



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

12 - 16 February 2024

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary business

Recess

On Thursday 8 February, the House of Commons rose for February recess. It will return on Monday 19 February.

On Wednesday 14 February, the House of Lords rose for February recess. It will return on Monday 19 February.

Forthcoming business

DSIT – oral questions

On Wednesday 21 February from 11:30am, the Secretary of State for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- Whether she has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on encouraging cooperation between universities and businesses to promote innovation. [Mr Barry Sheerman MP, Labour]
- What steps her Department is taking to support research and development in medical technology. [Liz Twist MP, Labour]
- What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics jobs. [Gavin Newlands, SNP; Hannah Bardell MP, SNP]
- What steps she is taking to promote careers for young people in science and technology industries. [Mr Laurence Robertson MP, Conservative]

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

Written Questions

Immigration: Overseas Students

Lord Tyrie: To ask His Majesty's Government what modelling they have undertaken of future immigration flows attributable to students, including those on student visas, dependents of those on student visas, and net migration resulting from such immigration; and what are the projected (1) immigration, (2) emigration, and (3) net migration figures for the next five years. [UIN HL2016]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: Last year as part of the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules published by the department on 17 July, an Impact Assessment was prepared setting out the impact from these Immigration Rules changes. This included analysis on student visas and net migration.

The Impact Assessment is subject to final departmental clearances and will be published in due course.

Business: Horizon Europe

Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask His Majesty's Government what are the eligibility criteria for businesses to apply for Horizon research programme funding; and how those grants will assist them. [UIN HL2009]

Viscount Camrose: Our association to Horizon Europe means that UK researchers and businesses, and their international partners can now apply for funding, and are strongly encouraged to do so. Any organisation can apply for Horizon Europe funding providing they meet the criteria for the specific calls of relevance: https://rea.ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe-who-should-apply_en

Research: China

Sir Robert Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential impact of universities sharing academic research with Chinese investors on UK security. [UIN 13000]

Tom Tugendhat: China poses an epoch-defining and systemic challenge under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) across almost every aspect of national life and

government policy. We continually assess potential threats to UK security, and the Integrated Review and Integrated Review Refresh committed to strengthening the UK's domestic resilience and international partnerships.

The Integrated Review Refresh 2023 also committed to launching a new and comprehensive review of legislative and other protections designed to protect our academic sector, to identify what more we could or should be doing, led by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). This review will conclude in the spring and will include an understanding of potential vulnerabilities relating to foreign access to academic research.

We have also introduced measures in recent years to protect our science and innovation base from state threats and misuse. This includes the establishment of the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) within DSIT, which supports the academic sector to recognise, manage and mitigate national security risks in international collaborations. RCAT has been positively received by the sector and is part of advice and guidance from Government helping to move research institutions beyond basic legal compliance to a more robust understanding of research security risks.

The National Security Act 2023 will make the UK an even harder target for states who seek to conduct hostile acts against the UK, steal our information for commercial advantage, or interfere in our society covertly. The Act creates a whole suite of measures designed to enable our law enforcement and intelligence agencies to deter, detect and disrupt the full range of modern-day state threats, including those related to academia.

Universities: Freedom of Expression

Sir Robert Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of universities accepting funding from entities linked to the Chinese People's Liberation Army on academic freedom. [UIN 13269]

Robert Halfon: The Integrated Review Refresh, which this government published in March 2023, sets out in clear terms the UK's policy towards engagement with China and Chinese entities.

Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous institutions and are responsible for ensuring they have adequate governance, risk management procedures and policies in place, including on the acceptance of donations. HE providers will also have their

own due diligence procedures which should consider reputational, ethical and security risks.

The department expects the HE sector to be alert to risks when collaborating with any international partners. Guidance published by Universities UK advises HE providers how to engage in international collaborations safely and securely. This guidance also includes a recommendation that due diligence should be conducted on all international partnerships and it is available here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/managing-risks-internationalisation>.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 will ensure that HE providers in England have the tools they need to deal with interference with, and threats to, freedom of speech and academic freedom wherever they originate. The Act will enable the Office for Students to monitor the overseas funding of registered HE providers and their constituent institutions and student's unions, and to take appropriate action. Provisions in the Act dealing with overseas funding are expected to come into force from 1 September 2025.

Childcare: Fees and Charges

Daniel Zeichner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to extend childcare grants to postgraduate research students. [UIN 13299]

David Johnston: Through the student loans company, the department offers a specific Childcare Grant (CCG) to support students with the costs of childcare whilst they are in study, which totals around £202 million per year.

The CCG offers parents support of up to 85% of their childcare costs up to a maximum of £183.75 a week for one child and £315.03 for two children.

CCG support is provided to individuals where both parents are students, the student is a lone parent, or the student parent's partner is on a low income.

The government has no plans to extend CCG to postgraduate research students.

The government introduced new support packages for students starting postgraduate master's degree courses from the 2016/17 academic year onwards and postgraduate doctoral degree courses from 2018/19 onwards.

These loans are not based on income and are intended as a contribution to the cost of study. They can be used by students according to their personal circumstances to cover the costs of fees and living costs including childcare. The new support packages have provided a significant uplift in support for postgraduate students while ensuring the student support system remains financially sustainable.

Students studying on postgraduate courses can apply for loans towards their course fees and living costs of up to £12,167 in 2023/24 for new students undertaking postgraduate master's degree courses, and up to £28,673 in 2023/24 for new students undertaking postgraduate doctoral degree courses.

As postgraduate stipends are not classified as income for tax purposes by HMRC, meaning that neither PhD students nor their university pay Income Tax or National Insurance Contributions on their stipend, stipends are therefore not counted as income from work. However, it remains the case that students are eligible for universal 15 hours childcare, which is available to all 3 and 4 year olds, regardless of family circumstances and/or income.

Sector News

Framework for Internationalising Higher Education – Advance HE resource

On Tuesday 13 February, Advance HE released an update to its Framework for Internationalising Higher Education.

Discussing the framework, Advance HE's Stuart Norton and Dr Kay Hack, said, "There is a need to synthesise the evidence base around internationalisation. The revised framework provides a vehicle to develop a shared understanding of the core components to do this. It will support institutions to categorise the points of intersect across related core thematic areas. It can also help shape and recognise the positive impact internationalisation can have on both staff and students.

"By using the framework to initiate conversations with staff, students and potential collaborators, I'm confident the framework will help clarify expectations and requirements, and positively impact outcomes across teaching, research, and the student experience."

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

Evaluation of new data science and artificial intelligence postgraduate conversion courses – OfS report

On Wednesday 14 February, the Office for Students (OfS) published the final report of an evaluation undertaken by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) into a programme of new data science and artificial intelligence (AI) conversion courses that launched in September 2020.

The independent evaluation found that over 37 courses were funded and delivered across 28 universities and more than 950 scholarships were awarded to students from underrepresented backgrounds.

You can [read the report](#).

TEF 2023 final results – OfS publication

On Thursday 15 February, the Office for Students (OfS) published the full set of final outcomes of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Assessments.

Of all 227 providers that took part:

- 51 providers have been rated Gold for delivering an outstanding experience and outcomes for their students
- 125 providers have been rated Silver for delivering a very high quality student experience and outcomes, and overall are performing well above our regulatory baseline
- 48 providers have been rated Bronze for delivering very high quality – notably above our regulatory baseline – in some of the areas that were assessed
- 3 providers received a ‘Requires improvement’ outcome, where the panel did not find enough evidence of excellence above our regulatory baseline and judged that improvement is required to be awarded a TEF rating.

You can [read the results](#).

Huge interest among young people in NHS careers – UUK survey

On Friday 16 February, Universities UK (UUK) published analysis of a Censuswide survey, commissioned by Universities UK and analysed by the Nuffield Trust. The survey shows that ambitious plans to recruit thousands of extra healthcare professionals will likely only succeed if greater financial support is offered to students and these careers are made more appealing.

Key insights include:

- Almost three-quarters of young people are considering or have considered healthcare careers with ‘improving the lives of others’ the main appealing factor.
- But there are several significant factors which the majority of young people say would put them off a healthcare career including perceptions of long hours, high pressure and low pay.

- Universities UK and the Nuffield Trust say health leaders and the UK Government must capitalise on strong interest in healthcare careers, as universities stand ready to support plans for a massive increase in the size of the NHS workforce.

You can [read the analysis](#).