



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

10 – 14 October 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology - Oral Questions

On Wednesday 12 November, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP, and her ministerial colleagues, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrat) asked what steps the Department is taking with universities to develop research and development policy. In her initial response, the Secretary of State underlined that the UK's "world-leading universities" and their research are central to economic growth, stating that every £1 of public R&D investment generates around £8 in economic benefit over the longer term. In her response, the Secretary of State highlighted the Government's £86 billion R&D investment over the current spending review period, describing it as the largest such commitment by any UK Government.

Ian Sollom argued that the UK is still missing too many opportunities in commercialisation, pointing to an under-resourced proof-of-concept fund that is "30 times oversubscribed" and to complex equity and intellectual property arrangements that deter investors and entrepreneurs from backing university spin-outs. He called for an **expansion of proof-of-concept funding and reform of IP and equity structures**. Liz Kendall agreed that the UK does not lack ideas or start-ups but needs to support them better to scale up. The Secretary of State cited work to encourage UK pension schemes to invest more in UK companies and said there is more to do, stressing that supporting high-growth firms born out of research is "absolutely at the top of our agenda".

Daniel Zeichner (Labour) reported that the Business and Trade Committee had visited the new Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge and raised concerns about the balance of research funding between post-doctoral researchers and PhD students. He requested that a meeting be arranged involving himself, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and relevant Ministers to resolve this "long-running issue".

The Secretary of State agreed to facilitate such a meeting, saying the Government must do more to back "world-leading researchers" and ensure that their work is turned into innovation and future growth, describing this as "the first part of the journey" that must be got right.

Dame Nia Griffith (Labour) highlighted the Swansea Bay city deal-funded Pentre Awel complex, where life sciences will be a central focus in partnership with Cardiff University, Swansea University and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She asked for assurances that life sciences would remain a top investment priority to support high-quality local jobs.

The Secretary of State confirmed that supporting the life sciences sector, and the universities and companies within it, is a top priority for the Government. She pointed to support for the Swansea Bay city deal and referenced the £520 million Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund, currently open for bids across all four nations, encouraging bids from the region.

Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat) referred to her campaign with the University of Bath against “spice-spiked vapes” in schools and the harms they cause to young people. She expressed frustration that Ofcom was not, in her view, using its powers under the Online Safety Act to hold social media companies to account, and called for a meeting to discuss how enforcement could be strengthened. The Minister, Kanishka Narayan, said her campaign “has been noticed” and agreed to meet to explore how to ensure robust enforcement against drug dealing and related harms on social media platforms.

Maya Ellis (Labour) raised concerns about the regional distribution of UKRI funding, noting that the £54 million UKRI Global Talent fund, designed to attract and retain international research talent, had excluded all northern universities. She highlighted that Lancaster University, a key driver of economic growth in Lancashire and the north-west that met the highest eligibility criteria, had received no funding, while UKRI had relaxed criteria to ensure devolved nations received support. She urged greater transparency in UKRI’s data and methodology and argued that institutional size and regional economic impact should be considered in future decisions.

Kanishka Narayan reiterated the Government’s commitment to ensuring every region benefits from the UK’s research base, pointing to £4.9 million in funding for Lancaster University’s cyber-focus project and referencing UKRI’s £500 million Local Innovation Partnerships fund aimed at turning local ideas into future industries.

Mark Pritchard (Conservative) drew attention to Harper Adams University as a world-leading research institution, particularly its agritech research centre. He invited the Minister to visit and see its work on robotics, artificial intelligence and sustainable, eco-friendly farming that increases productivity. Kanishka Narayan accepted “very easily”, saying the visit aligns with his interest in both agriculture and technology.

James Naish (Labour) noted that the University of Nottingham had announced the closure of 16 courses as part of cost-saving measures, stating that limited research income had made these courses less financially viable. He asked what steps the

Secretary of State is taking to ensure that the Department's substantial R&D budget reaches frontline institutions and universities that are central to the Government's economic growth ambitions.

The Secretary of State said she would look into the case in more detail and referenced the Government's post-16 education and skills White Paper, which sets out a vision for universities. She highlighted "record investment" from her Department into R&D and the protection of the strategic priorities grant for science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects, while acknowledging that "there is more that they can do".

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

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Lee Anderson (Reform UK): (UIN86301) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to remove interest rates on student loans.

Josh MacAlister: Student loans are subject to interest to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree. To consider both students and taxpayers, and ensure the real value of the loans over the repayment term, interest rates are linked to inflation.

Interest rates do not impact monthly repayments made by student loan borrowers. Student loan repayments are based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or the amount borrowed. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold.

No repayments are made for earnings below the relevant student loan repayment threshold. For lower earners who will not repay much of their loan, any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is cancelled after the loan term ends or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower.

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Andrew Snowden (Conservative): (UIN86395) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of an International Student Levy on the ability for universities to deliver on the Post-16 Skills White Paper.

Josh MacAlister: The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out how the department intends to work with the sector to achieve our vision for the future of higher education (HE). This includes the introduction of a tuition fee escalator to put the sector on a more sustainable footing, and the reintroduction of targeted means-tested maintenance grants, alongside a commitment to increase maintenance loans in line with inflation every academic year to widen access. We are also strengthening the Office for Students' powers to tackle pockets of low quality provision and protect value for public money.

The levy on international student fees will fund the means-tested maintenance grants. We will set out further details on both measures at the Autumn Budget.

HE providers are independent from government and as such must continue to make the necessary and appropriate financial decisions to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Department for Work and Pensions: Digital Technology and STEM Subjects: Apprentices

Paul Kohler (Liberal Democrats): (UIN80785) To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the availability of high-quality apprenticeships for young people in the (a) digital and (b) STEM sectors.

Andrew Western: This government is transforming the apprenticeships offer into a new growth and skills offer, which will offer greater flexibility to employers and learners across the country, including those in the digital and STEM sectors, and support the industrial strategy.

As a first step, the government has introduced new foundation apprenticeships, which are an employment-based training offer that give young people a route into careers in critical sectors, enabling them to earn a wage while developing vital skills. The first seven foundation apprenticeships became available in August 2025 focussed on four industrial strategy and priority areas, including digital and engineering and manufacturing.

From April 2026, the government will enable employers to also use the growth and skills levy for new short courses in areas such as digital, artificial intelligence and engineering, to support Industrial Strategy sectors.

Department for Work and Pensions: Apprentices

Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrats): (UIN83697) To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he has taken to help increase awareness amongst employers of the incentives available to hire apprentices, including National Insurance relief when hiring apprentices under 25.

Andrew Western: The government offers a range of financial support to help employers to take on apprentices. In addition to the National Insurance exemptions for apprentices under 25, the government pays £1,000 to employers that take on apprentices under 19 or eligible 19 to 24-year-olds.

An incentive payment of up to £2,000 has also been introduced to employers who take on foundation apprenticeships, on the seven apprenticeships that launched in August 2025.

Apprenticeships and the financial support available for employers are promoted through multiple channels, including social media and email and telephone marketing campaigns.

In addition, the government facilitates and funds the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN) which comprises 2,500 employers and apprentices who volunteer to promote the benefits of apprenticeships.

Department for Education: Higher Education: Admissions

Dan Norris (Independent): (UIN87228) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to increase access to higher technical qualifications and degree courses by low-income students.

Josh MacAlister: The Post-16 White Paper sets out our vision for a reformed system that helps everyone with the desire and aptitude to access higher education (HE), breaking down barriers to opportunity and supporting growth.

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are a key route into HE for disadvantaged learners. At Level 5, 54% of learners come from the 40% most deprived areas. As of September 2025, 281 qualifications have been approved as HTQs across 13 occupational routes, and the growth of HTQs will help to address key skills gaps.

We aim to reform regulation of Access and Participation Plans, allowing the Office for Students (OfS) to be more risk-based. There will be greater accountability for providers lagging behind in supporting disadvantaged students, and reduced bureaucracy for those doing well, with a greater focus on continuous improvement.

We will introduce targeted maintenance grants to support students from low-income households studying courses at Levels 4 to 6, including technical qualifications and degrees, aligned with the government's missions and the Industrial Strategy. The department is also introducing the lifelong learning entitlement, to help people study flexibly in a way that suits their needs.

Department for Education: Overseas Students

James McMurdock (Independent): (UIN87655) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Office for Students (a) collects and (b) publishes data on the (i) continuation, (ii) completion and (iii) attainment rates for international students by (A) provider and (B) ranking.

Josh MacAlister: The Office for Students (OfS) publish information on continuation and completion rates for higher education (HE) providers for non-UK domiciled students studying at English HE providers. The information is available for the English HE sector and by provider here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-outcomes-data-dashboard/data-dashboard>. This data is updated annually and was last published in August 2025.

Information on attainment rates for non-UK students in HE is published by the OfS annually and was last updated in October 2025 here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/outcomes-data-dashboard/>

As the independent regulator of HE, the OfS require HE providers to achieve minimum outcomes for their students. 80% of full-time undergraduate students studying a first degree, including international students, are expected to continue into a second year, and 75% are expected to complete their qualification.

The OfS awards ratings of Gold, Silver, Bronze or Requires Improvement to providers based upon a range of evidence, including student outcomes. The Teaching Excellence Framework Dashboard's ratings of providers can be found here: <https://tef2023.officeforstudents.org.uk/>.

There is no official government ranking system.

Department for Education: Degrees

James McMurdock (Independent): (UIN87663) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the alignment between degree subject provision and priority occupations identified by Skills England.

Josh MacAlister: The Skills England report, 'Assessment of Priority Skills to 2030' sets out that in higher education (HE) over half (53%) of employed recent education leavers are in priority occupations (see table below).

The HE sector is independent and individual institutions are responsible for deciding which courses to deliver. The government is not involved in these decisions but does

support delivery of high-cost courses through the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG). We are reforming the SPG to ensure alignment of funding with the priority sectors which support the Industrial Strategy and the Plan for Change and future skills needs. In addition, Priority Additional Entitlement under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will be available for courses that align with industrial strategy priorities. From January 2027, LLE funding will all also be available for level 4, 5 and 6 modules from full level qualifications in subject groups that address priority skills gaps and align with the government's industrial strategy.

Top 10 first degree (level 6) higher education subjects into priority occupations:

Subject	Share of learners entering priority occupations
Nursing and midwifery	97%
Medicine and dentistry	96%
Medical sciences	81%
Architecture, building and planning	79%
Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacy	78%
Allied health	73%
Computing	70%
Engineering	68%
Economics	65%
Physics and astronomy	60%

Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-of-priority-skills-to-2030/assessment-of-priority-skills-to-2030#education-supply-for-priority-occupations>.

Department for Education: Graduates: Pay

James McMurdock (Independent): (UIN87661) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of graduate earning outcomes in the UK relative to other OECD countries.

Josh MacAlister: The department works with the OECD to support their publications on education.

The OECD's 'Education at a glance 2025' shows that the earnings of graduate workers relative to secondary-educated workers in the UK is close to the OECD average. In particular, the report shows that the UK has a first degree graduate earnings premium of 37% among working age individuals, compared to 39% for the OECD average. In addition, table A4.5 presents the earnings differences in absolute terms. The publication can be found here: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2025_1c0d9c79-en.

Variations by field of study are explored further in the following OECD report: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/01/how-does-earnings-advantage-from-tertiary-education-vary-by-field-of-study_60f20424/8a4b8f7a-en.pdf.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Research: International Cooperation

Euan Stainbank (Labour): (UIN88025) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking to encourage collaboration between the UK and its international partners in the R&D sector.

Kanishka Narayan: Achieving the best outcomes for our citizens from our investment in R&D requires us to collaborate internationally. We are actively strengthening ties with key partners through:

- Funding, including through Horizon Europe, the International Science Partnerships Fund and our core support to UK research institutions. DSIT's overall R&D budget will grow in real terms over the SR period, totalling £58.5 billion from 2026/27 to 2029/30.
- Our Science and Technology Network which operates in 65 locations across the world to build partnerships and collaborations on science, technology and innovation.

- Dialogues and bilateral agreements with more than 20 international partners, including with the US, Australia, India, Germany, EU and Japan which cover issues including data adequacy, future technologies, and institutional co-operation.
- Being an active member of G7, G20, OECD through which we seek to align norms and standards.
- Collaborations with global partners on shared research infrastructures including world-leading facilities like CERN and new capabilities like the Square Kilometre Array Observatory – headquartered near Manchester with telescopes under construction in Australia and South Africa.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Universities: Research

Anna Gelderd (Labour): (UIN87649) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she plans to take steps to help (a) maintain and (b) increase research capacity in universities in the context of (i) academic staff time, (ii) funding and (iii) other matters.

Kanishka Narayan: Research and development is fundamental to kickstarting economic growth and delivering the Government's missions. That's why this government is investing a record £86 billion over the SR period in research and development, supporting universities, creating jobs, skills and economic growth right across the country. In the Post-16 Skills White Paper, we committed to improving grant funding cost recovery and reducing administrative burdens on academic staff, unlocking more time and resources for research. As independent institutions, universities are responsible for decisions on staff time allocated to research.

Department for Education: Universities: Freedom of Expression

The Lord Lebedev: (HL11410) To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to introduce safeguards to allow academics to speak freely on all matters, in particular measures to prevent dismissals or sanctions of university staff.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern: This government is absolutely committed to freedom of speech and academic freedom in universities. Academics must be allowed to test the truth of the ideas that shape society and to participate in the free exchange of ideas, including where this causes shock and discomfort.

On 28 April 2025, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, signed commencement regulations of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, enabling additional provisions to come into force from 1 August 2025. These provisions include strengthened duties on higher education (HE) providers in relation to securing and promoting the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom. The provisions make clear that academic staff must be able to question received wisdom and present new, controversial, or unpopular ideas without risking their privileges, jobs, promotions, or future roles at their provider.

Further guidance on employment and promotion of academic staff in relation to freedom of speech is set out in paragraphs 145 to 153 of the Office for Students' Regulatory advice 24.

Sector news

Lack of public connection to R&D and its benefits makes support for investment fragile - Campaign for Science and Engineering

New public attitudes research from the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) shows that only 29% of people report feeling a personal connection or interest in research and development (R&D), despite 88% agreeing that Government investment in R&D is important.

The study, *CaSE Public Attitudes to R&D 2025*, draws on responses from more than 8,000 UK adults through nationally representative polling, focus groups and individual interviews.

Findings indicate that while support for R&D investment is widespread, it is often not accompanied by a clear understanding of R&D's relevance or benefits. The report notes that this may pose challenges for maintaining long-term political support if R&D continues to feel abstract or distant from everyday life.

The research identifies place, purpose and involvement as key factors that help the public form stronger connections with R&D. Although 74% of respondents say they know little or nothing about R&D activity in their local area, around 70% express an interest in hearing more from researchers about local work.

Participants also report wanting clearer information on the purpose of R&D and how it contributes to addressing issues they consider important. Societal impacts are generally easier for people to identify with than commercial outcomes. There is also broad support for public involvement in decisions about R&D priorities and interest in opportunities to take part in research.

CaSE states that the findings are intended to support R&D advocates in developing evidence-led approaches to communication and engagement. The report sets out priority areas for sector-wide action over the next three years, including making R&D more locally visible, demonstrating connections to priority national issues and highlighting the range of roles within the R&D workforce.

Additional recommendations include sustained resourcing for public communication, engagement and involvement; piloting local engagement approaches; and improving coordination of public attitudes research across the sector.

CaSE plans to repeat this study every three years to build a long-term dataset to support ongoing decision-making.

Some stand out findings from across the research:

- Some 40% said they had heard of the term “R&D” and know what it means, rising to 82% when “research and development” is spelled out in full.
- Only around four in ten (41%) said that R&D was relevant to their life, and just 29% said they feel connected with R&D.
- Less than a third could immediately think of lots of ways R&D benefits the UK (29%) or their region (22%), falling to just 18% when asked about their local area or them and their family.
- Some 88% said it was at least somewhat important for the Government to invest money into R&D, and 71% think the Government should either increase or maintain levels of R&D investment.
- Two in three (67%) agreed R&D should be a tool to solve society's problems, but there was a disconnect between some of the public's priority issues and R&D's perceived role in addressing them.
- If there was extra money to invest in R&D, a majority (86%) said that new medicines and treatments should be a priority, followed by cleaner energy sources (72%).
- More than seven in ten (71%) agreed that the private sector has an important role to play in UK R&D, although focus groups demonstrated some concerns about the profit-driven motivations of business R&D.
- Some 56% would support a new R&D laboratory in their local area, while 68% would support a new science museum or discovery centre. In focus groups, participants demonstrated a genuine appetite and excitement for both.
- There are high levels of trust in R&D voices to talk about how much money the Government should invest in R&D, at 80% for research charities, 74% for researchers and 72% for universities.
- A large majority said that they would trust information about R&D from research charities (84%), researchers (81%) and universities (77%).
- There are high levels of trust in R&D voices to talk about how much money the Government should invest in R&D, at 80% for research charities, 74% for researchers and 72% for universities.

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

UK advances targeted science cooperation with China

The UK advanced a set of targeted science cooperation initiatives with China following a visit by Science Minister Lord Vallance on **11 November 2025**. The delegation, which included representatives from the national academies, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the university sector, met Chinese political, academic and industry counterparts to identify areas for focused collaboration.

The discussions covered climate and environmental science, planetary science and astronomy, health research, and agriculture and food science. The UK Government noted that these priority areas reflect shared scientific challenges, while reaffirming that national security and research security remain central to all UK international partnerships.

China remains one of the world's largest investors in research and development and a major contributor to the global research workforce. The UK continues to be a significant international research partner, with several globally recognised universities and a strong science and technology base.

During the visit, the Minister highlighted the role of international cooperation in UK science and innovation, while emphasising that all partnerships must operate within the UK's security and values framework.

The engagement forms part of the UK's broader approach to maintaining a stable, clearly defined science relationship with China - supporting collaboration where appropriate, establishing clear boundaries, and managing risk through existing research security guidance and advisory services.

UK research organisations continue to work independently, with access to Government support to ensure international collaborations meet UK regulatory and security requirements.

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

Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee - 40th Report

The House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee has published its 40th Report, examining the adequacy of the Home Office's supporting evidence for recent immigration-related statutory instruments. The Committee's findings were informed by an accompanying oral evidence session with Mike Tapp MP, Minister for Migration, and Dan Hobbs, Director-General for Migration and Borders at the Home Office.

The Committee drew attention to persistent concerns about the Home Office's transparency, noting that witnesses acknowledged the department had not consistently provided Parliament with the level of information expected when laying statutory instruments. Members highlighted that the Home Office had not demonstrated best practice in preparing explanatory material, and that the lack of timely impact assessments hindered effective scrutiny.

A central focus of the Report was the Impact Assessment (IA) covering several immigration-related SIs. The Committee noted that the reduction in the length of the Graduate route represented the largest immediate financial effect of the changes, driven by an estimated £1.1 billion loss in tuition fee income in the first appraisal year as fewer international students chose to study in the UK.

When questioned about the risks to the financial health of the higher education sector, Home Office witnesses said the changes were expected to have a "modest impact", projecting an annual reduction of fewer than 10,000 international students, or less than 3% of entrants. They argued that analysing impacts at the level of individual institutions would be disproportionate given what they characterised as the limited scale of the reforms.

However, the Committee said it was not convinced by this assessment, noting that the IA itself described the scale of the impact as "highly uncertain". Given ongoing financial fragility in parts of the sector, the Committee recommended that the Home Office and the Department for Education closely monitor the effects both at institutional and system level. Members suggested that a review in autumn 2026, aligned with international applications for the 2026–27 academic year, would be appropriate. They also expressed concern that institutions with existing material uncertainty warnings had not been specifically considered.

The Committee further highlighted potential implications for the supply of skilled labour, noting that only 30% of Graduate route visa holders were in "professional occupations" and that the reforms relied on higher-skilled graduates transferring into the Skilled Worker route. The Committee recommended monitoring whether this

outcome was achieved in practice. The IA indicated that the reforms would reduce net migration on the Graduate route by 6,000 to 10,000 per year.

On stakeholder engagement, Home Office witnesses said the department had engaged with several organisations, including Universities UK (UUK). They reported that stakeholders had raised concerns about impacts on international student recruitment, institutional finances, and the UK's global competitiveness. In response, the Home Office introduced transitional arrangements, retained the three-year post-PhD period, and committed to monitoring sector impacts following implementation.

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

Independent investigation launched to tackle rising youth inactivity - Department for Work and Pensions

An independent investigation has been commissioned on **10 November 2025** to examine the increasing numbers of young people in the UK who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The review will be led by former Health Secretary Alan Milburn. It will focus on the factors behind the rise in youth inactivity - with particular attention to the role of mental health conditions and disability.

The investigation comes at a time when almost one in eight young people aged 16-24 are currently NEET. Over a quarter of such young people now cite long-term sickness or disability as a barrier to participation, compared with about 12% in 2013-14.

The terms of reference indicate the study will review how health, welfare, skills and employment systems interact, assess current outcomes, identify barriers, and develop recommendations to improve access to work, education or training for young people. Interim findings are expected in Spring 2026, with a final report in Summer 2026.

The government said the investigation is part of its wider efforts to ensure that young people have the opportunity to “learn or earn”, turning what it described as a “crisis of opportunity” into a chance to improve life-chances and support the economy.

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

Office for Students - Strategy Roadmap 2025 to 2030

The Office for Students (OfS) has set out its *Strategy Roadmap: 2025 to 2030*, outlining the major areas of work it plans to deliver over the next five years as it seeks to strengthen regulation in the interests of students. The roadmap expands on the OfS's strategic goals and describes how its core "attitudes" will translate into practical regulatory activity across the higher education sector.

The roadmap states that the OfS will regulate with four guiding attitudes: being **ambitious for all students**, **collaborative** in its approach, **vigilant** with public money and student fees, and **vocal** about the value of higher education to society and the economy. These principles will shape all regulatory decisions and form the basis of new performance measures to assess the OfS's own effectiveness.

The plan centres on six strategic goals across three areas: **quality**, **student experience and support**, and **sector resilience**. On quality, the OfS intends to build on the Teaching Excellence Framework by developing a more integrated approach to quality assessment, using investigation and enforcement where necessary. It will also continue to hold institutions accountable for outcomes among disadvantaged and underrepresented students, and enhance its oversight of free speech and academic freedom.

In relation to student experience, the roadmap highlights growing pressures on students, including rising living costs and an increase in mental health needs. The OfS plans to strengthen consumer protections, promote clearer information for prospective students, and require institutions to develop evidence-led plans to support equality of opportunity. It also commits to regulating in areas such as harassment and sexual misconduct, while using non-regulatory approaches where student concerns fall outside formal powers.

On sector resilience, the OfS warns that many institutions face significant financial challenges due to declining real-terms domestic income, reliance on international fees, and wider economic pressures. It plans to maintain continuous assessments of sector financial risk, challenge institutions lacking credible plans, and work with providers to improve preparedness for potential closures. The roadmap also signals a stronger emphasis on governance, with enhanced monitoring and possible interventions where leadership or assurance arrangements pose risks.

The OfS says it will continue improving its regulatory processes, streamlining data collection, reducing unnecessary burdens, and strengthening engagement with students and institutions. It also commits to greater transparency, including the

publication of refreshed performance measures, annual reporting on student engagement, and surveys of institutional leaders to assess regulatory impact.

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

Policy Exchange - From School to the Skilled Workforce

A new report from Policy Exchange, published on 12 November 2025, explores how the UK can better bridge the gap between school leavers and employment in skilled occupations.

The report, *From School to the Skilled Workforce*, finds that around 27% of all job vacancies are now linked to skills shortages, and warns that if the UK does not act, skills gaps could cost up to £120 billion annually by the end of the decade.

Key findings include that many young people are leaving school without the technical or vocational skills demanded by employers, and that the current post-16 system does not consistently align with labour market needs. The authors argue that this misalignment is weakening productivity and limiting economic growth.

The report recommends a series of reforms to enhance education-to-work transitions, including:

- Strengthening technical and vocational pathways in schools, ensuring students gain skills relevant to future employment.
- Improving employer-provider collaboration, so that training and qualifications reflect the real needs of workplaces.
- Raising the status and clarity of non-university routes, making them more visible and respected as alternatives to higher education.
- Ensuring regional and local labour market alignment, so that young people in different parts of the country have access to opportunities that match local demand.

In conclusion, the report presents a case that without significant reform to how schooling links to employment, the UK risks sustaining a large cohort of young people under-prepared for skilled work, which in turn threatens productivity, earnings and social mobility.

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

The Contemporary Relevance of the UK's Social Sciences - Academy of Social Sciences report

A new report by the Academy of Social Sciences explores how the UK's social science disciplines remain vital to understanding and addressing major societal, economic and environmental challenges.

The report, *The Contemporary Relevance of the UK's Social Sciences*, outlines eight key dimensions through which social sciences contribute: from deepening our understanding of people, society, economy and place; to generating economic value, driving innovation, shaping public policy and improving lives. It also emphasises the value of social science skills in the workforce.

The analysis presents multiple case studies demonstrating that social sciences are already providing practical insights into pressing issues such as climate adaptation, technological change, health and wellbeing, and regional regeneration. However, the report warns that for these contributions to be sustained and expanded, two conditions must be met: long-term, sufficient funding for social science research and stronger institutional integration of social sciences into government evidence and innovation systems.

The report concludes that while the UK retains strong social sciences capabilities, their potential is under-realised unless funding patterns and policy frameworks shift. Without this, the opportunities to use social science for public benefit, economic growth and inclusive societies could be constrained.

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