



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

15 – 19 January 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

Home Office – oral questions

On Monday 15 January, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, the Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, and his ministerial team answered questions in the House of Commons.

Martin Vickers MP (Conservative), Sir David Evennett MP (Conservative) and Stephen Crabb MP (Conservative) asked questions on what steps were being taken to reduce legal net migration. The Home Secretary pointed to the package of measures announced on 4 December to reduce legal net migration, which included limiting family dependents brought by students, creating a salary threshold and progressively raising the minimum income requirement.

Stephen Crabb MP (Conservative) asked what the Home Secretary was doing to overcome the ‘enormous damage’ that the change in family dependent rules for students may cause to Britain’s elite business schools which compete globally for professionals. James Cleverly maintained that the UK is still ‘highly competitive’ and said his department will continue to work with the university sector on this. He emphasised the need to ‘ensure that the people we bring to the UK are here to study and add value’ and ‘no institution in our higher education sector mistakes its role—they are educators, not a back-door visa system’.

Kerry McCarthy MP (Labour) asked how the Home Secretary has assessed the impact of rising minimum income thresholds on universities’ ability to attract staff to undertake important research work. In his response, James Cleverly said the government would ‘always look to support the genuine draw on talent’, highlighting a postgraduate exchange deal with India, but repeated warnings about higher education being used as a ‘back-door means of immigration’.

The Minister for Legal Migration and the Border, Tom Pursglove MP, explaining his assessment of the proposed changes to visa income thresholds on the university sector, emphasised that the Home Office has been mindful of the need to balance impacts on individual sectors with economic growth. He pointed to analytical work supporting the decisions made as part of the policy development and said a regulatory impact assessment will be developed ‘in due course’.

Richard Thomson MP (Scottish National Party) cited the concerns of the director of Universities Scotland, Alastair Sim, that changes to the government’s visa income threshold ‘could affect universities’ ability to attract global talent’ and pointed to

international students and academics' £5 billion annual contribution to the Scottish economy. Tom Pursglove replied that individuals will still be able to make a 'valid contribution in the years ahead, but in a sustainable and managed way'. He said there are no 'immediate plans to introduce further exemptions' to the increased threshold, and emphasised that domestic recruitment should be supported at every opportunity.

The Minister for Security, Tom Tugendhat MP (Conservative), responding to a question from Nigel Mills MP (Conservative) on anti-extremism training in Government departments, mentioned a report on 'allegations about extremism and the failure to train properly, and what is going on in universities around the United Kingdom', but was vague about the link to universities.

Jack Lopresti MP (Conservative) asked how police are supporting communities during the Israel-Hamas conflict. In his answer, Tom Tugendhat mentioned committing £7 million to academic security due a 'massive increase' in antisemitism in universities.

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

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism – House of Commons debate

On Thursday 18 January, a House of Commons debate took place, titled 'Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism'. The debate was tabled by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Rt Hon James Cleverly MP.

Dan Jarvis MP, Shadow Minister for Security, and Kirsty Blackman MP (SNP) both commended the work of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) in their contributions to the debate.

Christian Wakeford MP (Labour) spoke about the threat of the recently banned Hizb ut-Tahrir (HUT) to university campuses. He highlighted the efforts of the UJS to have the group outlawed by the National Union of Students since 1994. He explained that, despite this, keynote speakers from HUT reportedly spoke at 10 campuses over 18 months between 2022 and 2023, naming Bradford, Birmingham, LSE and the University of Birmingham as examples. He drew attention to HUT's use of front groups to continue to operate on university campuses and said these front groups have been observed at Nottingham, Queen Mary and Manchester. He highlighted concern that the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 enabled HUT and its front groups to use free speech protections.

The Minister for Security, Tom Tugendhat MP, echoed the other members praise for the UJS. He cited a rise in antisemitism in universities across the UK and stated he has spoken to Universities UK and Russell Group about the issue. He said: ‘It is simply unacceptable to see students excluded from education because of the vile hatred of others. It is wrong. It is unBritish and it will not be tolerated.’

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

Intergovernmental relations within the UK – House of Lords debate

On Thursday 18 January, a House of Lords debate took place, titled ‘Intergovernmental relations within the UK’. The debate was tabled by the Earl of Kinnoull (Crossbench).

Baroness Wolf of Dulwich (Crossbench) spoke about emerging intergovernmental divergences relating to the higher education sector:

“The other example I will use briefly is higher education, where I must declare an interest as a professor at King’s College London. Here too we have a national system that we are not taking enough note of as things diverge. We have a national system of application to university in UCAS and a national body for student loans in the Student Loans Company. Again, the systems are diverging. That might be perfectly all right, but there is an assumption among all young people in all four of our countries that they can apply to national institutions—I think UCAS is an institution—and that they will be able to move around.

There is also the research economy, which is very relevant to our economic future because, if we do not maintain real research strength in this country, our future is genuinely grim. The UK Government recognise this by funding a large research budget, and specifically by running the research excellence framework: a four-country, UK-wide exercise that provides a periodic intensive review of the quality of research provision. It has certainly been a spur to action in universities and a major source of our international reputation as a very strong provider of higher education. It is run jointly by Research England, the Scottish Funding Council, the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research in Wales, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. England uses it as a way to target money into high-achieving universities to ensure that a certain number have the strength to maintain an international research reputation. In England we have to target because we now

have 416 registered providers of higher education compared with the, in my view, more reasonable numbers of 18 in Scotland and 11 in Wales.

Devolved Governments do not have to spend any of that money on research; it comes under the Barnett consequentials. Again, that is fine, but it is also true that divergence is increasing, which has—in quite a short term, let alone the long term—some real knock-on effects for movements of staff between universities within the United Kingdom and for the future of a joined-up national UK-wide university system.

My point is not that the London Government should take back control, but that we are not discussing those growing divergencies in any systematic way. I was therefore extremely concerned to learn that the UK Education Ministers Council met only once in 2023.”

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

Forthcoming business

DLUHC – oral questions

On Monday 22 January from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and his ministerial colleagues, will answer questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- Whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill on freedom of speech [Amy Callaghan MP, SNP]

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

Scotland – oral questions

On Wednesday 24 January from 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon Mr Alister Jack MP, and his ministerial colleagues will answer questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- Whether he has had discussions with the Scottish Government on funding for nursing bursaries for those studying in Scotland. [Karin Smyth MP, Labour]

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

DBT – oral questions

On Thursday 25 January from 9:30am, the Secretary of State for the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology to help increase inward investment into the science and technology sector. [George Freeman MP, Conservative]

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

Written Questions

Students: Mental Health

Rachel Maclean MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department collects data on students who self report (a) depression, (b) bad nerves and (c) anxiety. [UIN 8129]

David Johnston MP: The mental health of children and young people is an absolute priority for this government.

The department supports education settings through a range of guidance on mental health and wellbeing, including to support schools and colleges to establish a whole school/college approach to mental health, promoting positive wellbeing among students: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing>.

This guidance is supported by the opportunity for all state schools and colleges in England to access a senior mental health lead training grant by 2025, with over 14,400 settings having claimed a grant so far. The department is also continuing to roll-out Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) and extending coverage of MHST to an estimated 44% of pupils and learners by the end of this financial year, and at least 50% by the end of March 2025.

The department has also commissioned two new resources to help providers that have been published this year, a targeted pastoral support toolkit and a resource hub for mental health leads, which are intended to help colleges to identify the most appropriate and effective support at the early intervention stage.

School-specific resources include guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions, including conditions relating to mental health, which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>. Additionally, the department has published guidance on mental health problems manifesting themselves in behaviour, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2>.

The department is supporting the mental health of higher education (HE) students through an approach focussed on three pillars: funding and resourcing vital services,

spreading and implementing best practice, clear responsibilities for providers and protection for students.

The department has seen impressive progress with the target for all universities to join the University Mental Health Charter Programme by September 2024, with 96 members now signed up. Members follow a process of continuous improvement as they embed the principles which ensure that student wellbeing is supported in all aspects of university life.

The sector is active in developing best practice which supports HE student mental health and wellbeing. I have written to all HE providers to ensure they are implementing guidance produced by the sector and third sector charities, including around suicide prevention and actions to take following a death by suicide, and information sharing with trusted contact of students.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency collects data on the number of students declaring a disability, including mental health conditions: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-15>.

From 2022/2023, students with multiple disabilities will disclose each of their disabilities instead of falling under a catch-all "multiple disabilities" category. Depression, bad nerves, schizophrenia, anxiety, and other mental health conditions will continue to be included under one mental health category.

The department also collects data on various aspects of children and young people's wellbeing and mental health, presenting key sources from the department and other stakeholders through the annual State of the Nation report on Children and Young People's Wellbeing: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2022-children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing>.

Students: Debts

Kim Leadbeater MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will have discussions with the Student Loan Company on the cancellation of student debt when a provider's course is deemed insufficient to meet the requirements to issue a qualification. [UIN 8628]

Robert Halfon MP: The department tries to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, benefit from high-quality, world-leading higher education (HE) that leads to excellent outcomes. All HE providers will also have in place procedures for handling student complaints and academic appeals. If a student exhausts the internal

university procedures and is not satisfied with the final outcome, they can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. More details can be found using the following link: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/>.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) will cancel a student loan borrower's liability to repay a loan in limited circumstances. These include; when the loan term ends, when the borrower dies, and if the borrower receives a disability-related benefit and because of the disability is permanently unfit for work. The SLC has no power to cancel student loans in other circumstances.

Engineering and Nuclear Physics: Higher Education

John Spellar MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on (a) which universities offer courses in nuclear (i) physics and (ii) engineering and (b) how many (A) undergraduate and (B) graduate students are on such courses. [UIN 7744]

Robert Halfon MP: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), now part of Jisc, collects and publishes data on student enrolments and qualifications obtained at UK higher education providers. This includes data on full person equivalents (FPE) enrolled in different subject areas, categorised using the Higher Education Coding of Subjects (HECoS) system. Further information on the HECoS system is available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>.

This data has been used to approximate which providers offered courses including elements of the HECoS subjects 'Nuclear Engineering' (HECoS code 100172) and 'Nuclear and Particle Physics' (HECoS code 101077) in the 2021/22 academic year, and how many FPEs were enrolled in each of these subjects.

Full person equivalents enrolled in Nuclear & Particle Physics subjects by HE Provider
UK Higher Education Providers
Academic Year 2021/22

HE Provider	Undergraduate enrolments	Postgraduate enrolments	Total number of enrolments
The University of Manchester	0	70	70
The University of Oxford	0	50	50
The Nottingham Trent University	30	0	30
The University of Bristol	0	20	20
The University of Birmingham	0	15	15

The University of Liverpool	10	5	15
The University of Surrey	0	15	15
The University of the West of Scotland	15	0	15
The University of Edinburgh	0	10	10
The University of Sheffield	0	0	5
The University of Southampton	5	0	5
The University of Sussex	0	5	5
Total	65	190	255

Source: DfE analysis of the HESA Student and HESA Student Alternative Records

Note: Under the HESA Standard Rounding Methodology, all counts are rounded to the nearest 5. Due to this, some providers have been suppressed as their counts rounded down to 0.

Note: Counts are on the basis of full-person-equivalents. Where a student is studying more than one subject, they are apportioned between the subjects that make up their course.

For an up-to-date view of available undergraduate courses, including nuclear studies, please visit: <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/>.

Journalism: Cerebral Palsy and Disability

Vicky Foxcroft MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with the National Council for the Training of Journalists on the potential impact of the requirement for a shorthand proficiency of 100 words per minute to achieve the National Qualification in Journalism on (a) disabled people and (b) people with cerebral palsy. [UIN 8047]

Robert Halfon MP: The department has not discussed the impact of the requirements needed for the National Qualification in journalism with the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), newspapers or other media organisations. Higher education (HE) courses are designed and delivered by individual institutions, such as universities and colleges, according to their own academic standards and quality assurance processes. The government does not have a direct role in the development of the HE curriculum or the content of the courses. The government's role is to provide a regulatory framework for HE in England, which aims to protect the interests of students.

The government recognises that shorthand is a valuable skill for journalists, and that the NCTJ sets the industry standard for journalism training and qualifications. The department acknowledges that some disabled people may face difficulties or barriers in acquiring or demonstrating shorthand proficiency, and that this may affect their access to and progression in the journalism profession.

The department wants to ensure people of all ages and backgrounds can study at universities.

Under the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act, universities have the same responsibilities as all other service providers. Universities must make reasonable adjustments to make sure students with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged.

Graduates: Taxation

Alan Brown MP: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many taxpayers are paying the (a) 9% and (b) 6% tuition fee rate on earnings between £22,015 and £27,000. [UIN 8753]

Nigel Huddleston MP: The information is not held in the form requested. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) does hold information on the number of borrowers by Student Loan plan type but has not split these figures based on the borrowers' earnings.

Midwives: Training (1)

Grahame Morris MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the planned rise in student midwife numbers on (a) universities and (b) staff to student ratios. [UIN 7884]

Maria Caulfield MP: The supply of core clinical professions in the National Health Service, including midwives, relies on undergraduate degree programmes that are led and delivered by the university sector. As set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, we will work with Higher Education Institutes and system partners, including professional regulators, to plan and deliver the education expansion and reforms set out in the Plan. This includes work to develop an expanded and fully trained supervisory workforce.

Midwives: Training (2)

Grahame Morris MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate her Department has made of attrition levels on undergraduate midwifery courses; what the main contributing factors for attrition on those courses are; and

what steps her Department (a) has taken and (b) is considering taking to help retain students on those courses. [UIN 7885]

Maria Caulfield MP: As set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, NHS England is working with students, Higher Education Institutions, Royal Colleges and clinical placement providers to understand and address the reasons students leave training and the variation in their experiences. To support students during their training, the Government provides a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year to all eligible nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students through the NHS Learning Support Fund.

As of October 2023, there are 23,154 full-time equivalent midwives working in National Health Service trusts and other core NHS organisations in England. This is 3,541 or 18.1% more than in 2010.

Midwives: Training (3)

Grahame Morris MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps her Department has taken to help ensure that there are sufficient clinical placements of the correct standard for the planned increase in student midwife numbers. [UIN 7886]

Maria Caulfield MP: NHS England works with placements providers in all regions to ensure sufficient and high-quality practice-based learning. Over recent years, NHS England, formerly Health Education England, has invested £55 million to increase clinical placement capacity. This is in addition to the provision of placement tariff to support placement providers for nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students.

As set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, we aim to expand the number of midwifery training places from 3,778 to 4,269 by 2028. To support this expansion, NHS England will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure placement providers know what core standards they need to meet, supported by national co-design of placements, to provide a strategic view of capacity and support joined up working between the National Health Service and the education sector to ensure the correct standard of training, in the correct volumes and locations.

Midwives: Training (4)

Grahame Morris MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how much was paid from the public purse to (a) NHS trusts and (b) student midwives for clinical placements provided to student midwives in the last five years. [UIN 7887]

Maria Caulfield MP: In the previous five financial years, £87 million was paid by NHS England to National Health Service trusts for clinical placements for midwifery students. Travel and accommodation expenses are the only element of financial support provided to students by the Government which specifically supports clinical placements. The total amount of this paid to students undertaking education and training that enables them to register as a midwife with the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the previous five financial years is £6.6 million.

Prisoners: Higher Education

Ruth Cadbury MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many prisoners were participating in higher education courses as of 5 January 2024. [UIN 7955]

Edward Argar MP: As higher education is predominantly undertaken outside the core education contracts, the available figures are those we receive from the Open University (OU) on prisoners attending its courses. The OU reports that on 5 January 2024, 1761 prisoners were undertaking its courses. In addition, a number of prisoners are undertaking Level 4 courses with other providers, and H M Prison & Probation Service funds the Prisoners Education Trust, which provides access modules for prisoners and distance learning courses.

Food Supply: Research

Geraint Davies MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will work with higher education institutions to support (a) research and (b) development of new (i) technologies and (ii) practices to promote sustainable food systems. [UIN 7737]

Mark Spencer MP: Defra works extensively with UK higher education institutions in partnership with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to support research and development. This includes collaborating on the development and adoption of technologies and practices through the £270M Farming Innovation Programme. Universities and research organisations are involved in most projects within this

Programme, which develops real-world solutions to the challenges being faced, improving productivity and sustainability of farm businesses. Other examples include supporting the £47.5M UKRI-led Strategic Priorities Fund on Transforming Food Systems, which seeks to develop food systems that enhance both human and planetary health.

Defra's Agri-Food Science Programme develops R&D to stimulate innovation to enable sustainable food systems. This includes through our crop Genetic Improvement Networks, which bring together key research institutes in crop genetics, including from higher education institutes, to identify genetic traits to improve the productivity, sustainability and resilience of crops.

Antisemitism

Jack Lopresti MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to help support victims of antisemitism. [UIN 900931]

Tom Tugendhat MP: We're committed to tackling the scourge of antisemitism and are providing £18m for protective security funding for the Jewish community in 2023/24 – this figure will be maintained in 2024/25.

The Government is providing £7m to support schools and universities to tackle antisemitism, and funds both an online reporting portal to make it easier for victims to report crimes and a hub which supports local forces in tackling online hate crime.

Students: Loans

Alan Brown MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average repayment period for graduates to repay their tuition fee student loans is. [UIN 8755]

Robert Halfon MP: As education is a devolved issue, the following answers concern the student finance system in England only. The student finance systems of the devolved administrations differ from that of England.

The point at which a borrower becomes liable to begin repaying a student loan is known as the Statutory Repayment Due Date (SRDD); this is normally the start of the tax year (6 April) after graduating or otherwise leaving their course. After the SRDD, borrowers are required to make repayments if their income is above the repayment threshold. The forecast average loan balances of borrowers on their SRDD is

published at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-loan-forecasts-for-england/2022-23>(opens in a new tab).

Borrowers starting their studies in the 2023/24 academic year will take out loans under different repayment terms, known as Plan 5, to those starting in the 2022/23 academic year who repay under Plan 2. Loan balances at SRDD for Plan 2 borrowers are higher due to being charged an interest rate above inflation during their studies. The student loan repayment earning thresholds differ between the loan plan types and are published here: <https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/what-you-pay>(opens in a new tab).

Borrower earnings paths are complex. Some borrowers will have earnings which reach or exceed the repayment threshold for their plan type, others will not; some borrowers will, on multiple occasions, reach or exceed the threshold in one pay period and then fall below it the next. Unemployment, career breaks, parental leave, sick leave, and the undertaking of further study are all common life events that may drop earnings below the repayment threshold for a period of time. The cost of modelling and analysis required to answer the question would breach the disproportionate cost limit.

The average repayment period of student finance borrowers in England is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-loan-forecasts-for-england/2022-23>(opens in a new tab).

Borrowers starting their studies in the 2023/24 academic year will take out loans under different repayment terms, known as Plan 5, to those starting in the 2022/23 academic year who repay under Plan 2. Plan 5 borrowers have longer maximum repayment periods of 40 years than Plan 2 borrowers with maximum repayment periods of 30 years. Less than 50% of plan 2 borrowers are expected to fully repay their loans, and so the median repayment period is the plan 2 maximum of 30 years. Many more Plan 5 borrowers are expected to fully repay their loans. The median repayment period for the 2023/24 cohort is forecasted to be 31 years, within the Plan 5 maximum of 40 years.

Dentistry: Training

Chloe Smith MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to page 130 of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, if she will ensure that allocations of undergraduate dental training places in 2028 and 2031 are allocated to areas where levels of demand for NHS dentistry services are greatest. [UIN 9205]



Andrea Leadsom MP: We are establishing a governance structure to work with the Office for Students and key stakeholders to develop a methodology for allocating dental undergraduate student expansion, focussing on areas that have dental workforce challenges and aligning the methodology principles to that being developed for medical expansion.

Sector News

Immigration (Health Charge) (Amendment) Order 2024 approved by Parliament

On Monday 15 January, the Immigration (Health Charge) (Amendment) Order 2024 was approved by Parliament. The 66% increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) that was announced by the Government in July of last year will be implemented on 6th February 2024.

This will increase the IHS significantly for both students and staff. For those on the Student visa (as well as Student dependant, Youth Mobility Scheme and children aged under 18) the increase will go from £470 p/a to £776 p/a. For all other applicants the increase will go from £624 p/a to £1,035 p/a.

You can [read the full Immigration \(Health Charge\) \(Amendment\) Order 2024](#).

Internationalisation at Home (IaH) handbook – UUKi

On Tuesday 16 January, Universities UK International (UUKi) published a handbook to assist colleagues involved with Internationalisation at Home (IaH).

It is designed to help university practitioners develop a systematic approach to IaH that aligns to broader university practices and raises the profile of this activity.

You can [read more](#).

£12 million boost for degree apprenticeships to increase access and choice for students – OfS release

On Wednesday 17 January, the Office for Students (OfS) confirmed it will invest £12 million to increase the number of Level 6 degree apprenticeship courses and places available in English higher education.

The application deadline for the second competitive funding exercise was 19 December 2023. Universities and colleges will be able to apply for a third and final round of funding in spring 2024.

You can [read more](#).

National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence – OfS release

On Wednesday 17 January, the Office for Students (OfS) released a document which outlines their procedures for the reporting, handling and resolution of allegations of inappropriate influence in the promotion and running of the National Student Survey (NSS).

You can [read the document](#).

Investigation into student finance for study at franchised higher education providers – NAO report

On Thursday 18 January, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report which found governance and oversight of franchised higher education provision needs to be strengthened following instances of fraud and abuse in the sector.

The report recommends the Office for Students (OfS) and Department for Education (DfE) should jointly reiterate the higher education sector's role in preventing fraud and abuse and that lead providers bear direct responsibility for the governance and management practices of franchised providers. It also recommends the DfE should establish a common anti-fraud and corruption culture and risk tolerance, such as by encouraging the reporting of fraud and corruption and embedding discussions in risk management forums.

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

Regional research capacity: what role in levelling up? – HEPI report

On Thursday 18 January, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) released a report into the disparities and shortcomings in current investment strategies across the regions.

The key findings include:

1. **Inadequate investment and limited impact:** The report concludes that the UK's investment in research and innovation falls short, lacking the scale seen in Germany and the sustained commitment observed in the United States. Furthermore, the investment has not been effectively linked to enhancing research manpower capacity.
2. **Regional economic imbalance:** OECD data highlight a significant regional economic imbalance in the UK compared to the US and Germany. Despite disparities in regional research activity, the average academic research performance remains similar across regions.
3. **City-centric research capacity:** Analyses shifting the focus from regions to distance reveal that research capacity is concentrated in major conurbations, aligning with the economic influence of cities. The 'golden triangle' around London does not significantly outperform other regions in research quality or relative GDP enhancement.
4. **Funding disparities and institutional bias:** While research quality is evenly distributed, funding disparities are not simply regional; they reflect a bias towards specific institutions. The concentration of research activity within regions is masked by regional analyses, and regional research networks are underdeveloped.

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

Research culture initiatives in the UK – UKRI report

On Thursday 18 January, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) published a report on the current and past activity aiming to improve culture in the research and innovation (R&I) sector.

The report has generated three key recommendations for funders, employers, and policymakers:

1. Facilitate collective effort, building on existing interest and action on research culture.
2. Enable robust evaluation of research culture initiatives to determine effectiveness across sectors and with different communities.

3. Develop mechanisms to curate and share existing, emerging and future practices. These should consider the role that evidence synthesis can play in building and making more visible the knowledge base on research culture, informing decision making and avoiding duplication of effort.

These recommendations all support the development of meaningful, systematic change at all levels of the R&I system, which requires collective responsibility.

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