



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

11 – 15 May 2026

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

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Parliamentary business

Getting Britain Working Again – HoC Debate

On Thursday 14 May, MPs continued the debate on the King's Speech, with the day's debate focused on "Getting Britain Working Again". The debate was opened by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, and closed by the Minister for School Standards, Georgia Gould MP. Relevant contributions focused on youth employment, apprenticeships, skills, further and higher education, graduate pathways and student finance.

Pat McFadden MP said the government's approach to welfare reform would include education, health treatment, youth apprenticeships and employment support. He said there were almost one million young people not in education, employment or training, and highlighted the government's youth guarantee, including £2.5 billion in support for young people and employers, £3,000 hiring bonuses for employers taking on young people who have been out of work for six months, and £2,000 bonuses for small businesses taking on young apprentices. He also said the government would pay for training courses for young apprentices employed by SMEs.

Bob Blackman MP (Conservative) asked whether the government would reform training for unemployed people so that they are trained for jobs in sectors where opportunities exist. McFadden said this was the government's intention, including through shorter apprenticeship courses below the usual eight-month minimum, which he said employers had asked for.

Phil Brickell MP (Labour) raised the impact of artificial intelligence on the future of work and was asked what the government could do to ensure that graduates entering the workforce have good career pathways. Brickell said the government should continue to work closely with the further and higher education sector to plan proactively for future opportunities in the labour market, including those emerging over the next five to 10 years. He also expressed support for re-entry to Erasmus, citing his own experience as a former Erasmus student and arguing that young people should have access to similar opportunities.

Sam Rushworth MP (Labour), Chair of the APPG for T-levels, focused on further education, skills and youth opportunity. He said FE colleges had faced under-investment, with funding per student falling over the previous 14 years, and argued that vocational education had too often been treated as second class. Drawing on his experience as a former FE college teacher, he highlighted the role of access to higher education courses in supporting school leavers and young adults who need a second

chance. He argued that there should be no hierarchy of esteem between academic and vocational education, and that practical and technical routes should be valued alongside university study.

Oliver Ryan MP (Labour) said too many young people and graduates had been “left on the scrapheap” under the previous government, and linked youth unemployment and graduate outcomes to wider welfare and labour market reform. He welcomed the government’s approach to supporting disabled people and people with long-term health conditions into employment.

Saqib Bhatti MP, Shadow Minister for Education, said the Conservatives’ alternative King’s Speech included proposals to expand apprenticeships, including removing the funding cap for apprenticeships for 18 to 21-year-olds and introducing a business rebate for investment in training and skills. On higher education, he said the Conservatives wanted to “rebalance the system”, arguing that some degrees had become poor value for taxpayers and graduates. He said the party would use money saved from reducing “low value, low outcome degrees” to fund more apprenticeships. He also said the Conservatives would abolish real interest on plan 2 student loans.

Georgia Gould MP, Minister for School Standards, closed the debate for the government. She said the government was taking action on employment, apprenticeships and growth, and repeated that apprenticeship starts for young people had fallen under the previous government and had risen under the current government. She said youth unemployment had been a major theme of the debate and argued that education was central to restoring opportunity for people of all ages, including young people who are not in work or training.

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

Forthcoming business

Youth employment, education and training - Work and Pensions Committee oral evidence session

On Wednesday 20 May, the Commons Work and Pensions Committee will hold an oral evidence session on “Youth employment, education and training”.

Witnesses include:

- **Alan Milburn**, Chair, Young People and Work Report
- **Emily Erikson**, Research Fellow and Policy Lead, Institute of Employment Research, University of Warwick
- **Veerle Miranda**, Head of Youth Employment and Social Policies Unit, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- **Professor Dr Hubert Ertl**, Director of Research and Vice President, Germany's Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)

You [can watch the session](#).

Written questions and statements

Tackling Antisemitism – Written Ministerial Statement

Statement made by Steve Reed, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government:

The first duty of any government is to keep its people safe. The truest test of whether that is being met is how we respond when a community comes under attack. This crisis of antisemitism – the disgusting attacks being made against British Jews - is a crisis for all of us.

Today I want to update the House on steps we are taking as a government to combat this sickening hatred, and better protect, celebrate, and support Jewish communities.

Antisemitism is an old hatred, and though its nature changes over time, Jewish people are often the target when extremists are emboldened. Since the 7 October terrorist attacks, there has been a marked increase in antisemitism both here, and abroad. We have seen its devastating impacts in Manchester, Bondi, Washington, and, most recently, in Golders Green. There has also been a magnified threat from hostile states.

In March, we published *Protecting What Matters*, our strategy to tackle prejudice, bring people together, and take on extremists. It includes: action we will take online to give people greater control over what content they see; £7 million to tackle antisemitism in schools, colleges and universities; Lord Macdonald's review into existing public order and hate crime legislation; Sir David Bell's review into antisemitism in schools and colleges, and Lord Mann's review into tackling antisemitism and racism in the health service; the rollout of training across the Civil Service; and steps to help faith groups improve their safety and security.

These policies were developed in consultation with Jewish stakeholders, and sit alongside other measures to combat extremism. This includes: embedding the extremism definition; strengthening oversight of charities and universities; expanding disruption powers and operational capacity to counter extremist groups; and using the full strength of powers in the Online Safety Act 2023 to tackle harmful online content.

However, we know that we all need to do more.

On 5 May the Prime Minister convened a summit of leaders from across business, civil society, health, education, culture, and policing to explore how to tackle antisemitism in all corners of society.

Ahead of the summit, the government announced a series of measures, including:

- A further £25 million into increased police patrols and protective security to keep our Jewish communities safe. This brings the total funding this year to £58 million – the largest investment a government has ever made towards protecting Jewish communities.
- A £1 million expansion of the Common Ground programme for communities facing antisemitism.
- Working with the Arts Council to champion the talent and ambition of Jewish artists and creative professionals, with the Arts Council supporting, and part-funding, the UK's first Jewish Cultural Month.
- Ensuring the Arts Council is tough on organisations or individuals in receipt of Arts Council funding that peddle or promote antisemitic content, including using their powers to suspend, withdraw, or claw back that funding. DCMS will work with the Arts Council to carry out an independent audit focused on the use of these powers and their effectiveness: these powers will be strengthened where needed.
- Strengthening guidance to local licensing authorities on how existing licensing powers can be used to tackle events or venues promoting antisemitic behaviour or content.
- Ensuring that Arts Council and Home Office funding can be used to support protective security for Jewish artists and cultural organisations: this will mean that security costs driven by antisemitism do not lead to cancellations or exclusion.
- Setting an expectation for universities to publish robust disciplinary policies that explicitly set out the consequences of antisemitism, and how these policies will be enforced.
- Calling on universities to publish anonymised data on antisemitic incidents and the action taken: this will improve transparency, monitor frequency, and ensure accountability. Government will review the published data to ensure that this is being taken seriously.

We will also be fast-tracking legislation in the coming weeks to introduce new proscription-like powers to clamp down on individuals and groups carrying out hostile activity for foreign states, including those who act as their proxies.

No one should feel that they have to hide their identity for their own safety. Nobody should think twice before going to a synagogue, hide their Stars of David or kippahs, or avoid sharing their identity with school friends or colleagues. Simply put, no one should lead smaller lives to protect themselves.

We will not allow fear to dictate how Jewish people live in this country, or allow antisemitism to become normalised and excused.

We will not rest until the UK is a place where every Jewish person can live openly, safely, and proudly.

Sector news

Conservatives publish alternative King's Speech

The Conservative Party has published an “Alternative King’s Speech”, setting out the legislative and policy priorities it says it would pursue in government. The document is framed around two broad themes: building a “stronger economy” and a “stronger country”, with proposals covering public spending, tax, energy, deregulation, skills, crime, immigration, defence, health, education and constitutional reform.

On skills and higher education, the document includes a “New Deal for Young People”. This would scrap real interest rates on Plan 2 student loans, create 100,000 additional apprenticeships for 18 to 21-year-olds, and provide employers with up to £5,000 for each British apprentice they hire. The Conservatives say this would be funded by ending support for “wasteful university degrees” which they argue do not improve job prospects or earnings.

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

Simpler, shared system for describing skills needs launched

The UK Standard Skills Classification, a new national framework for identifying and describing skills needs across the labour market, was published by Skills England on 12 May.

Developed by the University of Warwick’s Institute for Employment Research and the University of Sheffield, in partnership with Omnifolio on behalf of Skills England, the framework provides a standardised set of categories linking skills, knowledge, tasks and occupations. The classification is intended to support employers, training providers, job seekers and those looking to upskill by providing a common language for understanding skills needs, matching people to job opportunities and informing skills investment.

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

Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students – HoC Education Committee report

The Education Committee has warned that the UK higher education sector is facing “unprecedented” financial pressure, with consequences already being felt through staff redundancies, course and department closures, recruitment freezes and asset sales. The report highlights the wider economic, social and research benefits of universities, and calls on the government to take greater account of the role universities play as economic anchors in their local communities when developing policy and responding to financial difficulties.

Insolvency and institutional failure

The Committee raises concern that there is currently no clearly understood protocol for how government would respond if a higher education provider were at imminent risk of insolvency. It recommends that the government urgently establish an early warning protocol, triggered when the Office for Students identifies an institution as being at risk of insolvency.

The Committee says this protocol should include costed plans to protect students, staff and local communities, and should set out options including restructuring, merger with another provider, direct financial support or an orderly exit. It also recommends that the government legislate to clarify whether an insolvent institution can continue operating, after the inquiry heard conflicting evidence on whether teaching could continue once a provider becomes insolvent.

The report also supports the introduction of a special administration-style regime for universities, drawing on the regime used in further education. The Committee argues that the consequences of a disorderly institutional failure would be too serious to leave unchecked, and says any regime should protect current students through teach-out arrangements, maintain access to sector-critical courses and avoid creating geographical cold spots.

Student protection

The Committee finds that existing Student Protection Plans are inadequate, particularly in the event of a large provider becoming insolvent. It welcomes the Office for Students’ willingness to reform the system, but argues that changes need to go further.

It recommends that strengthened student protection requirements should apply to all higher education providers, not just new entrants. The Committee also says protection plans should take account of staff, research activity, and the wider impact that provider failure would have on local economies and communities.

International students and financial sustainability

The report finds that financial pressures have increased universities' reliance on international student income, and says the Home Office now plays a "significant, even preeminent" role in the sector's financial health. The Committee argues that government policy on international students must be considered in a more joined-up way, and says that if the government's aim is to reduce international student numbers, it should set out how it will support the financial sustainability of higher education providers.

The Committee expresses regret that the Home Office was not a co-owner of the government's International Education Strategy, describing this as part of a wider coordination problem across departments affecting higher education.

The Committee also notes strong sector opposition to the proposed International Student Levy, which would charge providers £925 per international student from 1 August 2028, with an exemption for the first 220 international students. It recommends that the government take account of sector concerns, monitor the levy's impact on institutional finances, and assess its effects on students, local economies and communities.

On the Basic Compliance Assessment, the Committee warns that tighter visa sponsorship rules could deter institutions from diversifying their international recruitment markets, despite diversification being a stated aim of the International Education Strategy. It recommends that the government address the concerns raised by institutions, consider phasing in the changes, and explain how tighter compliance rules will support rather than undermine recruitment diversification.

Borrowing, governance and franchising

The report also highlights high levels of commercial borrowing as a further pressure on university finances, particularly following recent interest rate rises. It calls on the government to set out what steps it and the Office for Students are taking to ensure borrowing remains sustainable, including whether the OfS should have a role in approving high levels of borrowing.

On governance, the Committee says governing bodies need the capability and culture to challenge senior leadership assumptions on finances, student numbers and restructuring plans. It recommends that the OfS develop a programme to improve

governance, including direct support for institutions where needed. It also recommends implementing Sir Philip Augar's proposal to defer some senior leadership pay until the end of their term.

The Committee also raises concerns about franchised provision, where courses are delivered by another organisation on behalf of a registered provider. While it welcomes plans to introduce mandatory regulation of franchise providers, it warns that institutions heavily dependent on franchise arrangements could face financial shocks if they withdraw from such relationships. It recommends that the OfS provide guidance for universities seeking to scale back or exit franchising, and that the government explain how it would manage the impact of a franchise provider becoming insolvent.

UUK Chief Executive Vivienne Stern in response to the Education Committee's report on Higher Education and Funding:

"It's great to see this new report recognise the crucial role of universities to driving economic growth, supporting local communities and building the highly skilled workforce that our country desperately needs.

"Universities are incredibly grateful to the government for taking the tough decision to increase fees in line with inflation in England and across the sector institutions are taking significant steps to balance the books and become more efficient in an economically uncertain environment.

"However, falling per-student funding, visa changes which have decreased international enrolments, and a longstanding failure of research grants to cover costs have been creating huge pressures in all four nations of the UK. If we want our universities to continue to deliver for students, employers and the economy, government needs to maintain public investment."

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

Call for Evidence: access, participation and success for socio-economically disadvantaged students – The Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust is gathering examples of widening participation practice from universities across the UK to inform a guide on supporting social mobility across the student lifecycle, including outreach, admissions, student success and progression.

The survey is aimed at colleagues working across higher education institutions, including widening participation teams, admissions leads and APP leads. Responses will allow institutions to share examples of their work, evidence of impact and wider perspectives. Submissions will be reviewed by the Sutton Trust for potential inclusion in a publicly available guide intended to support widening participation practice across the sector.

You [can submit evidence here](#).

Government must avoid further cuts to public funding for teaching undergraduates – UUK report

Universities UK is warning government against further cuts to public funding for higher education, as it prepares to make decisions about the level of next years' Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) – the main way in which it directly funds undergraduate education.

New analysis from London Economics produced on behalf of UUK shows how, since HE funding was reformed in 2012, the cost of getting a degree has shifted significantly towards graduates and away from government.

When government increased tuition fees in 2012, it envisaged covering 54% of the cost of teaching English undergraduates. However, the report found that for students starting university in 2025/26, government will be contributing just 23% - less than half the proportion originally planned.

UUK says that while recent decisions to increase tuition fees in line with inflation are welcome, government must avoid undermining this decision by cutting the SPG and putting more of the cost of getting a degree onto graduates.

Anticipated per student funding from government for teaching has fallen sharply since 2012/13, declining in real terms by two thirds, from £7,720 (under the original Plan 2 system and macroeconomic conditions in 2012/13) to £2,480 (under the current 2025/26 system). This has happened as universities face rising costs and growing expectations on teaching quality, student outcomes, access and support.

As government makes decisions about the SPG in the coming weeks, universities are calling on ministers not to further shift the balance of funding.

Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

“Universities are incredibly grateful to the government for taking the tough decision to increase fees in line with inflation. However, further cuts to government teaching grants risk undermining the good work they have done.

Getting a degree benefits individuals because they go on to earn more, so it is right that they contribute, but it also benefits society and the government which get greater tax revenues and a stronger economy from a more highly skilled workforce.

Universities are now teaching with far less funding per student than a decade ago, while expectations on quality, access and outcomes keep rising. If we want to retain world class universities that deliver for students, employers and the economy, government needs to maintain public investment.

It is not fair to students and future graduates to keep raiding funding for higher education to meet growing costs elsewhere in the education system.”

Key findings

- When government increased tuition fees in 2012, it envisaged covering 54% of the cost of teaching English undergraduates. Under the original Plan 2 terms and the original discount rates, the Exchequer was expected to contribute £7,720 per student in 2012-13.
- For students starting university in 2025-26, government will be contributing just 23% of total teaching funding per student, ca. £2,480 based on Plan 5 loans. Anticipated per student funding from government for teaching has fallen by two thirds in real terms since 2012-13.
- Across every measure/scenario, the level of Exchequer contribution to total teaching funding per student in England has declined since 2012-13. On a like-for-like comparison using consistent discount rates, the Exchequer contribution still fell by £1,840 (43%) in real terms; even after accounting for the various changes to the Plan 2 system since 2012-13, it remains £1,100 lower (31%).
- After accounting for inflation, average total teaching funding per student declined in real terms, from £14,380 per student in 2012-13 to £10,610 in 2025-26 (-26%/-£3,770). English HE providers now receive £3,770 less teaching funding per student in real terms in 2025-26 than in 2012-13.
- The graduate contribution has also decreased in real terms from £10,070 to £8,130 (-19%/-£1,940). The high levels of CPI inflation have eroded the nominal increase in tuition fees and associated graduate loan repayments.

- Instead of contributing £0.30 to every £1 of teaching funding for higher education providers, the Exchequer now contributes only £0.23.

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

Mapping SHAPE provision in UK higher education – The British Academy

The British Academy has published an interactive mapping project on SHAPE provision in UK higher education, as part of its SHAPE Observatory. The project uses HESA data to show how provision in SHAPE subjects, including social sciences, humanities and the arts, has changed across UK higher education institutions between 2011/12 and 2024/25.

The maps focus on first-year, first-degree, UK-domiciled students, with the default view showing students aged 20 and under. They allow users to explore where provision has expanded, contracted or disappeared, including by subject, academic year, provider, mode of study and student age. The tool also identifies potential “cold spots”, defined as areas where a student would need to travel more than 60km to access a particular SHAPE subject.

The British Academy says the project is intended to support a more data-driven understanding of regional access to SHAPE subjects, including where reductions in provision may affect students who are less able to move away from home. The maps also include filters for joint honours provision and UCAS tariff, allowing users to examine whether access to subjects varies by the type of provision available or by the prior attainment profile of students entering those courses.

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

‘Happiness gap’ shows class shapes lifelong wellbeing – The Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust has published new research, supported by Co-op, examining the relationship between social mobility, class background and long-term wellbeing. The report finds that people from working-class backgrounds are a third more likely to experience low wellbeing than those from professional backgrounds, and that childhood social class continues to shape adult life satisfaction even where individuals move into higher-status jobs.

The research finds that upward mobility is associated with higher levels of wellbeing, particularly where it is linked to income, education, housing, employment status, health and leisure time. However, the Sutton Trust says that people who move up the social ladder do not fully close the wellbeing gap with those who started from more affluent backgrounds, while those who move down from higher-status backgrounds appear to be partly protected from similar declines in wellbeing.

The report also highlights the importance of community belonging, finding that people with a very strong sense of belonging to their community were three times more likely to report high wellbeing. It argues that policy responses to social mobility should consider wider quality-of-life factors, not only earnings or occupational status, including access to education, employment, housing, health, community ties and work-life balance.

The Sutton Trust and Co-op are calling for renewed action to address social and economic barriers to opportunity, including through education, employment access and investment in communities, with a particular focus on supporting those who do not experience upward mobility and who report the lowest levels of wellbeing.

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

Half of students miss one-third of their lectures - HEPI

The Higher Education Policy Institute and TechnologyOne have jointly published a major new report on the student experience in UK universities over the past 20 years.

What Matters Most? 20 Years of The Student Experience (HEPI Report 200) takes the long view, as it is based on two decades of data collected via the large *Student Academic Experience Survey*. This Survey first started just before tuition fees rose to £3,000 – seven Prime Ministers ago – and it has been run in recent years jointly by HEPI and Advance HE.

Key findings from the new report cover contact hours, value for money, expectations versus reality and the true cost of COVID on students' learning:

- in 2006, 63% of undergraduates attended all their scheduled classes but this had dropped to just under one-half (48%) by 2025 – compared to the past, more students have to undertake paid employment during term time while more accessible tech enables some online catch up;

- the average amount of scheduled teaching time missed by all students has more than doubled, from around one hour a week in 2006 to 2.4 hours a week (out of a total average of 15.2 hours a week) in 2025 – this means those students who miss any scheduled contact hours miss, on average, 5.0 hours a week;
- in percentage terms, total missed teaching sessions have doubled from 8% of total timetabled hours in 2006 to 16% in 2025 – meaning missed sessions equal an average of one-third of the weekly timetabled sessions of the one-half of students who miss any contact hours;
- over half (52%) of students who are satisfied with the number of timetabled sessions say their course is 'good' or 'very good' value for money – compared to just one-in-five (21%) students who are not satisfied with their timetabled hours;
- students who feel they belong on campus, students who feel comfortable expressing their views and students who have a positive sense of wellbeing are all significantly more likely to say their course provides 'good' or 'very good' value for money;
- conversely, students who do not feel as if they belong at their higher education institution are much more likely to say their experience had not matched their prior expectations – this factor alone explains 17% of the likelihood of having a subpar experience; and
- for those students most directly affected, the impact of the pandemic lingered on for long afterwards, with the COVID cohort of students less likely to report 'good' or 'very good' value for money throughout their higher education.

Detailed regression analysis reveals the personal characteristics of students, such as their sex, ethnicity and disability, have much less impact on student experience scores than other factors, such as teaching quality, course content and financial factors (fees and living costs).

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

OfS warns against persistent over-optimism as analysis finds institutions under continued financial pressure

The Office for Students' (OfS) annual financial sustainability report shows that, while higher education institutions reported a small improvement in financial performance in 2024-25, they remain under continued pressure due to volatile student recruitment patterns and rising costs.

Data published shows that more than a third (35.8 per cent) of institutions reported a deficit for 2024-25. While this is lower than expected, this figure is forecast to rise to four in ten institutions (42.7 per cent) for 2025-26.

The improvement in financial performance was not evenly shared among higher education providers, with performance varying significantly between different types of institution. The analysis shows how increased adjusted surplus levels from medium, smaller, and specialist institutions have offset an aggregate deterioration in performance for larger research- and teaching-intensive institutions, among others. Even among these groups, the performance of individual universities and colleges varied widely, with some faring much better or worse than institutions of similar types and sizes.

Nearly a quarter of institutions reported that they incurred costs from restructuring activities, such as voluntary redundancy schemes, in 2024-25. Sector-wide, these costs rose sharply by 20.7 per cent to £218.2 million, with the most significant rise reported by larger research-intensive institutions.

In the longer term, institutions have forecast a return to stronger performances from 2026-27 onwards. However, this anticipated recovery is again heavily dependent on the higher education sector's expectations of a significant increase in student recruitment, which remains unpredictable.

OfS modelling suggests that, if institutions do not meet these optimistic recruitment projections, a substantial number would face deficits, reduced operating cash flow, and declining liquidity. Without effective mitigating action, this would significantly increase financial risk across the sector and heighten the likelihood of disruption to students. As well as general recruitment challenges, the report identifies other risks that have persisted for a number of years, such as an overreliance on fee income from international students.

Responding to the release today of data from both the Office for Students (OfS) and the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) on higher education sector finances, Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK said:

"Through the skilled workforce and the innovations they produce, universities have a key role to play in the country's future success, but this analysis illustrates how the financial situation facing our world-class institutions remains extremely challenging.

"Universities are working hard to ensure their long-term stability, making tough decisions to control costs and looking for ways to do more with less, and we are seeing many examples of major transformation. The decision to increase fees in England in line with inflation was the right thing to do to begin to address the challenge, and government should be congratulated for grasping the nettle, but the task is not yet complete. Indeed, changes to visa policy, the introduction of a tax on international students and increased pension and national insurance costs have added to the pressure. We also fear that DFE is about to cut grant funding to English universities to support the cost of wider teaching. They should not do that.

"Universities can be real drivers of economic renewal but if we want a world-class system which delivers for students, employers and communities across the country, we need a serious conversation how degrees are funded and whether the government's share matches the value universities deliver for wider society."

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

King's and Cranfield University propose merger to support UK national capability and resilience

King's College London and Cranfield University have announced that they have signed an agreement as the first step towards a proposed merger, with the aim of bringing the two institutions together from August 2027. Under the proposal, Cranfield would become part of King's College London, while retaining and building on its distinct specialist contribution.

The institutions said the merger would combine King's interdisciplinary breadth and scale with Cranfield's expertise in technology, engineering, management, applied research and industry partnerships. They said the combined institution would support UK national capability and resilience in areas including engineering and technology, environment and resources, energy, leadership and innovation, society and policy, and security and defence.

The announcement also highlights the potential benefits of a combined footprint across London and the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, with the institutions arguing that this would strengthen collaboration with government, industry and research partners. Lord Vallance, Minister for Science, Innovation, Research and Nuclear, said the proposal had the potential to support the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and wider UK research capability and training.

Responding to the announcement, Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

“What the country needs from our universities is changing, and our universities are changing with it.

“This is a significant announcement and would create an extraordinary powerhouse of a university.

“Cranfield and Kings are creating a strategic, complementary partnership that brings together two incredible institutions to support our energy security, technological capability and ultimately our national resilience.

“It is further evidence that our universities are ready to evolve to play a full part in building the country’s future growth and prosperity.”

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

Adults locked out of learning to access education with new reform

The Department for Education has announced the first 130 universities and colleges approved to offer shorter, modular courses through the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. From September 2026, learners will be able to apply for student finance for these modules, as well as for shorter courses and full degrees, with teaching on the new modules beginning from January 2027.

Under the new system, eligible learners will be able to access funding equivalent to four years of post-18 study, currently worth up to £39,160, which can be used flexibly over their working lives. Maintenance support will also be available, with funding linked to the size of the course being studied rather than only to full academic years.

The government says the reform is intended to widen access to higher and further education for adults who need to fit study around work, childcare or other responsibilities, and to support retraining and upskilling. The modules will focus on

areas linked to skills shortages, including economics and computing, engineering and architecture, and health and social care.

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