



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

10 – 14 January 2021

University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill - Third Reading

On Monday 10 January, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) Bill received its third reading in the House of Lords.

Amendment 1, moved by Minister for Business, Energy and Corporate Responsibility, Lord Callanan, which removed a reference to a paragraph that was removed at Report was agreed. Lord Fox, Liberal Democrat BEIS spokesperson, argued they still did not know what ARIA was, what its purpose would be, or how it would interact with the rest of the research environment – although he acknowledged this might become clearer once they knew who would lead the agency. He asked the Minister to address the UK's membership of Horizon Europe, which appeared to still be in question, as well as the effectiveness of UKRI moving forward.

Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, raised concern about the rejection of amendments on transparency and accountability. She encouraged ministers to "resolve their outstanding differences" to ensure the UK's participation in Horizon for the future.

Bill passed and returned to the Commons with amendments ahead of Royal Assent.

You can read a transcript of the debate [here](#).

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions

On Tuesday 11 January, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Kwasi Kwarteng MP and his ministerial team answered questions from MPs.

Karl McCartney MP (Con) asked what steps the government were taking to harness science and innovation to support the levelling up agenda. The Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, George Freeman MP, responded that UK leadership drove new investment across the UK and that his department intend to go further, with more details to be announced in the levelling up whitepaper. He added that he was committed to supporting research and innovation clusters and was in talks with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up on how government support could be most effective.

Dan Jarvis MP (Lab) highlighted that nearly half of all R&D spending went into the 'golden triangle' of the south-east and asked what the government would do to ensure more funding reached the north of England. In response, George Freeman MP said his two objectives – to ensure the UK is a "science superpower" and an "innovation nation" – would not be achieved by moving the golden triangle north, but that the government would be increasing spending to the north and that the focus was more on growing supply chains than reallocation of funding.

Finally, Stephen Metcalfe MP (Con) asked how the government would ensure greater diversity in science and research to which George Freeman MP highlighted the ongoing work of the People and Culture Strategy. The minister added that a diverse R&D ecosystem was vital and that every community should have access to opportunities in science and research.

You can read a transcript of the debate [here](#).

Women and Equalities Oral Questions

On Wednesday 12 January, ministers from the Government Equalities Office answered questions in the Commons.

Suzanne Webb MP (Con) asked what steps were being taken to increase the number of women and girls (a) studying and (b) employed in STEM subjects and jobs. The Minister for Apprenticeship and Skills, Alex Burghart MP, responded that between 2010 and 2020, the number of women accepted onto full time STEM undergraduate subjected had increased by 49%.

You can read a transcript of the oral questions [here](#).

Home Affairs Committee Oral Evidence Session on Spiking

On Wednesday 12 January, the Home Affairs Committee held its first oral evidence session on its inquiry into spiking. The committee heard from victims about their experiences of spiking, including the impact it had on their physical or mental health, and the quality of support they received from police and other groups.

Zara Owen said she was at the committee to shed light on spiking via injection. She was a student at university who had been at a nightclub with friends. She said she had returned home with no memory of the entire event and had woken up with a sharp pain in her leg.

Zara confirmed to the committee that she had not informed her university. She said she had been aware of the support offered by the university and would have felt comfortable accessing it if needed. She later told the committee about initiatives provided by the students' union and support offered through the wellbeing team, but she felt more could be done to raise awareness.

The second session heard from campaign groups about their understanding of the prevalence of spiking and their work in promoting awareness. Julie Spencer, Head of Student Wellbeing at the University of Lincoln, told the committee about a collaborative project between the Students' Union and Lincolnshire Police to do rapid drug testing on campus and the information provided on student safety. Julie felt that education at schools and sixth forms, before students get to university, would be crucial.

You can read a transcript [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Science and Technology Committee evidence session on reproducibility and research intensity

On Wednesday 19 January at 9:30am, the Science and Technology Committee will hold an oral evidence session on inquiry into 'reproducibility and research integrity'.

Witnesses will include

- Professor Sebastian Vollmer, Associate Professor at the Departments of Mathematics and Statistics at University of Warwick
- Dr Adrian Weller, Principal Research Fellow in Machine Learning at University of Cambridge

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

Home Affairs Committee Oral Evidence Session on Spiking

On Wednesday 19 January at 10am, the Home Affairs Committee will hold an oral evidence session as part of its spiking inquiry.

Witnesses will include:

- Dr Adrian Boyle, Vice President, The Royal College of Emergency Medicine;
- Jade Quittenton, Night time economy lead, St John Ambulance, Councillor
- Jeanie Bell, member of the Local Government Association's Safer and Stronger Communities' Board and Cabinet Member for Community Safety at St Helen's Council;
- Paul Fullwood, Director of Inspections and Enforcement, Security Industry Authority;
- Michael Kill, Chief Executive Officer, Night Time Industries Association

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

Written Questions

Visitor immigration route

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the impact of the sixth-month limit on how long incoming exchange students can remain in the UK under the visitor immigration route. [94484]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visit route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months.

Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Visitor immigration route

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the potential economic and cultural benefits of extending the amount of time exchange students can remain in the UK under the visitor immigration route from six months to one year. [94486]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visit route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months.

Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Student visas

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to extend the time incoming exchange students can stay in the UK from 6 months to one academic year without having to apply for a Student Visa. [94487]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visit route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months.

Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Proportion of students who did not go onto further or higher education

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the proportion of students who left school in summer 2021, aged 18, who did not go onto further and higher education. [93866]

Alex Burghart: The sustained destinations of students who completed 16-18 study in summer 2021 are not yet available. The latest available data is for those students who completed 16-18 study in summer 2019. To be counted as having a sustained destination, the student must have had six contiguous months of activity in their destination year. The main destinations for this cohort are available here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/477e260e-ac3a-40d5-a7a9-b1e7a596c2c8> (opens in a new tab).

Of the 55.2% of students that did not sustain a further or higher education destination: 2.6% were in other education, 24.9% in employment, 8.4% in apprenticeships, 13.8% did not sustain a destination, and activity was not captured for the remaining 5.5%.

In addition to destination measures, the participation in education and training and employment publication may also be of interest: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment> (opens in a new tab).

This release provides official measures of participation and not in education, employment or training (NEET) for 16-18 year olds. The estimates relate to a snapshot of activities at the end of the calendar year, and proportions are given as that of the population. Estimates for end 2021 will be published in June 2022.

Antisemitism on university campuses

Peter Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to tackle rising levels of antisemitism on university campuses.

Michelle Donelan: The government is clear that antisemitism is abhorrent and we expect higher education (HE) providers to be at the forefront of tackling the challenge of it.

We have pushed for several years for greater action from HE providers to address antisemitism. We have encouraged HE providers to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism to give clarity of what constitutes antisemitic behaviour. This will enable providers to better understand and recognise incidences of antisemitism and take action to address them.

In October 2020, the former Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend for South Staffordshire, wrote to all HE providers urging adoption of the IHRA definition, stating that we would consider further action if HE providers did not adopt. The former Secretary of State for Education also sent a follow-up letter in May 2021, reinforcing the government's expectation that providers adopt the IHRA definition, stressing the even greater importance of doing so considering increased numbers of antisemitic incidents recorded as a result of the conflict in the Middle East .

In response to this, on 10 November 2021, the Office for Students published a list of HE providers who have adopted the definition. I am pleased to report good progress in the last year: an increase from around 30 to over 200 providers having adopted. This includes the vast majority of universities. I will continue to urge all HE providers to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism

Adoption of the IHRA definition is only a first step towards ridding HE of antisemitism. While the government considers that adoption of the definition is crucial, it is not enough on its own. As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has previously announced publicly, we are leading a summit later this month specifically focused on tackling antisemitism in HE. This event will include key stakeholders from the sector to examine what more can be done to make Jewish students and staff feel safe on campus.

Skills shortages in sectors of strategic importance to the UK economy

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment has he made of trends in the level of skills shortages in sectors of strategic importance across the UK economy. [93865]

Alex Burghart: We know that a lack of access to skills is one among a number of possible barriers preventing employers from being able to access the workforce they need, alongside others such as pay, progression opportunities or working conditions.

Where there is a genuine skills shortage affecting a key sector, the Department for Education will work with partners in industry and across government to take action. For example, we are delivering training to become an HGV Driver to 11,000 people via new Skills Bootcamps, as part of a wider package which also includes increasing testing capacity to help more people get out onto the road more quickly.

To help inform government and industry action, we gather data through different sources, including the Employer Skills Survey. The most recent version of this survey highlighted skills shortages in construction and manufacturing, where 36% of vacancies were proving hard to fill because of applicants lacking the appropriate skills, qualifications or experience (compared to an average of 24%). We are helping employers to address these shortages through our programme of skills reforms, which is leading to a growing number of new apprenticeship starts, the creation of new Skills Bootcamps up and down the country, and the introduction of new T Levels to help more young people get the technical skills they need to thrive in the world of work.

We are also drawing on analysis undertaken by groups and organisations including Construction Industry Training Board, Engineering Construction Industry Training Board and the Green Jobs Taskforce, which point, for example, to the need for 35,000 heat pump installers to be trained by 2028. We are working with industry to address these gaps through the Construction Skills Delivery Group and, in 2022, a new cross-cutting delivery group on green jobs.

Demand for apprenticeships and traditional higher education full time provision

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent comparative assessment he has made of the levels of demand among 18 to 25 year olds for (a) apprenticeships and (b) traditional further and higher education full time provision.

Alex Burghart: Apprenticeships provide young people with the opportunity to earn and learn the skills needed to start an exciting career in a wide range of industries, everything from artificial intelligence, archaeology, data science, business management and banking. There are currently over 640 employer-designed apprenticeship standards available at all levels, ensuring a wide variety of options for young people.

Prospective apprentices can search for employer advertised apprenticeship opportunities through the 'find an apprenticeship' (FAA) service on gov.uk and create an account to manage their applications and be alerted about new apprenticeships. Employers can advertise their apprenticeship vacancies through various other commercial services, or their own in-house channels, instead of, or in addition to FAA.

Latest published figures show over 15,000 vacancies on FAA available for prospective apprentices of all ages to apply for. Although we do not routinely publish data on apprenticeship demand through FAA, figures from the 12 months to 15 July 2021 show a ratio of roughly three applicants under 25 to one vacancy.

We are supporting employers to offer more apprenticeships to young people through encouraging more flexible training models such as front-loaded training, accelerated apprenticeships, and flexi-job apprenticeships. In addition, we continue to encourage more young people to consider

apprenticeships through our Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge programme which reached over 600,000 students across England in the last academic year.

We recognise the need for skills from employers and learners, and in January 2021 we published the Skills for Jobs White Paper. This is focused on giving people the skills they need, in a way that suits them, so they can get great jobs in sectors the economy needs and boost this country's productivity.

The White Paper supports delivery of my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister's, Lifetime Skills Guarantee which is aimed at giving people the opportunity to upskill and reskill at different points in their life. This includes funding people for their first advanced level (A level equivalent) course through Free Courses for Jobs, short, flexible ways to train through employer-led Skills Bootcamps, and a Lifelong Loan Entitlement to be introduced from 2025.

It is also focused on putting employers at the heart of the skills system so education and training meets their needs and local areas planning what skills they need through Local Skills Improvement Plans.

Together with other key reforms, such as the introduction of T Levels as a high-quality alternative to A levels, employer led apprenticeships and boosting level 4 and 5 technical provision, we are ensuring that there are a wide range of opportunities available for people of all ages to get the skills they need and meet demand.

In respect of higher education (HE), 2021 has been a record year for UK students in HE admissions, not just in terms of the number of applications, but also in terms of those who have been accepted onto university courses. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service publishes data on the number of applicants and acceptances by age to full-time undergraduate higher education. Figures for the 2021 application cycle show the number of UK domiciled 18 to 24 year old applicants was 505,880, and the number of UK domiciled 18 to 24 year old acceptances was 423,270.

Residential parking schemes in student areas

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether his Department plans to take steps to facilitate the implementation of residential parking schemes in student areas in the event that non-residential landlords and students do not participate in those schemes.

Trudy Harrison: Parking, including the operation of residential permit schemes, is the responsibility of local authorities and it is for them to determine what is best for their own area. Local authorities should ensure that their parking strategy takes account of transport and planning policies, so that the needs of the various road users are considered. Local councillors are responsible for ensuring that local decisions about traffic measures take account of the needs and opinions of local people.

Adequacy of funding for higher education providers to widen access programmes

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of funding for higher education providers to widen access programmes in the context of an increase in providers registered with the Office for Students. [93870]

Michelle Donelan: All higher education providers wishing to charge tuition fees above the basic fee level (£6,000+), and to be eligible for funding from the Strategic Priorities Grant, must agree an access and participation plan with the Office for Students (OfS) in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. These plans need to set out their targets and planned expenditure to improve access and participation based on their priorities, and the gaps they need to address for their own institution.

To support students most at risk of dropping out, the government provides additional formula-based funding for providers through the student premium (part of the Strategic Priorities Grant). As of July

2021, the OfS has allocated student premium funding totalling £273m to providers for the 2021/22 academic year.

Mass movement of students – Omicron

Stephen Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help ensure that the mass movement of students at the end of the Christmas term does not contribute to the spread of covid-19 in the context of the Omicron variant. [93014]

Michelle Donelan: The safety of students, staff and wider communities is the government's priority.

As outlined in our guidance to the sector, students were advised to take a test before they travelled home for the Christmas break: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>. We advised students to continue to test at home and to test before they travel back to their term time accommodation in January, using test kits issued by their university before the Christmas break, ordered online, or collected from their local pharmacy.

For those who are returning from abroad, the government has set out specific measures for people entering England with a test 2 days beforehand for those who are not considered fully vaccinated as well as testing on arrival for all. This includes measures for those who are not considered fully vaccinated, which would require quarantining at their place of residence for 10 days.

It has been impressive to see so many students playing their part by getting vaccinated. We strongly encourage all students to get both doses of the vaccine and the booster jab as soon as possible, unless they are medically exempt, to protect themselves and others from the spread of COVID-19.

All higher education (HE) providers have plans for managing and controlling outbreaks. These have been agreed with local directors of public health and continue to be reviewed and updated based on emerging lessons and local situations. We expect HE providers to continue to prioritise the health and safety of their staff, students, and local community by putting in place measures that apply to their individual circumstances.

Mass movement of students – Covid-19

Stephen Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of the mass movement of students at the end of the Christmas term on the spread of covid-19. [93015]

Michelle Donelan: The safety of students, staff and wider communities is the government's priority.

As outlined in our guidance to the sector, students were advised to take a test before they travelled home for the Christmas break: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses>. We advised students to continue to test at home and to test before they travel back to their term time accommodation in January, using test kits issued by their university before the Christmas break, ordered online, or collected from their local pharmacy.

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Reduction in UniConnect funding

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the reduction in funding to UniConnect for 2021-22 on access to higher education. [93869]

Michelle Donelan: The Uni Connect programme, operated by the Office for Students (OfS), is a 4 year investment programme established to support the creation of a strong and versatile network of local partnerships with cross- England coverage and aims to provide sustained outreach to young people in schools and colleges in areas with low or unexplained gaps in higher education (HE) participation.

The programme's annual funding allocation is made within the available Strategic Priorities Grant, and as such is subject to annual review and decision making, with due regard for general duties, the Public Sector Equality Duty, and statutory guidance.

The former Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend for South Staffordshire, wrote to the OfS on 19 January 2021, providing guidance under section 2(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This set out the funding allocation for the 2021-22 financial year and the government's priorities to ensure that more of taxpayers' money is spent on supporting HE provision which aligns with national priorities, including targeting funds to support students and prioritise the most disadvantaged learners.

This guidance detailed that the OfS should reduce its allocation to Uni Connect from £60 million to £40 million, allowing it to continue to deliver and maintain its core infrastructure, with savings reallocated to fund support for student mental health and student hardship.

The OfS consulted with the sector on recurrent funding in March 2021 and sought views on reductions to the fundings levels of the Uni Connect programme. The outcomes of this consultation were published in July 2021 and are available to view here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/recurrent-funding-for-2021-22-outcomes-of-consultation/>. The OfS's consultation response concluded that the Uni Connect partnerships could continue to meet the OfS's goals through a combination of increased efficiency and a focus on the most effective interventions and that they did not anticipate a reduction in the number of targeted learners.

Interest rates

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made through financial modelling of the effect of different interest rates on (a) the size of future debt, (b) students' ability to repay and (c) the size of the total loan debt arising from student loans. [93858]

Michelle Donelan: The student loan system in England removes financial barriers for those hoping to study higher education while sharing its costs between learners and the general taxpayer. The loans offer unique protections to borrowers. During and after study, interest rates are capped so that they do not exceed the prevailing market rate for comparable personal loans. After finishing study, monthly repayments are only required when a borrower is earning over the repayment threshold, currently £27,295 per year, or its weekly or monthly equivalent for Plan 2 (post-2012) loans and do not change based on rates or the amount borrowed. Any outstanding debt is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower.

As student loan repayments are income contingent, the impact of the repayment threshold and repayment conditions on students with particular protected characteristics depends on the earnings of those borrowers in each year over the loan term. The department publishes annual data on graduate employment and earnings by years after graduation, including by ethnicity, through the Graduate Outcomes publication which can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-outcomes-leo/2018-19>

Regular assessments of the student finance system, including forecasts of future loan outlay, repayments and the size of the loan book, are made and published annually. The most recent publication can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loan-forecasts-england-2020-to-2021>. This publication notes that the Resource Accounting and Budget (RAB) charge the proportion of loan outlay that is expected to not be repaid when future repayments are valued in present terms, was estimated to be 53% for loans issued to full-time undergraduates in the 2020-21 financial year. The interest rate adds to the total amount of repayments received, and for the 2020-21 loans, the department estimates that repayments due to interest reduces the RAB charge by 4 percentage points.

Potential reforms to student loan terms, with the goal of decreasing the public subsidy on student loans while preserving the income-contingent nature of the current system, were modelled as part of the work done by the independent panel which reported to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. We are carefully considering a range of options to ensure that student finance continues to deliver value for money for both students and the taxpayer as we continue to consider the recommendations made by the independent panel. The interim conclusion was published on 21 January 2021, and we plan to set out a conclusion to the review in due course.

Sustainability of the student loan system

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the sustainability of the student loan system and its effect on the public finances under the current repayment thresholds. [93860]

Michelle Donelan: The student loan system in England removes financial barriers for those hoping to study higher education while sharing its costs between learners and the general taxpayer. The loans offer unique protections to borrowers. During and after study, interest rates are capped so that they do not exceed the prevailing market rate for comparable personal loans. After finishing study, monthly repayments are only required when a borrower is earning over the repayment threshold, currently £27,295 per year, or its weekly or monthly equivalent for Plan 2 (post-2012) loans and do not change based on rates or the amount borrowed. Any outstanding debt is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower.

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Impact on BAME students of the current student loan system

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the impact on BAME students of the current student loan repayment conditions. [93862]

Michelle Donelan: The student loan system in England removes financial barriers for those hoping to study higher education while sharing its costs between learners and the general taxpayer. The loans offer unique protections to borrowers. During and after study, interest rates are capped so that they do not exceed the prevailing market rate for comparable personal loans. After finishing study, monthly repayments are only required when a borrower is earning over the repayment threshold, currently £27,295 per year, or its weekly or monthly equivalent for Plan 2 (post-2012) loans and do not change based on rates or the amount borrowed. Any outstanding debt is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower.

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Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made the number of fraudulent loans given out by the Student Loans Company.[93857]

Michelle Donelan: The Student Loans Company (SLC) provide quarterly fraud reporting figures to the department, which are then reported to the Cabinet Office as part of the GOV-13 Counter Fraud Functional Standard. In the 2020/21 financial year SLC identified 136 cases of a full or partial loss to fraud relating to a loan in the same year, paid through Student Finance England.

Minimum entry requirements

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of an introduction of minimum entry requirements of GCSE English and Maths (Level 4) for students seeking to study in Higher Education. [93872]

Michelle Donelan: We are considering the recommendations made by the Augar report regarding minimum entry requirements and we plan to set out a full response to the review of post-18 education and funding in due course.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of provisions in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill on the protection by higher education providers of academics' freedom of speech. [93854]

Michelle Donelan: This Bill includes a range of measures aimed at strengthening existing legislation on freedom of speech and academic freedom for academic staff in higher education in England.

The Bill is also clear that the job security of university staff should not be undermined by the expression of lawful speech, including where they may question and test received wisdom, and put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions.

The Bill does not amend existing employment law. However, it does provide a route to redress where an individual may not have clear contractual protections in place in respect of freedom of speech and academic freedom. Rather than having to rely on contractual protections in an employment tribunal, an academic member of staff will now have access to the Office for Students (OfS) complaints scheme, as well as the right to bring a claim in the courts via the new statutory tort.

The new complaints scheme will be overseen by a Director of Free Speech and Academic Freedom, who will also be responsible for overseeing the performance of all the OfS's new functions. This includes promoting the importance of freedom of speech within the law and academic freedom for academic staff, as well as the monitoring and enforcement of freedom of speech registration conditions and the new duties on students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers.

The OfS will also issue guidance for providers and students' unions to as they develop the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, thereby helping them to comply with their duties.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the levels of demand for modular provision within higher education. [93868]

Michelle Donelan: Many learners need to access courses in a more flexible way, to fit study around work, family and personal commitments, and to retrain as both their circumstances and the economy change. There is research available which makes a case for modular provision. A joint Universities UK (UUK)- CBI study using research with learners, as well as reviewing the flexible learning opportunities offered by higher education (HE) providers, concluded that there was a strong case for modular or credit based system for undergraduate provision in the longer-term.

The introduction of a Lifelong Loan Entitlement was also a key recommendation from the 'Post-18 Review of Education and Funding: Independent Panel' report (the Augar report) and endorsed in a House of Lords report which recommended 'funding for modules or credit where a full degree is not required', stating that proposals 'should facilitate transfer between different institutions'.

As such, the government sees the case for change, and has set out our ambition to make progress through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

As part of the pathway to the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, the Higher Education Short Course trial will test part-time, short course provision at levels 4-6, delivered flexibly to offer the learner choice around how they choose to study. We will use the trial to test learner and provider demand and behaviours as we learn lessons from this ahead of the full rollout of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.

A survey by UUK found around 24% of the population had considered part-time HE in the last 10 years but had not enrolled. The current system is not meeting these needs and, as a result, fewer entrants at levels 4 and 5 fund their tuition fees with student loans than entrants at level 6.

Sector News

Home Office Response to the Protect Duty Public Consultation

On Monday 10 January, the Home Office have published its response to the Protect Duty public consultation, which closed on 2 July 2021.

The purpose of the consultation was to consult private and public sector partners as to how appropriate considerations of security could take place, leading to proportionate security measures at publicly accessible locations – such as venues, schools and universities – and what support would be required from Government.

You can find the full response [here](#).

Department of Education Updated Covid-19 Guidance

On Monday 10 January, the Department for Education updated its Covid-19 [guidance](#) for international students before they travel to the UK. The Department for Education also published a guide for international students on what they should know before travelling to England.

You can find the guidance [here](#) and the guide [here](#).

New Clause to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

On Tuesday 11 January, Jessie Norman MP (Con) tweeted that he had laid a new Clause to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill titled 'Duty to disclose overseas gifts and contracts affecting freedom of speech'. The Clause is supported by Robert Halfon MP, Robert Buckland MP and Damian Green MP.

In response, Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP responded "Our universities are fantastic beacons for foreign investment, but transparency is important if we are to ensure that academic freedom remains protected. I will be looking carefully at this proposed amendment as we prepare for the Report Stage of our Free Speech Bill."

You can find the Clause [here](#) and the Education Secretary's response [here](#).

Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy interim findings published

On Wednesday 12 January, the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy has published its interim findings, which focus on the role funders play in the research system.

Announced last March, the review is led by Professor Adam Tickell, vice-chancellor of University of Birmingham, and will make recommendations to remove unnecessary red tape in the UK research system.

In August 2021, the review published a call for evidence, and has also been obtaining further feedback through literature reviews and stakeholder engagement. Further analysis of the responses

to the call for evidence will be set out in the Review's final report and will help to inform its recommendations.

You can find the interim report [here](#).

New Inquiry on the Financial Sustainability of the Sector

On Thursday 13 January, the Public Accounts Committee launched a new inquiry into the financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England.

The Committee will question senior officials at the Department for Education and the Office for Students on how effectively they are protecting students' and taxpayers' interests from risks to higher education providers' financial sustainability, including:

- whether DfE has set a clear purpose and scope for the oversight regime;
- whether the DfE and OfS are effectively managing known, systemic, risks;
- and whether DfE and OfS have responded appropriately to new financial risks, for example arising from COVID and EU exit.

You can find out more information [here](#).