



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

16 – 20 October 2023

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

Long-Term Strategic Challenges Posed by China – Lords debate

On Thursday 19 October, a debate on the ‘long-term strategic challenges posed by China’ took place in the House of Lords. This debate was tabled by Earl Howe (Conservative).

Lord Stirrup (Crossbench) was critical of the government’s approach to protecting Chinese students from undue pressure on political issues. He asked what mechanisms could effectively be used to protect students e.g., monitoring interactions that students have with their own government.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) raised Confucius Institutes and suggested that the UK worked with the Government of Taiwan for language and culture studies rather than the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He asked what steps were being taken to help universities reduce dependency and diversify their funding sources.

Baroness Coussins (Crossbench) cautioned against ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’ in responding to Confucius Institutes. She added that ‘closer monitoring of the situation in some universities is clearly advisable, but any action against the Confucius Institutes should be proportionate and properly targeted.’

Responding on behalf of the government, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, said a series of measures had been introduced to tackle threats to higher education, including the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. He said the government were working to increase protections for academic freedom and university research, including strengthening the screening of Chinese academics and researchers in sensitive areas of research. On Confucius Institutes, the Minister said they were ‘taking action to remove government funding from Confucius Institutes in the UK, but currently judge that it would be disproportionate to ban them.’

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

Forthcoming business

Department for Education – oral questions

On Monday 23 October from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial team, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps she is taking to help support students with the cost of living. [Rosie Duffield MP, Labour] + [Lilian Greenwood MP, Labour]
- Whether her Department is taking steps to increase the number of multi-disciplinary subjects taught to students before university. [Michael Fabricant MP, Conservative]
- What assessment she has made of the potential impact of planned reforms to university admissions on the (a) number and (b) demographic characteristics of students applying to university. [Emma Hardy MP, Labour]

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

Renters (Reform) Bill – second reading

In the afternoon of Monday 23 October, the Renters (Reform) Bill will receive its second reading in the House of Commons.

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – report stage

In the afternoon of Wednesday 25 October, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will receive its report stage in the House of Commons.

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

Written Questions

China: Academic Technology Approval Scheme

Catherine West MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many Academic Technology Approval Scheme applications made by Chinese nationals were rejected in (a) 2020, (b) 2021, (c) 2022 and (d) 2023 to date. [UIN 200997]

Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP: The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) is a country-agnostic counter-proliferation tool which seeks to ensure that universities do not facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technology relating to advanced conventional military technology, weapon of mass destruction (WMD) or their means of delivery. Because of the country-agnostic nature of the scheme, HMG does not publish data on ATAS decisions by country. However, we publish data for the scheme as a whole in the Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports.

Standard Individual Export Licenses: China

Catherine West MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many standard individual export licenses were granted to UK university sponsored applications for proposed exports to China in (a) 2020, (b) 2021 and (c) 2022. [UIN 201000]

Nigel Huddleston MP: (a) 2 SIELs were granted to UK universities for proposed exports to China in 2020.

(b) 2 SIELs were granted to UK universities for proposed exports to China in 2021.

(c) 2 SIELs were granted to UK universities for proposed exports to China in 2022.

Arms Trade: China

Catherine West MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many times military end-use controls were applied to proposed exports to Chinese universities in (a) 2020, (b) 2021 and (c) 2022. [UIN 200998]

Nigel Huddleston MP: The military end-use controls did not apply to China until 19 May 2022. Military end-use controls were applied to proposed exports to Chinese universities 45 times in 2022.

Standard Individual Export Licenses: China

Catherine West MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, how many standard individual export licenses were granted for proposed exports to Chinese universities in (a) 2020, (b) 2021 and (c) 2022. [UIN 200999]

Nigel Huddleston MP: (a) 238 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were granted for proposed exports to Chinese universities in 2020.

(b) 223 SIELs were granted for proposed exports to Chinese universities in 2021.

(c) 125 SIELs were granted for proposed exports to Chinese universities in 2022.

Overseas Students: Afghanistan

Neil Coyle MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department plans to take to help ensure the safety of Afghan Chevening scholars after the conclusion of their studies in the UK. [UIN 200783]

Leo Docherty MP: Our Chevening scheme for Afghanistan requires that applicants have resident status in a third country and that they are able to leave the UK at the end of their studies.

The FCDO can provide letters of consent to scholars in the UK who have completed their studies and whose visas in other countries have expired, allowing them to apply for another UK visa, exempting them from the normal requirement to leave the UK on completion of study, given the situation in Afghanistan.

Overseas Students: Afghanistan

Drew Hendry MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department is taking steps to support the top 20 nursing students from Afghanistan to continue their studies in the UK through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. [UIN 200703]

Robert Jenrick MP: As has been the practice under successive Governments, the Home Office does not routinely comment on individual cases.

We remain committed to providing protection for vulnerable and at-risk people fleeing Afghanistan and so far, have brought around 24,600 people impacted by the situation to the UK.

We continue to work with likeminded partners and countries neighbouring Afghanistan on resettlement issues, and to support safe passage for eligible Afghans. We also continue to welcome individuals to the UK through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

UK Research and Innovation: Finance

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what funds UK Research and Innovation committed to (a) researchers under the Horizon Europe Guarantee scheme and (b) other Horizon Europe aspects of the UK research system in (i) 2021-22, (ii) 2022-23 and (iii) 2023-24; whether her Department provided financial support to UK Research and Innovation for such funds in each such year; and whether there have been changes to the budget of UK Research and Innovation since the publication of its Annual Report and Accounts 2022 to 2023. [UIN 202790]

George Freeman MP: The government's priority is to ensure the UK's R&D sector gets the right support to allow them to continue their ground-breaking research and international collaboration. UKRI has to date issued grant offer letters totalling approximately £1.36bn through the Horizon Europe Guarantee scheme with further funds to be committed throughout 2023-24. UKRI has delivered further support across the Horizon programme, including elements of targeted investments to support UK research, as announced by the Government in November 2022, - with spend underpinned by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. UKRI's budget remains as published in our Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23.

Sector News

What do we want from the King's Speech – Policy Exchange

On Monday 16 October, Policy Exchange released a report titled 'What do we want from the King's Speech?', written by Iain Mansfield. The report sets out a programme of 14 new laws that the think tank believes should be announced in the upcoming King's Speech.

A 'Higher Education and Skills Bill' are among the proposals. This Bill would 'restore government control over the number of university places funded each year, with the money reinvested into a new Skills Tax Credit to support employers in training the skills we need to improve our productivity.'

The Bill is required due to the oversupply of graduates in the Labour market and the underfunding of other forms of skills investment. The Bill would impose a duty upon the Secretary of State for Education to determine the total number of undergraduate university places that would be funded for the following academic year. The Office for Students (OfS) would have a duty to apportion the limit on funded places amongst higher education providers by imposing a limit on funded places upon each provider.

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

Staff digital experience insights survey 2022/23 – Jisc

On Tuesday 17 October, Jisc published a report on perceptions of higher education teaching staff to technology and its potential in teaching.

The survey found:

- 71% of teaching staff surveyed agree that the use of digital technology in teaching is convenient to them.
- 61% agree that it allows them to teach in ways they prefer.
- 64% rate the quality of their online teaching environment as above average.
- 61% agree that it enables students to make good progress.

However, the survey also shows that teaching staff need more time and encouragement when it comes to improving their digital skills, with nearly half (49%) rating support for teaching effectively online as average or below average.

Kathryn Heywood, head of business intelligence, data analytics at Jisc said: ‘This year’s student digital experience insights survey shows that HE students find online learning more engaging and motivating since 2020, and they have reaped the benefits of teaching staff working hard to improve their practice. What’s clear from this year’s staff survey, is that teachers need more dedicated support from the organisation to focus on their digital skills.’

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

Autumn statement submission – Russell Group

On Tuesday 17 October, the Russell Group published its submission for the upcoming Autumn Statement.

The submission acknowledges the ‘welcome decision’ to associate to Horizon Europe and urges the government to not ‘miss the opportunity [to] take our R&D potential to the next level.’

Suggested actions include:

- Investment to ensure high rates of participation in Horizon Europe.
- Investment to leverage university capability to drive AUKUS pillar 2.
- Investment to strengthen UK-Germany research.

It further calls for the creation of a UK Research Security Fund aimed at disrupting hostile attempts to interfere in the UK’s world-leading university research.

You can [read the full Autumn Statement submission](#).

Climate Change and Student Mental Health – Student Minds and UPP Foundation

On Wednesday 18 October, Student Minds and the UPP Foundation published a report titled ‘Climate Change and Student Mental Health.’ The report examines questions of curriculum design, leadership, behaviour changes, the impact on specific

student groups, the role of government and higher education institutions (HEIs), and more.

The report draws on survey responses of 153 students from UK institutions alongside focus group responses.

Key findings include:

- 71% of student respondents were quite or very concerned about climate change, while 68% were quite or very concerned about the impact on them personally.
- 53% of students wanted to learn about sustainability in their curriculum, while only 20% already had.
- Students believe their universities and the government should focus on energy and recycling over measures to tax or ban meat on campus.

Richard Brabner, Director of the UPP Foundation, said: ‘This fascinating report illustrates the need for universities to offer students practical and constructive ways for them to tackle climate change and wider environmental issues - not only for the good of the planet - but for their own wellbeing too.’

You can [read the full report](#) and [watch an accompanying webinar](#).

Meeting the mental health needs of students – OfS insight brief

On Thursday 19 October, the Office for Students (OfS) published an insight briefing which examines some of the issues relating to mental health at university, with reference to the most recent data.

The brief looks at the likelihood of students reporting mental health conditions in terms of various characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals when at school and area-based measures of deprivation and participation), and how these conditions affect outcomes in terms of continuation, completion, attainment, and progression.

It also considers how the regulator can work with universities and colleges to address these negative impacts.

You can [read the insight brief](#).

English Social Mobility Index – LSBU

On Thursday 19 October, the results of the annual English Social Mobility Index were published. The Index, compiled by London South Bank University (LSBU) and published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), compares the performance of individual English higher education providers.

The Index measures the social distance travelled by graduates from each institution as well as the proportion of graduates so transported. It combines access, continuation, and outcomes measures for undergraduates for all modes of study (except apprenticeships).

The 2023 results show:

- Bradford (1), Aston (2) and City, University of London (3) perform best – these are all former Colleges of Advanced Technology (which became universities almost sixty years ago on the back of the Robbins Report of October 1963).
- King’s College London (4), the LSE (5) and Queen Mary University of London (6), which are all members of the Russell Group, come next in positions 4, 5 and 6.
- Birmingham City (7), Wolverhampton (8) and Huddersfield (9), three post-1992 universities and former polytechnics are just behind, with another Russell Group University, University College London (10), taking the final spot.

Professor David Phoenix, Vice-Chancellor of LSBU, who compiles the Index for HEPI, said: ‘Universities of all types, up and down the country, are countering expectation by consistently delivering improved economic prosperity for some of our most disadvantaged students.’

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