



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

15 – 19 December 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

UK Research and Innovation funding grants to study at UK universities which are not open to white or Asian applicants – HoL Oral Question

On Monday 15 December, an oral question titled “UK Research and Innovation funding grants to study at UK universities which are not open to white or Asian applicants” took place in the House of Lords. This question was tabled by Lord Young of Acton (Conservative).

Lord Young opened by asking whether any UKRI-funded grants were closed to white or Asian applicants, and what assessment the Government had made of this. Responding, **Lord Vallance of Balham** (Labour), Minister of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, said that UKRI funds around 1,800 training grants supporting some 27,000 PhD students. He explained that a small proportion of studentships are ring-fenced by research organisations for under-represented groups as lawful positive action to address inequality, but stressed that no UKRI training grants entirely exclude white or Asian applicants, and that only around 1% of studentships are ring-fenced for widening participation.

Lord Young pressed the issue, citing a specific UKRI-funded postdoctoral role he said excluded white and Asian applicants, and arguing that research funding was being influenced by “radical progressive ideology”. He asked the Minister to reassure the House that funding decisions would be based on intellectual merit rather than ethnicity. Lord Vallance replied that the example appeared to relate to two posts at the Laboratory of Molecular Biology reserved to increase black representation among scientists, comparing this to earlier initiatives such as the Dorothy Hodgkin fellowships for women. He argued that excellence remained central to funding decisions and that a research culture that tolerates bullying or suppresses challenge is not conducive to high-quality science.

Several peers spoke in support of positive action measures. **Baroness Royall of Blaisdon** (Labour) highlighted data showing that white applicants receive a disproportionate share of grants, noting that in 2020–21, 81% of UKRI principal investigators were white and only 1% were black. She pointed to severe under-representation of black academics, with just 160 black professors nationwide. Lord Vallance agreed that these were “stark figures” and said evidence showed that targeted schemes increased confidence and application quality among under-represented researchers. **Lord Clement-Jones** (Liberal Democrat) asked for

reassurance that universities and research councils would continue to be supported in using lawful positive action, which the Minister confirmed.

The debate also touched on wider research funding issues. **Lord Bilimoria** (Crossbench) raised concerns about potential cuts to arts and humanities PhDs, which Lord Vallance denied, stating that overall PhD numbers would be maintained and that arts, humanities and social sciences would continue to be supported through UKRI. **Viscount Camrose** (Conservative) warned that funding decisions perceived to prioritise diversity over excellence could undermine confidence in UK science; Lord Vallance responded that excellence remained the core criterion and cited cross-party agreement on the need to remove systemic barriers.

Further contributions, including from **Lord Wood of Anfield** (Labour) and **Lord Patel** (Crossbench), emphasised equality of opportunity across ethnicity, socioeconomic background and caring responsibilities, arguing that positive action was evidence-based rather than ideological. Closing exchanges focused on workforce data, with Lord Vallance reiterating that while postgraduate participation broadly reflects society, senior academic representation does not, again highlighting the very low number of black professors as justification for continued intervention.

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

Impact of the Autumn Budget 2025 on graduates - Westminster Hall Debate

On Tuesday 16 December, there was a Westminster Hall debate on the “Impact of the Autumn Budget 2025 on graduates”, tabled in by Jack Rankin MP (Conservative).

Opening the debate, Jack Rankin MP set out a detailed critique of how recent Budgets have affected graduates’ living standards, arguing that those who had “done everything right” were now facing mounting financial pressures. He illustrated his case through two representative examples: a graduate in their early thirties on a professional salary, and a slightly older, higher-earning graduate approaching the £100,000 income threshold. He argued that freezes to income tax thresholds, increases in student loan repayments, rising rents and the impact of higher employer national insurance on hiring were combining to leave graduates with little disposable income and limited prospects of home ownership. He cited analysis from the Centre for Social Justice suggesting that high effective marginal tax rates can leave working graduates little better off than households receiving benefits, and warned that this was creating resentment and disillusionment among young professionals.

He focused particularly on student finance changes announced in the Budget. He criticised the freeze on the Plan 2 student loan repayment threshold and the decision

to maintain high interest rates on student debt despite falling market rates, describing these measures as a “hidden graduate tax”. He argued that graduates would begin repaying earlier and pay more over their lifetimes, with higher earners facing especially punitive interest rates that delay repayment of the principal. He claimed that the combined effect of Budget measures could increase the average graduate’s lifetime costs by over £20,000, and questioned whether the Government viewed graduates as having the “broadest shoulders”.

Jim Shannon MP (Democratic Unionist Party) intervened to highlight the specific impact of freezing the Plan 2 repayment threshold until 2030. He argued that this amounted to a stealth tax on career progression, increasing monthly deductions and potentially deterring young people from entering higher education at all.

Alex Easton MP (Independent) raised concerns about the financial sustainability of higher education institutions, citing warnings that many universities could be in deficit by the middle of the decade. He argued that course closures and staff cuts risked creating a system that favoured the wealthy, and urged the Government to act to secure access to higher education for a broad cross-section of society

Responding for the Government, **Torsten Bell MP**, Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, welcomed the focus on graduates’ lived experience rather than abstract economic indicators. He acknowledged the pressures facing young people, including housing costs, job insecurity and student finance, and credited the mover of the debate for recognising shortcomings under previous Conservative governments, including a sharp fall in youth apprenticeships. He argued that the Government’s primary objective was to improve graduate outcomes by strengthening the overall economy, pointing to upgraded growth forecasts, increased public investment and stronger real wage growth in the first year of the new Government.

The Minister addressed labour market and growth policies, arguing that measures in the Budget to support business investment, scale-up and long-term stability would ultimately create more and better graduate jobs. He emphasised the importance of reducing inflation and borrowing, noting that falling interest rates were already easing mortgage costs for many graduates. On housing, he outlined a two-pronged approach: improving security in the private rented sector through the Renters’ Rights Act 2025, and increasing housing supply through planning reform and higher levels of housebuilding, including targeted measures for London.

He also addressed longer-term issues affecting graduates’ financial security. He highlighted the establishment of a Pensions Commission to examine whether younger generations are on track for adequate retirement incomes and to assess the distribution of risk within the pension system. Bell acknowledged the unacceptably high number of young people not in education, employment or training, committing the Government to action through a youth guarantee and expanded mental health

support, while noting that labour market scarring tends to fall most heavily on those with lower qualifications.

Turning to tax and student loans, he argued that the Budget required contributions from across society in order to stabilise public finances and restore public services. He noted that many features of the Plan 2 student loan system were introduced by previous Conservative governments as part of a shift towards greater graduate contributions, and that a substantial proportion of loan balances are never repaid. The Minister maintained that graduates would continue to benefit, on average, from higher earnings and employment rates, and stressed that no graduate would repay unless they earned above the threshold. He said the Government would keep the student finance system under review, but defended the Budget as striking a necessary balance between fairness to graduates and fairness to taxpayers, including those who did not attend university.

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

UK-EU Common Understanding Negotiations - HoL Debate

On **Thursday 18 December**, the House of Lords held a debate on the Government's **UK-EU Common Understanding negotiations**, following a Statement made in the House of Commons about progress in the UK's strategic partnership with the European Union. The focus of much of the discussion was the government's announcement that the UK and the EU had **concluded negotiations for the UK's association to the Erasmus+ programme from 2027**.

The Statement highlighted that association with Erasmus+ will reopen *world-class opportunities* for UK students, teachers, youth workers and sports professionals to study, train, work or volunteer abroad from 2027. It emphasised the benefits for schools, colleges, universities and other education providers by providing access to international networks, research collaboration and enhanced professional development. The Government also noted a 30% financial discount on the UK's contribution for 2027 and outlined plans to review participation 10 months after association begins to assess demand and value.

The Earl of Courtown (Conservative) welcomed the personal and educational benefits of opportunities to study abroad but raised *value-for-money* concerns, questioning how the Government will ensure the scheme is balanced and beneficial for the UK taxpayer, given historical cost imbalances and potential numbers of students coming

to the UK. He also asked what safeguards exist to prevent escalating costs and to protect university revenue streams.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat) welcomed the Statement and spoke from personal experience of teaching EU students at universities, emphasising the benefits of international exchange. He argued for strong promotion of the scheme to encourage British students to study and work overseas, fostering intercultural understanding.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent (Government Whip) responded for the Government, reaffirming that association with Erasmus+ will open doors for learners of all ages across **education, training, youth** and sport sectors. She emphasised that the UK will work to maximise take-up of the programme, ensure accessibility for disadvantaged communities, and that **the Turing scheme will continue to operate alongside Erasmus+**. She noted that funding calls will open in late 2026 and encouraged peers to raise awareness of the opportunities.

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Labour) noted unanimous support for the benefits of Erasmus+ for young people and clarified that the programme's scope extends *beyond universities* to further education, schools and other sectors.

Lord Grocott (Labour) welcomed the scheme but stressed the importance of ensuring that students from *diverse backgrounds and regions*, not just from elite universities, can access these opportunities, pointing out that larger research-intensive institutions may attract more participants if not managed carefully.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green Party) praised the return to Erasmus and highlighted practical issues such as **visa barriers** and coordination with **devolved nation schemes** to ensure smoother participation across the UK.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Labour) welcomed the initiative as beneficial for children and youths of all backgrounds, stressing the importance of ensuring value for money and broad access, so that **universities and students nationwide** can benefit from international exchange.

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

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Gareth Thomas (Labour): (UIN97086) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether British students will be able to take part in the Erasmus+ exchange programme by January 2027.

Josh MacAlister: As set out at the UK-EU Summit in May, the UK agreed to work towards association to the Erasmus+ programme on mutually agreed financial terms.

Negotiations are ongoing, and the timelines for any association are subject to ongoing discussion. We are open to associating to Erasmus+ for 2027 in principle, but only if we can reach agreement on financial terms, which should ensure a fair balance as regards the contributions of and benefits to the UK.

Department for Education: Students: Fees and Charges

James Naish (Labour): (UIN97438) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to address the difference in home fee status eligibility for siblings who are both British nationals where one child benefits from Withdrawal Agreement protections and another does not due to the timing of their university entry after 2028.

Josh MacAlister: UK nationals and their children living in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, who wish to study in the UK, will be eligible for automatic home fee status and student support for courses starting up to seven years from the end of the transition period.

The seven-year period ensures that eligible UK nationals and their children, whose normal place of residence is in the EEA or Switzerland but wish to undertake higher education in England, will still be able to access home fee status and student financial support immediately on their return to the UK during this time.

From 1 January 2028, UK nationals and their children must normally have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for at least three years immediately before the start of their course to qualify for automatic home fee status and student support.

Grouped Questions: 97435

Department for Education: Students: Fees and Charges

James Naish (Labour): (UIN97436) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department will consider introducing discretionary provisions within home tuition fee eligibility criteria for British nationals living abroad who can demonstrate genuine and ongoing connections to the UK but were unable to relocate prior to their children commencing university.

Josh MacAlister: To qualify for automatic home fee status and higher education student support, students must normally be settled in the UK and have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for at least three years before their course begins. However, if a student has spent time overseas due to their own or a specified family member's temporary employment abroad, this does not interrupt their ordinary residence in the UK, providing flexibility for those who have not made a long-term decision to live outside the UK. Decisions on whether a student meets the criteria for home fee status rest with higher education providers, which are independent and autonomous bodies. Student Finance England makes decisions about eligibility for student finance.

EDM: Higher education pension cuts (2479)

That this House expresses its alarm at the growing number of higher education institutions deploying approaches which are having a negative impact on the pension schemes of academics and staff, including through fire and rehire proposals and other approaches tantamount to forcing workers onto worse contracts, terms and conditions; further expresses alarm that such actions have triggered trade disputes at institutions such as Southampton Solent and Northumbria universities, where staff are facing threats of dismissal and permanent pay freezes, respectively, unless they agree to pension cuts; insists that using subsidiary companies to circumvent employment rights and to undermine pay, terms or conditions is unacceptable behaviour that simply serves to negatively impact industrial relations further in a sector already suffering from mass redundancies and industrial action; calls on the Office for Students immediately to investigate institutions accused by trade unions of undermining pension rights to establish whether they are failing in their duties, including those relating to good governance and protecting the interests of students; and further calls on the Government to take urgent steps to prevent pension cuts and a race to the bottom in higher education provision, including through legislative change if necessary.

Sponsors: Rachael Maskell | John McDonnell | Kim Johnson | Jeremy Corbyn | Carla Denyer | Liz Saville Roberts | Grahame Morris | Ian Lavery | Ian Byrne | Mary Kelly Foy | Brian Leishman | Steve Witherden

Department for Education: Students: Loans

The Lord Cashman CBE (Non-affiliated): (HL12544) To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to review (1) the application of compound interest, (2) the length of repayment periods, and (3) the overall operation of the student loans system.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government keeps the student finance system under continuous review to ensure that it delivers good value for both students and taxpayers. We set out our plan for higher education (HE) reform through the Post-16 education and skills white paper, published on 29 September.

We are determined that the HE funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students and the government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university.

Department for Education: Universities: Finance

The Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour): (HL12583) To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support small and specialist universities who receive a high proportion of their total income from charitable sources and operate at a deficit due to low levels of cost recovery on that income.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern: Higher education (HE) providers are independent from government and are responsible for ensuring their business models provide long-term sustainability.

The Office for Students (OfS) has statutory duties regarding the sector's financial sustainability, but the department has a clear interest in understanding the sector's level of risk. We work closely with the OfS to understand the sector's changing financial landscape.

This government is committed to creating a secure future for our world leading HE sector, demonstrated by our decision to increase tuition fee caps in line with forecast inflation and our refocusing of the OfS on monitoring the sector's financial health.

Moreover, the government provides annual funding through the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG), supporting the teaching of high-cost subjects such as science and promotes access and participation for students from under-represented groups. For 2025-26, the recurrent SPG allocation for world-leading small and specialist providers will be maintained at £57.4 million.

EDM: Reducing emigration of young, skilled British citizens (2514)

That this House notes with concern that of the 255,000 British citizens who emigrated last year, 176,000 were aged 16 to 34, accounting for 99 per cent of the net outflow; recognises that the loss of young, skilled and UK-trained workers represents a serious drain on national talent and investment; further notes that high taxes, pressures on public services and sustained low-skilled migration are suppressing opportunities for young people to build secure and successful futures in the UK; and calls on the Government to take urgent action to improve economic competitiveness, strengthen domestic opportunities, and ensure that migration and workforce policies support the retention of UK-trained talent.

Sponsors: James McMurdock

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Mathematics: Higher Education

Mark Swards (Labour): (UIN98630) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the role of the mathematical sciences within future Strategic Priorities Grant funding.

Kanishka Narayan: The mathematical sciences sector is key to delivering the Government's missions and plays an important role from advising government and business, to sharing expertise that underpins the innovation and scientific discovery that helps our country and economy thrive.

Ministers and officials in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) engage regularly with counterparts in the Department for Education (DfE) on a wide range of issues related to mathematical sciences and higher education funding. While we maintain this ongoing dialogue with the DfE, there have been no specific discussions on the role of mathematical sciences in the Office for Students' Strategic Priorities Grant funding.

Sector news

Alan Milburn calls for a 'movement' to address lost generation of young people not earning or learning as investigation opens - Department for Work and Pensions

With almost one million young people currently not in education, employment or training (NEET), Alan Milburn has launched an independent investigation into the factors driving rising youth unemployment and economic inactivity in recent years. The formal launch of the investigation set out the scope of the review and its aim to examine the underlying causes of these trends and identify potential responses.

As part of the launch, Alan Milburn announced the membership of an expert panel, bringing together individuals with experience across health, business, education and public policy, to support the development of evidence-based recommendations.

The panel will be mobilised immediately and will meet for the first time this week, it consists of:

- Gavin Kelly - Chief Executive of the Nuffield Foundation and previous Chair of the Resolution Foundation.
- Rachel Perkins – Clinical psychologist with over 30 years' NHS experience and former Mind Champion of the Year
- Ruth Owen OBE – CEO of Leonard Cheshire and disability rights advocate
- Shuab Gamote – Co-author of 'Inside the Mind of a 16-Year-Old' and educational equality advocate
- Sir Charlie Mayfield – Former Chairman of John Lewis Partnership and Chair of Keep Britain Working review
- Tracy Brabin – Mayor of West Yorkshire
- Andy Haldane – President-Elect of the British Chambers of Commerce and former Chief Economist at the Bank of England
- Ravi Gurumurthy – Group Chief Executive Officer at Nesta
- Lisa O'Loughlin – Principal and CEO of East Lancashire Learning Group
- Dr Jennifer Dixon – Chief Executive of the Health Foundation
- Dame Louise Casey DBE – Social welfare sector expert.

The independent report will examine the drivers behind rising NEET rates and economic inactivity among young people and make recommendations for policy responses aimed at maximising opportunities for young people.

He also opened a [Call for Evidence](#), inviting submissions to inform the inquiry's work. The call is open until **30 January 2026** and seeks contributions from a wide range of stakeholders, including young people themselves, parents, educators, employers and community organisations.

The inquiry takes place alongside wider government action to support young people into work or learning. This includes a **£1.5 billion investment** announced at the Spending Review, aimed at expanding support through the Youth Guarantee and increasing apprenticeship opportunities for young people, including funding for up to 50,000 additional apprenticeship places.

The review will consider evidence showing that approximately **946,000 young people** are currently NEET, with a growing proportion citing long-term sickness or disability as a barrier to participation. Data also indicate that the likelihood of being NEET is more than twice as high for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with lower qualifications.

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

Launch of Women in Tech taskforce - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

The UK Government announced the launch of a Women in Tech Taskforce, led by the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Liz Kendall, to address gender imbalances and barriers within the UK technology sector. The taskforce is intended to help more women enter, remain in and progress to leadership roles in tech, with the overarching aim of unlocking a broader talent pool, supporting inclusive economic growth and improving diversity across the sector.

According to Government analysis, the tech industry currently under-utilises female talent, contributing to an estimated £2 billion to £3.5 billion annual economic loss as women leave or change roles due to persistent barriers. The taskforce will work to identify and dismantle these obstacles across education, training, career progression and leadership pathways, and will develop practical recommendations for both government and industry to implement jointly.

The initiative brings together leading figures from across the tech ecosystem, including industry executives, education specialists and diversity strategists. Early appointed members include Anne-Marie Imafidon (STEMettes founder) alongside senior representatives from BT Group, techUK, Revolut UK, coding and inclusion organisations, and academic institutions. The group is expected to advise ministers on policy and sector activity to broaden access and retention in tech careers.

The founding members of the Women in Tech Taskforce are:

- Liz Kendall: Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology
- Dr. Anne-Marie Imafidon: Founder – STEMETTES
- Allison Kirkby: CEO – BT Group
- Anna Brailsford: CEO and Co-Founder – Code First Girls
- Francesca Carlesi: CEO – Revolut UK
- Louise Archer: Academic – Institute of Education
- Karen Blake: Tech Inclusion Strategist, Former Co-CEO of the Tech Talent Charter
- Sue Daley OBE: Director Tech and Innovation – techUK
- Vinous Ali: Deputy Executive Director, StartUp Coalition
- Charlene Hunter: Founder – Coding Black Females
- Dr. Hayaatun Sillem: CEO – Royal Academy of Engineering
- Kate Bell: Assistant General Secretary at TUC
- Amelia Miller: Co-Founder and CEO – ivee
- Dr Ismini Vasileiou: Director – East Midlands Cyber Security Cluster
- Emma O'Dwyer: Director of Public Policy – Uber

The taskforce will also complement existing Government efforts to build tech skills across the education pipeline. This includes alignment with programmes such as the TechFirst skills initiative and curriculum reforms aimed at improving digital and AI skills among young people, which are designed to encourage more girls and women to consider tech careers from an early age.

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

HESA's subject uptake dashboard

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) has published a new **Subject Uptake Dashboard**, an open data tool that presents trends in subject choices among students in UK higher education over a twelve-year period. The dashboard draws on HESA's

student record data to show the numbers of students entering, studying and qualifying in different subjects, with filters for level and mode of study and demographic breakdowns such as sex and ethnicity. It also includes geographical mapping to illustrate how subject provision varies across the UK.

Data highlighted in the release illustrate **shifts in student interest across fields**: for example, there has been a **notable decline in uptake of French and other language courses** alongside a **marked growth in students studying Artificial Intelligence** and related subjects. These patterns reflect broader changes in academic demand within the higher education sector and may inform curriculum planning and strategic decision-making by universities, researchers and policymakers.

HESA has positioned the dashboard as a resource for analysis and planning within the HE sector, enabling users to explore subject uptake trends over time and in different regions, and to derive insights for policy development or institutional strategy. Feedback from users of the tool is invited to help guide potential future enhancements.

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

UKRI doctoral training investment set to power UK growth

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) announced a major investment in doctoral training aimed at strengthening the UK's research talent pipeline and supporting national economic growth through the development of highly skilled researchers in strategic sectors. The investment comprises more than £40 million across two flagship initiatives, the Industrial Doctoral Landscape Awards (IDLAs) and Doctoral Focal Awards (DFAs), which together will fund over 320 new PhD studentships with three yearly intakes beginning in 2026.

The initiatives target priority areas such as bioscience, biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), data science and engineering biology, reflecting UKRI's focus on building capacity in fields considered central to future innovation and economic competitiveness.

The IDLAs will embed doctoral researchers within industrial settings and involve collaboration between universities, businesses and research organisations. Ten awards will be delivered with more than 50 research organisations and over 100 external partners, enabling co-designed training that aligns academic research with real-world industrial needs.

The DFAs will support doctoral training across areas including AI-enabled bioscience and engineering biology, involving co-investment from multiple UKRI research councils. These awards aim to equip students with advanced skills relevant to emerging technologies and national capability-building.

UKRI stated that placing doctoral researchers at the interface of academia and industry is intended to strengthen the UK's innovation ecosystem, increase productivity in key sectors and support long-term growth. Alongside traditional higher education contributions, these investments are designed to integrate doctoral training more closely with industrial research and commercial applications.

Overall, the announcement positions doctoral training as a strategic priority for research and innovation policy, reinforcing UKRI's role in developing a skilled research workforce and enhancing university-industry collaboration to meet national economic and technological goals.

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

AI for Science Strategy: UK universities' joint statement

On 16 December 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology published a joint statement from UK universities expressing support for the Government's AI for Science Strategy, which sets a strategic direction for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into scientific research across the UK higher education and research ecosystem. The statement welcomes the ambition of the AI for Science Strategy and emphasises the role universities will play in ensuring the UK benefits from advances in AI-enabled science.

The universities note that AI is already being applied to significant scientific challenges—such as developing treatments for neurodegenerative diseases, discovering new sustainable materials, and advancing fusion and quantum research—and that coordinated action will be important in maintaining the UK's scientific strengths and global standing amid rapid technological change.

Signatories underscore the central role of universities in delivering aspects of the strategy, including providing training in AI methods, fostering interdisciplinary research cultures, developing rewarding careers for technical staff, building strategic relationships with industry, and promoting robust data standards. They highlight ongoing efforts within higher education institutions, such as specialist training programmes, AI conversion courses, fellowships focused on AI for science, and expanded support for research technical professionals, as examples of alignment with the strategy's goals.

The statement affirms a commitment to collaborative, whole-ecosystem approaches involving government, universities and other partners as the strategy moves into implementation and invites further engagement as the work progresses.

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

Young people from all backgrounds to get opportunity to study abroad as UK-EU deal unlocks Erasmus+

On 17 December 2025, the UK Government announced that the United Kingdom and the European Union have reached an agreement for the UK to associate with the EU's Erasmus+ programme from 2027. This marks the first time the UK will participate in Erasmus+ since leaving the scheme after Brexit and is intended to expand opportunities for young people from across the UK to study, train and gain international experience abroad.

The Government said the deal will open Erasmus+ opportunities to young people "from all backgrounds", including students in higher education and further education, apprentices, youth workers, educational staff and other learners, with an estimated 100,000 people in the UK expected to benefit in the first year. The programme offers placements in education, training, youth, culture and sport, and is described as supporting skills development, confidence building and international experience that can enhance career prospects.

Ministers indicated that work will be undertaken with educational institutions and young people to maximise take-up, with particular emphasis on supporting participation among disadvantaged groups. The Government also said the deal fulfils a commitment made at the UK-EU Summit earlier in 2025 and forms part of a broader package of agreements between the UK and the EU on issues such as energy market integration and trade negotiations.

Responding to the Erasmus+ announcement today, Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive of Universities UK said:

"Today's announcement that the UK will associate to the Erasmus+ programme from 2027 is fantastic news for the UK, and for students and universities here and across Europe. The agreement marks a huge step forward in our relationship with the EU and will offer life changing opportunities for thousands of students.

The UK government and the EU deserve credit for moving these complex negotiations forward at pace and reaching a mutually agreeable deal. We look

forward to working with our universities and our partners in Europe, to ensure that the programme plays a pivotal role in rebuilding our international partnerships and delivers the best possible outcomes for the UK.”

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

Explainer: UKRI budget allocations

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has published a detailed budget allocation explainer outlining how its funding will be invested across the four-year period 2026–27 to 2029–30 following the 2025 Spending Review. UKRI, the UK’s largest public investor in research and innovation, has been allocated £38.6 billion for this period by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), as part of a broader £86 billion public R&D budget.

The explainer sets out UKRI’s new outcome-focused approach to budgeting, aligning resources with strategic priorities to advance knowledge, support economic growth and address national societal challenges. The allocations are organised into three priority “buckets” plus cross-cutting enabling activity:

- Curiosity-driven, foundational research, underpinning long-term scientific discovery, with £14.5 billion allocated.
- Strategic government and societal priorities, encompassing targeted research and development addressing national needs, with £8.3 billion.
- Supporting innovative companies, helping firms to scale and commercialise technologies, with £7.4 billion.
- Additionally, £8.4 billion has been dedicated to enabling and strengthening the UK R&D system, including investment in talent, infrastructure, institutes and facilities that support activity across all priority areas.

The allocations reflect a shift to a more integrated and flexible funding model, emphasising strategic outcomes over historic programme structures and enabling UKRI to respond dynamically to emerging opportunities. Under this structure, universities, major recipients of UKRI funding through competitive grants and quality-related research funding, are expected to continue benefiting from increased investment. The explainer notes that while specific line-by-line comparisons with previous budgets may not be directly possible under the new approach, overall funding available to universities and research organisations will increase over the Spending Review period.

The strategic investment plans include funding aligned with industrial strategy growth sectors, such as digital technologies (including AI and quantum), life sciences, clean energy and advanced manufacturing, while preserving strong support for foundational research across disciplines. UKRI will also engage with stakeholders as it refines detailed delivery plans and publishes further strategic documents in 2026.

In summary, the explainer provides stakeholders across the research and innovation ecosystem with transparency on how UKRI's record budget will be allocated to drive scientific excellence, economic impact and societal benefit over the next four years.

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