



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

11 – 15 July 2022

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

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions

On Tuesday 12 July, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Rt. Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng MP, and his ministerial team answered questions in the House of Commons.

Shadow Science, Research and Innovation Minister, Chi Onwurah MP, criticised the government for placing the UK's association to Horizon Europe in "peril". The Energy Minister, Rt. Hon. Greg Hands MP, said the government was committed to achieving a "good deal" for UK science, either through participation in Horizon or a 'Plan B' fully funded approach.

Valerie Vaz MP (Labour) asked whether the BEIS Secretary would ensure money from the 115 cancelled Horizon grants would be given to UK scientists. The BEIS Secretary said he was "proud" that the government had committed to Horizon association initially and that 'Plan B' would ensure money invested in the programme would be retained in the UK. He added that he was in discussion with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on this issue.

Labour MP and former Mayor of South Yorkshire, Dan Jarvis MP, asked whether the minister would pledge to work with South Yorkshire's "outstanding translational research institutions and universities", referring to the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) and Sheffield Hallam's Advanced Wellbeing and Research Centre (AWRC). Greg Hands responded saying he already had plans to join a delegation to Sheffield and that the government was committed to increasing research and development (R&D).

Julian Sturdy MP (Conservative) praised the University of York-led Bio Yorkshire initiative and asked whether the government would continue its commitment to R&D during changes to ministerial personnel. Greg Hands stated that the government remained committed to the "fasted and most sustained R&D funding uplift" target to reach £20 billion per annum in 2 years' time.

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

National Security Bill at Commons Committee

On Tuesday 12 July and Thursday 14 July, the National Security Bill continued its line-by-line scrutiny by Public Bill Committee.

The Committee briefly discussed how research could be covered in the scope of the Bill. Holly Lynch MP (Labour) spoke to the offence set out by Clause 1 of the Bill on 'obtaining or disclosing protected information', and said it was required due to "the theft of research, policy development and datasets" from hostile state actors in recent months.

Also speaking to Clause 1, Stephen McPartland MP (Conservative) said that its scope would capture early-stage ideas such as research as well as established ideas that are more likely to be subject to protective measures. He said that it was clear that legitimate conduct would not be captured by this offence. He cited an example of a team of researchers working with a foreign power and stated that their research partnership would authorise them to share information with the foreign power.

The Bill will continue with its committee stage scrutiny on Tuesday 19 July, before returning after recess for further sessions in the autumn. You can read transcripts of completed committee sessions and the latest amendment papers [here](#).

Women and Equalities Oral Questions:

On Wednesday 13 July, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and Minister for Equalities, Rt. Hon. Liz Truss MP and her ministerial team answered questions in the House of Commons.

Margaret Ferrier MP (Independent) cited concern of the lack of gender and ethnic diversity within science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) subjects. She asked the minister what steps the government were taking to level the playing field. The minister cited that 42% of undergraduate STEM students were women and sought to open further research opportunities.

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

Forthcoming business

Westminster Hall debate BTEC qualifications

On Monday 18 July at 4:30pm Marsha De Cordova MP (Labour) has scheduled a debate following an e-petition to block the withdrawal of funding for BTEC qualifications.

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

Health and Social Care oral questions

On Tuesday 19 July at 11:30am the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt. Hon. Steve Barclay MP, and his ministerial team will answer questions in the House of Commons.

You can read the full list of tabled questions [here](#). You can watch the session [here](#).

National Security Bill at Commons Committee

On Tuesday 19 July at 9:25am and 2:00pm, the National Security Bill will continue its line-by-line scrutiny by Public Bill Committee.

You can watch the session [here](#) and read the full list of amendments [here](#).

Women and Equalities Committee oral evidence

On Wednesday 20 July from 2:30pm the Woman and Equalities committee will be taking evidence on attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings. Witnesses include:

- Professor Steve West, Professor at Universities UK
- Ammaarah Faisal, Student Ambassador and Human Research for Higher Education at Our Streets Now
- John Edmonds, John Edmonds Co-author of Unsafe Spaces: Ending Sexual Abuse in Universities
- Dr Rachel Fenton, Senior Lecturer at University of Exeter Law School
- Dr Anni Donaldson, Honorary Research Fellow at University of Strathclyde
- Richie Benson, Universities Project Lead at Beyond Equality

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

The House of Commons and House of Lords rise for summer recess on Thursday 21 July. Both Houses will return on Monday 5 September, when a new Conservative leader will also be announced.

Written Questions

Housing: Students

Dr Matthew Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what his Department's policy rationale is for rejecting a tenancy exemption scheme for students residing in Purpose Built Student Accommodation. [UIN 31077]

Eddie Hughes: Privately managed purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) is distinct to the rest of the private rented sector (PRS). It caters specifically to student needs, is often restricted to housing students due to planning constraints, and it is not designed to offer long-term accommodation. Standards in privately managed PBSA are upheld by Government Codes, which outline the obligations of PBSA landlords and set benchmark standards for the accommodation they manage. Compliance with The Codes also ensures that problems or disputes can be resolved promptly if they do occur. Currently around 95% of PBSA providers are signed up to The Codes.

PBSA developments are an important part of student accommodation supply. Under our proposed reforms to the private rented sector, private PBSA providers who are signed up to a government-approved code will be exempt from assured status and therefore the new periodic tenancy system. This will make sure that PBSA can continue to provide efficiently run housing in line with the academic year for the students that choose to live there.

Medicine: Training

Navendu Mishra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of replacing the NHS Bursary for medical students with access to the NHS Learning Support Fund. [UIN 30181]

Maria Caulfield: We have no plans to make a specific assessment. From year five of an undergraduate course and from year two of a graduate-entry course, medical students can access the non-repayable NHS Bursary. This comprises payment for tuition fees, a non-means-tested grant and a further means-tested award. Students eligible for the NHS Bursary can also apply for a reduced rate non-means tested maintenance loan for living costs from Student Finance England.

Higher Education: Ethnic Groups

Philip Hollobone: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will take steps with the Secretary of State for Education to help ensure that the proportion of white state-school educated students obtaining a place in higher education is raised to the same proportion as mixed heritage, Black, Asian and Chinese students. [UIN 901085]

Brendan Clarke-Smith: There are still under-represented groups who are struggling to access Higher Education (HE), including white, working-class males.

Prior attainment is a key determinant of successful participation in HE. When we account for this, we see reductions in the gaps between the most and least advantaged groups.

That is why we are refocusing the entire access and participation regime to drive up standards throughout the system – and we are asking universities to take a more direct role in doing this.

We are asking universities to raise standards in schools and colleges, offer flexible and skills-related courses, tackle drop-out rates, and support students throughout university and graduation into meaningful employment.

To increase aspiration and attainment a far greater focus needs to be placed on activities which benefit students, including summer schools, programmes of intervention in schools and targeted bursaries to assist with living costs.

An investment of up to £75 million has been announced to create a National Scholarship Scheme which will support high achieving disadvantaged students to reach their full potential.

Horizon Europe

The Marquess of Lothian: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have any plans for the UK to join Horizon Europe; and if so, what steps they are taking to secure the UK's membership [UIN HL1390].

Lord Callanan: The UK stands ready to formalise our association to Horizon Europe at the earliest opportunity. The Government continues to do everything it can to complete this process swiftly, but disappointingly there have been persistent delays from the EU.

In order to provide reassurance to the sector, the UK Government has guaranteed funding for the first and second waves of eligible successful applicants to Horizon Europe who expect to sign agreements by December 2022 and who have been unable to sign grant agreements with the EU. If the UK is unable to associate to Horizon Europe, we will be ready to introduce a comprehensive alternative programme of international science, research and innovation collaborations.

Universities: EU Countries

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to build partnerships between European universities and UK (a) university and (b) business sectors. [UIN 31155]

Jane Hunt: The UK has strong and deep research and innovation ties with our European partners through longstanding university and industrial partnerships both bilaterally and multilaterally. We

remain committed to associating to European research programmes, but if delays to our association continue, we will introduce a comprehensive set of alternative programmes to maintain our global science superpower trajectory. We will continue to support work with European universities to maintain research and innovation excellence, collaborative networks and thought leadership.

Research and development spending

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to assess the extent of the research and development potential of locations across the UK. [UIN 31151]

Jane Hunt: BEIS will aim to invest 55% of its R&D budget outside the Greater South East by 2024/25. We have also given UKRI a new organisational objective to increase consideration of local growth criteria and impact in R&D fund design. These measures will help to ensure that high potential R&D clusters across the UK see the benefit from our record uplift in R&D investment to £20 billion by 2024/25.

Research: Visas

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has had discussions with the Home Secretary on the potential impact of delays in providing short-term visas to visiting academics who are on international research commissioned by UK universities. [UIN 30013]

Jane Hunt: My Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State welcomes the recent progress to expand the range and speed of routes for international talent to come and work in the UK. Should the UK be unable to associate to Horizon Europe, continued mobility for researchers will be a top priority.

Sector News

Andrea Jenkyns MP announced as new Higher Education Minister

Andrea Jenkyns MP was announced as new Skills, Further and Higher Education Minister on 12 July.

Andrea Jenkyns has been the MP for Morley and Outwood since 2015. She has held positions in All-Party Parliamentary Groups for Education and Social Mobility and is a former director of University of Bolton-funded Research Institute of Social Mobility and Education (RISE).

On her announcement, the newly appointed minister stated, "we'll be powering ahead with ambitious plans to boost skills and opportunities for everyone, regardless of where they are in life, delivering for individuals, employers and the economy."

UCAS 2022 Cycle Applicant Figures:

On 14 July, Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) published statistics for the 2022 June 30 application deadline.

The overall application rate for UK 18-year-olds stood at 44.1 per cent, with 683,650 applicants, 93,000 more than in 2021. Nearly 135,000 international students had applied by the deadline, an increase of 3 per cent since last year. There was an increase in the number of applications from students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with 38,300 18-year-olds applying from the lowest participation areas.

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

OfS data on cancelled events 2020-21:

New data published on 14 July by the Office for Students (OfS) found that 19,407 events were held by universities and colleges with external speakers in 2020-21, with 193 speaker requests or events

rejected. The data was published alongside sector-wide information on the data universities and colleges return to the OfS as part of their compliance with the Prevent duty.

Commenting on the data, Susan Lapworth, interim chief executive at the OfS, said: “This data shows that more than 99 per cent of events and speaker requests were approved in 2020-21 and suggests that – in general – universities and colleges remain places where debate and the sharing of ideas can thrive. However, it is the case that the number and proportion of rejections sharply increased in 2020-21, with almost 200 speakers or events rejected. We would be concerned if those cases suggest that lawful views are being stifled”.

Andrea Jenkyns MP, Higher Education Minister, responded saying “universities and colleges must be places that champion debate and diversity of thought and this government has warned of the chilling effect of censorship on our campuses”.

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

Student loan forecasts for England:

Forecasts for entrants, outlay and repayment on student loans were released by the Department for Education (DfE) on 14 July.

Full-time undergraduate higher education students starting in the 2021/22 academic year are expected to borrow an average of £42,000 over the course of their studies, 20% of students are expected to repay their loan in full, and the government is forecast to subsidise 44% of loans issued in this cycle.

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

Bursaries to help learners upskill and retrain:

On 15 July, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that learners who struggle with study-related costs can apply for up to £2.5 million worth of targeted bursary funding to help them access new higher education ‘short courses.’

22 universities and colleges across England will offer over 100 short courses to students from September as part of a three-year trial before the roll out of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). The courses give learners the flexibility to gain an accredited certificate and valuable skills that can be applied in the workplace.

Secretary of State for Education, Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP, said, “this bursary will break down barriers to learning and give everyone the ability to upskill and retrain at a pace which suits them.”

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