



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

20 – 24 February 2023

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary business

Horizon Europe Lords oral question

On Thursday 23 February, the House of Lords considered “loss of funding to the UK since 2020 as a result of leaving the Horizon programme”. This oral question was tabled by Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Conservative).

Baroness McIntosh spoke of the successes of Horizon Europe and said there were ‘no obvious international comparators’. Replying on behalf of the government, Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Conservative) said the government continued to hope for association and cited other opportunities to forge partnerships such as the International Science Partnership Fund.

Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat) said that universities were losing research funding following the withdrawal and noted that £1.6 billion earmarked for R&D had been returned to the Treasury. She called for this to be reinstated as a matter of urgency. In his reply, Lord Parkinson clarified that funding was still available to ensure the continuation of research projects.

Lord Blunkett (Labour) requested clarity on the future of the £1.6 billion of R&D funding and asked whether it would be made available in addition to resources allocated for next year. Lord Parkinson reiterated his previous remarks on association but did not comment on the specifics.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench) said that Plan A was preferable to Plan B and highlighted that partnerships with non-EU countries were not affected ‘one-way-or-the-other’ by Horizon negotiations. In his reply, Lord Parkinson said that the government were committed to negotiations, and reassured the House that the comprehensive alternative was ready to be implemented.

Lord Bishop of Leeds (Bishops) highlighted the broken promises on the Erasmus Programme and asked when the scientific community would have certainty. Lord Parkinson said that he hoped the EU would swiftly follow through with the agreements in the Trade and Cooperation agreement. He highlighted the opportunities offered through the Turing programme.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Labour) asked for clarity on the final date for Horizon Europe association and the alternative arrangements. Lord Parkinson said the

research community would receive at least as much money over the spending period and negotiations were ongoing.

Baroness Randerson highlighted the inadequacies of the UK Shared Prosperity Funds (UKSPF) in replacing EU Structural Funds, noting how UKSPF is distributed by local authorities that do not have the mechanisms or incentives to fund university research. She asked what the government were doing to rectify this. In his reply, Lord Parkinson celebrated how funding decisions could now be made in the UK rather than EU.

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

Forthcoming business

Education oral questions

On Monday 27 February from 2:30pm, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education, and her ministerial team, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

These include:

- What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that education and training programmes meet local skills needs. [Dr Ben Spencer MP + Mark Menzies MP, Conservative]
- What steps her Department is taking to support upskilling opportunities for adults. [Andrew Jones MP + Anthony Higginbotham MP, Conservative]
- What steps her Department is taking to increase the uptake of Higher Technical Qualifications. [Stephen Hammond, Conservative]
- What steps her Department is taking to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships. [Andrew Selous, Conservative]

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

Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill: Second reading

In the afternoon of Monday 27 February, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill will receive its second reading in the House of Commons.

You can [read a helpful explanation of the Bill](#) here and [watch the session](#) here. UUK's [briefing is available](#) here.

Foreign Affairs Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 28 February from 2:30pm, the Foreign Affairs Committee will hear evidence for a non-inquiry session focused on UK universities' engagement with autocracies.

Witnesses include:

2:30pm:

- Fiona Quimbre, Analyst at RAND Europe
- Dr Andrew Chubb, Senior Lecturer in Chinese Politics and International Relations at Lancaster University
- Vivienne Stern MBE, CEO at Universities UK

3:20pm:

- Sir Anthony Finkelstein, President at City, University of London
- Dr Tim Bradshaw, CEO at Russell Group
- Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice-Principal International and Director of Edinburgh Global at University of Edinburgh

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

National Security Bill – report stage

In the afternoon of Wednesday 1 March, the National Security Bill will return for its first day at report stage in the House of Lords.

You can [read the latest amendments](#) here and [watch the session](#) here.

Lords Oral question on ARIA

In the morning of Thursday 2 March, the House of Lords will consider the ‘progress of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) in terms of employees recruited and funds disbursed to support research and invention’. This oral question has been tabled by Lord Fox (Liberal Democrat).

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

Written Questions

Apprentices and Vocational Education: Solihull

Julian Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support (a) degree apprenticeships and (b) higher technical education in Solihull. [UIN 140184]

Robert Halfon: Employers have designed over 155 high-quality degree level apprenticeship standards to support them to develop the skilled workforces they need. The department is working to expand these opportunities, so they are accessible to people across England, including in Solihull.

The department is making up to £8 million available in the 2022/23 financial year to higher education institutions through the Strategic Priorities Grant to enable them to grow provision and form new employer partnerships.

The department is promoting apprenticeships at all levels, including degree level, to young people through the Apprenticeship Support & Knowledge (ASK) programme. ASK ensures students across England are aware of the benefits of apprenticeships. From this autumn, UCAS will expand their service so that young people can see more personalised options, including apprenticeships. From 2024, students will be able to apply for apprenticeships through UCAS alongside an undergraduate degree application. This means thousands of more young people will benefit from a wider choice of high-quality options, and employers can benefit from better access to talent on UCAS.

The department has worked with employers across the country to help them showcase higher and degree level apprenticeship vacancies. During National Apprenticeship Week, we published a listing featuring hundreds of vacancies that are available for people to apply for now, including in the West Midlands. This listing is available at: <https://amazingapprenticeships.com/app/uploads/2022/11/Higher-Degree-Listing-FEB-2023.pdf>.

The department is delivering reforms to improve higher technical education, including by investing £300 million to establish 21 Institutes of Technology (IoT) across the country. IoTs are collaborations between employers, colleges and universities that focus on the higher level science, technology, engineering and mathematics skill needs of employers and learners. The department used £9 million of the capital funding to support the creation of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull

IoT. This IoT opened in 2020 and delivers higher technical education in the advanced manufacturing and engineering sectors.

The department has introduced Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). HTQs are level 4 to 5 qualifications providing the skills demanded in the workplace by employers. Solihull College & University Centre, as part of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull IoT, received funding through the Higher Technical Education Growth Fund in 2022 to support the rollout of HTQs.

The department is also introducing T Levels at Level 3, which provide a high quality route into Higher Technical Education. Solihull College and University Centre offer T Levels in Digital, and Solihull Sixth Form College will offer T Levels in Education and Childcare from September this year.

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Nurses: Students

Julian Sturdy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent steps he has taken with Cabinet colleagues to help support student nurses. [UIN 142679]

Will Quince: The Student Loans Company provides the primary funding support package for students in further education. Student loan repayments are unlike commercial loans, with built-in protections, including repayments linked to income and not based on interest rates or the amount borrowed, and with outstanding loan amounts written off after 30 years. Student loans are subsidised by the taxpayer, this is a conscious investment in the skills and people of this country.

In addition to this, eligible nursing students have access to supplementary funding support via the NHS Learning Support Fund, which offers a non-repayable grant of £5,000 per academic year plus additional grants and supports depending on their circumstances.

Students: Cost of Living

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Statement made on 11 January 2023 by the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, whether her Department held consultations

with the Office for Students regarding the demands on university hardship funds before the reallocation of £15 million to premium funding; and what recent steps she has taken to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. [UIN 142691]

Robert Halfon: The department discusses the additional cost of living pressures that are impacting students this year in our regular meetings with stakeholders, including the Office for Students (OfS), Universities UK and the higher education Mission Groups. The department has also consulted with the National Association of Student Money Advisers to understand the ongoing situation in relation to increased requests from students for hardship awards from their universities.

On 11 January 2023, the department announced a one-off reallocation of funding to add £15 million to this year's student premium funding, enabling extra hardship awards to be made to tens of thousands of disadvantaged students. There is now £276 million of student premium funding available this academic year to support disadvantaged students. This extra funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. The department works with the OfS to ensure universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

All households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Act, passed on 25 October 2022, includes the provision which requires landlords to pass any benefits they receive from energy price support onto end users, as appropriate. Further details of the requirements under this Act are set out in the legislation.

Research: Foreign Investment in UK

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department is taking help attract international (a) investment and (b) partnerships to research and development facilities outside the UK's largest universities. [UIN 141341]

George Freeman: The Government commitment to invest in R&D makes the UK a globally competitive destination for investment and partnerships. Funding programmes which anchor investment in the UK are open to international investors and partners.

An example is Research Partnership Investment Fund which supports investment in higher education facilities across the UK. Universities must attract a further £2 from

non-public sources for every £1 invested by the fund. Funded projects go on to attract wider investment and partnerships as they develop to enrich the UK science and research system.

Arts: Training

Dawn Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will take steps to help increase skills in the creative and arts sector. [UIN 142638]

Stuart Andrew: As our world-leading creative sectors continue to grow and recover from the pandemic, the Government understands the importance of ensuring that the creative industries and the arts have the skills they need, both now and in the future. The DCMS-led Creative Industries Sector Vision, due to be published soon, will set out our long-term strategic vision for the sector to 2030. Focused on promoting growth, this vision will include consideration of the opportunities and challenges regarding the skills, workforce and talent pipeline for the sector.

The Schools White Paper (2022) also set out that the Department for Education would publish a Cultural Education Plan, working with DCMS and our arms-length bodies, in 2023. The Plan aims to articulate and highlight the importance of high-quality cultural education in schools; promote the social value of cultural and creative education; outline and support career progression pathways; address skills gaps; and tackle disparities in opportunity and outcome. The crossbench peer, Baroness Bull, has been appointed to chair the independent advisory panel helping to inform the plan.

The Government continues to support initiatives to boost training and employment opportunities in the arts and creative sectors. For example, DCMS supports the industry-led Creative Careers Programme, which between 2018 and 2020 showcased creative career pathways to over 115,000 pupils at over 1,500 schools across England. The programme, relaunched in 2022 with £950,000 of Government funding, will specifically target young people from under-represented backgrounds. It will do so in 77 priority areas across England, selected using data from the Government's education and careers opportunity areas, and Levelling Up for Culture priority places.

Students: Cost of Living

Zarah Sultana: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to support students with the cost of living; and if she will make it her policy to implement the NUS' recommendations to (a) tie student maintenance

support with inflation, (b) reform Universal Credit to include fair access for students, (c) cap rents to prevent a student homelessness crisis, (d) provide funding to education providers to deliver improved hardship funds and (e) adjust maintenance loan thresholds to reflect changes to family income. [UIN 143894]

Robert Halfon: The government reviews the support provided to cover students' living costs on an annual basis.

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have impacted students.

On 11 January 2023, the department announced a one-off reallocation of funding to add £15 million to this year's student premium to support additional hardship requests. There is now £276 million of student premium funding available this academic year to support disadvantaged students. This extra funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. The department works with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

In the 2022/23 academic year, there has been an increase of 2.3% in loans for living costs, and there will be a further increase of 2.8% for the 2023/24 academic year. Decisions on student finance have had to be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of higher education are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university. Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the tax year 2022/23 has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

Loans for living costs are a contribution towards students' living costs while attending university. The highest levels of support are targeted at students who need it the most, such as students from low-income families.

The Primary source of financial help for students is provided through the student support system. As such, students on full-time higher education courses cannot normally satisfy the entitlement conditions for Universal Credit. Exceptions are only made where students have additional needs that are not met through the student support system, for example, they are responsible for a child. Further details on claiming Universal Credit as a student which includes a list of students who may

qualify for Universal Credit can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-students>(opens in a new tab).

The government plays no role in the provision of student residential accommodation. Universities and private accommodation providers are autonomous and are responsible for setting their own rent agreements. We encourage universities and private landlords to review their accommodation policies to ensure they are fair, clear, and have the interests of students at heart. This includes making accommodation available at a range of affordable price points where possible.

More widely, Government does not support the introduction of rent controls in the private rented sector to set the level of rent at the outset of a tenancy. The White Paper, 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector', published on 16 June outlines our proposed reforms which will help prevent unfair rent increases for tenants, while ensuring landlords can continue to make necessary changes to rent. The measures include only allowing increases to rent once per year, ending the use of rent review clauses, and improving tenants' ability to challenge excessive rent increases through the First Tier Tribunal.

Universities: Research

Rachael Maskell: To ask Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on funding university research; and how that responsibility is shared between her Department and the Department for Education. [UIN 142772]

George Freeman: The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is responsible for general policy on university research funding and through UKRI, is the principal public funder of university research. The Department for Education is responsible for higher education policy. There are regular discussions and joint working on areas of common interest across both departments.

Office for Students: Finance

Emma Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the financial performance of the Office for Students. [UIN 147162]

Robert Halfon: Officials in the department and the Office for Students (OfS) regularly discuss the OfS's finances and funding and its business planning and efficiency, including the level of resource it needs to deliver its priorities.

The Framework Document between the department and the OfS can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1129117/OfS_framework_document.pdf.

The document sets out the governance framework within which the OfS and the department operate, and the OfS's core responsibilities, including in relation to financial matters.

Students: Loans

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Government consultation on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement launched on 24 February 2022, when she will (a) publish her response to that consultation and (b) implement an Alternative Finance Product. [UIN 146954]

Robert Halfon: On 6 May 2022, the department concluded the consultation on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) as part of our planned pathway to delivery from 2025. This consultation, and other ongoing sector engagement, is a critical part of delivering a transformation of student finance. The department is carefully considering the contributions and will publish the response in due course.

The department remains committed to delivering an Alternative Student Finance (ASF) product compatible with Islamic finance principles, and work has started to assess how we can ultimately deliver an ASF product alongside the LLE. The department will provide a further update on ASF as part of our response to the LLE consultation.

Office for Students: Reviews

Emma Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when the Public Bodies Review Programme 2023-24 will report on its review of the Office for Students. [UIN 147160]

Robert Halfon: The Cabinet Office has not yet published the list of public bodies to be prioritised for review in the 2023/24 financial year.

It is currently the intention that the Office for Students will be reviewed under the Public Bodies Review Programme from autumn 2023, with findings likely published by the end of the financial year. These timings may change.

Cabinet Office guidance outlines the requirements for reviews of public bodies, including the new requirements covering governance, accountability, efficacy and efficiency of arm's length bodies.

Office for Students: Reviews

Emma Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she expects the Public Bodies Review Programme for 2023-24 to assess the Office for Students. [UIN 147161]

Robert Halfon: The Cabinet Office has not yet published the list of public bodies to be prioritised for review in the 2023/24 financial year.

It is currently the intention that the Office for Students will be reviewed under the Public Bodies Review Programme from autumn 2023, with findings likely published by the end of the financial year. These timings may change.

Cabinet Office guidance outlines the requirements for reviews of public bodies, including the new requirements covering governance, accountability, efficacy and efficiency of arm's length bodies.

Sector News

Interim joint statement from UCU and UUK on USS dispute

On Friday 17 February, Universities UK (UUK) and the University and College Union (UCU) published an interim joint statement following the latest information from the USS Trustee.

The latest information provided by the USS Trustee suggests that the forthcoming 2023 valuation is likely to reveal a high probability of being able to improve benefits and reduce contributions.

The statement notes, “we are committed to working together so that this, and future, valuations are undertaken on a moderately prudent and evidence-based basis, taking account of the open and long-term nature of the scheme.”

It concludes that “our negotiations have been constructive, and we commit to joint collaboration through the 2023 valuation process to achieve the optimum outcome for all stakeholders after appropriate consultation.”

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

£1.6 billion earmarked for R&D returned to HM Treasury

On Wednesday 22 February, it was confirmed that £1.6 billion of unused funds earmarked for association to the Horizon Europe research programme were returned to the Treasury.

This was revealed in the [Central Government Supply Estimates 2022-23 document](#) and received backlash from the research community.

Sarah Main, Executive Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), said: “The government’s reversal of this position with today’s withdrawal of £1.6 billion for R&D undermines the prime minister’s assertions about the importance of science and innovation to the UK’s future and the creation, only this month, of a new department to pursue this agenda.”

Dr Tim Bradshaw, Chief Executive of the Russell Group, said: “Regardless of where the funding is allocated for accounting purposes, what is important is for the government

to deliver on its commitment to increase investment in UK research and innovation significantly, as set out in the spending review.”

You can [read more about the funding and responses](#) here.

Nurse training MillionPlus report

On Wednesday 22 February, MillionPlus released a policy briefing titled ‘Who trains the nurses – universities and the placements shortfall’. This policy briefing calls for the UK and Scottish government to urgently reform the clinical training placements system to ensure a healthy supply of nurses across the NHS.

It analyses the challenge of meeting an increased demand for more nurses within the NHS alongside the need for a resilient and flexible clinical placements system to boost and support growth.

This briefing highlights the innovative approaches universities have taken to expand placement capacity, the mentoring and monitoring of students while on placement, and improvements to working hand in hand with their partner NHS Trusts, care homes and other placement facilities. It calls for more stable investment in nursing education and more efficient use of existing resources to free up placement capacity.

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

Office for Students tackling harassment and sexual misconduct consultation

On Thursday 23 February, the Office for Students (OfS) proposed a new condition of registration to address harassment and sexual misconduct at universities and colleges.

If a condition is introduced following the consultation, universities and colleges would have to take a number of steps, including:

- Maintaining a register of personal relationships between staff and students.
- Introducing mandatory training for students and staff. This should include 'bystander training' for potential witnesses to raise awareness of and prevent sexual misconduct.

- Publishing a single document setting out how an institution will make a significant and credible difference in tackling harassment and sexual misconduct. The document would include information about how to report cases of harassment and sexual misconduct and explain how students will be supported through the process.
- Banning the use of non-disclosure agreements in cases of harassment and sexual misconduct, and any enforcement of existing non-disclosure agreements.

The OfS consultation runs from 23 February 2023 to 4 May 2023.

Susan Lapworth, Chief Executive of the OfS, said: “These are important proposals which would allow the OfS – for the first time – to directly regulate concerns about harassment and sexual misconduct. Some universities are already doing excellent work in this area, but we know that progress across the sector has been too slow and too patchy.”

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

Quarterly immigration figures released

On Thursday 23 February, the Home Office released immigration figures for the fourth quarter of 2022.

Key findings include:

- Almost half a million sponsored study visas were issued to students last year – nearly double the number issued in 2019.
- 31,537 graduate route visas were issued in Q4 - up from 16,025 in the equivalent period the year before.
- 22% of all sponsored study related visas granted last year were to dependants of students (135,788), compared to 6% (16,047) in 2019.

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

Cost of living for higher education students ONS findings released

On Friday 24 February, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released findings from the Student Cost of Living Insights Study (SCoLIS) This shows the behaviours, plans, opinions, and well-being of students related to the cost of living.

Key findings include:

- 91% of students were either somewhat or very worried about the rising cost of living, the same as in early November 2022.
- 78% of students were concerned that the rising cost of living may affect how well they do in their studies.
- 46% of students reported their mental health and well-being had worsened since the start of the autumn term 2022.

Responding to the findings, Professor Steve West CBE, President of Universities UK and Vice-Chancellor of UWE Bristol, said: “The latest results from the ONS survey further highlights the worrying impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on students up and down the country, even over the past few months. While universities are going the extra mile to support those who need it, the reality is that the student maintenance package in England is at its lowest value in seven years and students are also eligible for much lower maintenance loans than when the system was designed.”

You can [view the full release](#) here.