



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

2 – 6 December 2024

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

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Parliamentary business

Migration and Border Security – HoC ministerial statement

On Monday 2 December, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, delivered a ministerial statement on migration and border security in the House of Commons.

In her statement, Yvette Cooper MP said the government is ‘clear that net migration must come down’ and it is continuing with visa controls introduced by the previous government, citing restrictions on dependent visas for students, and maintaining ‘we must go further to restore order and credibility to the system’.

Shadow Home Secretary, Rt Hon Chris Philp MP, pointed out that student dependent visas are down by 84% and student visas down by 19% due to the policies of the previous government.

Lisa Smart MP (Liberal Democrat) said the country needs a migration system ‘that sees our university sector as a jewel in the crown, welcoming students from overseas, and as a way of using the UK’s soft power for good’.

Dr Scott Arthur MP (Labour) criticised the Shadow Home Secretary for ‘describ[ing] the drop in the number of students coming to the UK as something to be celebrated’.

Nigel Farage MP (Reform) highlighted that 69% of asylum claimants did not come into the country on small boats and asked the Home Secretary how these asylum seekers were entering into the country, alluding to student visas as a potential explanation.

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

Work of the Department for Science Innovation and Technology – HoC SIT Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 3 December, the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee heard oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, and Sarah Munby, Permanent Secretary of DSIT.

Chair of the SIT Committee, Chi Onwurah MP (Labour), asked what the ambitions were for the DSIT. The Secretary of State said it was his ambition that DSIT could contribute meaningfully to high-growth areas, which would have an impact on the future of the country and on individuals to achieve their potential. There was nothing inevitable about technology achieving these things; the government had agency in the way technology, science and research and development (R&D) impacted society, and it was his ambition to ensure every person from every background and every part of the country benefitted equally from it.

Chi Onwurah MP asked what the Committee should hold him to account for in six months. The Secretary of State said he should be held to account for the focus on R&D and science, the national missions, and priorities of the country. There was an outstanding scientific community; the work of the UKRI and all funding bodies was exemplary. The Prime Minister would set out priorities in a speech later this week. The Industrial Strategy Council (ISC) had been established and would set out priorities. He wanted to ensure the R&D community played a part in delivery.

Chi Onwurah MP said some funding had come with other departments into DSIT. She asked what trade-offs DSIT anticipated as part of the upcoming Spending Review. The Secretary of State said he did not expect there to be trade-offs. DSIT was the foundation for all the government missions. This government recognised the value of R&D, innovation, life sciences and technology sectors, which were all high-growth sectors and would create great jobs. He did not see trade-offs but saw greater cooperation between DSIT and front-line public services. Chi Onwurah MP said the endorsement for investment in DSIT was welcome.

George Freeman MP (Conservative) asked whether DSIT was focused on the digital piece but not on broader exploitation of science research, technology, and innovation to drive growth (such as semi-conductors, advanced manufacturing, fusion, and meteorology). He asked how this worked organisationally. He asked what the private sector investment figures were by sector, place, and department. He also asked about clusters for measuring and harnessing R&D around the country. The Secretary of State said growth was a priority for every government department. There was a more integrated workflow between departments. DSIT's direct influence on growth had a few aspects. Firstly, there were formal links to the industrial strategy and the seven priorities set out by Department for Business and Trade (DBT). DSIT led on two; bioscience and digital technology, and there would be a direct link into the strategy.

The Secretary of State said on clusters, DSIT recognised areas and partnerships which added up to more than a sum of their parts. There were areas in the scientific and research community which did this. He had spoken to the university sector to understand ways in which DSIT could have greater leadership from universities to deliver greater clusters. Leadership needed a clarity of vision and had to be different for each area.

George Freeman MP asked whether DSIT or DBT were looking at the £20 billion R&D figure and considering whether there was good private sector investment from it. Sarah Munby said it was a DSIT responsibility in partnership with DBT and other sector-owning departments across government, for example DEFRA for farming.

Chi Onwurah MP said this was an important point. The Committee would hold DSIT to account for the interface between science (£20.4 billion budget) and the business, industry, and growth. George Freeman MP said it was important to be able to see which areas were unlocking private money and which were not. Sarah Munby said DSIT had been working with ONS on a way to cut R&D data which was intelligible by sector.

Kit Malthouse MP (Conservative) said leveraging private sector money was critical. Some of it was attracted by risk-sharing out of the budget and it operated in the wider fiscal environment. He asked whether the post-budget environment was conducive to the risk-taking required in life sciences. The Secretary of State said DSIT was successful already - as per the Investment Summit - in unlocking additional investment into the economy regarding digital infrastructure. There was an ambition to move to 10-year funding, in certain circumstances. This was a key way to unlock greater private sector investment. DSIT was working on the detail on where this could be the most effectively deployed but were open minded. The key metric was using it in circumstances where the stability of the 10-year funding would unlock private sector funding, such as an aerospace sector where the 'up to 10-year funding' was used in certain circumstances and the return it unlocked from private sector investment was almost double other sectors. It was a key motivation to move in that direction.

The Secretary of State said the budget was the first step forwards on stabilisation of university finances, which was the majority of funding which went through DSIT R&D budget. It was not possible to achieve what was needed to offer security. The uplift would directly benefit, as well as the university fee increase. The budget affected organisations in different ways. DSIT was considering this. Ruthless prioritisation was needed to ensure delivery in the biggest potential sectors and research programmes which would have the most impact.

Kit Malthouse MP asked whether it was the intention to put more money into areas which were impacted by national insurance. The Secretary of State said DSIT would invest in areas which had the most impact in research potential. Government supported scientific organisations in different ways. As the Chancellor said, not every problem could be solved in one go but in key areas, DSIT was investing where it was possible to unlock private sector investment using R&D budgets.

Adam Thompson MP (Labour) asked how the 10-year funding settlement might affect research staff contracts, particularly productivity given the issues of short-term

contracts, which cause researchers to spend a lot of time looking for the next contract. The Secretary of State said he was aware that of a 3-year contract, the first year was spent getting set up, the 2nd doing the project and the last 18 months was driven by insecurity over what happened next. It was not ideal in certain circumstances to get the right talent and for the talent to feel rooted and secure and it was not ideal for private sector investment. He welcomed insight into areas which could maximise potential for 10-year funding. He had higher expectations because of the potential for leveraging talent and potential. Chi Onwurah MP said the Crick Institute had said to the Committee how welcomed the 10-year funding would be. It would translate into greater security for early career researchers. The Secretary of State said he hoped so.

Emily Darlington MP (Labour) said she welcomed the 10-year R&D settlement. It was exciting for efficiency and scientific discovery. DSIT was essential for every mission, and it had a cross-government role on R&D. She asked how DSIT was able to influence the R&D spend in other departments and asked how DSIT could flex the departmental spend to support mission delivery. The Secretary of State said there was a lot more the government had to do to deliver for the country. There were five missions and five mission boards, and he sat on three of them. In the last budget, an R&D mission fund was created with £25 million. He believed science and technology was recognised across government departments but there were singular challenges faced by the five missions. With DSIT's relationships, DSIT could take on some of the challenges. This was the purpose of the fund.

Emily Darlington MP asked about the Official Development Assistance programme spend, to which DSIT was allocated a part. She asked what the priorities were and how it would develop the country's global role in science. The Secretary of State said DSIT contributed to the global International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF) and would maintain support. He had not yet decided whether it would be adjusted based on global trends and government priorities but sought to leverage the best of the British scientific community. Sarah Munby said the priorities would be refreshed formally as part of the upcoming Spending Review process.

Dr Lauren Sullivan MP (Labour) asked how the skills gaps were being identified and how younger people were being inspired to choose science with practical skills. The Secretary of State said DSIT worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE), who were establishing Skills England. DfE were undertaking the largest review of secondary education national curriculum for a generation. DSIT was integral to these reviews and were feeding in as much as possible. DSIT wanted to ensure the voice of science was heard loud and clear. Chi Onwurah MP said the Committee would follow closely how the government could equip everybody with the skills needed.

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

Work by the Department of Education and the Foreign Development and Commonwealth Office to promote the attractiveness of higher education sector internationally – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 4 December, there was a House of Lords oral question on the work by the Department of Education and the Foreign Development and Commonwealth Office to promote the attractiveness of higher education sector internationally. This question was asked by Lord Blunkett (Labour).

Minister for Skills, Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern, emphasised the government's commitment to 'maintaining our world-leading higher education sector and promoting its attractiveness internationally'. She pointed to the Secretary of State's first speech setting out the 'valuable contribution that international students make to our universities, communities and country'. She said they are also working with FCDO and DBT on a new international education strategy.

Lord Blunkett asked Minister Smith if she would persuade the Home Office to remove international students from net migration statistics, given they 'pay very large sums of money to receive a service and bring enormous amounts of funding and cultural improvement to our country'.

Minister Smith agreed that international students 'enrich our campuses and communities, form lifelong friendships, become global ambassadors and contribute to the economic benefits of this country' and that is why 'they will always be welcome'. She said that the ONS is independent in producing statistics, but she encourages people to look at the detailed breakdowns of migration statistics to see the different elements of migration.

Baroness Coussins (Crossbench) pointed to it being 'much harder for universities to form international partnerships' as the Turing scheme is not reciprocal. She asked whether the government has 'assessed the impact of that on the sustainability and reputation of our higher education sector'. Minister Smith highlighted other forms of support for international partnerships in research, teaching and co-operation through DSIT. She also spoke of the value of transnational education and said these are all areas that the international education strategy will look at.

Shadow Education Minister, Baroness Barran, asked about the OfS' announcement that it was suspending new registrations and said this sends a terrible message to students in the UK and abroad and risks undermining financial sustainability. Minister Smith disagreed, saying it showed her government was determined to 'put

universities on a firmer financial footing'. She said the OfS' refocus on financial sustainability and the government's tuition fee increase both demonstrated this government was committed to 'create a secure future for our world-leading universities'.

Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat) asked what level of support the sector is expected to get from international students, to ensure accessibility for domestic students. Minister Smith said 'there is not a lose/lose here' and explained that international students' contributions help subsidise the cost of domestic students and universities' research capacity.

Viscount Hanworth (Labour) asked about cuts to universities' staff, claiming this makes the sector less attractive to international students as well as deterring people from becoming academics. Minister Smith said she recognises the financial strain universities are under and reiterated the government's commitment to making the sector more financially sustainable so international students and academic staff are not deterred.

Lord Patel (Crossbench) highlighted that 43,000 of 113,000 PhD students in the UK are international students and called for more stability in migration policy for students and post-docs as they will 'grow our economy and innovate'. Minister Smith agreed that it is important the graduate route is protected, which allows PhD graduates to stay in the UK for 3 years after graduation.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) also expressed shock at the OfS' announcement it was suspending applications to the register, saying it sends a 'terrible message to investors around the world and will deter institutions that want to follow trailblazers ... in bringing innovation and choice to our higher education system'. He asked whether this duty should be delegated back to the Quality Assurance Agency so it is fulfilled. Minister Smith reiterated that the refocus on financial sustainability is necessary to ensure the health of the sector, but she will take his points on board.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Affiliated) asked the Minister to reinstate the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act as international students from less democratic countries are now finding UK campuses 'as censorious as at home'. She also asked for reassurance that the legislation 'was not withdrawn to appease repressive regimes'. Minister Smith assured Baroness Fox this is not the case and explained that the freedom of speech legislation 'would have been overly burdensome on universities and would potentially have had unintended consequences'. She said the government had engaged with stakeholders and would lay out the next steps soon.

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

Financial sustainability of higher education – Westminster Hall debate

On Thursday 5 December, Adam Thompson MP (Labour) led a debate in Westminster Hall on the financial sustainability of higher education.

Adam Thompson MP opened the debate by highlighting the contributions of universities to local and national economic growth and the acute financial pressures facing the sector, across all four nations of the UK, citing the real terms decline in the value of the tuition fee in England and the Office for Students' recent evaluation of the sector's financial sustainability. He called for a concerted and strategic effort by universities and the Government to secure the long-term financial sustainability of universities.

He went on to describe the main financial risks facing universities, including reductions in numbers of international students, increased expenditure, and reduction in the growth rate of domestic students. He cited evidence which shows that the biggest influence on choice of study destination for prospective international students is post-study work opportunities and asked if the Government will commit to maintaining the Graduate route on its current terms for the duration of the parliament? He also pointed to the significant financial burden placed on institutions that are members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme. He asked if Ministers in the Department for Education (DfE) would commit to working with Ministers in His Majesty's Treasury to explore how universities can be provided with flexibility to allow consideration of alternative pension pots? He described research funding as structurally unsustainable and asked for government's view on taking a long-term approach to this. He welcomed the Government's announcement on 4 November to increase maintenance support for students in England and called on the Government to go further by reintroducing maintenance grants for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and to indicate a timeline for this.

He outlined the impact of the financial challenges facing universities and the steps they are taking to become more efficient, citing Universities UK's transformation and efficiency taskforce as an example of such efforts. He went on to outline the steps needed to support universities as highlighted in UUK's report 'Opportunity, growth and partnership: a blueprint for change'.

Rachel Hopkins MP (Labour) described the important role that her local institution - the University of Bedfordshire plays in widening access and opportunities for young people from less advantaged backgrounds, who are often the first in their family to go to university. She also described it as a major employer and community stakeholder in Luton, engaging with diverse communities and supporting key

regeneration projects in the town. She said that the university is experiencing significant issues due to changes introduced by the previous Government, which includes restrictions to student visas. She asked if the Minister would confirm whether her department has done any impact assessment to establish whether that policy change has been positive for higher education settings.

Max Wilkinson MP (Liberal Democrat) responded on behalf of the Liberal Democrats by stating that the previous Government had 'broken the sector's finances' and made the tuition fee system unfair. He said the Liberal Democrats could not support raising fees at this stage without substantial reforms. The right thing to do would be to undertake a full review of finances in the sector to consider ways to improve access to, and participation in higher education as well as the quality of courses, because 'value for money for students remains extremely important'. He said the reintroduction of maintenance grants is a crucial step to removing barriers to entry for new students. On the issue of international students, he noted that his local institution - the University of Gloucestershire - has reported reductions for both the January and autumn intakes, resulting in a £4 million hit to its income. As a result, the university is closing some courses and consolidating others, thereby reducing student choice. He said the university has reported that its agents are receiving feedback from prospective students who feel they are 'not quite so wanted in the UK' as they once were, so they are opting to study in other countries such as Australia, America, and Canada, where they feel more welcome.

Responding on behalf of the opposition, Neil O'Brien MP focussed his remarks on teaching, while also noting that the previous Government put a 'huge amount more money into research', growing Government spending on it from £9.8 billion in 2011 to £16.1 billion, and increasing research and development as a share of the economy. He acknowledged that a number of institutions are 'financially stressed' and thinking hard about their future and how they operate. He noted positively that participation in higher education has increased dramatically, especially from the most disadvantaged groups. However, he raised concerns about the growing financial burden on graduates. He also cited evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies that around 30% of people do not benefit from going to university and the need for a national conversation on where funding for higher education should be best directed. He went on to ask the Government to address the Office for Students' decision to stop accrediting new institutions.

Responding for the Government, Janet Daby MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, spoke about the OfS' work on the sector's financial stability. She noted the Government's engagement with the OfS, higher education representative groups such as Universities UK, and other Government Departments such as the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology to help understand the financial sustainability in the sector. She said that if a provider was at risk of

unplanned closure or found itself in the process of exiting the sector, the Department would work with the OfS, the provider and other Government Departments to ensure that students' best interests were protected. She said that the Government will publish its plan for higher education reform by summer 2025 and will work with the sector and the OfS to ensure that the system delivers the Government's five priorities for reform of the higher education system.

On international students, she reaffirmed the Government's commitment to a United Kingdom that is outward looking and welcoming. On the question of reintroducing maintenance grants, she said the government's plans for higher education reform will include what more needs to be done to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. She also said that the Department for Education plans to publish its assessment of the impact of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly. On research funding, she said the Department looks forward to working in partnership with the sector, the Office for Students, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and UK Research and Innovation to shape the changes to Government policy. Finally, she acknowledged that there have been some concerns regarding the recent OfS' announcement that it is enacting temporary changes to its operation to allow a greater focus on financial sustainability. She said this decision by the OfS reflects the Government's determination to move providers towards a firmer financial footing.

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

Forthcoming business

Education oral questions

On Monday 9 December from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps she is taking to reform skills training.
- What progress her Department has made on its review of Applied General qualifications.

You can [read a full list of tabled questions](#) and [watch the session](#).

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoC committee stage

On Monday 9 December, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will have its remaining stages of committee stage in the House of Commons.

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

Written questions and statements

Apprentices: Disadvantaged

Jodie Gosling MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that apprenticeship opportunities are made more widely available for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. [UIN 14498]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. As part of this, we want to ensure that more people from disadvantaged backgrounds can undertake apprenticeships.

The department continues to pay additional funding to employers and training providers to support them to take on young apprentices, apprentices with learning difficulties and disabilities, and care leavers.

The department has begun work to develop new foundation apprenticeships, providing high quality entry pathways for young people. We will engage with relevant stakeholders to inform our thinking to maximise the positive impact on young people, including those in disadvantaged areas. More detail on foundation apprenticeships will be set out in due course.

Overseas Students: Visas

Scott Arthur MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes in the level of international student visa applications to UK universities in 2024 on the sector. [UIN 14844; Grouped Question: 14843]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The latest Home Office data shows that there were 350,700 visa applications made by international students for a sponsored study visa between January and September 2024. This is 16% lower than between January and September 2023 when 417,000 sponsored study visas applications were made by international students.

There are many factors that influence international students when they choose to study abroad. These may include the range and quality of available courses, the visa rules that apply in countries they are considering and the appeal of living and studying in those countries.

The government recognises that international students enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK, as well as making a significant economic contribution to the higher education (HE) sector and our country as a whole. It is for these reasons that the government offers international students the opportunity to remain in the UK on a graduate visa for two to three years after their studies come to an end.

The department will continue to monitor available data and engage closely with the HE sector to assess the level of international student admissions to UK universities in the 2024/25 academic year.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Mike Martin MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent guidance her Department has issued on whether students who have extended their visas under the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme are eligible for home fees status for university fees in England. [UIN 16106]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The department laid the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 on 22 May which ensures that students who have been granted leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme will qualify for student support in England and home fee status from the 2024/25 academic year, without requiring them to meet the normal three year ordinary residence requirement. This is in line with those granted leave under the other Ukraine schemes.

The Student Loans Company will make the necessary amendments to guidance in time for when the scheme opens.

Turing Scheme: Private Education

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of (a) schools that have students with Turing grants are independent schools and (b) students that receive Turing grants attend independent schools. [UIN 16155]

Minister for Early Education, Stephen Morgan MP: For the 2024/25 academic year, over £10 million in funding was awarded to 298 successful schools projects from across the UK. This will provide funding for over 7,000 pupils to participate in placements overseas. Of these, 56% will be for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Of these 298 successful school applications, 6 were from private schools (2%), providing funding for just over 100 pupils to take part in international placements (1.6%), however this is subject to change as these projects are delivered through the year.

Postgraduate Education

Abtisam Mohamed MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to increase funding for postgraduate researchers. [UIN 15578; Grouped Question: 15577]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government introduced postgraduate loans which, alongside other sources of funding, are a contribution to the cost of postgraduate level study to stimulate take-up.

Decisions on student finance have had to be taken to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and that the costs of higher education (HE) are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university

We will set out this government's longer term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is working with key postgraduate research stakeholders to deliver a UK postgraduate research offer under the New Deal for Postgraduate Research that attracts, empowers and supports talent. Between the 2021/22 and 2024/25 academic years, UKRI has raised the minimum student stipend that UKRI funded students receive by over 23% in cash terms.

Innovation and Research

Adam Jogee MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of science and innovation on regional inequalities. [UIN 15330]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: Increasing productivity right across the UK is fundamental to our mission to kickstart economic growth. We know businesses grow faster because of science and innovation. In the 6 years after receiving their first R&D grant funding, the average business increases employment by 21% and turnover by 23%. The Government will continue to support regional growth through the industrial strategy. As set out in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, research, development, and innovation are essential to developing the UK's

growth-driving sectors. The Government will explore how to build on existing place-based initiatives to support high-potential clusters.

Innovation and Research

Adam Jogee MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of research and development on the Government's growth agenda. [UIN 15329]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: R&D is fundamental to achieving the Government's mission of kickstarting economic growth and we know businesses grow faster because of science and innovation. 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%.

That is why the government is investing record amounts into R&D, with total government investment in R&D rising to a record £20.4 billion in 2025/26. This investment also supports our research base and underpins the innovations and technological advancements that will help the UK boost productivity and create high-paid jobs.

We are ensuring R&D supports the government's five missions, via such vehicles as the R&D Missions Programme. Through this, R&D is at the heart of our agenda to boost growth and improve lives by maximising the potential of science and technology.

Innovation and Research

Adam Jogee MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of an international strategy for science and innovation. [UIN 15332]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: Science and innovation are fundamentally international endeavours, and the Government has an open-arms approach to international science. The Government's strategy is to strengthen ties with international partners and rebuild the UK's reputation as a strong, reliable partner, while harnessing the power of science and technology for global benefit. This includes making the most of the UK's association to Horizon Europe, as well as continuing to build wider international partnerships including through the International Science Partnerships Fund. The Government is also fully committed to attracting and retaining the very best scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs globally.

Innovation and Research

Gregory Stafford MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to help protect the integrity of global research from authoritarian regimes. [UIN 15378]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The Government wants the UK research sector to engage with all international partners, in a way that takes account of specific national security concerns, is compliant with the UK's security policies and regulations, and protects the integrity of global research.

As part of my department's proactive engagement with the research sector, the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) provides tailored advice to universities on managing national security risks in international collaboration. The Government also offers published guidance through the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and National Protective Security Authority's (NPSA) Trusted Research.

Students: Fees and Charges

Lord Godson (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they made of the degree of contact hours that were being provided to students on courses at higher education providers when deciding to increase tuition fees to £9,535 from September 2025. [UIN HL2575]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: Higher education (HE) providers must be transparent about the way courses are advertised and delivered, to give students the information they need to make informed decisions. This should include information about the number and type of contact hours that students can expect, such as the balance between teaching that is delivered face-to-face and online.

The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of HE in England. The OfS regulates through conditions that apply to registered providers. Whilst the conditions of registration do not include a ratio of face-to-face to online teaching, they specify how providers must ensure that students receive a high-quality academic experience. For example, students must receive effective engagement, up-to-date resources, and sufficient support whilst undertaking their courses. The OfS can investigate providers where it has concerns that they are not providing the high-quality teaching students should expect.

If students are not happy with the quality of education they are getting, they should complain directly to the university or college first. If they are not happy with the

outcome, they can escalate the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Virtual learning can be of huge benefit to students, but it must support and not detract from the quality of a student's learning experience. The OfS published its Blended Learning Review report in October 2022. It called on providers to make sure students have clear information about what they can expect when applying for courses and to work with their students to evaluate their experiences of blended learning.

Universities: Standards

Lord Godson (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the consistency of standards at English universities given that the proportion of students receiving a first-class degree was 7 per cent in 1997 and 29.5 per cent in 2022–23. [UIN HL2576]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: Unjustifiable increases in the proportion of top degrees being awarded threaten to undermine the value of degrees. Data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, now a part of Jisc), shows in the past two years the proportion of top degrees being awarded has begun to return to pre-Covid levels. In 2022/23, 30% of students of UK higher education (HE) providers qualified with a first class honours first degree, down from 32% in 2021/22 and 36% in 2020/21. This is still an increase on the 22% qualifying with a first class honours first degree in 2014/15.

The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of HE providers in England. The department is working with the OfS to ensure vigilance about any concerns over grade irregularities which would damage the reputation of HE in England.

In 2022/23, the OfS opened 14 investigations into providers based on regulatory intelligence relating to quality. It has to date published 11 reports on these assessments. The investigations to examine the reasons for sharp increases in the rates of students being awarded first class and upper second class honours degrees at three providers are ongoing. The OfS also publishes an annual report of degree classifications over time, which analyses graduate attainment rates and uses statistical modelling to assess to what extent the increases and decreases in these rates could be statistically accounted for by changes in the prior attainment of, and distribution of subjects studied by, graduate populations.

Students: Fees and Charges

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the change in total fee incomes to all higher education providers resulting from the increase in undergraduate tuition fees for the 2025–26 academic year. [UIN HL2402]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government recognises that UK higher education (HE) creates opportunity, is an engine for growth in our economy and supports local communities. The 3.1% increase to tuition fee limits for the 2025/26 academic year will provide additional financial help for HE providers after seven years of no increases to maximum tuition fees, which has meant that fees have not kept pace with inflation. The department plans to publish an assessment of impacts, including on equality, of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly.

The department is aware that 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 statement, raising the revenue required to fund public services and restore economic stability requires difficult decisions, which 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, and the update is attached.

The department also understands the financial pressures that the sector is currently facing, which is why my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has already taken the first step of appointing Sir David Behan as interim Chair of the OfS to oversee the important work of refocussing the OfS's role to concentrate on key priorities, including the HE sector's financial sustainability. The department continues to work closely with the OfS as the independent regulator of HE in England to understand the changing financial landscape.

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.

Higher Education: Employers' Contributions

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the financial impact of the increase in employer

National Insurance contributions announced in the Autumn Budget on higher education providers. [UIN HL2403]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government recognises that UK higher education (HE) creates opportunity, is an engine for growth in our economy and supports local communities. The 3.1% increase to tuition fee limits for the 2025/26 academic year will provide additional financial help for HE providers after seven years of no increases to maximum tuition fees, which has meant that fees have not kept pace with inflation. The department plans to publish an assessment of impacts, including on equality, of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly.

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Apprentices: Finance

Neil O'Brien MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what proportion of (a) apprenticeship courses started and (b) apprenticeship levy spent were for (i) Level 6 and (ii) Level 7 apprenticeships in each year since 2016. [UIN 16537]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The proportions of apprenticeships starts at level 6 and level 7, as a percentage of total apprenticeship

starts at all levels, are provided in the table below for each academic year between 2015/16 and 2023/24.

Academic Year	Proportion of total starts at Level 6 (%)	Proportion of total starts at Level 7 (%)
2015/16	0.10%	<0.05%
2016/17	0.30%	<0.05%
2017/18	1.70%	1.20%
2018/19	2.80%	3.00%
2019/20	4.70%	4.80%
2020/21	6.10%	6.10%
2021/22	6.70%	5.60%
2022/23	7.40%	6.50%
2023/24	7.70%	7.00%

Further information on numbers of apprenticeship starts by detailed level can be found at: <https://content.explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/api/releases/bfd06312-7732-41bc-97e7-94a6d85d2400/files/1ff3ab06-a956-4baa-921c-7166db33c723>.

The apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017, from which the department is allocated an apprenticeships budget for England. This budget is used to fund training and assessment for new apprenticeship starts in apprenticeship levy and non-levy paying employers, and to cover the ongoing costs of apprentices already in training and any additional payments made to employers and providers.

The table below shows total spend on level 6 and level 7 apprenticeships, in both levy-paying and non-levy paying employers in England, as a proportion of the total spend on the apprenticeship programme since the 2017/18 financial year.

Financial year	Level 6 spend (£million)	Level 7 spend (£million)	Total apprenticeships spend (£million)	Proportion of total spend at Level 6 (%)	Proportion of total spend at Level 7 (%)
2017/18	50	12	1,586	3%	1%
2018/19	71	50	1,738	4%	3%
2019/20	114	103	1,919	6%	5%
2020/21	172	165	1,863	9%	9%
2021/22	296	236	2,455	12%	10%
2022/23	349	234	2,458	14%	10%
2023/24	387	238	2,509	15%	9%

Spend is rounded to the nearest million and proportions to the nearest whole number.

Students: Fees and Charges

Gavin Williamson (Conservative) (Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge): (16169) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an estimate of (a) the number of students who will not be charged the increased annual tuition fee due to their contracts preventing a change in fees once they have started their degree and (b) the total cost of this differential for universities.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): Higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees under the fee cap.

In deciding whether or not to increase fees, providers will want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students achieve their ambitions. For continuing students, this will depend on providers' individual contracts with students, and they will wish to make their own legal assessment of this.

The department plans to publish an assessment of impacts, including on equality, of the planned tuition fee and student finance changes shortly.

Further Education: STEM Subjects

James Asser MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking encourage the take-up of STEM subjects at further education level. [UIN 16024]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The department continues to support the take-up of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in further education (FE). Skills, including STEM skills, are crucial for the delivery of the government's missions. That is why the department is building a coherent, flexible, high-quality skills system to break down barriers to opportunity and drive economic growth, underpinned by a new post-16 skills and education strategy.

The department is setting up Skills England to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to help meet the skills needs of the next decade. Aligned to the government's industrial strategy, this work will also be underpinned by Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) which help make technical education and training more responsive to local labour market and employer needs.

The department will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through its technical education offer, with a range of high-quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels. Examples of this include:

- 12 T Levels in STEM subjects, including engineering, science, digital and media.
- Over 370 employer-designed apprenticeship standards in STEM, including level 3 Cyber Security Technician, level 4 Software Developer and level 6 Civil Engineer (degree).
- Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) in STEM, such as a foundation degree in biomedical sciences, Higher National Certificate in electronic systems, or Higher National Diploma in space technologies.

HTQs are level 4 to 5 qualifications, approved and quality marked by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education as providing skills in demand by employers. To date, 169 HTQs have been approved across Digital, Construction, and Health and Science routes.

In October, the department expanded eligibility for retention incentives to include early career FE teachers in key STEM and technical subjects. FE teachers can apply for the payment between 14 October 2024 and 31 March 2025 on GOV.UK accessible here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/targeted-retention-incentive-payments-for-fe-teachers>. This targeted retention incentive gives eligible teachers in disadvantaged schools and all colleges up to £6,000 after tax. This has doubled the previous retention payments paid to school teachers and is now available to eligible teachers at all FE colleges, for the first time.

Access to future employers is critical for young people making decisions on their careers and it should not be limited to who they or their parents and guardians know. The department's ambition is to offer a guarantee of two weeks' worth of high-quality work experience to all young people, irrespective of their background.

To support young people with careers information, advice and guidance, the Careers and Enterprise Company, back by £30 million of government funding in 2024/25, coordinates a national network of Careers Hubs which now includes 93% of secondary schools and colleges. The network includes 400 leading employers and around 4,000 business volunteers, including many in STEM occupations. The department's careers framework, the Gatsby Benchmarks, includes a clear expectation that all 11 to 18-year-olds should have at least one meaningful interaction with employers per year. This should include a STEM-focused encounter or event before year 11.

Higher Education: Teachers

Dan Tomlinson MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her policies on higher education reform will include employment rights protections for (a) permanent and (b) non-permanent lecturers. [UIN 16091]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government wants to work in partnership with the higher education (HE) sector to deliver the change that the country needs. The department has outlined its five strategic priorities for the sector and will set out its plan for HE reform by summer 2025, to ensure the system delivers against these priorities.

HE providers are independent from government, and as such government does not have a role in workforce matters, including in staff contracts or pay and provision at specific providers.

However, the department does recognise the financial environment of the HE sector is increasingly challenging, for both HE providers and for staff. We are aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing in order to safeguard their financial sustainability.

The department will continue to work on building strong relationships with sector bodies and unions to better understand the issues facing the sector and its workforce. Departmental officials are working closely with the sector to find practical ways forward to address the challenges faced, and with officials at the Department for Business and Trade on the provisions of the Employment Rights Bill.

This government is committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading universities so they can deliver for workers, students, taxpayers and the economy.

On employment rights protections more generally, the government's plan to Make Work Pay sets out an ambitious agenda to ensure employment rights are fit for a modern economy, empower working people and contribute to economic growth. Once implemented, it will represent the biggest upgrade of workers' rights in a generation.

Apprentices

Richard Holden MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding her Department plans to provide for level seven apprenticeships in each of the next three financial years; and on what categories of apprenticeship this funding will be spent. [UIN 16518]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Spending on apprenticeships, including the categories of apprenticeship, is demand led as apprenticeships are a job with training and therefore employers and their needs determine which opportunities are available to learners.

The government will be asking more employers to step forward and fund level 7 apprenticeships themselves, outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer. This will enable better targeting of funding and help more people to get on at the start of their working lives instead of subsidising qualifications for those already established in their careers. The department will set out more detail in the new year.

Students: Fees and Charges

Lord Godson (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what consideration they gave, before deciding to increase tuition fees to £9,535 from September 2025, to using the powers in Schedule 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to limit the fee rise only to higher education providers that hold a high-level quality rating in order to ensure good value for money for students. [UIN HL2703]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government recognises that UK higher education (HE) creates opportunity, is an engine for growth in our economy and supports local communities. In making the tough decision to increase tuition fee caps, after seven years of frozen fee caps under the previous government, the department's immediate priority is helping all providers manage the financial pressures they are facing.

However, if the department is to maintain and enhance our national and international reputation, we need a culture that accepts nothing less than high standards, and that requires continuous improvement from all providers. This requires a rigorous approach to improving quality and supporting improvement. The department expects all providers to raise the bar further on teaching standards to maintain and improve our world-leading reputation and to drive out poor practice.

Following Sir David Behan's review, the department will work closely with a re-focused Office for Students (OfS) as it develops its new approach to assessing quality. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has already taken the crucial first step of appointing Sir David as interim Chair of the OfS to oversee this important work.

The department expects the sector to deliver the very best outcomes, both for students and for the country. The department will publish its plan for HE reform by summer 2025 and will work with the sector and the OfS to deliver the change that the country needs.

Higher Education: Science

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many university (a) biology, (b) chemistry and (c) physics departments (i) opened and (ii) closed in the last five years. [UIN 16539]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government is committed to promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and skills to ensure the UK remains competitive in the global economy.

Universities operate as autonomous institutions, therefore specific data on the number of university biology, chemistry and physics departments that have opened and/or closed in the last five years is not collected or maintained by the department.

The government recognises the financial environment of the higher education sector is increasingly challenging and the department is aware that some providers are making difficult decisions in order to safeguard their financial sustainability. The department is committed to working with the sector to create a secure future for our world-leading universities.

Technology: Women

Samantha Niblett MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he has had discussions with Cabinet colleagues on support for female-led spin-out tech start-ups at UK Universities. [UIN 16779; Grouped Question: 16778]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: Innovate UK are currently running an all-women cohort of their Innovation to commercialisation of university research (ICURE) programme, which will identify and support women researchers to explore commercialisation pathways that can lead to spinouts.

Supporting female tech founders and spin-out companies from our universities are important issues that I and colleagues across government are working on.

I am pleased that over time there are more female-led spin-outs, with 32% of spin-outs in 2022 having a female founder, up from 25% in 2017. However, with 68% still having all-male founders, there is still room for improvement.

Sector news

Care and Learning in Higher Education: How society and universities can support care experienced and estranged students to succeed – SMF report

On Monday 2 December, the Social Market Foundation (SMF) published a report exploring the gaps in support for care experienced and estranged students, and suggesting ways to ensure that support is more consistently available.

Key recommendations include:

- **University funding:** Universities should receive a guaranteed minimum of £1,000 per student per academic year. These payments would reflect the additional costs of supporting care experienced and estranged students, as well as providing clear encouragement to enrol and retain them.
- **Reinstatement of grants:** Student Finance England should offer non-repayable grants, equivalent to an average parental contribution, for care-experienced and estranged students, reintroducing grants previously available in the UK 25 years ago. Additional grant funding should come with requirements to follow evidence-led good practice, and support to identify that practice.
- **Guaranteed university offers:** introduce a *Guaranteed Offer Scheme*, ensuring that care-experienced or estranged students receive a guaranteed offer to study at institutions when they meet the minimum entry requirements, as is already the case in Scotland.
- **Extended local authority support:** Standardise and extend statutory support from local authorities for students up to graduation, provided they enrol before the age of 25.
- **Sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant:** All Higher Education providers should be signatories to the Care Leaver Covenant to solidify their sense of responsibility for care experienced and estranged students

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

OfS announces temporary changes to allow greater focus on financial sustainability – OfS press release

On Monday 2 December, the Office for Students (OfS) set out temporary changes to its approach to registering institutions, granting degree awarding powers and applications for university title to allow a greater focus on the financial sustainability of the sector and individual institutions.

The changes are:

- No new registration applications will be accepted and all registration cases in the early stages of assessment will be paused
- No new applications for degree awarding powers will be accepted, and applications that have been received but where assessment has not yet started will be paused
- No new applications for university title, or for a change in an institution's name where it already holds university title or university college title, will be accepted. Those already submitted will be completed.

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

Investment to address regional priorities with UK communities – UKRI press release

On Monday 2 December, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) announced a groundbreaking public engagement investment in nine community research networks across the UK.

The five-year £9 million programme will enable communities to set research agendas and develop the knowledge, skills and tools to act on issues that matter to them.

The investment will reach all four nations of the UK and deliver on UKRI's mission to transform tomorrow together by placing R&I at the heart of society and the economy.

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

Diversity of governors in higher education 2024 – AdvanceHE report

On Tuesday 3 December, AdvanceHE published a report revealing progress in diverse representation in higher education governance but highlighting the need for continued efforts to ensure governing bodies reflect the diversity of staff and student communities.

Key findings:

- 43.4% of governing body members were women - a 1 percentage point increase since 2020/21.
- Almost a third (31.6%) of institutions had a governing body where between 45% and 55% of governors were women.
- 15.2% of UK governors are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds - an increase of 3 percentage points since 2020/21.
- Moderate increase in governors who disclosed a disability, increasing from 5.8% in 2020/21 to 6.5% in 2022/23.

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

2024 English Social Mobility Index – HEPI report

On Tuesday 3 December, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published the annual LSBU English Social Mobility Index measuring the social mobility of graduates.

In 2024, the results show:

1. Bradford (1) and Aston (2) perform best – maintaining their respective positions of first and second since the SMI’s launch. Both are former Colleges of Advanced Technology (CAT);
2. Post 92 institutions, The University of Wolverhampton (3) and The University of Bolton (4), former CAT, The University of Salford (5) and former University College, Birmingham Newman University (6), come next in positions 3, 4, 5 and 6;
3. The University of Huddersfield (7), Birmingham City University (8) both post 92 institutions come in 7 and 8 while London universities, City St George’s,

University of London (9), and the London School of Economics and Political Science (10) complete the top 10.

4. While London universities made up half of the top ten last year, only two institutions have been included in the 2024 iteration as the salary premium enjoyed by London-based graduates has been accounted for by regional weighting. Universities in the West Midlands, conversely, now make up four of the top ten.
5. The number of Russell Group institutions in the top ten has also reduced from four to one.

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

10 Year Health Plan for England – University Alliance submission

On Tuesday 3 December, University Alliance published its submission to the ‘Change NHS: help build a health service fit for the future’ consultation.

Policy proposals include:

- **Convening a cross-government health education task force** to ensure education and skills policy is fully aligned with the NHS 10 Year Plan.
- **Retaining Level 7 apprenticeships** for skills and roles in demand in health and social care.
- Issuing guidance to ensure **universities and colleges play a key role in Integrated Care Systems (ICs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)**.
- **Retaining funding for 21 different level 3 AGQs** in key subjects such as Applied Science and Health and Social Care – to protect the level 3 health and social care pipeline.
- **Addressing financial shortfalls for higher education students and providers.**
- **Providing access to additional capital funding** for universities and colleges to invest in scaling up their simulated education and training provision.
- **Progressing reforms to the regulatory framework for nursing and midwifery education.**

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

Partnerships, pride, and pay-offs critical when talking about global-facing R&D – CaSE research

On Wednesday 4 December, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) published the findings of a poll conducted by Public First, showing that focussing on partnerships, pride, and pay-offs are the most effective way to connect with public audiences when talking about global-facing R&D.

The research also found that:

- 71% thought higher income countries should work in partnership with lower income countries to solve problems
- A majority said that if the UK invested money into R&D to come up with new solutions to problems facing other countries, it would have a meaningful positive impact (62%) and that they would feel proud (61%)
- A majority thought R&D into global issues would have a positive impact on the UK's reputation overseas (68%), the UK's security (55%) and people in the UK (51%), and a plurality felt it would have a positive impact on the UK's economy (49%)
- 59% would prefer large R&D infrastructure to be paid for by and built in the UK so the UK can benefit from job creation and be a key part of the research, compared to 24% who said they would prefer it to be built elsewhere so the money can be used on more pressing national issues
- 53% agree that cutting funding for R&D that benefits other countries would be a mistake, with just 14% disagreeing

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

Correspondence from Chair to Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, in relation to a breakdown of R&D expenditure across Government – HoC SIT Committee correspondence

On Wednesday 4 December, the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee published its correspondence from Chair to Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, in relation to a breakdown of R&D expenditure across Government, dated 20 November 2024.

You can [read the correspondence](#).

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2024 – AdvanceHE report

On Thursday 5 December, AdvanceHE published the results of the 2024 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), conducted by Advance HE across 61 member institutions in the UK and Australia. The survey highlights encouraging levels of satisfaction in the PGR experience and offers insights and evidence to support enhancement.

Key findings include:

- The survey found that satisfaction levels have increased by 2% compared to 2023, with improvements across most areas of the research degree experience. Overseas students (84%) reported higher levels of overall satisfaction than 'home' students (82%)
- The survey identified three key areas strongly linked to overall satisfaction: creating a sense of belonging, institutional response to feedback, and support for academic skills. Among these, a sense of belonging and valuing feedback achieved relatively low scores and hence point to areas for improvement
- The results identified that 71% of PGRs report their studies have been impacted by cost-of-living challenges, with over one-third saying their studies were affected "a lot" – a higher proportion than among taught postgraduate

or undergraduate students who were asked comparable questions in Advance HE's other student surveys

- While online and hybrid learning continues to be widespread, with around one in four PGRs interacting mainly online with supervisors, these students reported lower satisfaction levels (75%) compared to those studying in-person (85%). The data suggest that one of the main reasons behind this is a perceived lack of opportunities for online PGRs to feel part of a community
- Across many areas of the survey, there is a parity of experience between (UK-domiciled) PGRs from a range of different ethnic backgrounds, although it is not the case among students from mixed-race backgrounds. However, the 2024 data points to students from White backgrounds having greater access to development opportunities and finding themselves less affected by financial pressures
- Financial pressures are a challenge for both institutions and their PGR communities. Respondents report that they have had fewer opportunities this year to attend conferences or teach – which may be related to a squeeze on institutional budgets.

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

Evolution of Devolution: how higher education policy has diverged across the four nations of the UK – HEPI report

On Thursday 5 December, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report providing a comprehensive analysis of how higher education policies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have evolved over the past quarter of a century.

Key findings include:

- **Distinct Policy Approaches:** The four nations have developed markedly different systems, from Scotland's free tuition model to Wales' integrated approach to post-16 education.
- **Funding Divergence:** England relies heavily on graduate contributions, Scotland and Northern Ireland have maintained lower tuition costs and Wales offers the UK's most generous maintenance support.

- **Cross-Border Dynamics:** Significant student movement between nations underscores the interconnectedness of the UK's higher education landscape despite devolved policy frameworks.

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

State of the Relationship 2024: Analysing trends in UK business-university collaboration – NCUB report

On Thursday 5 December, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) published a report offering important insights into the scale and nature of interactions between universities and businesses, identifying patterns and trends over time.

Key findings include:

- Collaboration between businesses and universities plays an important role in delivering the Government's five missions.
- However, collaboration faces challenges and appears to be declining.
- Policies and practices are evolving to strengthen collaboration in the future, but they might not go far enough given the sizeable headwinds.

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

NHS 10 year plan consultation – UUK and GuildHE response

On Thursday 5 December, Universities UK and GuildHE published a joint response to the NHS 10 Year Plan Consultation.

The joint response calls for:

- Strategic workforce training and development being an essential component of the new 10-Year Health Plan
- The definition of clear growth milestones from the plan to collectively aim for
- NHS England to encourage tri-partite partnerships between systems (ICBs), providers (hospital trusts) and the HE sector, fostering healthy collaboration dynamics
- Mental health being a key priority in the 10-Year Health Plan

The response also sets out how universities can support the three shifts set out in the consultation:

- Moving more care from hospitals to communities
- Making better use of technology in health and care
- Spotting illnesses earlier and tackling the causes of ill health

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

HE Provider Data: Finance – HESA open data release 2023/24

On Friday 6 December, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) published finance data for 77 English HE providers for 2023/24. The data published relates to higher education providers in England whose financial year-end dates fell between 1 August 2023 and 31 March 2024. These are non-traditional higher education providers with many specialising in a small number of subjects.

You can [explore the data](#).