



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**19 – 23 January 2026**

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:

Andrea Rezman | [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

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# Parliamentary business

## Department for Education - Oral Questions

On Monday 19 January, at 2.30pm the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, and her ministerial colleagues, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

**Gareth Bacon MP (Conservative)** pressed the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, about the Government's handling of the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023*. He noted that statutory complaints mechanisms originally included in the Act had been dropped over a year ago, and cited a public letter from hundreds of academics warning that this undermined the purpose of the law and put free speech at risk in universities.

In response, the minister reiterated the Government's commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom. She emphasised that safeguarding freedom of expression is a core principle and rooted in existing law, citing the *Human Rights Act* as foundational. While she did not provide a specific timetable or detailed policy for reinstating the dropped complaints scheme, she said the Government was "considering options" to protect free speech and academic freedom going forward.

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

## Cabinet Office - Oral Questions

On Thursday 22 January, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, The Rt Hon Darren Jones MP (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

**Matt Rodda MP (Labour)** asked what steps the Government is taking to increase education and training opportunities for young people through the **Erasmus+ programme**. Rodda highlighted the importance of international exchange and mobility for students, apprentices, and young professionals as a means of enhancing skills, deepening cultural understanding, and strengthening links between UK universities and their European counterparts.

In reply, the minister said the Government has negotiated associate membership of the Erasmus+ programme from 2027, which he described as a significant expansion of opportunities for learning, study, training, and volunteering abroad. He noted that this could benefit more than 100,000 young people from diverse backgrounds,

including those in further education, higher education, and business sectors. Ward emphasised that the scheme is part of the Government's effort to build a "strong new relationship with the EU" that serves the UK's national interest.

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

# Forthcoming Business

## Department for Work and Pensions - Oral Questions

On Monday 26 January, at 2.30pm the Secretary of Department for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, and his ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant questions include:

- **Peter Swallow (Labour):** What steps his Department is taking to help ensure that post-16 education provides the necessary skills to support the economy

You [can watch the session](#).

## Distribution of education funding - HoC Adjournment Debate

On Wednesday 28 January, there will be a House of Commons debate on “Distribution of education funding” tabled in by Pippa Heylings (Liberal Democrat).

You [can watch the session](#).

# Written questions and statements

## Home Office: Visas: Overseas Students

**Blake Stephenson (Conservative):** (UIN104255) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what proportion of higher education providers require Student Visa applicants to prove their knowledge of English before issuing a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies.

**Mike Tapp:** To make a successful Student visa application, all international students must meet the relevant English Language requirement that applies to their circumstances, in line with Appendix Student of the Immigration Rules. The methods that a Student may rely on to meet their English Language requirement are outlined in Appendix English Language of the Immigration Rules. Whilst most acceptable methods require submission of evidence with the application, where the student is studying a course at degree level or above at a Higher Education Provider with a track record of compliance, the sponsor can make a self assessment. The Home Office does not record data on which methods students have relied on for the purposes of meeting the English Language requirements in a manner that enables comparative figures to be produced.

All student sponsors have a duty to assess that each student's English language ability is of the required level as specified in Appendix Student before they issue a CAS to the student. Sponsors are required to state the evidence used to assess the student's English language ability on the CAS.

Source

## Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme: Finance

**Blake Stephenson (Conservative):** (UIN102073) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how rejoining the Erasmus scheme will be funded.

**Josh MacAlister:** The department has agreed terms with the European Commission that represent a fair balance between the UK's contribution and the benefits the programme offers, which paved the way for UK participation.

We have agreed a 30% discount compared to the default terms in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement as well as a review of the UK's participation in the programme ten months after our association, including data concerning demand for

funding in the UK. Any continued UK participation in Erasmus+ under the next Multiannual Financial Framework will be informed by our experience of association in 2027.

Erasmus+ costs will be funded above the department's Spending Review settlement and scored in the usual way at the next fiscal event.

[Source](#)

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**David Chadwick (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN102292) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of Plan 2 student loan borrowers who will begin making repayments as a result of the freeze to the Plan 2 repayment threshold.

**Josh MacAlister:** The department currently forecasts around 240,000 additional English Plan 2 loans (4.8% of all English Plan 2 loans for which borrowers are eligible to make repayments) will see a repayment in financial year 2030/31 given the announced threshold freeze when compared to a scenario with inflationary increases to thresholds. These are current estimates and are subject to change given updates to economic forecasts and other key forecast inputs.

The department will release an equalities impact assessment, including the impact on the number of borrowers forecast to make obligatory repayments, alongside other borrower impacts.

[Source](#)

## Written Answer: Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

**Blake Stephenson (Conservative):** (UIN101958) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the press release entitled Young people from all backgrounds to get opportunity to study abroad as UK-EU deal unlocks Erasmus+, published on 17 December 2025, if she will make an estimate of the cost of a) establishing and b) operating the new national agency.

**Josh MacAlister:** In order for the UK to participate in Erasmus+, EU regulations require the UK to establish a National Agency separate to any existing government department to manage the indirect management actions of the programme. The European Commission entrusts the distribution of indirect management funding to



the National Agency to bring Erasmus+ as close as possible to its beneficiaries. National Agencies promote and implement the Erasmus+ Programme at the national level and are the link between the European Commission and participating organisations at local, regional, and national levels.

A National Agency will be appointed in due course to deliver Erasmus+ for the UK.

Grouped Questions: 101957

Source

## **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Universities: Research**

**Freddie Van Mierlo (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN103083) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to help ensure that UK universities remain competitive in attracting global research talent.

**Kanishka Narayan:** To keep our world-leading universities globally competitive, the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out a joint DfE–DSIT vision for a financially sustainable higher education sector that delivers better value for students, supports local growth, and meets labour market needs. This includes record DSIT R&D investment of £58.5 billion between 2026/27 and 2029/30.

The UK's immigration offer attracts research talent through visa routes such as the fast-track Global Talent visa, complemented by funding via UKRI and National Academies fellowships and professorships, our association to Horizon Europe, and the Global Talent Fund to retain world-class researchers.

UKRI allows visa costs, including the Immigration Health Surcharge, to be claimed on grants, and many other organisations also allow these costs on their grants. Visa costs are also allowable costs for researchers on Horizon Europe grants.

Source

## **Department for Education: Students: Childcare**

**Anneliese Dodds (Labour):** (UIN103835) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number and percentage of a) undergraduate and b) postgraduate students who are parents with caring responsibilities.

**Josh MacAlister (Labour):** The Higher Education Statistics Agency is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK higher education (HE) sector. This data is shared with the department and includes a wide range of information on students studying at UK HE providers.

However, information on students who are parents with caring responsibilities is not collected, and therefore numbers and percentages of students in this position cannot be identified by the department.

Source

## Department for Education: Postgraduate Education: Childcare

**Anneliese Dodds (Labour):** (UIN103837) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the percentage of doctoral loans used by students to cover the costs of childcare.

**Josh MacAlister:** Doctoral loans are intended to contribute to the cost of study, rather than to specifically cover tuition fees or livings costs, which provides flexibility to the student. The department does not hold any information on the proportion of doctoral loan funding that is spent on childcare.

Source

## Department for Education: Students: Childcare

**Sarah Pochin (Reform UK):** (UIN104115) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of excluding full-time higher-education student households from childcare support schemes when mandatory placements prevent parents from working on those households.

**Josh MacAlister:** Students with children who are undertaking work placement years with private employers do not qualify for the full-rate partially means-tested loans for living costs or means-tested dependants' grants (Childcare Grant or Parents' Learning Allowance). They only qualify for a reduced rate loan for living costs from Student Finance England. The government expects private employers who benefit from students' work to provide support for students during work placements rather than the taxpayer

The government makes an exception for many work placements in the public sector by making available the full-rate partially means-tested loan for living costs and

dependants grants to encourage students to gain work experience in these areas. This ensures that low-income students with children undertaking working placements in the public sector receive targeted support through the student support system.

Public sector work placements include unpaid service with a hospital, with a local authority in relation to the care of children and young persons, health and welfare, with the prison and probation service, and with either House of Parliament. They also include unpaid research at a UK or overseas institution.

Source

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**Alex Sobel (Labour):** (UIN907330) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of raising the minimum income threshold for student maintenance loans in line with inflation.

**Josh MacAlister:** This government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to attend higher education. We are future proofing our maintenance loan offer by increasing maintenance loans in line with forecast inflation every academic year from 2026/27 onwards, and making all care leavers automatically eligible for the maximum maintenance loan regardless of their income from 2026/27.

We are also introducing new targeted maintenance grants from the 2028/29 academic year, which will provide disadvantaged students with up to £1,000 extra per year, on top of existing maintenance loans, increasing cash in student's pockets, without increasing their debt.

We need to ensure that student funding system is financially sustainable. Around £20.7 billion of student loans administered by the Student Loans Company were issued in the 2024/25 financial year, of which £9.1 billion of maintenance loans were issued to undergraduate students.

The current system targets the highest levels of support at students with household incomes of £25,000 or less, who need it most.

Source

## Department for Education: Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

**Gareth Bacon (Conservative):** (UIN907332) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent progress her Department has made on implementing the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

**Josh MacAlister:** On 28 April, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, signed commencement regulations, bringing the following provisions into force on 1 August 2025:

- Duties on higher education (HE) providers (and their constituent institutions) to take reasonably practicable steps to secure freedom of speech within the law, to put in place a code of practice on freedom of speech and academic freedom, and to promote freedom of speech.
- The ban on non-disclosure agreements for staff and students at HE providers in cases of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.
- The duties on the Office for Students (OfS) to promote freedom of speech and the power to identify good practice and advise HE providers on it.

We are seeking a suitable legislative vehicle to amend and repeal other elements of the Act in due course, including in relation to the complaints scheme.

In the meantime, the OfS published its regulatory guidance on free speech on 19 June 2025. The OfS Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom continues to work with the sector to offer advice and share best practice, so providers themselves are more effectively protecting free speech and academic freedom.

[Source](#)

## Department for Education: Arts: Higher Education

**Freddie Van Mierlo (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN104539) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposed changes to higher education funding on creative arts courses, and the potential consequences for the creative industries.

**Josh MacAlister:** The government is committed to supporting creative arts subjects in higher education and acknowledges the importance of this provision to the creative

industries. These subjects will benefit from further increases in tuition fee limits in line with forecast inflation that we have announced for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 academic years.

For this academic year, we have maintained the funding at £57 million for the 20 small and specialist providers previously identified by the Office for Students as world leading. Of these providers, 13 are focused on creative arts. These 20 providers will retain their world leading status for 2026/27.

Decisions around funding through the Strategic Priorities Grant for 2026/27 have not yet been made. We will prioritise subjects that are essential to delivery of our Plan for Growth, and the Industrial Strategy, and we will issue guidance to the OfS setting out our funding priorities for 2026/27 in due course.

Source

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**David Chadwick (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN102294) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of Plan 2 student loan borrowers who will repay at the higher interest threshold as a result of the freeze to the Plan 2 repayment threshold.

**Josh MacAlister:** Freezing the Plan 2 repayment and interest rate thresholds for English borrowers means the upper threshold, used for calculating the variable portion of Plan 2 interest rates, will be lower than previously projected. This means more borrowers will be charged the highest rate of interest but only where their income increases.

The department does not break down estimates of loan borrower numbers by the rate of interest paid.

## Delivering the Industrial Strategy and the Global Talent Taskforce – Ministerial statement

On 20 January, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade Blair McDougall published a written statement setting out the Government's next phase of **the Industrial Strategy** with what they describe as a "major package to strengthen the United Kingdom's position as a world-leading destination for exceptional international talent"

Statement below:

## “Delivering the Industrial Strategy

We are moving further and faster to realise the vision set out in the Industrial Strategy to increase business investment in our highest potential sectors and create high quality jobs across the UK. In a world where geopolitics is not something that happens somewhere else, and what happens across the world shapes the cost of energy, the price of food, the security of jobs, delivering this strategy is essential not just to raise living standards, but also to support national security and sovereignty.

Today we are announcing a package of measures to support scale-ups, accelerate battery innovation, and reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens. This builds on the ‘Entrepreneurship in the UK’ prospectus published at Budget, which committed to change how government works with founders to back firms to start, scale and stay in the UK. Together, these actions mark a coordinated approach to ensure UK businesses feel an immediate positive impact, unlocking investment and supporting innovation to boost economic growth.

Today’s announcement follows last week’s publication of the latest Quarterly Update on delivery of the Industrial Strategy. This was published alongside the Industrial Strategy Advisory Council’s (ISAC) 2026 mandate letter, which commissions the Council to provide impactful advice and analysis on key delivery priorities. We have also announced three new members to the ISAC, Amelia Gould, Keith Anderson and Dana Strong, to broaden the Council's insight across UK industry.

In today’s global economy, we must use every tool of government – domestic and international – to fight for the interests of working people, as well as fighting for British interests abroad.

## BBB

The British Business Bank will be making a £25 million investment into Kraken Technologies as part of Kraken’s \$1 billion demerger from Octopus Energy Group, the Bank’s largest direct investment to date; and two £50 million scale-up fund investments into: Life Sciences via Epidarex Capital; and deep tech via IQ Capital. The last quarter has seen a step change in the activity of the British Business Bank, committing or deploying £1.03bn in the last quarter.

## UK Export Finance

So far this financial year, UK Export Finance has provided over £9bn of support to help UK businesses grow, invest and secure new contracts overseas. We have introduced legislation to Parliament which will significantly expand UK Export Finance's firepower from the £80 billion it has today, so UKEF can back more British firms to seize opportunities in fast-growing international markets. Later this month,

the Secretary of State will convene major high-street banks to unlock additional finance for high-growth exporters.

#### Battery Innovation Programme

The Government is making its largest ever investment in UK battery Research and Development, with £180 million of Battery Innovation Programme funding going towards supporting UK SMEs to: secure private capital; accelerate the development of high-risk, high-reward technologies; and commercialise cutting-edge, home-grown battery innovation here in the UK, reducing exposure to volatile global supply chains.

#### Regulation package

Building on the Government's Regulation Action Plan progress update in October, the Secretary of State and the Chancellor have commissioned all departments to set out plans by March to meet the 25 per cent administrative burden reduction target, and the Government will update on further progress towards the target in due course.

The Government will also:

- Launch deep dives working with industry and trade unions on health and safety regulation and farming and agritech regulation, building on the approach and lessons of the Fingleton review;
- Launch the competition consultation Refining our Competition Regime, delivering on the commitment in the Regulation Action Plan. This will include proposals to deliver increased pace, predictability, proportionality and improved processes across the UK's competition regime, such as amending the decision-making model in mergers and markets investigations;
- Not proceed with the proposed Audit Bill, avoiding further business burdens; and
- Bring forward the consultation on modernising corporate reporting to early 2026, expanded to include virtual Annual General Meetings.

The Business Secretary and the Chancellor will also ask Ministers to develop and set outcome-focused growth goals for key watchdogs that still lack clarity from government on what growth means for them.

The Industrial Strategy was never about a single publication at a single point in time. These measures go further and faster, building on existing commitments to ensure we succeed in ushering in ten years of stability, growth and investment - the decade of national renewal, even as global pressures evolve.

#### Talent Package

We have seen competition for top talent around the globe intensify – particularly in research and technology. This is an opportunity for the UK to issue a clear and confident signal: that we welcome the world’s best minds to come help us drive our Industrial Strategy and wider growth mission, and that they will find the environment, support and opportunities they need to thrive here.

This Government knows that attracting top international talent is a catalyst for creating British jobs, boosting investment, and increasing productivity. We are continuously working to better welcome top researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs to the UK, ensuring we respond swiftly to changes in global mobility trends.

Today’s announcement follows the launch of the Global Talent Taskforce, a new concierge service to support top talent to lay down roots in the UK; and DSIT’s £54m Global Talent Fund, which sits as part of a wider £5bn HMG offer on research talent, and which has already secured the relocation of top researchers and their teams to work in our Industrial Strategy priority areas.

The 2025 Immigration White Paper set out plans to improve and expand key visa routes for talent, making it easier to move to the UK for exceptional researchers, entrepreneurs and future leaders.

And, in her 2025 Autumn budget, the Chancellor also expanded the Enterprise Management Incentives scheme (EMI), so scale-ups can offer more competitive equity, and increased the Venture Capital Trust (VCT) and Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) investment limits to help high-growth companies raise more capital as they scale.

Today’s package continues to build on this work with a series of targeted and practical measures designed to enhance the UK’s offer to exceptional talent. We are:

- Doubling the resourcing of our Global Talent Taskforce, including bringing in specialist private sector head-hunting expertise and emboldening our concierge offer to the world’s elite talent, starting with a dedicated focus on international AI talent.
- Reimbursing visa fees in a limited and targeted manner for those with skills that will further our deep tech, innovation and R&D aspirations, including in AI, Quantum and Semi-conductors.
- Expanding the Global Talent visa to make it simpler and easier for those with a relevant academic or research appointment and those in industry to get their visa ensuring the UK can access the talent it needs, including those working in cutting edge industries.



- Launching a referral route to fast-track sponsorship licences for high growth and high potential firms supported by the Global Talent Taskforce or the Office for Investment.
- Providing new government-funded scholarships for International Mathematical Olympiad gold medal winners.

We are also adding a new talent pathway on [business.gov.uk](https://business.gov.uk) to provide a single, clear “shop window” for exceptional global talent considering relocating to our country.

This Government remains committed to exploring how we can best attract and retain the world’s top talent. By welcoming exceptional individuals through these initiatives, the UK is powering research and innovation that creates jobs, builds our science capabilities, attracts investment, and strengthens our economy for the long term. These initiatives form part of our Industrial Strategy and broader growth mission to strengthen the UK’s global competitiveness, and strengthen cutting-edge industries – now, and for the future.”

# Sector news

## UCEA publishes 'Position paper' calling for a sustainable approach to HE pension provision

UCEA has published a Position Paper: Financial Stability in Higher Education: Enabling a Sustainable Approach to Pension Provision, arguing that the excessive employer contribution rates paid by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) into TPS are exacerbating the sector's current financial pressures. The mandated use of TPS, which the paper argues offers poor value for money for HEIs, increases the risk of institutional failure and closure.

The paper also argues that:

- **Post-92 HEIs face a competitive disadvantage because of this mandated TPS participation\***. UCEA analysis of HEIs in the same geographic area shows that post-92 institutions saw the monetary cost of their TPS (E&W) contributions increase by c.15% in the year to 31 July 2025, while their local pre-92 HEI saw a reduction in the monetary cost of their USS contributions of c.12%.
- **Only the HE sector is suffering the full consequences of TPS costs**. FE colleges and schools in England and Wales receive increased funding through departmental budgets to specifically offset the additional costs of TPS. Independent schools, which are not mandated to offer TPS also have flexibility not to offer it to new joiners. Even this form of flexibility is not available to HEIs.
- **The cost of TPS is expensive for staff**. A significant proportion of TPS (E&W) members in HE opt-out and, therefore, have no pension provision, no-ill health benefits and no life cover. Current TPS opt out rates for HEIs generally range from 10 to 15%, although some HEIs have seen opt out rates higher than this in recent years.

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

## The UK's International Education Strategy 2026

This strategy sets out the government's plans to place the UK's world-class education system, from early years to schools, colleges and higher education, at the heart of the UK's global engagement. It sets out the UK's ambitions to:

- increase the UK's international standing through education and make UK the global partner of choice at every stage of learning

- sustainably recruit high-quality international higher education students from a diverse range of countries
- collectively grow education exports to £40 billion per year by 2030

The strategy is a joint commitment across government, co-owned by the Department for Education, the Department for Business and Trade, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

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

## **Bold new strategy will grow education exports to £40bn a year by 2030, supporting UK jobs and investment.**

The UK government published a new International Education Strategy outlining its approach to supporting UK education providers in growing their global reach and economic impact. The strategy is jointly owned by the Department for Education, the Department for Business and Trade, and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and replaces the previous strategy first published in 2019.

### **Core ambitions:**

The strategy sets out three overarching ambitions:

1. **Increasing the UK's international standing through education** - positioning the UK as a preferred global partner across all stages of learning.
2. **Sustainable recruitment of international students** - continuing to attract high-quality international students from a range of countries, with an emphasis on student experience and outcomes rather than fixed numerical targets.
3. **Growing education exports** - collectively increasing the annual value of UK education exports to £40 billion by 2030.

The strategy frames these ambitions as part of the government's *Plan for Change*, where expanding global engagement through education is linked to economic growth, jobs and investment.

The strategy 2026 **does not set numerical targets for international student recruitment in the UK**. Previous ambitions, such as the aim to grow international student numbers, have been replaced with language emphasising “sustainable recruitment” and strong quality standards.

In response, Professor Malcolm Press CBE, President of Universities UK said:

“ Universities UK warmly welcomes the UK Government's new International Education Strategy.

It signals a renewed commitment to fostering the global reach, reputation and impact of our universities, and recognises the huge benefits this delivers to our global partners and to communities across the whole of the UK.

The new strategy provides a clear framework for growth and partnership that will benefit learners, the economy, and the UK's international standing.

Around 620,000 students are already registered with UK universities overseas, with campuses and distance learning across nearly 200 countries and territories.

This comes alongside new government action to ensure those coming here to study are genuine students, and education providers take their responsibilities seriously.

Universities will be subject to toughened compliance standards and those which fail to meet them will face action, including recruitment caps and licence revocation.

Net migration is now at its lowest level in half a decade, having already fallen by more than two-thirds under this government after it exploded to nearly one million under the last government.

The strategy marks a step up in ambition for UK skills and technical education, ensuring the UK does not stand still as global demand for high-quality training accelerates. Work with education providers and businesses will develop action plans to increase the value of UK education exports.

By backing colleges to expand overseas and build international partnerships, the Government is committed to being a forerunner in the global skills market, turning UK expertise into long-term growth, jobs and influence at home.

The strategy strengthens opportunities for UK students to study, work and volunteer abroad, with a sixth year of the Turing Scheme confirmed to support international placements. It comes as the Government has also announced the UK will join the Erasmus+ programme in 2027.”

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

## **Turing Scheme: international placements, 2026 to 2027**

The UK government published updated guidance on the Turing Scheme for international placements in the 2026–2027 academic year on 20 January 2026. The guidance sets out how the scheme will support education providers in the UK and British Overseas Territories to secure funding to help their students and apprentices take up study, work or training placements abroad.

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

## **Correspondence from Secretary of State for Department for Science, Innovation and Technology**

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology published correspondence with the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, following her evidence session earlier in December. The letter responds to questions raised by Dame Chi Onwurah (Chair) and provides further detail and clarification on key points the Committee had asked about.

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

## **UK Research and Innovation R&D strategy for the creative and cultural economy – UKRI**

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has published a new R&D Strategy for the Creative and Cultural Economy setting out how research and innovation will support growth in the UK's creative industries. The strategy provides a high-level framework for future investment, with a more detailed delivery plan to follow.

The strategy emphasises the role of universities and research organisations in driving innovation across creative sectors such as film, music, design and digital media. It highlights the importance of translating academic research into commercial and societal impact, including through industry partnerships, spin-outs and interdisciplinary collaboration between creative disciplines and emerging technologies such as AI and immersive media.

A strong focus is placed on regional innovation, with universities positioned as anchors for local creative clusters across the UK, as well as on developing a skilled and

diverse workforce through postgraduate training and research. The strategy also points to the need for supportive intellectual property and data frameworks, improved evidence on what drives growth, and stronger international research collaboration.

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

## **UCAS expands fee waiver to care leavers after tens of thousands on free school meals benefit from first scheme**

UCAS has announced it is expanding its application fee waiver to cover care leavers up to age 26 across the UK from the 2027 cycle, in a bid to encourage more to apply to university or college.

The latest [figures from the Department for Education](#) show just 13% of care leavers progressed to higher education (HE) by age 19 by 2023-24 compared to the progression rate for all other pupils which was more than three times higher at 46%.

Care leavers can face specific challenges when considering and deciding on their options, including a lack of family or financial support. By waiving the fee, UCAS aims to make it easier for more care leavers to take that next step and apply to higher education. Sharing their information earlier will also mean universities and colleges can offer them tailored support throughout the application process and before they start their course.

This announcement builds on the introduction of UCAS' fee waiver for those in receipt of free school meals (FSM) which supported more than 40,000 students who applied last academic year to start university or college in autumn 2025.

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

## **UCAS Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2025**

UCAS published its **2025 Undergraduate End of Cycle Data Resources**, which provide detailed statistics on applicants and acceptances for full-time undergraduate courses in the UK through the 2025 admissions cycle. These data cover the number of applications and accepted offers across different student characteristics (such as age, domicile and demographics) and include **sector-level dashboards by parliamentary constituencies**. Provider-level datasets are scheduled for publication in January 2026.

You can read the full resource.