



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**16 – 20 June 2025**

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, please contact:

Andrea Rezman | [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

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# Parliamentary business

## Department for Education - Oral Questions

On Monday 16 June, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

**Jack Rankin MP (Conservative)** raised concerns about antisemitism on university campuses, referencing StandWithUs UK's *Voice of Students 2024/25* report. He called for recognition of anti-Zionism as antisemitism and proposed financial penalties for universities failing to protect Jewish students. The Education Secretary confirmed the government's firm stance, referencing £7 million in targeted funding and new measures from the Office for Students to tackle harassment and discrimination. Steve Yemm MP (Lab) sought confirmation that Holocaust education would continue under new legislation; the Secretary of State gave this assurance.

**Greg Smith MP (Conservative)** questioned the government's decision to cut funding for level 7 apprenticeships for those aged 22 and over, highlighting concerns from NHS Employers. Minister Janet Daby MP defended the policy, saying it aims to rebalance opportunities towards younger people and confirmed alternative training routes remain available. Shadow Minister Neil O'Brien MP (Con) criticised the scale and timing of the cut, citing an 11,000-nurse shortfall. Daby reassured that level 6 apprenticeships would be protected. Ian Sollom MP (LD) asked about workforce shortages in community nursing and whether Skills England was coordinating with NHS planning; Daby confirmed their involvement and reiterated the focus on early-career support.

During topical questions, **Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrat)** raised concerns about financial instability in higher education, citing claims that a "handful" of universities had received undisclosed emergency funding. The Education Secretary did not confirm any specific interventions but stressed that financial oversight remains a priority, with the Office for Students playing a central role. She defended the government's approach to long-term sustainability, pointing to recent student fee increases and ongoing reforms to strengthen financial regulation in the sector.

You can find a [list of questions](#).

## Innovation showcase - Science and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 17 June, the HoC Science and Technology Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Innovation showcase, Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser: Valedictory”.

Witnesses included:

- Luke Emery (Director at Bright Idea)
- Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (Chief Executive at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI))

On Tuesday 17 June 2025, the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee heard evidence from Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser as she marked the end of her tenure as Chief Executive of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Professor Leyser addressed the financial pressures facing the UK’s university sector and the implications for research. She stated that “there will inevitably need to be some kind of consolidation across the university landscape”, although she clarified that this would not “necessarily” involve a reduction in the number of universities. Instead, she suggested that some institutions may need to focus on a “smaller range” of research areas, as opposed to continuing with “unstrategic expansion”.

She noted that, in recent years, universities have been “strongly incentivised to increase the volume of their research”, often subsidised through international student fees. However, the current model—driven by competition for UKRI funding against a “relatively narrow set of criteria”—has led to “harmonisation” across institutions, when what is needed is greater diversification and more strategic alignment to institutional strengths.

Leyser emphasised that a coordinated approach to consolidation “would not necessarily be a huge negative for the UK’s research and innovation endeavour”, provided universities are encouraged to “lean in” to their unique strengths and geographic roles. She described the anticipated transition as “a real challenge” that would require cross-government cooperation and revised Competition and Markets Authority guidance to enable universities to collaborate more openly during such restructuring.

She also addressed the closure of arts and humanities departments, suggesting that these were largely being driven by falling student demand rather than explicit government policy or UKRI funding priorities.

You can watch the session.

# Forthcoming business

## Further Education and Skills - Education Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 24 June, the House of Commons Education Committee will hear oral evidence as part of its inquiry into “Further Education and Skills.”

Witnesses include:

- The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Minister for Skills, Department for Education)
- Julia Kinniburgh (Director General for Skills, Department for Education)

You can [watch the session](#).

## Industrial Strategy

On Monday 23 June, the Westminster government is expected to publish its finalised industrial strategy.

## Debate on the Estimate of the Department for Education

On Tuesday 24 June 2025, the House of Commons will consider estimates of spending of the Department for Education as part of the Estimates Day debate.

## Department for Science, Innovation and Technology - Oral Questions

On Wednesday 25 June, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, The Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant questions include:

- Rachael Maskell (Labour): What steps he is taking to distribute funding for science and innovation (UIN 904809)

- Emily Darlington (Labour): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of funding for health science and innovation on the UK's global influence (UIN 904810)

You can [find a list of questions](#).

## **Universities in Wales - Welsh Affairs Committee oral evidence session**

On Wednesday 25 June, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee will hear oral evidence on the topic of "Universities in Wales."

Witnesses include:

- Professor Rachael Langford (Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff Metropolitan University)
- Dr Ben Calvert (Vice-Chancellor, University of South Wales)
- Professor Elwen Evans KC (Vice-Chancellor, University of Wales Trinity Saint David)
- Professor Joe Yates (Vice-Chancellor, Wrexham University)
- Ben Lewis (Director, Open University in Wales)
- Professor Jon Timmis (Vice-Chancellor, Aberystwyth University)
- Professor Edmund Burke (Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University)
- Professor Wendy Larner (Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University)
- Professor Paul Boyle CBE (Vice-Chancellor, Swansea University)

You can [watch the session](#).



# Written questions and statements

## Department for Education: Apprentices

**Gregory Stafford (Conservative):** (UIN57100) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department plans to introduce a national alternative to the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme.

**Janet Daby:** The government is committed to ensuring every young person can develop the skills they need to succeed in work and life. We want them to have access to good quality careers advice as part of our mission to break down barriers to opportunity, under our Plan for Change.

Nationally, schools and colleges can access a range of digital and in-person support to help them inform their students about technical routes, such as apprenticeships. This support includes T Levels Ambassador Networks, the Skills for Apprenticeships support page (part of the government's Skills for Life – 'It All Starts With Skills' communications campaign), and The Careers and Enterprise Company's (CEC) resource directory.

Locally, through careers hubs, data and front-line insights support conversations about what is preventing take-up of technical and vocational pathways at the local level, enabling local partners to devise solutions. The government will continue to invest in high-quality careers education for young people, including boosting skills pathways such as apprenticeships and other technical education routes.

We will continue investing in wider careers infrastructure, including careers hubs, to ensure successful implementation of our careers programme.

Careers hubs, supported by CEC, will continue locally to address barriers relating to apprenticeships and technical education awareness and uptake.

## Apprentices: Finance

**Gregory Stafford (Conservative):** (UIN 57098) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of withdrawing funding for level 7 apprenticeships for people aged 22 and over on workforce planning in critical public services.

**Janet Daby:** This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

From January 2026 the government will no longer fund level 7 apprenticeships, equivalent to master's degree level, except for young apprentices under the age of 22. This will enable apprenticeship opportunities to be rebalanced towards young people and create more opportunities for those entering the labour market, who need skills and training to get on in their careers.

This decision was informed by a wide range of evidence, including Skills England's analysis of official apprenticeship statistics and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Skills England's evidence suggested there was unlikely to be a significant or unavoidable fall in the supply of these skills in the long term, post-defunding.

We are encouraging more employers to invest in upskilling their staff over 22 to level 7 where it delivers a benefit to the business and the individual. It will be for employers to determine the most appropriate training. There are alternative training options available to employers at level 7 including non-apprenticeship routes.

Grouped Questions: 57094

## Department for Education: Apprentices

**Pippa Heylings (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 56946) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the effectiveness of Level 7 apprenticeships in helping people to attain higher-level qualifications while in paid employment.

**Janet Daby:** The department knows that level 7 apprenticeships can open up opportunities for young people, supporting them to begin careers as solicitors or accountants for example, and we are keen for this to continue. That is why, in line with our mission to break down barriers to opportunity, we will continue to fund level 7 apprenticeships for those under the age of 22, or those aged 22 to 24 who have an education, health and care plan or have been in local authority care. We are also encouraging more employers to invest in upskilling their staff over 22 to level 7 where it delivers a benefit to the business and the individual. This will enable apprenticeship opportunities to be rebalanced towards young people.

## Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN 57353) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 May 2025 to Question 50912 on Students: Loans, whether her Department has considered (a) changes to interest rates, (b) changes to

repayment thresholds and (c) other policy changes to help prevent loan balances from increasing despite regular repayments.

**Janet Daby:** The government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university. The student finance system removes upfront financial barriers so that everyone with the ability and desire to enter higher education can do so.

Student loan debt is not like other debt. Monthly repayments depend on earnings, not on interest rates or the amount borrowed. No-one who earns under the student loan repayment threshold is required to make any repayments. At the end of the loan term, any outstanding loan balance, including interest built up, will be written off. This write-off is a deliberate investment in our people and the economy. No commercial loan offers this level of protection.

Furthermore, since August 2023, loans for new undergraduate borrowers have been issued on Plan 5 terms. These have an interest rate set in line with the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure of inflation. This means Plan 5 borrowers will not repay more than they originally borrow over the lifetime of their loans, when adjusted for inflation.

The department will set out longer-term plans for higher education reform as part of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper this summer.

## Department for Education: Apprenticeships

**Connor Naismith (Labour):** (UIN 57516) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to review the age cap on funding for (a) Level 6 and (b) Level 7 apprenticeships.

**Janet Daby:** This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

From January 2026 the government will no longer fund level 7 apprenticeships except for young apprentices under the age of 22. This will enable apprenticeships opportunities to be rebalanced towards young people and create more opportunities for those entering the labour market, who need skills and training to get on in their careers.

Level 6 apprenticeships will continue to be funded for all ages (16+) by the government.

## Universities: Admissions

**Sarah Gibson (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 57881) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the publication entitled Skills England: Sector evidence on the growth and skills offer, published in June 2025, what steps her Department is taking to ensure vocational pathways are presented to young people on an equal basis to university routes.

**Janet Daby:** The publication referred to sets out Skills England's findings from its analysis and engagement with sectors on the growth and skills offer, supported by its assessments of skills needs. Skills England and the department will work together to ensure the offer meets the needs of employers across the country.

Widening the apprenticeships offer into a growth and skills offer, including new foundation apprenticeships, will give more young people a foot in the door at the start of their working life.

The department is investing in, and promoting, a wide range of non-academic routes to support young people into employment, including:

- T Levels, a high-quality technical education option for young people, including a valuable workplace industry placement which prepares them work.
- Higher Technical Qualifications, occupation-focused level 4-5 qualifications, approved and quality marked as providing the skills demanded in the workplace by employers.
- Skills Bootcamps, which give learners the chance to build sector-specific skills and include with a job interview on completion.
- Free Courses for Jobs, giving learners the chance to access high value level 3 qualifications.

There is also strengthened legislation to ensure all secondary pupils have multiple opportunities for meaningful encounters with providers of technical education and apprenticeships.

## Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN 57352) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 May 2025 to Question 50912 on Students: Loans, what steps her Department takes to help ensure that borrowers are adequately informed

about (a) how interest accrues on student loans and (b) the potential impact of making minimum repayments.

**Janet Daby:** When a borrower takes out a student loan, they are provided with the terms and conditions. These clearly set out the repayment thresholds, when a borrower will start repaying, how their repayments will be calculated, how interest is applied, and when the loan term ends. Details around the protections available for borrowers, including the fact that any outstanding balance will be written off at the end of the loan term, are also included. All student loan borrowers must confirm that they have read and understood the terms and conditions prior to signing the loan agreement.

Access to this information up front ensures that prospective students can weigh up the likely overall costs and likely benefits to them of undertaking higher education, alongside the financial cost of repayment across the length of the loan period.

For those who may still be unclear about the long-term commitment of a student loan, there is a range of guidance on student loans available from the Student Loans Company.

Student loan borrowers may make additional, voluntary repayments at any time, if they wish to reduce their loan balance sooner or repay their loan in full. They will need to consider their personal circumstances and the fact that any outstanding loan balance, including interest accrued, will be written off at the end of the loan term. Voluntary repayments cannot be refunded.

## Education: Finance

**Neil O'Brien (Conservative):** (UIN 54342) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding she plans to provide to (a) the National Careers Service, (b) the Education and Training Foundation, (c) WorldSkills UK and (d) the Careers and Enterprise Company in the 2025-26 academic or financial year.

**Janet Daby:** As part of our Plan for Change, the government is investing in skills in order to drive economic growth and break down barriers to opportunity. The overall programme resource budget for apprenticeships, further education and higher education in the 2025/26 financial year is £15.8 billion. This includes funding for the National Careers Service, the Education and Training Foundation, WorldSkills UK, and the Careers and Enterprise Company.

## Department for Education: Skills England

**Mike Wood (Conservative):** (UIN 53531) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether appointments to Skills England will be included in the Public Bodies Order in Council; and whether the chair appointment will be classified as a Significant Appointment.

**Janet Daby:** The department will give due consideration on whether to request the inclusion of Skills England in the Public Appointment Order in Council at the point when the Cabinet Office invites departments to nominate bodies for inclusion in the Order. Concurrently, we will assess whether the Chair position falls within the scope of appointments deemed significant under the criteria specified by Cabinet Office at the time of the request.

## Apprentices: Finance

**Victoria Collins (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 57822) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of removing funding for Level Seven apprenticeships for people aged 22 and above on (a) gender equality and (b) social mobility.

**Janet Daby:** This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. That is why we are moving funding away from level 7 apprenticeships for learners aged 22 and over, to ensure that funding is prioritised for learners at lower levels, who need the skills and training to progress in their careers.

This decision was informed by a wide range of evidence, including Skills England's analysis of official apprenticeship statistics and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Skills England's evidence suggested there was unlikely to be a significant or unavoidable fall in the supply of these skills in the long term, post-defunding, and alternative routes are well supplied. A significant proportion of level 7 apprentices are from non-deprived backgrounds and are significantly less likely to be deprived than apprentices at lower levels.

Women are slightly less likely to be represented in the 16 to 21-year-old cohort of level 7 apprenticeships starts than those aged 22 and over. This is likely to be due to the recruitment norms in the standards that have a higher proportion of starts in the 16-21 age group, such as accountancy. The department will monitor trends over time and consider how this gap could be narrowed.

## Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN 57354) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 May 2025 to Question 50912 on Students: Loans, what comparative assessment she has made of the number of borrowers with increasing loan balances in (a) financial year 2024-25 and (b) previous financial years.

**Janet Daby:** The number of borrowers whose loan balance has increased between the start and end of the financial year for the most recent four years is:

- 2024/25: 2,409,255
- 2023/24: 2,317,667
- 2022/23: 1,805,426
- 2021/22: 1,313,137

These figures cover Student Finance England loan borrowers only, whereas the previous number provided to Question 50912 included borrowers from all UK funding bodies.

These numbers include all borrowers whose loan balance has increased, regardless of the number of payments they have made across the financial year, whereas Question 50912 included only borrowers who made at least four payments across the financial year.

These figures cover Plan 2, 5 and 3 undergraduate and postgraduate loan borrowers funded by Student Finance England. For each of the financial years provided, the figure was generated by comparing borrowers' loan balances between 1 April at the start of the financial year and 31 March at the end of the financial year.

At the end of a borrower's loan term, any outstanding loan balance, including interest built up, will be written off. This write-off is a government subsidy and a deliberate investment in our people and the economy.

## Department for Education: Apprentices

**Victoria Collins (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 57823) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of preserving full funding for Level Seven apprenticeships for (a) people from disadvantaged backgrounds, (b) career changers and (c) people returning to work after career breaks.

**Janet Daby:** This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. From January 2026, the government will no longer fund level 7 apprenticeships, equivalent to master's degree level, except for young apprentices under the age of 22, or those aged 22 to 24 who have an education, health and care plan or have been in local authority care. This will enable apprenticeship opportunities to be rebalanced towards young people and create more opportunities for those entering the labour market, who need skills and training to get on in their careers.

This decision was informed by a wide range of evidence, including Skills England's analysis of official apprenticeship statistics and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Skills England's analysis found that level 7 apprenticeships have a higher proportion of older learners than other apprenticeships, a higher proportion of learners who already hold higher level qualifications, and a significant proportion are less likely to be deprived than those in apprenticeships at lower levels. It also suggested there was unlikely to be a significant or unavoidable fall in the supply of these skills in the long term, post-defunding.

We are encouraging more employers to invest in upskilling their staff over 22 to level 7 where it delivers a benefit to the business and the individual. It will be for employers to determine the most appropriate training. There are alternative training options available to employers at level 7, including non-apprenticeship routes.

## Department for Education: Vocational Education

**Adam Dance (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 57813) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support the introduction of more (a) vocational and (b) functional education pathways for students in (i) Somerset and (ii) England.

**Janet Daby:** The department continues to reform qualifications so they have clearer routes to higher education or skilled employment and are, where applicable, aligned to occupational standards designed by employers. 140 reformed qualifications at levels 2 and 3 have been approved for next academic year.

There are a wide range of technical and functional pathways in all areas of the country, including Somerset. These include:

- T levels, a high-quality technical education option for young people, including a valuable workplace industry placement which prepares them work.



- Higher Technical Qualifications, occupation-focused level 4-5 qualifications, approved and quality marked as providing the skills demanded in the workplace by employers.
- Apprenticeships, including widening the offer into a growth and skills offer which will include new foundation apprenticeships, giving more young people a foot in the door at the start of their working life.
- Skills Bootcamps, giving learners the chance to build sector-specific skills with a job interview on completion.
- Free Courses for Jobs, giving learners the chance to access high value level 3 qualifications.
- Functional Qualifications in English, mathematics and digital, available to learners for whom a GCSE is not the right qualification path, designed with employers in mind and taught depending on the needs of the learner.

## Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN 57355) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 May 2025 to Question 50912 on Students: Loans, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of persistent student loan debt on levels of social mobility among (a) graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds and (b) other graduates.

**Janet Daby:** The system is designed to ensure that those who benefit financially from higher education contribute towards the cost of it. This is why repayments are linked to income and not the loan balance, with monthly repayments increasing with borrower income.

Student loans are not like commercial loans, as they carry significant protections for borrowers. Those earning below the repayment threshold repay nothing, and at the end of the loan term, any outstanding debt is cancelled. This subsidy is a conscious investment in the skills capacity, people and economy of this country.

Furthermore, student loan balances do not appear on borrower credit records.

A full equality impact assessment of how student loan reforms may affect graduates, including detail on changes to average lifetime repayments under Plan 5, was produced and published in February 2022 under the previous government and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

## Postgraduate Education: Discrimination

**Connor Naismith (Labour):** (UIN 57517) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether there is an external right of appeal for people who believe they have been discriminated against when applying for doctorates at universities in the UK.

**Janet Daby:** Higher education providers (HEPs) are autonomous from government and are responsible for their own admissions decisions. The department has no legal remit to become involved in disputes between prospective students and their university.

Responsibility for handling applicant complaints and/or appeals, in the first instance, is a matter for the relevant HEP and each university has formal complaints and appeal processes.

If a complainant has exhausted the official process and the matter has not been resolved to their satisfaction, they are free to consider bringing a claim for judicial review or for discrimination under the Equality Act.

Another route available to dissatisfied applicants is through the higher education regulator, the Office for Students (OfS). While the OfS cannot become involved in individual complaints, applicants can notify the OfS if they think that a university has broken its conditions of registration.

## Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN 57356) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that the student loan system does not entrench socioeconomic disparities for (a) first-generation university students and (b) students from lower-income households.

**Janet Daby:** This government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university. The student finance system removes upfront financial barriers so that everyone with the ability and desire to enter higher education (HE) can do so.

All eligible students, regardless of their household income, can apply for up-front fee loans to meet the full costs of their tuition. Unlike commercial loans, student loans carry significant protections for borrowers. Monthly repayments are linked to income, not to the amount borrowed, and individuals are only required to make their contribution to the system when they are earning over the repayment threshold.

The government has announced that maximum loans and grants for living and other costs will increase by 3.1% for the 2025/26 academic year, with the highest levels of support paid to students from the lowest income families. A 3.1% increase is in line with forecast inflation based on the RPIX inflation index.

The department aims to publish our plans for HE reform as part of the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy White Paper in the summer, and we will work with the sector and the Office for Students to deliver the change that the country needs.

## Universities: Freedom of Expression

**Lee Anderson (Reform UK):** (UIN 57348) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to defend the right to free speech on university campuses.

**Janet Daby:** This government is absolutely committed to freedom of speech and academic freedom in universities. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, confirmed to Parliament on 15 January the government's plans for the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which will create a more proportionate, balanced and less burdensome approach to protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech.

On 28 April, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State signed commencement regulations, bringing the following provisions into force from 1 August 2025:

- Strengthened higher education (HE) provider duties in relation to securing freedom of speech, academic freedom and promoting the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom.
- A requirement for HE providers to put in place effective codes of practice on freedom of speech and academic freedom.
- A ban of non-disclosure agreements in HE for staff and students where there is a complaint about bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.
- A requirement for the Office for Students to promote free speech, and enable it to give advice and guidance on it.

## Universities: Student Unions

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** (UIN57705) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department has issued to (a) universities and (b) students' unions

on (i) conducting and (ii) the oversight of risk assessments for student-led (A) extracurricular and (B) off-campus activities.

**Janet Daby:** Risk assessments are a legal requirement, and it is crucial for higher education (HE) providers and their affiliated student groups to comply with existing legislation and relevant guidance. This includes adhering to the Health and Safety Executive's guidelines for schools and education settings, any National Union of Students guidance and HE provider policies. Ensuring that risk assessments are conducted appropriately is essential to managing risks associated with student-led activities. Each HE provider should establish its own guidance and procedures to ensure compliance with these requirements.

## Ministry of Justice: Freedom of Expression

**Suella Braverman (Conservative):** (UIN 57289) To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether her Department plans to bring forward legislation to protect free speech.

**Alex Davies-Jones:** This Government recognises the fundamental importance of freedom of speech as a cornerstone of our democratic society. We have had free speech in this country for a very long time. It is one of our foundational principles of which we are all very proud. It is already protected by legislation, including notably the Human Rights Act 1998, which gives further domestic effect to the right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

## Higher Education: Research

**Chi Onwurah (Labour):** (UIN 57234) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to ensure the continuation of UK research in the higher education sector.

**Feryal Clark:** The government is protecting record levels R&D investment, allocating £20.4bn across departments in 2025/26. DSIT's overall R&D budget will be £13.9bn in 2025/26, including £8.8bn for UKRI to support talent, infrastructure, and innovation. This funding ensures the continuation of research in higher education and supports key priorities such as building R&I talent, fostering student startups, and maintaining Quality-Related (QR) funding, which was around £2bn in 2024/25.

## Visas: Graduates

**Maureen Burke (Labour):** (UIN 58388) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to reduce processing times for applications for Graduate visas.

**Seema Malhotra:** Our published transparency statistics can be found here: [Migration transparency data - GOV.UK](#), including data on service standards.

The current publication covers to end of March 2025: [Visas, status and immigration data: Q1 2025](#) - 98% of standard Graduate cases are considered within service standard.

We continue to operate within our service standard of 8 weeks for straightforward applications, with even faster times for our priority services.

We encourage applicants to apply as early as possible and ensure they have provided all required documents, and their university has reported successful course completion to UKVI, to avoid any delay in processing.

Where applications are complex or there is missing information, decisions may take longer. Applicants will have been informed by email if this is the case, but these emails can be missed or ignored. We encourage applicants to check their junk or spam folders and respond promptly to any request for further information. Further information on processing times is available here: [Visa processing times - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

## Visas: Graduates

**Maureen Burke (Labour):** (UIN 58387) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending the application window for international students to apply for a Graduate visa in the event of their university exam results being delayed.

**Seema Malhotra:** If a student's results are not expected before their current visa expires, and they need more time to demonstrate successful course completion, they may apply to extend their Student visa as set out in the Immigration Rules Appendix Student.

### Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Universities

**Imran Hussain (Labour):** (UIN 59404) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to increase (a) core

funding and (b) grant opportunities for universities in the north of England conducting AI and data science research as part of its strategy to support regional growth.

**Feryal Clark:** The government has committed to invest more than £86 billion on research and innovation over financial years 26/27-29/30, supporting the UK's scientific excellence and its full economic potential around the country, including in areas such as AI and data science. This funding will support the UK's top scientists and innovators in business, universities and R&D organisations. DSIT will share further details of how its £58.5bn settlement over the Spending Review period will be invested once multi-year business planning allocations conclude this Autumn.

## Employment Schemes: Graduates

**Katie White (Labour):** (UIN 59226) To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department is taking to increase employment opportunities for university graduates.

**Alison McGovern:** As part of the Get Britain Working package, the government is investing £240 million to trial new ways of getting people into work. The government will test new approaches and collect robust evidence on how to tackle the root causes of ill-health related inactivity, support young people who are not in education, employment or training, and help people to develop their careers.

Jobcentre Plus is fully equipped to offer advice to anyone who is looking for work, regardless of their background, profession or occupation. It offers comprehensive services including, job search advice, skills advice, CV and job applications support, help with retraining, and access to the thousands of new vacancies posted daily.

In addition to general support, Jobcentre Plus provides a range of tailored opportunities to improve individuals' likelihood of entering or re-entering the labour market. This includes demand-led training for higher skilled jobs in specific sectors.

Jobcentre Plus provides guidance and good practice ideas to help individuals to direct their job search in the most effective manner. Jobcentres work closely with several organisations to support graduates to secure employment. Our strong network of partnerships with external training providers, universities and colleges enhances the support available. We have also improved online signposting for graduates, managers and professionals looking to use our services.

## UK Research and Innovation: Loans

**The Lord Nash (Conservative):** (HL7964) To ask His Majesty's Government what was the total value of innovation loans written off by UK Research and Innovation in each financial year since the scheme began in 2017.

**The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB:** Since April 2018, £267.7m commitments have been made across 304 loans (including those approved and currently in execution). £221.2m in commitments are currently live across 248 loans, of which £191.9m is drawn. Under the terms of the loans with Innovate UK repayment of all of the loans in the current portfolio is due by 2033, with over half by 2028.

31 loans have already repaid in full, recovering £18.4m in capital. 16 defaulted loans with a combined outstanding exposure of £12.7m have completed the administration / recovery process, with £400k recovered and the remainder written-off. These write-offs occurred over following financial years as follows:

Year	Number	Value of write-off
2018-2020	0	0
2021	1	£1m
2022	1	£0.5m
2023	2	£2.4m
2024	4	£2.9m
2025	8	£5.5m

A further 59 loans are currently in default against their obligations. 40 of these (£28.3m total commitment) are subject to recovery action through legal recourse and administration; 19 (£12.5m commitment) are subject to restructuring within Innovate UK Loans Limited with a view to securing a realistic plan for repayment over time.

Grouped Questions: HL7963

## Department for Education: Overseas Students

**The Lord Cashman CBE (Non-affiliated):** (HL8093) To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to attract international students to UK institutions who are unable to enrol at US universities due to recent US policy changes.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The UK is a highly attractive study destination for international students with 4 universities in the top 10 and 15 in the top 100, alongside a wide array of high quality institutions which can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students from around the world.

As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has made clear in her video message last year, this government welcomes international students who enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK.

As set out in the Immigration White Paper, published on 12 May, the department will retain our competitive post-study work offer for international students, principally through the graduate visa that will remain available for a reduced duration so that graduates move more quickly into skilled work. This will maintain our attractiveness as a study destination while ensuring individuals granted a graduate visa obtain employment in graduate level roles and contribute to the country's skills needs. We will issue further details on implementation of the White Paper measures in due course.

## Immigration: Overseas Students

**The Rt Hon. the Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative):** (HL8118) To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the White Paper Restoring control over the immigration system, published on 12 May, whether they plan to introduce primary legislation to implement the levy on international student fees.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The Immigration White Paper sets out a series of measures that will achieve a reduction in net migration, while maintaining the UK's globally competitive offer to international students and making a significant contribution to growth by boosting our skills base.

The White Paper includes the commitment to explore the introduction of a levy on higher education (HE) provider income from international students. We will set out further details in due course, including setting out the way in which proceeds from the levy would be reinvested into our HE and skills system.

Grouped Questions: HL8115



## Overseas Students: Visas

**The Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative):** (HL8087) To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had in 2025 with the higher education sector on visa restrictions placed on international students.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department regularly engages with the higher education (HE) sector to discuss range of topics including the recruitment of international students. This has recently included discussions with various HE institutions and their representative bodies on the measures set out in the Immigration White Paper, published on 12 May, and plans for their implementation.

This government will always welcome international students where they meet the requirements to study in this country. Our world class HE sector can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students from around the world.

The Immigration White Paper sets out a series of measures that will achieve a reduction in net migration, while maintaining the UK HE sector's globally competitive position and making a significant contribution to growth by boosting the UK's skills base.

## Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

**The Rt Hon. the Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative):** (HL8117) To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the White Paper Restoring control over the immigration system, published on 12 May, which areas of the skills and higher education sector the levy on international student fees will be reinvested.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The Immigration White Paper sets out a series of measures that will achieve a reduction in net migration, while maintaining the UK's globally competitive offer to international students and making a significant contribution to growth by boosting our skills base.

The White Paper includes the commitment to explore the introduction of a levy on higher education (HE) provider income from international students. We will set out further details in due course, including setting out the way in which proceeds from the levy would be reinvested into our HE and skills system.

The business models of a significant number of providers will need to change in the near future to ensure financial sustainability. All providers must continue to adapt to uncertainties and financial risks. We will publish our plans for reform of the HE system in the summer as part of the Post-16 Skills White Paper.

Grouped Questions: HL8116

# Sector news

## A World of Difference - Sutton Trust report

On Tuesday 17 June, the Sutton Trust released a new report, *A World of Difference*, comparing England's apprenticeship system to international models, with a particular focus on how it supports progression into and through higher education. The findings raise concerns about limited access to higher-level apprenticeships and weak pathways into degree-level study, particularly for disadvantaged young people.

A key theme of the report is the underdevelopment of higher-level (Level 4+) apprenticeships in England. In contrast to countries like Germany and Switzerland - where advanced apprenticeships are a respected and established route into higher education - England's system offers too few opportunities beyond Level 3, and uptake remains low among young people. The report highlights a need for clearer progression routes that connect school, apprenticeships, and higher education.

Key findings include:

- Just 7% of apprenticeship starts in England are at higher levels, compared to 30% in top-performing countries.
- Degree apprenticeships are disproportionately taken up by older and more privileged learners, limiting their role in widening participation.
- Many universities are not yet fully engaged in delivering or expanding apprenticeship pathways.

To improve this, the Sutton Trust recommends:

- Strengthening quality assurance and ensuring apprenticeships include face-to-face instruction, making them more comparable to academic routes.
- Expanding access to higher and degree apprenticeships, especially for young people from less advantaged backgrounds.
- Guaranteeing that apprenticeships lead to named qualifications, enabling smoother progression into university or higher-level training.

The report concludes that a more integrated system - linking vocational and academic pathways - could play a major role in improving both skills and social mobility. Without reform, England risks reinforcing educational divides rather than bridging them.

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

## UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education activity

On Thursday 19 June, the Department for Education published its 2022 estimates of UK revenue from education-related exports and transnational education (TNE) activity. The figures, revised using a new methodology, show total export earnings reaching £32.29 billion, up from £29.49 billion in 2021 - an increase of 9.5%.

A key theme of this year's release is the continued strength of higher education as the UK's largest education export. Revenue from HE-related exports rose by £1.41 billion (6.3%), with international tuition fees and student living expenditure generating a combined £18.64 billion, or nearly 79% of the HE total.

Other sectors also saw notable growth:

- Transnational education (TNE) grew by 30.3%, reaching £2.97 billion, driven by increased overseas provision and an expanded data approach
- English Language Training (ELT) rebounded from pandemic lows, growing by 189%, from £0.19 billion to £0.56 billion
- Education publishing and related services rose by 6.1% to £3.89 billion, with academic publishing contributing £2.98 billion
- Schools exports increased to £0.98 billion (up 6%), and Further Education (FE) exports grew by 38%, reaching £0.19 billion

The report also reflects improvements in how education exports are measured:

- For the first time, the full value of UK-published academic journals is included - adding £1.99 billion to the total
- Revenue now reflects the full output of UK-controlled overseas institutions, rather than only repatriated profits

The figures suggest that the UK remains on track to meet its £35 billion education export target by 2030, as set out in the International Education Strategy. Officials have invited feedback on the revised methodology, which will be fully adopted in future publications.

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

## Freedom of Speech Guidance - Office for Students regulatory advice

On Thursday 19 June, the Office for Students (OfS) published new guidance setting out how universities, colleges, and students' unions in England should meet their new legal duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which comes into force on 1 August 2025. The guidance aims to support providers in protecting lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom across higher education.

A key theme of the guidance is the introduction of a structured three-step framework for compliance. Before restricting any speech, providers must confirm it is lawful, take all reasonably practicable steps to secure it, and only impose restrictions if legally justified and proportionate.

The OfS outlines how institutions should implement the new requirements:

- Policies and codes of conduct must not inhibit lawful speech or academic debate
- Governance processes must include clear accountability and documentation on decisions affecting freedom of speech
- A new statutory freedom of speech code of practice must be developed by each provider and students' union
- Equality, diversity and inclusion policies must be applied in ways that do not unduly restrict lawful speech

The guidance also defines key legal concepts, including:

- Freedom of speech within the law, referencing the Human Rights Act 1998
- Academic freedom as it applies to staff in teaching and research roles
- Duties under the Equality Act 2010, and how they interact with free speech obligations.

The OfS plans to provide further support, including worked examples and case studies, to help providers meet their responsibilities from August 2025.

OfS Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Arif Ahmed emphasised that universities must take proactive steps to protect free expression, warning that failure to comply may lead to regulatory action. He called the new duties "a positive and necessary step" in reinforcing higher education's role as a space for open and lawful debate.

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