



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**18 – 22 November 2024**

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:

Jasmin Glynne | [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

Click on the items in the table of contents to go straight to debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.





# Contents

---

Parliamentary business	3
DSIT – oral questions	3
Apprenticeships and T-Levels – Westminster Hall debate	3
IfATE (Transfer of Functions) Bill – HoL committee stage	5
Forthcoming business	6
Skills for the future: apprenticeships and training – HoL Industry and Regulators Committee oral evidence	6
IfATE (Transfer of Functions) Bill – HoL committee stage	6
Written questions and statements	7
Research: Investment Returns	7
Research: Finance	7
Universities: Research	8
Apprentices: Employers' Contributions	8
Educational Institutions: Subversion	8
Universities: Asylum	9
Universities: Freedom of Expression	10
Universities: China	10
Students: Loans	11
Homelessness: Students	13
Further Education and Universities: Finance	13
Languages: Higher Education	14
Students: Fees and Charges	15
NHS Learning Support Fund	15
Universities: Employers' Contributions	16
Dentistry: Students	17
Languages: Higher Education	17
Nurses: Graduates	18



---

Sector news	19
Research and innovation clusters to boost UK regional growth – UKRI press release	19
Letter from Secretary of State for Education on Student finance changes for academic year 2025-26 – Education Select Committee correspondence	19
Skills England – DfE publication	20
Mapping SHAPE provision in UK higher education – British Academy research	20
Universities revise budget bid to Scottish Government upwards as there is no scope to absorb increased costs – US press release	21
New analysis reveals graduates in every region earn at least a third more – UUK analysis	21
People and Places: How to put R&D on the map – CaSE report	22
Non-Examinable Content: Student access to exam scripts – HEPI report	23
Supporting outstanding transitions from school and college to university – UPP briefing paper	23

# Parliamentary business

## DSIT – oral questions

On Wednesday 20 November, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

During topical questions, there was an exchange on the topic of research security:

**David Davis MP (Conservative):** Last year, nearly 50 British universities were identified as having research ties with what are deemed very high-risk Chinese institutions. Subsequently, the intelligence services briefed 24 universities on resisting the infiltration attempts of foreign agencies, but the Intelligence and Security Committee report states that it is “highly likely” that joint UK-China research projects are used for military purposes. What is the Department doing to protect our research and our security?

**Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP:** The Government are working closely with individual universities, the university sector and our intelligence community to ensure that our research is not only world class but safe and secure.

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

## Apprenticeships and T-Levels – Westminster Hall debate

On Wednesday 20 November, a Westminster Hall debate on apprenticeships and T-Levels took place in the House of Commons. This debate was tabled by Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP (Conservative).

Damian Hinds MP opened the debate by linking low productivity to gaps in technical skills and advocating for a simplified and employer-driven vocational education system. He highlighted T-levels and apprenticeships as essential reforms but raised concerns about the challenges of finding industry placements and the effectiveness of Skills England, which he criticised as lacking independence.

Luke Taylor MP (Liberal Democrat) raised concerns about the potential defunding of BTECs, which could limit options for students not suited to T-levels or A-levels, particularly those with special educational needs.

Steve Yemm MP (Labour) highlighted the importance of collaboration between further and higher education institutions to drive local economic growth, citing Nottingham Trent's partnership with FE colleges in his constituency and the investment and opportunities these partnerships bring to the area. He said he had recently invited the Secretary of State for Education to Mansfield to use this local model as a blueprint for FE-HE collaboration across the country.

Lewis Cocking MP (Conservative) reflected on his own experience at university and championed apprenticeships and routes straight into work as valuable alternatives to university. He called for greater flexibility in the apprenticeship levy to support workforce needs.

Jonathan Brash MP (Labour) criticised the apprenticeship levy as poorly designed and ineffective in addressing skills gaps. He called for better alignment between industry needs and training opportunities, particularly in areas like Hartlepool with high NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates.

Peter Bedford MP (Conservative) urged a shift in perception to view apprenticeships as equal to academic routes, highlighting the potential for on-the-job training to drive social mobility and economic growth.

Gareth Snell MP (Labour) praised T-levels for improving funding and facilities in FE colleges but stressed the need for clarity on future qualifications and pathways, especially for adult learners.

Tim Farron MP (Liberal Democrat) advocated for T-levels and apprenticeships tailored to key local industries like tourism and agriculture, calling for more advanced qualifications to address workforce shortages.

Ian Sollom MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Universities and Skills, emphasised preserving BTECs alongside T-levels to maintain flexibility in education pathways. He also criticised apprenticeship wage levels and called for improved guidance and funding for employers and learners.

Neil O'Brien MP (Conservative) echoed calls for clarity on Government policies, including the scope of the apprenticeship levy and disparities in funding for college staff compared to schoolteachers.

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP, defended the Government's commitment to apprenticeships and T-levels, emphasizing plans to reform qualifications to better align with employer needs. She highlighted the role of Skills England in addressing skills gaps and promised greater flexibility and support for both employers and learners. She also acknowledged the complexity of balancing reforms with industry expectations and educational inclusivity.

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

## **IfATE (Transfer of Functions) Bill – HoL committee stage**

On Thursday 21 November, the first day of committee stage for the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill took place in the House of Lords. No amendments were agreed.

Topics covered in the session include:

- Lack of understanding and enthusiasm for vocational skills by university educated politicians.
- Establishment of Skills England and the risk of the Department for Education becoming the awarding body for T-level qualifications.
- Calls for Skills England to be established as an arm's-length body.
- Government plans for the defunding of applied general qualifications.
- Fragmentation and complexity of the wider skills system.
- Need for close collaboration with employers and the risk that the changes will possibly lead to less engagement of employers.
- IfATE's achievements including a suite of more than 700 high-quality occupational standards across sectors.
- Importance of consulting employers, especially SMEs.
- Need to review qualifications at regular intervals.
- Importance of a chief skills adviser to ensure that skills changes will be enacted by someone who can take a view over the country of which skills are in short supply in which areas and need local support.

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

# Forthcoming business

## **Skills for the future: apprenticeships and training – HoL Industry and Regulators Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 26 November from 10:30am, the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will hear oral evidence as part of their Skills for the future: apprenticeships and training inquiry.

Witnesses giving evidence:

- Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister for Skills
- Alison McGovern MP, Minister for Employment
- Julia Kinniburgh, Director General, Skills Group at Department for Education
- Tammy Fevrier, Deputy Director, Youth and Skills at Department for Work and Pensions

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

## **IfATE (Transfer of Functions) Bill – HoL committee stage**

On Tuesday 26 November from 3:45pm, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill will have its second day of committee stage in the House of Lords.

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

# Written questions and statements

## Research: Investment Returns

**Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the rate of return to public investment in UK R&D. [12757]

**Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP:** Public R&D generates significant benefits for the UK, with each pound of public R&D investment estimated to leverage, on average, £2 of private R&D investment in the long run. We know businesses grow faster because of public R&D. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, employment increases in the average business by 21% and turnover grows by 23%.

The measurable returns of R&D projects will vary, depending on the specific area of research. Returns for closer-to-market research are generally less challenging to quantify than those for fundamental, curiosity-driven research. To ensure that public R&D investments continue to have high impact all new significant DSIT investments are assessed for their value for money and the Department evaluates programmes' impact.

## Research: Finance

**Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of public sector funding for research and development on private sector investment in research. [UIN 13227]

**Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP:** Public Sector funding for research and development has been found to leverage additional private investment in R&D. Each pound of public R&D investment is estimated to leverage, on average, £2 of private R&D investment in the long run and some studies estimate even higher levels of private investment.

Businesses grow faster because of public R&D grants. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, employment increases in the average business by 21% and turnover grows by 23%.



## Universities: Research

**Chi Onwurah MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to paragraph 4.94 of the Autumn Budget 2024, published on 30 October 2024, HC 295, by what process the support for the commercialisation of university research will be allocated; and what the expected return is. [UIN 13203]

**Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP:** DSIT and UK Research and Innovation are designing a new process to allocate this funding. This will build on engagement earlier in the year with the university sector on how to design proof-of-concept funding. While the benefits realised will depend on the precise design, evaluations of existing UKRI programmes show strong benefits. For example, the Medical Research Council's evaluation of their developmental pathway funding scheme found that spin-outs from those awarded funding raised on average £4 million, whereas most spin-outs from projects marginally rejected for funding raised very little, or nothing.

## Apprentices: Employers' Contributions

**Neil O'Brien MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to paragraph 2.40 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the increase in the rate of employer National Insurance Contributions on the number of apprenticeship starts in each year to 2030. [UIN 13233]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** To repair public finances and help raise the revenue required to increase funding for public services, the government has taken the difficult decision to increase employer National Insurance.

The government recognises the need to protect the smallest employers, which is why we have more than doubled the Employment Allowance to £10,500, meaning more than half of businesses with National Insurance Contributions (NICs) liabilities either gain or see no change next year. Employers will continue to be able to claim employer NICs reliefs, including the relief for employing apprentices under 25, where eligible.

## Educational Institutions: Subversion

**Blair McDougall MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department issues guidance on (a) identifying and (b) tackling political interference from international actors to academic institutions. [UIN 12753]

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

The government works in partnership with the sector to support institutions to make informed decisions on international collaborations and manage national security risks. Universities UK, with government support, continues to deliver a programme of work to increase the understanding and awareness of the threat from interference within the higher education sector. A key output of this work is the publication of two sets of guidelines: 'Managing risks in Internationalisation: Security related issues' and 'Managing risks in international research and innovation'.

These guidelines are available here:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/managing-risks-internationalisation;>

[https://www.ukri.org/publications/managing-risks-in-international-research-and-innovation/.](https://www.ukri.org/publications/managing-risks-in-international-research-and-innovation/)

The guidance has specific sections on mitigating against foreign interference. In addition, the Research Collaboration Advice Team and National Protective Security Authority continue to provide tailored advice to researchers and institutions on how to manage national security risks in international research collaborations.

The National Security Act 2023 further strengthened the government's legal powers to counter foreign interference, including those actions which amount to transnational repression, and provides the security services and law enforcement agencies with additional tools to deter, detect and disrupt modern-day state threats.

## **Universities: Asylum**

**Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) asylum seekers and (b) refugees are studying degree courses at universities. [UIN 12994]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The UK has a longstanding and proud tradition of providing a safe haven to those who have no choice but to leave their home country because of endangerment to their lives or to those of their families. Higher education student support is available to those recognised as refugees, as well as their spouses, civil partners and children who were family members on the date the refugee applied for asylum, provided they have been ordinarily (i.e. lawfully) resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man) since being recognised by the government as a refugee and are ordinarily

resident in England on the course start date. They are exempt from the three-year ordinary residence requirement.

4,948 students with refugee status received student support from Student Finance England in the 2023/24 academic year to support their studies on full time undergraduate courses.

Individuals seeking asylum are not entitled to student support in England, whilst they are seeking asylum.

The department does not hold information on students who have self-funded their studies.

## **Universities: Freedom of Expression**

**Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what legal costs have been incurred by her Department for the appeal by the Freedom of Speech Union against her decision to pause the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 as of 1 November 2024. [UIN 13264]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The requested information is not known while this claim is in process and it is not appropriate to comment on live legal proceedings.

## **Universities: China**

**Josh Simons MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help (a) ensure that academic (i) funding and (ii) other resources are not used to support Chinese state surveillance and (b) protect universities from national security risks. [UIN 13269]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The UK welcomes international partnerships and students, including those from China, who make a very positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, economy and society as a whole. However, the UK will always protect its national security interests, human rights and values.

There are a set of measures that protect against undue foreign interference in UK universities. These include the Academic Technology Approval Scheme, which vets students and researchers seeking to study in sensitive areas, as well as the provisions of the Education Act 1986, which require HE providers to uphold freedom of speech within the law for staff, students and visiting speakers. In England, all registered

providers must uphold applicable public interest governance principles in order to meet the regulatory requirements of the Office for Students, including principles on academic freedom and accountability, such as operating openly and with integrity.

The government also offers practical advice through the National Protective Security Authority, the National Cyber Security Centre and the Research Collaboration and Advice Team (RCAT) to support the HE sector with maximising the opportunities of international collaboration, whilst also managing the risks. The department works alongside these partners and engages directly with the sector to increase their understanding of the risks and their ability to respond to them.

The National Security Act 2023 further strengthened the UK's legal powers to counter foreign interference, including those actions which amount to transnational repression, and provides the security services and law enforcement agencies with additional tools to deter, detect and disrupt modern-day state threats.

This government will take a consistent, long-term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in UK and global interests. We will cooperate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must. The department is contributing towards the government's audit of the UK's relationship with China as a bilateral and global actor, to improve the UK's ability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses.

## Students: Loans

**Rupert Lowe MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 6 November 2024 to Question 11711 on Students: Loans, for what reason there was an increase in the amount of debt written off between 2022-23 and 2023-24. [UIN 13306]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The table below shows the amount that has been cancelled or written off in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years, broken down by reason.

Reason	Amount cancelled or written off during the financial year (£m)	
	2022/23	2023/24
Because of death	35.5	73.8
Because of age	20.1	24.0

Because of disability	2.9	2.8
Because of bankruptcy	-	-
On completion of Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA)	-	-
Trivial balances	-	-
Losses through fraud (including phishing)	0.2	0.4
Other	-	-
Total	58.6	101.1

In the 2023/24 financial year, the department approved the Student Loans Company (SLC) to close or write off accounts confirmed as deceased by HMRC. Previously, when notifications were received from HMRC, SLC would be required to obtain the death certificate copy which would result in delays in closing the account formally (the account would sit at 'Deceased Notified'). The SLC are working through a backlog of cases, hence increased numbers of such write-offs in the 2023/24 financial year.

Write-offs do not include trivial balance write-offs. Trivial balance write-offs occur if there is a positive or negative balance on an account of £25 or less and no contact can be established with the borrower (customers can request for this to be reversed). In the context of these figures, these borrowers are considered fully repaid and are therefore not included. Cancellations involve the clearance of the remaining debt in line with the terms of the loan, for example, when reaching a specific age or becoming permanently disabled. Write-offs for bankruptcy, Individual Voluntary Arrangement or trust deed are no longer allowed against student loans balances. Any figures arise from retrospective clear up exercises.

These figures have been taken from SLC's student loans in England publication which is updated in June each year. The publication, Student loans in England: 2023 to 2024 can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loans-in-england-2023-to-2024>.

The figures were published in 'Table 1A' here: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?c3JjPQ==https%3A%2F%2Fasset.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F6672d0e2f92bc4be25da7e13%2Fslcsp012024.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>.

## Homelessness: Students

**Ian Byrne MP (Independent Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of trends in the level of student homelessness. [UIN 13257]

**Minister for Homelessness and Democracy, Rushanara Ali MP:** The Government recognises that homelessness levels are far too high and this can have a devastating impact on those affected. The homelessness statistics show that 4,850 (1.5%) households had an employment status of 'student/training' and were threatened with homelessness or were homeless in 2023-24.

As announced at the Budget on 30 October, funding for homelessness services is increasing by £233 million compared to this year, bringing total spend to nearly a billion in 2025-26. The increased spending will help to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping.

## Further Education and Universities: Finance

**Lord Jones (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government whether they intend to make further funding available to further education colleges and universities to assist with their financial challenges. [UIN HL2264]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** All young people should have access to high quality education and training that meets their needs and provides them with opportunities to thrive. This is why, in the 2025/26 financial year, the government is providing an additional £300 million for further education to ensure young people are developing the skills they need to succeed.

The department recognises the financial strain that some higher education (HE) providers are under and are working closely with the Office for Students (OfS) to monitor any risks and to ensure there are robust plans in place to mitigate them. Sir David Behan has been appointed as interim OfS Chair to oversee the important work of refocusing the OfS' role to concentrate on key priorities, including the HE sector's financial stability.

HE providers are autonomous and responsible for managing their own budgets and business models. However, in recognition of the financial challenges the sector is facing, the government has made the difficult decision to increase tuition fee limits by forecast Retail Prices Index inflation. As a result, the maximum fee for a standard full-time undergraduate course in the 2025/26 academic year will increase by 3.1%, from

£9,250 to £9,535. Longer-term funding plans for the HE sector will be set out in due course.

Adapting to the changed context of the HE sector over the next decade will require providers to undertake a more fundamental re-examination of business models and much less wasteful spending. In return for the increased investment we are asking students to make in the sector, we will need to see far greater collaboration across the sector to drive efficiency. We will expect the sector to be significantly more transparent on how it is managing its resources and to be held to account for delivering great value for money for students and the taxpayer.

## **Languages: Higher Education**

**Baroness Coussins (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reduction in the number of university degree courses on modern foreign languages. [UIN HL2345]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), now part of Jisc, collects and publishes data on student enrolments across all UK higher education (HE) providers. This includes data on full person equivalents enrolled in different subject areas, categorised using the HE coding of subjects system. Counts of enrolments across all subjects from 2019/20 to 2022/23 are published in Table 52 of HESA's Student Data, which can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-52>.

Table 52 can be used to determine that there were 34,840 entrants to a HE course in 'language and area studies' in the 2022/23 academic year and of these, 11,245 were studying a language or culture other than English, down by 12% from 2020/21. In the absence of a clear definition of 'modern foreign languages', all non-English languages have been included for completeness.

Analysing the HESA student record, the department estimates that there were 4,845 courses in 'languages and area studies', excluding English studies, with at least one enrolment in 2022/23, down from 5,590 in 2020/21. The HESA data only includes courses where students have enrolled, so it is not possible to quantify the number of courses being offered with no enrolments.

HE providers are autonomous and independent institutions. This means they are ultimately responsible for the decisions that they make with regards to which courses they choose to deliver.

## **Students: Fees and Charges**

**Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated):** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that rising university tuition fees do not exclude students from the poorest households. [UIN HL2336]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** 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 (HE) can do so.

Tuition fees will increase in line with inflation for the 2025/26 academic year for new and continuing full-time, part-time and accelerated degree domestic undergraduate students. HE providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees under this level. In deciding to keep charging full fees, providers will want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students progress their qualifications.

Eligible students will be able to apply for upfront loans to meet the full costs of their tuition. Student loan borrowers will not see their monthly repayments increase as a result of this change, because monthly repayments depend on earnings, not on interest rates or the amount borrowed. Student loan borrowers are protected. Borrowers only make repayments when earning over the relevant student loan repayment threshold. At the end of the loan term, any outstanding loan debt, including interest accrued, will be written off, with no detriment to the borrower.

Borrowers who would be forecast not to repay their loans in full under the 2024/25 academic year fee and maintenance levels will see no increase to their lifetime student loan repayments.

## **NHS Learning Support Fund**

**Jayne Kirkham MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing medical students in all years of the course to access the Learning Support Fund. [UIN 14419]

**Minister for Secondary Care, Karin Smyth MP:** Funding arrangements for students are reviewed annually ahead of the start of each academic year.



## Universities: Employers' Contributions

**Laura Trott MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of how much the increase to employers National Insurance contributions will cost universities. [UIN 14395; Grouped Question: 14394]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The department is aware that higher education (HE) providers will have to pay increased National Insurance contributions. As my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out in the Autumn Budget 2024, raising the revenue required to fund public services and restore economic stability requires difficult decisions. That is why the government has asked employers to contribute more.

The Office for Students (OfS) is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the financial sustainability of the HE sector. The OfS has made its own estimate of the impacts in their update published on 15 November 2024. This update is available here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/s32lw2vq/financial-sustainability-of-higher-education-providers-in-england-november-2024-update.pdf>.

It is clear that the UK needs to put its world-leading HE sector on a secure footing in order to face the challenges of the next decade and ensure that all students have confidence they will receive the world-class HE experience they deserve. In line with this approach, from August 2025, the government will be increasing the maximum cap for tuition fees by 3.1%, in line with forecast inflation.

The government recognises the impact the cost of living crisis has had on students and is also increasing the maximum loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, to ensure that more support is targeted at students from the lowest income families. The department plans to publish an assessment of impacts of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly.

The department expects the HE sector to demonstrate that, in return for the increased investment that students are being asked to make, they deliver the very best outcomes both for those students and for the country. We are calling for providers to go further and play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.

The department knows how vital securing a sustainable future for the HE sector is for the success of students. We will set out our longer-term plans for HE reform by next summer.

## Dentistry: Students

**Mark Sewards MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of the potential merits of making tuition free for dental students; and what steps he is taking to ensure that dentists receive adequate funding to treat NHS patients. [UIN 13627]

**Minister for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP:** The Government is determined to rebuild National Health Service dentistry, but it will take time and there are no quick fixes. Strengthening the workforce is key to our ambitions.

The Government will make sure the NHS has the staff it needs to be there for all of us when we need it. We have no plans to make tuition free for dental students. From year five of an undergraduate course, and from year two of a graduate-entry course, dental students can access the NHS Bursary. This is non-repayable and comprises payment for tuition fees and, where eligible, further grants and allowances.

The Government will tackle the immediate crisis with a rescue plan to provide 700,000 more urgent dental appointments and recruit new dentists to the areas that need them most. To rebuild dentistry in the long term, we will reform the dental contact, with a shift to focus on prevention and the retention of NHS dentists.

## Languages: Higher Education

**Baroness Coussins (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to issue guidance to the Office for Students and institutions of higher education that modern foreign languages should be classified as strategically vulnerable subjects and fall within category C1 of the Strategic Priorities Grant. [UIN HL2344]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** In the 2024/25 academic year, over half of the £1.4 billion recurrent funding to higher education providers allocated through the Strategic Priorities Grant is supporting the provision of strategically important high-cost subjects that support the NHS and wider healthcare policy and high-cost science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, for example medicine and dentistry, science, engineering. This is in recognition of the higher costs of teaching those subjects.

The department will continue to work with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure that costs of provision are assessed. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, will issue guidance to the OfS in due course setting out her funding priorities for 2025/26.

## **Nurses: Graduates**

**Joe Robertson MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has had discussions with the Department for Education on (a) the impact of university debt on nursing degree graduates and (b) a student loan forgiveness model for those graduates. [UIN 14426]

**Minister for Secondary Care, Karin Smyth MP:** The Department of Health and Social Care works closely with the Department for Education on a wide range of matters to ensure the education system is supporting healthcare students, while delivering value for money for taxpayers. Student funding arrangements are reviewed annually ahead of the start of each academic year. The Government currently has no plans to introduce a student loan forgiveness model for nursing degree graduates.

## Sector news

### **Research and innovation clusters to boost UK regional growth – UKRI press release**

On Tuesday 19 November, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) announced seven new projects to kickstart economic growth and address regional needs.

They will bring benefits to regional and local economies and communities including new jobs, skills development, private investment and the growth of start-ups. The projects include:

- Accelerating digital healthcare technology to market in Belfast to reduce the pressures of an ageing population.
- Strengthening the offshore renewable energy cluster in the Forth and Tay region to help deliver Scotland's net zero emissions target.
- Launching the East Midlands as the UK's 'Rehab Tech Valley' to deliver pioneering technology that will transform how people recover from injury and illness.

The projects are led by consortia of universities, civic bodies, businesses and local authorities and are supported by a £22 million investment from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

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

### **Letter from Secretary of State for Education on Student finance changes for academic year 2025-26 – Education Select Committee correspondence**

On Tuesday 19 November, the House of Commons Education Select Committee published its correspondence with the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, regarding the changes to student finance for 2025-26.

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

## **Skills England – DfE publication**

On Tuesday 19 November, the Department for Education (DfE) updated its Skills England information page, adding information about Skills England's intention to consult employers and other key organisations on what priority training should be accessible through the Growth and Skills Levy:

### **Skills England autumn engagement and the Growth and Skills Levy**

In its first report, Skills England outlined its intention to consult employers and other key organisations to provide DfE with initial views on what priority training should be accessible through the Growth and Skills Levy.

The initial engagement exercise will take place in November and December 2024 and feed into DfE's consideration of the priorities for the Growth and Skills offer. Skills England will prioritise 10 sectors in this initial engagement:

- the 8 growth-driving sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy
- construction and health and social care which are essential to the government's missions

Skills England is planning to publish its findings from this engagement process in early 2025. This publication will:

- develop the skills needs assessments set out in the first Skills England report with skill needs assessments for each of the 10 priority sectors
- feed into the ongoing Industrial Strategy planning process

Stakeholders can email evidence to DfE at: [level7.APPRENTICESHIPS@education.gov.uk](mailto:level7.APPRENTICESHIPS@education.gov.uk).

This evidence will be considered as part of the decision making process.

You can [read the full information page](#).

## **Mapping SHAPE provision in UK higher education – British Academy research**

On Wednesday 20 November, the British Academy published a project using data to visually demonstrate Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy (SHAPE) provision in the UK's higher education system, and how it is

changing. It does so through a series of maps which depict contractions and expansions in provision by a variety of different measures.

You can [view the interactive maps](#).

## **Universities revise budget bid to Scottish Government upwards as there is no scope to absorb increased costs – US press release**

On Wednesday 20 November, Universities Scotland announced they were increasing their 2025/25 budget ask of the Scottish Government.

In addition to previous asks of the Scottish Government, they now have also asked for, due to the increase in financial pressures:

- An additional 3% real terms uplift (using GDP deflator at 2.39%) to the SFC Resource Budget (a £41m uplift).
- The GDP deflator was also revised at the autumn budget which sees the cost of our original 1% real terms request on the teaching grant rise. This brings the total increased bid for funding to £49 million more than our original bid.

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

## **New analysis reveals graduates in every region earn at least a third more – UUK analysis**

On Thursday 21 November, Universities UK published new analysis of government LEO (Longitudinal Education Outcomes) data, demonstrating those who chose to attend university earn significantly more than those who didn't – irrespective of the region they are from. This data provides a new perspective on opportunities for graduates across England.

Key insights include:

- By age 31 graduates earn on average a third more than non-graduates that could have gone to university (between 32-37%).
- Graduates earn nearly twice as much as other employees in some regional sectors – earning 96% more in the accommodation sector in the West Midlands, and 85% more in financial services in the East of England.

- This money benefits graduates' wider communities, and the country as a whole - based on recent analysis, graduate skills, are estimated to have an economic impact of £95 billion nationwide in 2021-2.
- There is also a clear trend across the country – that those regions with more graduates are more productive, driving economic growth.
- The industries of the future, those that the government has set out as driving growth over the next decade, are heavily dependent on graduate skills- including the creative sector (76%), Professional and business services (74%) and life science sector (73%).

**Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE FRSE, President of Universities UK, said:**

“Those of us who work in universities witness the transformative power of higher education every day, and it is compelling to see this borne out so strongly in this analysis. But this data shows something new – universities are anchors for growth right across the UK. As well as contributing to their local area through the money they spend while studying, graduates go on to meet the needs of local industries and to earn more. This new analysis gives a clear message to government, local and mayoral authorities that thriving universities in every part of the country are central to the prospects for individuals and communities.”

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

## **People and Places: How to put R&D on the map – CaSE report**

On Thursday 21 November, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) published a report exploring the use of place as a framing to strengthen connections between the R&D system and the public across the UK. It draws on insights from CaSE's Discovery Decade programme, including extensive public opinion research and a set of pilot studies carried out across the UK in 2023-24, and from experts across the sector.

CaSE is urging organisations to collaborate and has made a series of recommendations for action. These are framed around five ways that R&D sector and local actors and governments can strengthen the connection between the public and R&D in their area:

- Build a distinct brand for R&D in your area.
- Open up R&D's doors to local communities.

- Demonstrate R&D's benefits and champion diversity among researchers and research.
- Encourage collaborations across disciplines, sectors and geographic areas.
- Prioritise building public connections with R&D when harnessing powers of devolution.

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

## **Non-Examinable Content: Student access to exam scripts – HEPI report**

On Thursday 21 November, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new report sponsored by the University of Manchester, which calls on universities to improve confidence and transparency in their assessment processes by routinely giving students to access their scripts.

Key recommendations:

- **All universities should publish a policy outlining their approach to student access to exam scripts**, with input from individual exam schools and faculties. While the policy need not be overly prescriptive and may include discretion as appropriate, it should nonetheless set out clear principles around feedback and exam access for department-level policies to follow.
- **The default position should be that students are able to view, make copies of and share their scripts**, with the minimal restrictions necessary imposed in exceptional cases where permitting full access would incur excessive cost.
- **Universities should consider adopting technologies that help automate giving candidates access to scripts**, as part of assessment modernisation efforts.

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

## **Supporting outstanding transitions from school and college to university – UPP briefing paper**

On Thursday 21 November, the University Partnerships Programme (UPP) Foundation published a new briefing paper alongside The Brilliant Club and Villiers Park Education Trust on supporting outstanding transitions from school and college to university.



The key themes the research focusses on include:

- The value of personalised and one-one support, with both projects showing the benefits of coaching in improving confidence and agency for students from under-represented groups.
- The role of personalised transition programmes, including coaching, in supporting belonging and enabling students to build their own peer networks.
- The importance of sustained support throughout a student's life cycle, from transition support starting early to supporting life beyond university.
- Improving school-university partnerships in fostering successful transition programmes

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