



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

18 - 22 April 2022

University APPG weekly update

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

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[Click on the items in the Table of Contents to go straight to the debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.](#)

Table of Contents

Parliamentary Business	3
Education Committee accountability session with Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi	3
Forthcoming business.....	3
Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill	3
Lords Science and Technology Committee session on ‘Delivering a UK science and technology strategy’	3
Education Committee session on ‘The future of post-16 qualifications’	4
Science and Technology Committee session on ‘Delivering a UK science and technology strategy’	4
Written Questions	4
Number of students from universities in Afghanistan offered places to study in UK.....	4
Chancellor of the Exchequer’s last visit to a university	5
MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy	5
Cost of MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy.....	5
MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy	6
MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy	6
Financial support for Ukrainian refugees wishing to continue studies in the UK	6
Recognition of Ukrainian qualifications.....	7
Sector News.....	7
Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee report	7
Department for Education Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy.	8
Department for Education commissioned report on degree classifications	8

Parliamentary Business

Education Committee accountability session with Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi

On Wednesday 20 April the Education Committee held an accountability session with Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State for Education, and Andrew McCully, the Director General for Schools at Department for Education. The committee focused its questions on schools and skills, including the Schools White Paper, the SEND Green Paper, and reform of post-16 education.

The chair, Robert Halfon MP, asked about university sign up to the IHRA definition of antisemitism and what the department was doing to tackle Institutional racism in the NUS. The Education Secretary said he wanted every university to sign up to the IRHA definition, or to explain why they have not. He confirmed that the Universities Minister was looking into what more could be done to address antisemitism in the NUS and that no options were off the table, including the department's relationship with the organisation.

In response to a question from Ian Mearns MP on higher education institutions delivering teacher training, the Education Secretary confirmed that the Minister for Schools has been engaging heavily with institutions to ensure concerns were listened to.

Finally, the Education Secretary said they needed to honour the commitment made to an alternative student finance system and that he would write to the committee with a full response.

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

Forthcoming business

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

On Monday 25 April, there will be a carry-over motion on the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill.

A carry-over motion allows a Public Bill to continue its progress from one parliamentary year (session) into the next. Public Bills that have not been passed by the end of the session in which they were introduced will otherwise fail.

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

Lords Science and Technology Committee session on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'

On Tuesday 26 April at 10:15am, the Lords Science and Technology Committee will be holding a session on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'.

Witnesses will include:

- Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive Officer at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
- The Lord Browne of Madingley, Co-Chair at Council for Science and Technology,
- Dr Beth Mortimer, Royal Society University Research Fellow at University of Oxford
- Professor Sir Richard Friend, Cavendish Professor of Physics at University of Cambridge

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

Education Committee session on ‘The future of post-16 qualifications’

On Wednesday 27 April at 9:30am, the Education Committee will be holding a session on ‘The future of post-16 qualifications’.

Witnesses for this session will include:

- The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett
- The Rt Hon. the Lord Willetts
- Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair at QA Group

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

Science and Technology Committee session on ‘Delivering a UK science and technology strategy’

On Wednesday 27 April at 9:30am, the Science and Technology Committee will be holding a session on ‘Diversity and inclusion in STEM’

Witnesses will include:

- Katherine Sparkes MBE, CEO at Lightyear Foundation
- Dr Jasleen Jolly, Associate Professor in Vision and Eye Research and representative at Anglia Ruskin University and National Association of Disabled Staff Networks
- Dr Gayle Brewer, Senior Lecturer in Psychology and representative at University of Liverpool and National Association of Disabled Staff Networks
- Katharine Birbalsingh CBE, Chair at Social Mobility Commission, and Headmistress at Michaela Community School
- Dr Izzy Jayasinghe, Senior Lecturer and UKRI Future Leader Fellow, and representative at School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield, and LGBTQ+ STEM
- Dr Katie Perry, Chief Executive at The Daphne Jackson Trust

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

Parliament will be prorogued on Thursday 28 April. It will return for the Queen's Speech on Tuesday 10 May.

Written Questions

Number of students from universities in Afghanistan offered places to study in UK

Baroness Goudie: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many students from universities in Afghanistan have been offered places to study within the UK. [HL7635]

Baroness Barran: The department does not hold information on the number of students from overseas coming to study in the UK. However, data from the 2020/21 academic year shows that the number of Afghan domiciled students studying at a UK higher education (HE) provider was 215.

As part of Operation Warm Welcome, it was announced on 1 September 2021 that funding for a single cohort of students for entry into the next academic year (2022/23) will be provided for up to 300 undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships for Afghan students at UK universities. Further details will be launched shortly.

Chancellor of the Exchequer's last visit to a university

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he last visited a (a) primary school, (b) secondary school, (c) further education college and (d) university since 14 February 2020; and if he will publish details of those visits.

Helen Whately: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has last visited the following educational institutions:

Primary and Secondary School: King Solomon Academy, London – 29 April 2021

Further Education College: Darlington College, Darlington – 11 April 2022

University: Aston University, Birmingham – 2 August 2021

MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many people have (a) commenced and (b) completed an MBA using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy in each of the last three years. [150148]

Alex Burghart: A Master of Business Administration (MBA) is not a mandatory qualification in any current apprenticeship standard.

A mandatory master's level qualification, which could have included an MBA, was previously included in the Level 7 Senior Leader standard, however, it was removed in March 2021. This followed a request to the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. The request was to review the standard to ensure all apprenticeships represent value for money and that government funding supports those who can benefit the most from our high-quality apprenticeships.

We do not have data on the number of apprentices on the level 7 senior leader standard who undertook an MBA as part of their apprenticeship. We therefore cannot provide figures on the cost of government funding provided or the number or type of employers that have received government funding for MBA qualifications as part of an apprenticeship.

Cost of MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the total cost of MBAs funded through the Apprenticeships Levy in each of the last three years. [150149]

Alex Burghart: A Master of Business Administration (MBA) is not a mandatory qualification in any current apprenticeship standard.

A mandatory master's level qualification, which could have included an MBA, was previously included in the Level 7 Senior Leader standard, however, it was removed in March 2021. This followed a request to the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. The request was to review the standard to ensure all apprenticeships represent value for money and that government funding supports those who can benefit the most from our high-quality apprenticeships.

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MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of (a) companies and limited liability partnerships, (b) charities and (c) other organisations that have used the Apprenticeships Levy to fund MBAs for staff in each of the last three years. [150150]

Alex Burghart: A Master of Business Administration (MBA) is not a mandatory qualification in any current apprenticeship standard.

A mandatory master's level qualification, which could have included an MBA, was previously included in the Level 7 Senior Leader standard, however, it was removed in March 2021. This followed a request to the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education. The request was to review the standard to ensure all apprenticeships represent value for money and that government funding supports those who can benefit the most from our high-quality apprenticeships.

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MBAs completed using funds raised by the Apprenticeship Levy

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which (a) Government departments and (b) other public sector organisations have used the Apprenticeship Levy to fund (i) MBAs and (ii) other academic masters qualifications for staff in each of the last three years; and how many staff have been supported in that way for those qualifications by (i) Government departments and (ii) other public sector organisations in those years. [151067]

Alex Burghart: The data the department publishes on public sector apprenticeships can be found [here](#). This shows the average public sector starts between 2017/18 and 2020/21 as a percentage of headcount by sector. Public bodies in scope of the target are required to submit an annual return to the department by the end of September. The information collected is limited to employee headcounts and overall apprentice numbers. The department expects to publish data for the 2021/22 public sector target in our apprenticeships and traineeships full 2021/22 academic year release in November. The department does not hold data in the format requested on whether public sector organisations, including other government departments, have utilised government funding for apprenticeships that include either an MBA or other academic masters qualification. The data reported by public sector organisations does not include a breakdown by level or standard.

An MBA is not a mandatory qualification in any current apprenticeship standard. A mandatory master's level qualification, which could have included an MBA, was previously included in the Level 7 Senior Leader standard but was removed in March 2021. This followed a request to the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, to review the standard to make sure all apprenticeships represent value for money and that government funding supports those who can benefit the most from our high-quality apprenticeships.

Of the 647 apprenticeship standards developed by employers, 56 are at Level 7, which is equivalent to master's level, and 27 of these have a mandatory degree qualification. Details of apprenticeship standards can be found [here](#).

In the 2020/21 academic year there were 19,570 apprenticeship starts at Level 7 which represented 6% of total starts for the year.

Financial support for Ukrainian refugees wishing to continue studies in the UK

Lord Blunkett: To ask Her Majesty's Government what waivers they have agreed, if any, in relation to eligibility for (1) financial support in the form bursaries and loans, and (2) UK residency rules, in respect of fee levels for Ukrainian refugees wishing to continue their studies in the UK. [HL7534]

Baroness Barran: The department has been working closely with the education sector and across government more widely to ensure that Ukrainian students are supported during this difficult time. In March 2022, my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Higher and Further Education convened the higher education (HE) taskforce, bringing together representatives from across the sector to discuss how we can work together to facilitate the progression of Ukrainian students to HE.

The department is also providing support through the Strategic Priorities Grant to support Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian-domiciled students studying at English HE providers. We have asked the Office for Students to use up to £4 million of funding in the 2022/23 financial year for providers to support Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian-domiciled students whose usual financial support has been impacted by events in Ukraine.

The difficulties facing Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian-domiciled students studying in England, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are unique. Whilst providers are already making their own student hardship funds available to Ukrainian students who need financial assistance, we are providing this funding to ensure there is additional support available to support these students to complete their courses.

Recognition of Ukrainian qualifications

Lord Blunkett: To ask Her Majesty's Government what arrangements, in any, they have made with (1) the Russell Group of universities, or (2) Universities UK, for the recognition of Ukrainian qualifications in order that Ukrainian refugees can continue their studies in the UK. [HL7535]

Baroness Barran: We have seen an extremely positive response from the higher education (HE) sector who have offered significant support to Ukrainian students and are pleased to see work they are doing across the sector for a coordinated approach to support students fleeing the conflict in Ukraine .

All UK higher education institutions (HEIs) subscribe to the UK National Information Centre for the recognition of qualifications (UK ENIC). This service, provided by ECCTIS Ltd on behalf of the government under contract to the Department for Education, has the necessary expertise and resources to provide advice to HEIs on the comparability of Ukrainian qualifications with those of the UK. UK ENIC stands ready to support HEIs and Ukrainian refugees to ensure they can continue their studies in the UK, you can find out more [here](#).

My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Higher and Further Education convened the HE Taskforce, bringing together representatives from across the sector to discuss how we can work together on a range of important issues including supporting Ukrainian universities, academics, and students.

Sector News

Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee report

On Tuesday 19 April, the House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee published its latest report which considered the Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 and expressed concern over the content of the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum (EM) to the instrument.

The regulations have been laid by the Department for Education (DfE) and make changes which mean the current repayment thresholds for student loans that applied in the 2021-22 financial year will be maintained and continue to apply in the 2022-23 financial year. This avoids an automatic 4.6% increase of these thresholds on 6 April 2022.

The committee recognised the need for financial prudence in the public sector and the Department for Education's commitment to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the student loan system, however, it expressed concern regarding the impact on those who have student loans.

The committee drew the regulations to the special attention of the House on the ground that they are politically or legally important and give rise to issues of public policy likely to be of interest to the House.

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

Department for Education Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy.

Wednesday 21 April, The Department for Education has launched its Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy.

The strategy has five action areas including:

- Climate education
- Green skills and careers
- Education estate and digital infrastructure
- Operations and supply chain
- International

The government also confirmed its plans to accelerate the rollout of carbon literacy training to support at least one sustainability lead in every university. The training will support settings to develop climate action plans that will bring together and drive activity to improve climate education, put in place measures to protect them against the effects of climate change, and increase climate resilience through adaptation initiatives.

You can read the strategy [here](#).

Department for Education commissioned report on degree classifications

On Wednesday 20 April, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published a report commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) on examining the financial benefits associated with different degree classifications.

The report showed that even after controlling for student characteristics, higher degree classes are associated with substantially higher earnings:

- The average premium for gaining a first class degree over an upper second (2.1) is 4% for women and 7% for men.
- The penalty for getting a lower second (2.2) as opposed to a 2.1 is 7% lower earnings for women and 11% lower earnings for men.
- Obtaining a lower class (below 2.2) degree is associated with 15% lower earnings for women and 18% lower earnings for men, again compared with a 2.1.

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