



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**16 September – 4 October 2024**

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

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# Forthcoming business

## **UK's membership of Horizon Europe – HoL oral question**

On Tuesday 8 October at 2:30pm, there will be an oral question in the House of Lords on the UK's membership of Horizon Europe. This oral question was tabled by Viscount Stansgate (Labour).

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

## **Renter's Rights Bill – HoC second reading**

On Wednesday 9 October, the Renter's Rights Bill will have its second reading in the House of Commons.

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

## **Skills England – Westminster Hall debate**

On Wednesday 9 October at 4pm, there will be a Westminster Hall debate on Skills England. This debate was tabled by Antonia Bance MP (Labour, Tipton and Wednesbury).

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

## **Higher education in Staffordshire – HoC adjournment debate**

On Wednesday 9 October, there will be an adjournment debate on higher education in Staffordshire in the House of Commons. This debate was tabled by Adam Jodge MP (Labour, Newcastle-under-Lyme).

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



## **Studying computer science at English universities – HoL oral question**

On Wednesday 9 October, there will be an oral question in the House of Lords on studying computer science at English universities. This oral question was tabled by Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate (Non-affiliated).

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

# Written Questions

## Apprentices

**Paul Davies MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to provide further support to young people seeking to start apprenticeships. [UIN 4139]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** This government is transforming the Apprenticeship Levy into a new Growth and Skills Levy to create opportunities for learners of all ages, including young people at the start of their careers, and to give employers greater flexibility to train and upskill their workforce.

The department is working across government to develop the design of the Growth and Skills Levy and will set out more detail in due course. This will include further information on the role of Skills England in identifying the training for which the Growth and Skills Levy will be accessible and ensuring that those training programmes, including apprenticeships, are well designed and delivered to meet the needs of both learners and businesses.

## Universities: Applications

**Jim Shannon MP (DUP):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of levels of uptake of university applications in the last 12 months. [UIN 3978]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The majority of students who applied for places at universities in 2024 will have done so before the change of government in July 2024.

Final applications, acceptances and confirmations of these places will continue to be finalised until the end of October 2024.

The department will continue to work closely with the higher education sector to support the 2025 intake of students and to ensure they can progress to their next step in life.

## **Overseas Students**

**Luke Charters MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking with (a) universities and (b) other higher education institutions to help ensure that the UK remains an attractive place for international students to study. [UIN 3892]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The government recognises that international students enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK, as well as making a significant economic contribution to the higher education (HE) sector and our country as a whole.

The government expects the UK to remain a highly attractive study destination. The UK has four universities in the top ten, and 15 in the top 100 and we offer international students the opportunity to remain in the UK on a graduate visa for two to three years after their studies come to an end.

The department regularly engages with the HE sector to understand the emerging picture of international students' admission for the 2024/25 academic year.

## **Higher Education: Finance**

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the extent to which the independence of the UK higher education sector has been compromised by a reliance on funding from China. [UIN HL560]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The government has made significant strides to protect our values against those who do not respect the UK's fundamental rights and freedoms, or whose strategic intent is hostile to UK interests. The department has committed, in the Integrated Review Refresh, to review the full set of legislative and other provisions designed to protect our academic sector, in order to identify what more the department could or should be doing.

The department recognises the potential for overseas interference in our higher education (HE) sector and we are committed to ensuring ways to increase transparency, improve HE providers' overall resilience and economic security, whilst respecting the autonomy of universities.

A key part of the department's International Education Strategy is diversification. Our universities must ensure they have appropriate processes in place to manage risks associated with dependence on a single source of funding, whether that is from a single organisation or a single country. The Office for Students, the regulator of HE in England, monitors the risk of over-reliance on overseas income at a sector level.

## **Overseas Students: British Overseas Territories**

**Andrew Rosindell MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help increase the accessibility of UK university education to British Overseas Territories citizens. [UIN 4617]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** Since 2007, persons who have settled status in the United Kingdom (UK), and who come to the UK from specified British Overseas Territories, have been eligible for home fee status if they meet the requirement of three years' ordinary residence in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and/or specified British Overseas Territories.

Since 2022/23, those starting designated full-time and part-time undergraduate courses are also now eligible for tuition fee loans in England if they meet the residency requirements. These are that they have been ordinarily resident in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and/or specified British Overseas Territories throughout the three-year period preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course, with at least part of that period having been spent in the British Overseas Territories.

## **Universities: Finance**

**Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated):** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that universities remain and do not close down despite financial difficulties. [UIN HL733]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department is committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading universities so they can deliver for students, taxpayers, workers and the economy. The government has already started reviewing options to deliver a more robust higher education (HE) sector but it will take time to get it right.



Sir David Behan has been appointed as interim Chair of the Office for Students (OfS) to oversee the important work of refocusing their role to concentrate on key priorities, including prioritising the financial stability of the HE sector.

However, the government recognises the immediate financial strain that some providers are under and is working closely with the OfS to monitor any risks and to ensure students' best interests are protected.

Ultimately, HE providers are independent from the government and therefore it is their responsibility to ensure they have a sustainable business model.

## **Research: Investment**

**Neil O'Brien MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page 6 of the policy document entitled Statement of Levelling Up Missions, published on 25 January 2024, whether it remains his Department's policy that levels of public investment in research and development outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% by 2030. [UIN 5106]

**Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP:** This public R&D regional investment target is committed to in legislation via the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Increasing productivity right across the UK is fundamental to our mission to kickstart economic growth. Through our Industrial Strategy and the development of Local Growth Plans, we will build on local strengths to ensure that public and private R&D investment right across the UK helps local places to reach their potential.

## **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023**

**Joy Morrissey MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the decision to stop implementation of the Higher Education (Free Speech) Act 2023, whether she received representations that informed that decision (a) on the potential impact of that Act on universities' (i) operations and (ii) revenues in non-democratic states and (b) from academics or academic groups on matters relating to academic freedoms; and if she will publish the (A) minutes of meetings and (B) written representations received relating to that matter. [UIN 4423]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The decision to pause the implementation of the Higher Education (Free Speech) Act 2023 took account of

views from across the higher education (HE) sector, including universities and academics, who felt that the Act is disproportionate, burdensome and damaging to the welfare of students and that it would expose HE providers to costly legal action, and that the fear of sanction could push providers to overlook the safety and wellbeing of minority groups.

The government does not routinely publish details of meetings and correspondence that inform policy making, as this risks undermining the ability of Ministers to hear free-spoken views.

## **Universities: Health**

**Lord Stevens of Birmingham (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government which scientific criteria they apply in deciding whether an educational institution can describe itself as a Health Sciences University; whether these criteria could apply to an institution teaching homeopathy and other alternative therapies; and which peer-reviewed research or externally-assessed teaching the Office for Students relied upon in deciding to allow the Anglo-European College of Chiropractic and University College of Osteopathy to rebrand themselves as the Health Sciences University. [UIN HL695]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** When a provider requests to change its name, a strict criteria and assessment process is followed. The provider will already have undergone considerable scrutiny when being awarded Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs), including input from quality experts, drawn from the sector, to test the provider against multiple criteria. Indefinite DAP's status is the main eligibility test for providers to be able to go through the title process.

In this instance, the provider gained degree awarding powers in 2016 and so was able to apply for university title as per the rules set out in the Office for Students' (OfS) 'Regulatory advice 13: how to apply for university college and university title', which is attached and also available

at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-13-how-to-apply-for-university-college-and-university-title/#:~:text=and%20university%20title-,Regulatory%20advice%2013%3A%20How%20to%20apply%20for%20university%20college%20and,as%20part%20of%20their%20name.>

The department and the OfS were notified in September 2023 regarding the provider changing its name. When considering the proposed new name for a provider, the OfS must have due regard to the need to avoid names that are, or may be, confusing. In

addition, in the instance of the newly named Health Sciences University, the OfS operated an open consultation on the proposed name. This ran from 22 February 2024 to 21 March 2024, and determined the regulator's final decision. The OfS approach is set out in their case report 'Approval of proposed new name for AECC University College - Office for Students', which is attached and can also be found at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/approval-of-proposed-new-name-for-aecc-university-college/>.

In addition to the OfS process, regulations brought into force under the Companies Act 2006 means that the department has responsibility for confirming that it has no objection to the use of the sensitive word 'university' in a business name. The OfS published approval of the proposed new name from 'AECC University College' to 'Health Sciences University' in July 2024. The department then considered the request from the provider to change its name to 'Health Sciences University' and was satisfied that the use of the word 'university' was appropriate in this context. The department had no objection to the use of the term 'university' in the proposed business name 'Health Sciences University' and issued the provider with a non-objection letter on 18 July 2024.

During this consultation the OfS did not receive any responses questioning the merit of the subject area(s) of the provider.

## **Universities: Research**

**Baroness Crawley (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to review the Research Excellence Framework process for universities, and whether they plan to replace it with a less onerous and more cost-effective process. [UIN HL878]

**Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, Lord Vallance of Balham:** The next research assessment exercise, REF2029, will be completed in 2029. It is led by Research England and the Devolved Funding Bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These funding bodies are engaging with the sector to lighten the bureaucratic burden wherever possible, for example by using existing data sets.

DSIT recognises the need to reduce bureaucracy across the research system as much as possible. The department is working with the sector and funders to achieve this.

## **Semiconductors: Training**

**Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support collaboration between universities and industry on upskilling to address skill gaps in the domestic supply chain of semiconductor chips. [UIN HL1121]

**Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, Lord Vallance of Balham:** This Government recognises the importance of skills as a crucial factor in maximising the potential of our semiconductor sector, driving growth, and creating high-quality jobs throughout the UK. My officials are collaborating with stakeholders across industry and academia to understand the challenges faced by the semiconductor sector in order to take the necessary steps needed to expand the talent pool for the long term. The newly announced Skills England will play a vital role in bringing together government, industry and training providers to address the skills needs of the coming decade.

## **Universities: Finance**

**Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the financial state of universities; and what steps they are taking to address issues in this regard. [UIN HL789]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of Higher Education (HE) in England, publishes an annual report on the financial health of the HE sector.

The OfS' most recent report, published in May 2024, showed that the financial position of the HE sector has become increasingly challenging. The report can be found at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/ly1buqlj/financial-sustainability-report2024.pdf>, as attached.

The government recognises the immediate financial strain that some providers are under, and the department is working closely with the OfS to monitor any risks to ensure there are robust plans in place to mitigate them. Sir David Behan has been appointed as interim Chair of the OfS to oversee the important work of refocusing their role to concentrate on key priorities, including prioritising the financial stability of the HE sector.

This government is committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading universities so they can deliver for students, taxpayers, workers and the economy. This government has already started reviewing options to deliver a more robust HE sector, but we recognise it will take time to get it right.

Ultimately, HE providers are independent from government and therefore it is their responsibility to ensure they have a sustainable business model.

## **Apprentices: Finance**

**Baroness Wolf of Dulwich (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of the Department for Education's 2022–23 apprenticeship spend applied to new starts; and what proportion to ongoing costs for apprentices already in training, both (1) overall, and for (2) levy-payers and non-levy-payers separately. [UIN HL922; Grouped Questions: HL920, HL921]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The English apprenticeships budget for the 2022/23 financial year was £2,554 million. The total spend was £2,458 million meaning that 96% of the English apprenticeships budget was spent in the 2022/23 financial year.

In the 2022/23 financial year, 69% of the overall apprenticeships spend was spent on apprenticeships for levy paying employers and 29% was spent on apprenticeships for non-levy paying employers. This includes the spend on COVID-19 incentive payments made to employers recruiting new apprentices between August 2020 and January 2022. The remaining 2% was spent on the costs of running the apprenticeships programme.

31% of the department's apprenticeships spend for the 2022/23 financial year supported new apprenticeship starts and 62% was spent on the ongoing costs of apprentices that had started in previous years.

22% of the department's apprenticeships spend for the 2022/23 financial year supported new starts in levy paying employers and 43% was spent on the ongoing costs of apprenticeships in levy paying employers that had started in previous years.

9% of the department's apprenticeships spend for the 2022/23 financial year supported new starts in non-levy paying employers and 18% was spent on the ongoing costs of apprenticeships in non-levy paying employers that had started in previous years.



Details of annual apprenticeships spend for the 2023/24 financial year is set out in the department's annual report and accounts, which was published in July 2024 and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-consolidated-annual-report-and-accounts-2023-to-2024>.

# Sector News

## **Powering the engine: The non-financial contribution of international postgraduate students to the UK – UUKi report**

On Tuesday 17 September, Universities UK International (UUKi) published a report commissioned from Counterculture Partnership LLP and Public First to enhance the evidence base on the contribution and impact of international postgraduate research (PGR) talent to the UK's Research and Development performance.

Key recommendations include:

- **Coordinating effort:** The government should convene a time-limited expert group to consider how to maximise the impact of international PGR students within current government science ambitions.
- **Visa policies during study:** The government should review the practicalities of an exemption to working time limits where an international PGR student is employed by their own university in a role adjacent to their study.
- **Post study work visa policy (i):** The government should continually review whether the post-study visa landscape is internationally competitive and effectively retaining international PGR students.
- **Post study work visa policy (ii):** Government should collate more detailed visa data including which qualifications students obtaining Graduate route visas have achieved.
- **Competition:** Government should urgently review whether the collation of incidental costs to study, and mandated up front payments, including visa fees and the Immigration Health Surcharge are inhibiting the attraction of international PGR students.

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

## **Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity – 10 Downing Street and DfE press release**

On Tuesday 24 September, the government announced a new growth and skills levy which will replace the existing apprenticeship levy and include new foundation apprenticeships.

These new apprenticeships will give young people a route into careers in critical sectors, enabling them to earn a wage whilst developing vital skills.

The new levy will also allow funding for shorter apprenticeships, giving learners and employers greater flexibility over their training than under the existing system – where apprenticeships must run for at least 12 months.

The training eligible for funding under the new levy will develop over time, informed by Skills England’s assessment of priority skills needs.

You can [read the full press release](#).

## **Skills England: driving growth and widening opportunities – DfE report**

On Tuesday 24 September, Skills England released its first report, providing an initial assessment of the nation’s working skills, as well as future skills needs and gaps which employers are struggling with across the country.

The report finds that employer investment in training has been in steady decline over the past decade, with training expenditure at its lowest level since records began in 2011, with investment per employee down by 19% in real terms.

It also shows that, across the UK, almost 1 in 10, or over 2.5 million roles are in critical demand, with more than 90% being in roles that require training or education.

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

## **UK position on EU's Research and Innovation Framework Programme – DSIT policy paper**

On Thursday 26 September, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) published a UK Position Paper on emerging themes related to the shape and



direction of the European Union's Research and Innovation Framework Programme 10.

The paper concludes:

We would welcome opportunities for future discussion with researchers, innovators, businesses, institutions, the Commission and Member States as FP10 develops given our many shared priorities. The UK is keen to support the harnessing of excellence-based research and innovation for our collective security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. We are confident that the strengths of the UK's R&D system and our long history of collaboration can help contribute to these shared endeavours.

You can [read the full policy paper](#).

## **Undergraduate fees revisited – HEPI report**

On Thursday 26 September, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report written by Tim Leunig, former Chief Analyst at the Department for Education and Visiting Professor at the LSE, calling for ten changes to the undergraduate fee system:

1. A 20-year, rather than 40-year, repayment term on student loans.
2. No increase, even in nominal terms, of the amount owed.
3. A minimum student loan repayment of £10 a week after graduation.
4. An additional repayment of 3% of income between the income tax and student loan repayment thresholds.
5. Letting graduates reduce their pension contributions in order to make higher student loan repayments more affordable.
6. Reintroduction of an interest rate supplement for graduates earning over £40,000 a year, set at a maximum of 4% for those on over £60,000.
7. A new 1% National Insurance surcharge for employers with graduates.
8. New maintenance grants for students with parental incomes up to £65,000, with full grants of around £11,000 for those with household incomes below £25,000.

9. Provision of maintenance loans for all students not receiving a full grant, provided their parents' income is below £100,000 a year.
10. Additional teaching grants averaging £2,000 per student.

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

## **Professor Sir Steve Smith reappointed as UK's International Education Champion – DBT and DfE press release**

On Friday 27 September, the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) and Department for Education (DfE) announced the reappointment of Professor Sir Steve Smith as its International Education Champion, supporting the promotion of UK education excellence around the world.

### **Baroness Smith, Minister for Skills, said:**

Sir Steve has a wealth of experience in showcasing our brilliant education sector, and I am thrilled that he will continue in this role for a further year.

The UK is rightly regarded as an education powerhouse and Sir Steve's vital work will continue to strengthen that reputation around the world, driving economic growth and boosting our global prestige.

You can [read the full press release](#).

## **Opportunity, growth and partnership: A blueprint for change from the UK's universities – UUK report**

On Monday 30 September, Universities UK (UUK) published its blueprint for change, setting out a bold package of reforms to widen opportunity and boost the sector's contribution to growing the economy.

Key ideas in the blueprint include:

- A major efficiency drive by universities to achieve transformative change in the way they work
- Increasing the opportunities for students from parts of the country and backgrounds where participation in higher levels of education is currently low, working with schools and colleges

- Working more closely in local areas with businesses, chambers of commerce and metro mayors to make the strongest possible contribution to growth at local and regional levels

**Professor Dame Sally Mapstone FRSE, the President of UUK and Principal and Vice-Chancellor of St Andrews University, said:**

Universities are essential to economic growth. For every one pound spent on them, the government makes 14 pounds in return. But we face a choice. We can take the path which leads to better and stronger universities, delivering on the new government's missions, and doing more to open up opportunities to a broader range of people, or we can let them slide into decline.

We must choose the former path. This is not just government's responsibility. It is a shared responsibility with universities themselves, and one which we are taking head on with this blueprint.

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

## **Annual report 2023-24 – UUKi report**

On Wednesday 2 October, Universities UK International (UUKi) published their annual report, providing an overview of activities in the 2023-24 year, including work to deliver several outcomes across priority areas of:

- Attracting international staff and students
- Supporting the development of TNE
- Expanding international experience for UK students
- Fostering global research and innovation
- Supporting the trusted research agenda

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

## **Our vision for Framework Programme 10 – UUKi paper**

On Wednesday 2 October, Universities UK International (UUKi) published a position paper outlining their vision for FP10 and recommending FP10 should be based on five core principles:

1. FP10 should retain its long-term, seven-year cycle with a clear programme structure and should continue to incorporate global challenges. There should, however, be a continued focus on enhancing the effectiveness of the programme and realising synergies between other EU policies and programmes.
2. FP10 should be based on excellence and increase funding for fundamental research. This creates the knowledge that drives innovation and underpins economic and industrial competitiveness.
3. FP10 should support the development of the next generation of researchers and the highly skilled workforce. This should include continued support for Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), at scale, and new opportunities to support early career researchers.
4. FP10 should continue to be open to the world. Long-standing and trusted partners should have the opportunity to play a full role in shaping and influencing the programme.
5. FP10 should take a balanced and proportionate approach to fostering secure and trusted research collaborations. Barriers to the participation of associated countries in fields related to critical and emerging technologies must be minimised.

You can [read the full position paper](#).

## **North East England’s five universities to strengthen collaboration to achieve greater impact and influence – UNEE press release**

On Thursday 3 October, it was announced that a new partnership Universities for North East England (UNEE), consisting of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside universities, would launch later this year to strengthen their collaboration to achieve even greater social and economic impact.



It will work with the Tees Valley and North East Combined Authorities as a unified voice of higher education in North East England.

In a joint statement, the vice-chancellors of the five universities said:

As places of knowledge and innovation, our universities play a crucial role in driving regional economic growth as well as the educational, social and cultural success of our cities, towns and wider region.

The diversity of each institution and our extensive global, national and regional networks underpin the strength of our collaboration.

Through the enhanced impact of us working together we will make an even greater contribution to everyone who lives, works and studies in North East England.

Through Universities for North East England, we can strengthen our existing close partnerships and collaborations and act as a strong unified voice for the higher education sector and the North East region.

You can [read the full press release](#).