. All HE providers will need to show they have the capability and resource capacity to implement the new requirements. More details of this condition can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/student-protection-and-support/harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/>.

Students: Loans

Bradley Thomas MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of a 0% interest rate for student loans for the study of specific courses. [UIN 28743]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Student loans are subject to interest to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree, irrespective of the subject studied. The student loan system has significant borrower protections, and the government has not made an assessment of the impact of making interest rates dependent on the course studied.

Interest rates on student loans do not affect monthly repayments made by borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or the rate of interest. If a borrower's income drops, so does the amount they repay. If income is below the relevant student loan repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, then they do not have to make repayments at all. Any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off after the loan term ends, or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower.

Interest rates are set annually in relation to the Retail Price Index (RPI). The government caps maximum student loan rates when needed to ensure that student loan interest rates do not exceed market rates for comparable unsecured personal loans.

The government is determined that the higher education funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities, and for students. The department is considering the system and will continue to engage with stakeholders on this.

Skills England: Accountability

Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that Skills England is accountable to Parliament. [UIN 28623]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: It is intended for Skills England to become an Executive Agency of the Department for Education. As with all other Executive Agencies, Skills England will be required to have robust governance arrangements and clear lines of accountability, including to parliament. This will be set out in a publicly available Framework Document.

Educational Institutions: Freedom of Expression

Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support freedom of speech in (a) schools and (b) universities. [UIN 27677]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government is absolutely committed to freedom of speech and academic freedom in schools, universities and beyond. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, confirmed to Parliament on 15 January the government's plans for the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which will create a more effective, proportionate, balanced and less burdensome approach to protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech.

In addition, schools must promote the fundamental British values, including democracy and individual liberty. Schools have a statutory duty to ensure a balanced presentation of political issues, but older pupils can engage with the political issues provided activity is conducted sensitively and not targeted at others. The promotion of fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and

mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs is considered by Ofsted in their inspections.

Apprentices: Finance

Ian Roome MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions her Department has had with Skills England on potential changes to the funding of apprenticeships. [UIN 27442]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Apprenticeships and skills will play a critical part in the government's mission to drive growth across the country, supporting people to get better jobs and improve their standard of living.

The government has established Skills England to form a coherent national picture of skills gaps and help shape the technical education system so that it is responsive to skills needs. This will include advising on priorities for the new growth and skills offer.

Skills England engaged with employers and other key partners regarding early priorities for the new growth and skills offer, including proposals to ask more employers to step forward and fund more level 7 apprenticeships themselves.

Skills England spoke to over 700 stakeholders before Christmas as part of their engagement exercise, and have shared their findings with the department. Its findings from this engagement process will be published in early 2025.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Mike Martin MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 29 November 2024 to Question 16106 on Overseas Students: Ukraine, whether Ukrainian students who gain an 18-month extension on their visa through the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme will be eligible for home fees status for the full duration of their degree; and whether she is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to allow Ukrainian students to extend their visa once the 18-month extension has expired. [UIN 28362]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The department has amended the Student Support regulations so that those who have been granted leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme may qualify for higher education student support in England and home fee status without the requirement to meet the normal three-year ordinary residence requirement.

Where a person's Ukraine Scheme permission expires during their course of study and they are granted further permission to remain under one of the standard immigration routes, they will continue to be eligible to access student support and home fee status while they complete their studies. This is in line with those granted leave under the other Ukraine Schemes.

We will continue to keep the Ukraine Schemes under consistent review in line with developments in the ongoing war.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Jess Brown-Fuller MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to create a pathway for Ukrainian refugees to apply to UK universities. [UIN 29281; Grouped Question: 29279]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government remains committed to giving all Ukrainians in the UK the same access to education as enjoyed by UK citizens.

Persons granted leave under one of the Ukraine Schemes, including the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme, have access to higher education (HE) student support and home fee status on the same basis as those within other protection-based categories, such as refugees.

Support on applying to HE courses can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/higher-education-courses-find-and-apply>, where students can explore a range of resources to help them apply to UK HE providers.

Organisations such as the UK Council for International Student Affairs also provide extensive information and support for Ukrainian students wishing to study in the UK, including a student advice line.

Overseas Students

Martin Wrigley MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of the most recent long-term migration figures were accounted for by international students. [UIN 29254]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: According to the latest Office for National Statistics estimates, net migration to the UK (immigration minus emigration) of international students was 262,000 in the year ending June 2024. Total net

migration for the same period was 728,000, meaning international students' net migration made up 36% of total net migration.

Sector news

A Quantitative Assessment of the Return on Investment of Research England's Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) – Research England report

On Friday 7 February, Research England published an independent evaluation providing an in-depth evidence base to assess the effectiveness of past knowledge exchange (KE) funding and to inform future policy decisions. This evaluation focuses on evidencing the impacts of the £280 million HEIF, alongside demonstrating how the HEIF programme delivers value.

Key findings include:

- The study finds a significant total return on investment (ROI) figure for the programme of £14.9 for every £1 of HEIF invested.
- Approximately 38% of KE outputs and incomes would not have happened in the absence of HEIF.
- HEIF is particularly valuable for supporting the commercialisation of research through technology transfer and other routes, for supporting student startups, and for enabling the higher education providers (HEP) to realise impacts from its physical assets.
- A new analysis for this report evidences the important role that HEIF is playing in supporting and enabling student entrepreneurship. 53% of student startups in receipt of formal business or enterprise support from the HEP were attributable to HEIF, and the analyses suggest the return to HEIF investment in supporting student entrepreneurship and enterprise is £15.6 for every £1 invested.

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

Our submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2025 – UUK submission

On Monday 10 February, Universities UK published its submission setting out recommendations for the government at the Comprehensive Spending Review, focused on growth, opportunity, and sustainability.

The proposals, which build on our [Blueprint recommendations](#), include:

- Supporting growth by increasing investment in research and innovation activity and promoting the UK as a first-choice study destination and partner.
- Boosting opportunity through the reinstatement of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged, uplifting maintenance loans, and establishing a Tertiary Education Opportunity Fund.
- Enabling all this activity to be continued and strengthened by putting the sector on a sustainable and secure footing.

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

What works to attract and retain people into R&D careers – DSIT independent report

On Monday 10 February, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) published a report by the Behavioural Insights Team to understand the evidence base on what works to attract and retain people in Research and Development (R&D).

The report identified four key barriers:

1. Lack of awareness and understanding of R&D
2. Lack of diversity and inclusion in R&D
3. Poor working conditions
4. Skills gaps

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

10,000 more apprentices as Government slashes red tape to boost growth – DfE press release

On Tuesday 11 February, the Department for Education (DfE) announced up to 10,000 more apprentices will be able to qualify per year as the government cuts red tape to boost economic growth by giving employers more flexibility over maths and English requirements.

Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson said:

Growing the economy and opportunity for all are fundamental Missions of our Plan for Change, and we are determined to support apprentices throughout this National Apprenticeship Week and beyond.

Businesses have been calling out for change to the apprenticeship system and these reforms show that we are listening. Our new offer of shorter apprenticeships and less red tape strikes the right balance between speed and quality, helping achieve our number one mission to grow the economy.

Skills England will be a major driver in addressing the skills gaps needed to support employers up and down the country and I look forward to working with the new leadership.

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

DSIT evaluation strategy – DSIT policy paper

On Tuesday 11 February, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) published its plan for delivering a demonstrable change in how DSIT plans, implements, and learns from evaluation activity in the department.

To achieve DSIT's vision, it outlined three core objectives to achieve alongside a clear plan of action for each of them:

1. **Effective evaluation governance** – establishing clear, accountable governance structures that support rigorous and ethical evaluation practices.
2. **Robust and innovative methodologies** - employing scientifically sound and innovative methodologies to ensure the reliability and validity of our evaluations.
3. **Improved evaluation dissemination and use** - ensuring that evaluation findings are effectively communicated and utilised to inform policy and practice, driving continuous improvement and impactful outcomes.

You can [read the full policy paper](#).

Submission to the UK Government Spending Review Creating a Strong Enabling Environment for Research – Wellcome Trust submission

On Tuesday 11 February, the Wellcome Trust published its submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Key asks include:

- Increase R&D intensity - including by following through on plans to invest £22bn on R&D in 2026/27 and setting a longer-term ambition to become the most R&D intensive economy in the G7.
- Work with the sector to ensure that the funding environment for UK universities supports their financial sustainability.
- Support the new and ongoing costs of world class infrastructure and international collaboration.
- Invest in research and innovation as the engine of continuous improvement throughout the entire NHS.
- Champion the UK's global role in science to foster equitable partnerships, drive global health outcomes, and stimulate growth.

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

University Alliance's submission to the Spending Review

On Tuesday 11 February, University Alliance published its submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The submission highlights how professional and technical universities are critical to delivering the Government's decade of renewal, and focuses on three of the government's missions: kickstarting economic growth, building an NHS fit for the future and breaking down the barriers to opportunity.

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

GuildHE submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review

On Wednesday 12 February, GuildHE published its submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Their submission demonstrates why a diverse higher education sector is vital to the Government's key missions and how spending reforms and further investment will enable it to thrive. It addresses key funding concerns and offers recommendations that will ensure vocational, technical and specialist providers can continue to contribute effectively to the social, economic, and financial needs of the UK.

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

Antisemitic Incidents Report 2024 – CST report

On Wednesday 12 February, the Community Security Trust (CST) published its annual Antisemitic Incidents Report, showing 3,528 instances of anti-Jewish hate recorded across the UK in 2024, a 18% fall from the 4,296 antisemitic incidents in 2023, and 56% higher than the next highest figure: 2,261 incidents in 2021.

CST logged 145 cases of anti-Jewish hate wherein the victims or offenders were students or academics, or which involved student unions, societies or other representative bodies. It is a fall of 23% from the 189 incidents of this kind reported in 2023. Of these 145 incidents, 65 were online, 66 took place on campus or university premises, and 99 (68%) referenced Israel and events in the Middle East. For context, 52% of incidents not linked to universities also contained this rhetoric.

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

One Step Beyond: How the school and college curriculum in England can prepare young people for higher education – HEPI report

On Thursday 13 February, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report responding to the Curriculum and Assessment Review by considering how well the curriculum prepares young people for higher education.

The report recommends:

- A greater focus on ensuring all young people reach minimum standards in Maths and English, alongside a greater push for digital, oracy and critical thinking skills;
- A renewed focus on creative subjects, such as by including creative subject in the English Baccalaureate;
- A broader curriculum at 16-18, with students able to take four or five subjects rather than just three;
- BTECs should not be defunded unless there is a clear alternative vocational route into higher education;
- The number of, and amount of content in, assessments should be reduced;
- Students should be given more education on financial planning, but PSHE cannot become the dumping ground for content which does not fit anywhere else;
- Every young person should get a **pathways mentor guarantee**, a one-to-one conversation with an expert in careers pathways to advise them on the best post-16 choices.

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

London Higher's Submission to the Spending Review: Phase 2

On Thursday 13 February, London Higher published its submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review, proposing four growth-focused measures to ensure London and London's universities continue to deliver for the UK economy.

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

Monthly monitoring of entry clearance visa applications – Home Office data

On Thursday 13 February, the Home Office released statistics on numbers of people with an intention to enter the UK for work and study reasons.

Applications from Sponsored study visa main applicants in the year ending January 2025 (411,100) were 13% lower than the year ending January 2024.

There were 21,500 applications from dependants of students in the year ending January 2025, 84% fewer than the year ending January 2024. This followed the rule changes that came into effect in January 2024 which prevent students from bringing

dependants, apart from those studying postgraduate research courses or courses with government-funded scholarships.

You can [explore the data in full](#).

2025 cycle applicant figures: 29 January deadline – UCAS data release

On Thursday 13 February, UCAS published data providing core numbers for the 2025 January Equal Consideration application deadline and graphical illustrations of key trends.

You can [explore the data in full](#).