



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

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University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Prime Minister's Statement on Covid-19 Restrictions

On Wednesday 19 January, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, made a statement in the House of Commons confirming that England will be returning to 'Plan A' measures and 'Plan B' regulations will expire.

As a result, from Thursday 27 January:

- Mandatory Covid passes in England will end. Organisations can continue to use the NHS Covid pass if they choose.
- There will no longer be a mask mandate anywhere and from Thursday 20 January face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors in teaching settings.
- The guidance on working from home will come to an end.
- Restrictions on care homes will be eased, with details to come from the Health Secretary in the coming days.

However, as part of 'Plan A', there remains a legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test. The isolation period remains at five full days with two negative tests. Self-isolation regulations are due to expire on 24 March and the expectation is they will not be renewed. The Prime Minister indicated he would seek a vote to bring this date forward.

The Opposition Leader, Sir Keir Starmer, confirmed Labour would support the relaxation to restrictions.

You can read a transcript of the statement and questions [here](#).

Home Affairs Committee inquiry into spiking

On Wednesday 19 January, the Home Affairs Committee heard oral evidence as part of the inquiry into spiking.

The first session discussed data on incidents of spiking, the night time economy service at St John Ambulance, identifying instances of spiking, an NHS duty on spiking, process, and the issue of dirty needles.

The second session explored the prevalence of spiking, legislation, further data on spiking, the Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan Strategy, reporting, the role of local authorities, training, door supervisors, and licence revocation and court backlogs.

Michael Kill, Chief Executive of the Night Time Industries Association, stated that spiking had been occurring across the industry over 20 to 30 years. He added that venues often found an increase in spiking around the autumn period, as students returned to university, and following the reopening of nightlife spaces after Covid-19 restrictions had lifted.

Paul Fullwood, Director of Inspections and Enforcement for the Security Industry Authority, stated that there were only 7,500 items of intelligence on night-time instances and only 25 of these were about spiking and date-rape. This was underreported, he continued, as there was a lack of awareness and understanding of the issue. Data that the Security Industry Authority had demonstrated that it was widespread across different cities and not only student areas, but it also found no intelligence of spiking by needle, suspects were mostly male, and intelligence suggested that victims were spread across female and male.

You can read a transcript of the committee [here](#).

Science and Technology Committee Reproducibility and Research Integrity

On Wednesday 19 January, the Science and Technology Committee held an oral evidence session as part of the inquiry into Reproducibility and Research Integrity.

This session focused on how artificial intelligence research was being conducted by discussing risks, challenges, reproducibility, sharing findings, and peer reviews.

A transcript of the committee will be published [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Home Affairs Committee inquiry into spiking

On Wednesday 26 January at 10:30am, the Home Affairs Committee will hold an oral evidence inquiry as part of the inquiry into spiking.

Witnesses will include

- Joy Allen, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner, Joint Lead on Addictions and Substance Misuse, The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners
- Dean Ames, Forensic Drugs Operations Manager at Metropolitan Police Service, Deputy Chief Constable
- Jason Harwin, Lead for drugs at National Police Chiefs' Council

You can watch the committee [here](#).

Lords question on the Turing scheme contract

On Thursday 27 January at 11am, Baroness Coussins (crossbench) will ask what criteria were used to determine the award to Capita of the contract to administer the Turing Scheme after March 2022.

You can watch this question [here](#)

Lords question on plan to increase number of nurses in the NHS

On Thursday 27 January after 11am, Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) will ask what plans the government have to increase the number of nurses working in the NHS.

You can watch the question [here](#).

Written Questions

Health of the study of, and research into, pure mathematics in Higher Education

Lord Clement-Jones: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of health of the (1) study of, and (2) research into, pure mathematics in Higher Education.

Baroness Barran: The government strongly supports mathematical sciences in higher education. Ensuring that there is high-quality provision in a range of subjects is critical in order to build our workforce and support our public services.

We are pleased many students chose to take up courses in mathematical sciences (39,210 students in England in the 2019/20 academic year). Our student loan system supports students who have the qualifications to access higher education, including a range of mathematics courses. In the 2019/20 academic year, a total of £300 million was made available as tuition fee and maintenance loans for students doing maths courses. Breakdowns of higher education enrolments in England can be found [here](#).

The UK continues to be a world leader in mathematics. Following the government's announcement in January 2020 to invest additional funding into Mathematical Sciences, UK Research and Innovation has awarded £104 million of additional funding to the discipline, over and above the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's core Mathematical Sciences Theme budget. The additional investment has funded institutes, small and large research grants, fellowships, doctoral studentships and postdoctoral awards.

Furthermore, the department has funded the Advanced Maths Support Programme (AMSP) since 2018, providing support to schools and colleges to improve the effectiveness of level 3 maths teaching and increase participation, providing tailored support to schools and colleges. To ensure that the programme is targeted at those students, teachers, schools and colleges most in need, the AMSP provides support through a priority area programme and a national programme.

The AMSP delivers high quality teacher professional development as well as focused support and enrichment for students and institutions across A level mathematics, further mathematics and core maths to improve participation and provision in level 3 mathematics through targeted support.

The AMSP provides targeted support for students preparing for study at higher education. Over summer 2021 the AMSP ran a 4 to 6 week supported self-study programme of approximately 30 learning hours for year 13 students to support transition to higher education.

The AMSP also provides regular higher level problem solving classes and other support and information for students considering studying maths and maths-rich subjects at university and helps them to prepare for university admission tests.

Mathematics research

Lord Clement-Jones: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to support research into mathematics that is not defined as affecting the physical and material universe. [HL5099]

Lord Callanan: The UK is a world leader in Mathematics. British mathematicians publish a large volume of highly regarded work. When compared to international colleagues, British mathematicians have the 5th largest share of publications in the world. When looking at the top 1% of most cited publications, UK mathematicians are responsible for the third largest share.

Between Financial Year 2015-2016 and September 2021, UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) council the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) committed £259.9m to research grants Mathematical Sciences. This includes commitment from the Additional Funding Programme.

Following the Government's announcement in January 2020 to invest additional funding into Mathematical Sciences, UKRI has awarded around £104 million of additional funding to the discipline, over and above EPSRC's core Mathematical Sciences Theme budget. The additional funding has covered institutes, small and large research grants, fellowships, doctoral studentships and postdoctoral awards.

On the 27 October 2021, the Government announced the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. BEIS and UKRI will now set out how we meet the commitment to invest additional funding into Mathematical sciences in forthcoming years, as part of the allocations process.

Disabled Students' Allowance

Vicky Foxcroft: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to Part One of the National Disability Strategy on 28 July 2021, what progress her Department has made on making an Access to Work Adjustments Passport available to all disabled students, including those receiving Disabled Students' Allowance, when they leave university. [102729]

Chloe Smith: The Adjustments Passport universities pilot announced in the National Disability Strategy was launched with students at University of Wolverhampton and Manchester Metropolitan University in November 2021. This was publicly announced on gov.uk in December 2021. A third university is due to join the pilot in early 2022.

R&D spending through UKRI

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what proportion of research and development spending in his Department was channelled through UKRI or the research councils formerly organised under Research Councils UK in (a) 2010 and (b) 2021. [98274]

George Freeman: Science and research allocations for 2010/2011 were published in The Allocation of Science and Research Funding 2011/12 to 2014/15. Allocations for 2021 were published in May 2021 in BEIS research and development budget allocations 2021 to 2022.

R&D Inter-Ministerial Group

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which other Government departments will participate in the R&D Inter-Ministerial Group; and what the aims are of that Group. [98281]

George Freeman: In order to support the Government's ambitions to cement the UK's status as a global science superpower and an innovation nation, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is in the early phases of developing an Inter-Ministerial Group, to support ongoing cross-Government discussions on research and development. Further details about the group will be formalised in due course.

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will publish the aims of the R&D Inter-Ministerial Group. [98942]

George Freeman: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is in the early phases of developing the Inter-Ministerial Group, to support ongoing discussions on research and development. Further details about the group will be formalised and made available in due course.

Attracting international workers with STEM qualifications to the UK

Kieran Mullan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to attract international workers with science, technology, maths, and engineering qualifications to the UK. [100747]

Kevin Foster: Attracting international talent is a key component of our global points-based immigration system. We have a very generous immigration offer, which enables talented scientists, academics and creatives to come to the UK through several different routes, including Global Talent, Skilled Worker, Creative and Temporary Worker Government Authorised Exchange (GAE) routes.

The new Points-Based System is working well, attracting skills the UK needs, as demonstrated by the latest Immigration Statistics for yearend September 2021 with issuance of work visas across all routes is up on both 2020 and 2019 (pre-pandemic).

Since its launch in 2020 the Global Talent route has seen a significant increase in applicants compared to the predecessor route, despite the impact on international travel caused by the pandemic. The number of visas granted on this route has continued to grow from 422 between its launch in February 2020 to year end September 2020, to 1,709 applicants for the year ending September 2021.

A new High Potential route will launch later this year, to further enhance our excellent offer to talented individuals with qualifications in sectors such as science, technology, maths and engineering.

Sector News

Universities Minister launched NDA pledge campaign

On Tuesday 18 January, Universities Minister Michelle Donelan MP launched a campaign for every university to sign a pledge to end the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) when handling complaints of sexual misconduct, bullying and harassment.

The pledge, backed by MPs and campaign groups, commits universities to not use legally-binding NDAs against students and staff who come forward to report abuse, amidst fears victims are being pressured into signing agreements which stop them from speaking out and protect the reputations of perpetrators.

Six university vice-chancellors invited to attend the launch signed up to a pledge.

You can see the announcement [here](#).

Office for Students consultations on student outcomes and teaching excellence

On Thursday 20 January, the Office for Students (OfS) launched a consultation on three new sets of proposals for regulation of quality and standards in English higher education.

Student outcomes

- OfS has [published](#) numerical thresholds which will underpin requirements for minimum student outcomes, and providers not meeting these could face investigation – with fines and restrictions on their access to student loan funding available as potential sanctions.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

- OfS [has also set out plans](#) to incentivise excellent teaching, learning and student outcomes at universities and colleges performing above our minimum requirements.
- Under new proposals for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), universities and colleges in England would be assessed on their undergraduate courses for a TEF award every four years. Universities and colleges in England meeting the OfS's minimum requirements for quality would need to apply for a TEF award, which would be assessed by panel based on excellence in the student experience and student outcomes.

Outcome and experience data

- A [further consultation](#) on the construction, presentation and interpretation of the data comprising that evidence base, which will also be used in access and participation data dashboards, has also been launched.

You can find out more [here](#).

Updated Covid-19 guidance for higher education providers

On Thursday 20 January, the Department for Education updated its Covid-19 guidance for higher education providers to align with the Prime Minister's Plan B announcement. This includes the removal of the recommendation to wear face coverings in teaching settings and communal areas, that mandatory certification will no longer be in place and that people are no longer advised to work from home if they can.

From 20 January, face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors in teaching settings. From 27 January, face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors in communal areas. Though no longer recommended, HE providers may still choose to use them voluntarily.

You can find the guidance [here](#).