



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

20 –24 November 2023

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

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Parliamentary business

Pay and financial support for healthcare students – Westminster Hall debate

On Monday 20 November, e-petitions 610557, 616557 and 619609, relating to pay and financial support for healthcare students were considered in Westminster Hall. The debate was led by Marsha De Cordova MP (Labour).

Marsha De Cordova opened the debate by sharing the words of former Universities UK (UUK) President, Professor Sir Steve West who stated that ‘students risk becoming the forgotten group in the cost of living crisis.’ She noted that ‘academic and workplace commitments leave little room for students to earn outside their studies’ and cost of living pressures were ‘more pronounced’ for those studying healthcare subjects. She also highlighted that healthcare students often lose out on additional support or entitlements, such as the 30 hours of free childcare, as they are not paid or classed as workers.

She shared the Petitions Committee’s survey of healthcare students which found:

- 58% said it was difficult or very difficult to afford energy, including gas and electricity.
- 19% said that they had visited a food bank, and 26% said that they were considering using one.

Paul Blomfield MP (Labour) intervened to ask the Minister whether he was concerned by the 16% decline in the number of people applying for healthcare courses as revealed by UCAS data.

Marsha De Cordova continued by describing how healthcare students are only eligible for the standard student finance package of tuition fee and maintenance loans, whereas students in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland enjoy fully funded education. She said the additional £5,000 training grant through the NHS learning support fund was ‘simply...not enough.’

Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Minister for Social Care, said 89% of student midwives in England worried about the amount of debt they were in and 74% of them expected to graduate with debts of more than £40,000. He echoed previous member’s remarks on the ‘unique nature’ of health care students and implications that not addressing financial support would have on the workforce and pressures to the NHS.

The Shadow Minister highlighted the importance of placements and said increasing provision was an important part of the plan to extend the NHS workforce. This also included exploring new entry routes to a career in the NHS, including apprenticeships.

Andrew Stephenson MP, Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care, opened his remarks by stating that ‘students are the future of our NHS, so it is imperative that we not only support them throughout their studies, but ensure that as many as possible go on to successful careers in healthcare.’

On placements, the Minister explained that they were for student development rather than meeting staffing needs which was why they should not be described as jobs. He added that the government does not have plans to introduce pay for students on placement.

The Minister proceeded to outline the measures that the government were taking to support healthcare students. This included a training grant of at least £5,000 per academic year as well as a 50% increase to the travel and accommodation payments available through the learning support fund. He added that the government were continuing to expand the apprenticeship offer with a target to increase them from 7% to 20% by 2032.

Regarding the UCAS figures showing a 16% decline in applications, the Minister explained that this reflected an ‘expected rebalancing following the unprecedented demand for healthcare courses during the pandemic.’

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

Response to the Independent Review of UK’s Research, Development and Innovation Landscape

On Monday 20 November, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Labour) asked when the government intended to respond to the Independent Review of the UK’s Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape.

Viscount Camrose, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT), said the government’s response to the landscape review was in its ‘final stages of preparation’ and would be published ‘imminently.’

Baroness Jones called for reassurance that the government would take on board the integrated set of recommendations and establish an authoritative working group to implement them, rather than adopting a piecemeal approach. The Minister said that the creation of DSIT itself and the laying down of the Science and Technology Framework were two ‘major steps’ that built on the foundations laid by the Nurse review.

Lord Krebs (Crossbench) highlighted that government investment in R&D in the UK was 0.12% with the UK ranking 27 out of 36 OECD countries. He asked where the Minister thought the UK should rank. In his reply, the Minister said the amount spent on R&D as a percentage of GDP was between 2.8% and 2.9% which placed the UK fourth in the G7 behind Japan, Germany and the US.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat) noted that the expansion in the workforce would require higher pay for research at British universities as well as changes to the visa and health surcharge system. In his reply, the Minister said that the government’s position was that those benefiting from visas, rather than the taxpayer, should bear the immediate costs of visas and healthcare. He added that these were always kept under review.

Lord Patel (Crossbench) highlighted that the two funding streams for university research activity (quality-related funding and charity research support funding) had been eroded over time. He asked the Minister if the government would commit to bringing funding up to inflationary levels. The Minister outlined some of the streams of funding the government supported and said he was ‘happy to look’ at the proposal made by Lord Patel.

Baroness Wolf of Dulwich raised the importance of ‘institutional autonomy and freedom of action’ and noted that the Nurse review identified numerous occasions where government-funded research did not facilitate this. She asked the Minister for assurance that the response to the review would pay attention to those principles. The Minister agreed on the importance of these principles.

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

Renters (Reform) Bill – Committee Stage

On Tuesday 14 and Thursday 16 November, the Renters (Reform) Bill was scrutinised at committee stage.

A summary of these sessions will be available in the edition next week.

You can watch the sessions ([9:25am 14 November](#), [2:00pm 14 November](#), [11:30am 16 November](#), [2:00pm 16 November](#)).

Autumn Statement

On Wednesday 22 November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, delivered the Autumn Statement to the House of Commons.

The Chancellor reiterated that the government had accepted all the recommendations of the independent review of spinouts and would introduce a new £20 million cross-disciplinary proof-of-concept research fund, which would help prospective founders in universities demonstrate the commercial potential of their research.

The government also announced it was extending the Investment Zones programme from five to ten years, which will double the funding and tax reliefs available in each Investment Zone from £80 million to £160 million. This also included confirming the next set of Investment Zones:

- The Greater Manchester Investment Zone will focus on advanced manufacturing and materials and local partners expect it to help to leverage £1.1 billion in private investment and help to create 32,000 jobs in the region over the next 10 years.
- The West Midlands Investment Zone will focus on advanced manufacturing and local partners expect it to help to leverage £2 billion in private investment and help to create 30,000 jobs in the region over the next 10 years.
- The East Midlands Investment Zone, with a focus on green industries and advanced manufacturing, is expected by local partners to help to leverage £383 million in private investment and help to create 4,200 jobs in the region over the next 10 years.

The government confirmed that there will be two Investment Zones in Wales; one located across the Cardiff and Newport area, and delivered by the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee, and another focusing on the Wrexham and Flintshire region delivered by the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. The government has now confirmed details of 6 of 13 Investment Zones in the UK and will work with local partners with the aim of confirming details of all Investment Zones by summer 2024.

The government supported plans to catalyse the growth sectors (digital technology, green industries, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and creative industries) by committing £50 million to deliver a two-year apprenticeships pilot to explore ways to stimulate training in these sectors and address barriers to entry in high-value standards.

£7 million of funding was confirmed for educational programmes on antisemitism over the next three years. The aim is to ensure support is in place for schools and universities to understand, recognise, and tackle antisemitism.

You can [read a transcript of the statement](#) and [watch the session](#). [Supporting documents](#) have also been published.

Forthcoming business

Home Office – oral questions

On Monday 27 November from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, and his ministerial team, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing temporary visas to the dependents of visiting students and academics when the dependents are living in conflict zones. [Wendy Chamberlain MP, Liberal Democrat]
- What steps his Department is taking to improve the application process for student visas. [Wera Hobhouse MP, Liberal Democrat]

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

Graduate job market – Lords oral question

On Monday 27 November from 2:30pm, Lord Londesborough (Crossbench) will lead an oral question in the House of Lords on an ‘assessment of graduate job market and whether this points to a mismatch between skills and vacancies.’

You can [watch the session](#).

Renters (Reform) Bill – Committee Stage

On Tuesday 28 and Thursday 30 November, the Renters (Reform) Bill will continue its Committee Stage in the House of Commons.

You can watch the sessions ([28 November 9:25am + 2:00pm](#) and [30 November 11:30am + 2:00pm](#)).

Written Questions

Further Education and Higher Education: Social Media

Cat Smith MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how many staff working in higher and further education settings have had information gathered on them as part of investigations into their political views; and how much money from the public purse has been expended on such activities. [UIN 1615]

Andrew Griffith MP: When individuals are recommended for an appointment in a public role, departments may carry out due diligence, which involves gathering publicly available information. This may include a search against the insolvency register, a search against the register of disqualified directors and some basic internet searches to check for any undeclared conflicts of interest or other issues around the suitability of the appointment that should be considered. In line with the Civil Service Code, there are no other circumstances where officials conduct investigations into the political views of individuals.

Overseas Students: India

Andrew Bridgen MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on including student visas for Indian nationals in a future free trade agreement with India. [UIN 1880]

Robert Jenrick MP: It is not government policy to comment on live negotiations. Trade and immigration are separate policy areas. Any trade agreement we conclude with other countries must be consistent with the UK's points-based immigration system and the government's commitment to bring down net migration to sustainable levels.

Catapult Centres: Finance

Chris Bryant MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what financial support has UK Research and Innovation given to catapults in each of the last five years. [UIN 2105]

Andrew Griffith MP: The UK's nine Catapults fuel economic growth in the UK by enabling innovative businesses to turn great ideas into reality. Between April 2018 and March 2023 the Catapults received the financial support set out below from UKRI. These figures are based on committed spend and include core grant funding and additional, competitive funding won by Catapults from UKRI in collaboration with businesses. They exclude spend from other Government departments and Arms Length Bodies.

Financial Year Spend

2018/2019 £310m

2019/2020 £317m

2020/2021 £348m

2021/2022 £346m

2022/2023 £367m

Sector news

International students’ digital experience – Jisc report

On Friday 17 November, Jisc published a report titled ‘International students’ digital experience phase two: experiences and expectations.’

In April 2023, Jisc published the first phase of research that aimed to better understand the international student digital experience (ISDX) for those who chose the UK as their study destination. The second phase has involved working directly with international students to hear their experiences, attitudes, and opinions about using digital technologies both on their course and in their wider living experience.

This report summarises their feedback and provides recommendations to the sector on how to improve the digital experiences of international student. Key findings include:

- Most international students were positive about the use of technology-enabled learning (TEL) on their course; notably, they appreciated how it gave them access to a wide range of digital resources, online libraries and recorded lectures.
- Most were using AI to support their learning and wanted more guidance on effective and appropriate practice.
- It is important for individual higher education providers to actively consider the needs of both current and forthcoming international student cohorts and to embed this across several strategic areas (including business planning, equality, diversity and inclusion, curriculum design and student support).

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

Talking Tertiary – London Higher report

On Monday 20 November, London Higher published a report titled ‘Talking Tertiary: How London’s universities and colleges are working together to support students, employers and local communities.’ It considers how the potential of London's tertiary education sector can be harnessed in the context of the ever-increasing demand for highly skilled workers.

The report posits that ‘holistic, place-based approaches’ bringing further education (FE) and higher education (HE) together provide opportunities to tackle skills need and shortages from new angles. These approaches could include joined-up approaches to widening participation and providing smoother transitions for learners moving between FE and HE.

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

Research on the Systematic Threats of CSSAs in the UK

On Monday 20 November, the Henry Jackson Society published a research brief examining the systematic threats of Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) to the UK.

This report notes that it is important for universities and students’ unions to recognise that CSSAs are not independent from one another, or from CSSAUK and Chinese diplomats. As such, they must look beyond evidence from their particular CSSA to the wider phenomenon when evaluating the systematic threat that CSSAs pose to freedom of speech and national security in the UK.

It posits that university regulators which have responsibilities and investigative power in this regard, including the Office for Students (OfS), must address this issue. The report also recommends that the government should issue guidance on whether CSSAs fall under the requirement for registration under the newly created Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS).

You can [read the full research brief](#).

University spin-outs review

On Tuesday 21 November, the ‘Independent review of university spin-out companies’ was published. This review ran from March to October 2023 and was led by:

- Professor Irene Tracey CBE, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford and member of the Medical Research Council (MRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).
- Dr Andrew Williamson, Managing Partner of Cambridge Innovation Capital and Chair of the Venture Capital Committee at the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (BVCA).

The review looked at the most successful university spin-out ecosystems across the world, and within the UK, to identify best practices and opportunities to support spin-outs to generate greater investment and faster growth in the UK.

The review is part of the government's ambition for the UK to be science and technology superpower, with thriving partnerships between universities and high-tech spin-out companies contributing to economic growth and productivity. The government has accepted all the recommendations of the review.

The recommendations are intended to accelerate the UK towards a desired end state where:

- Universities partner with their local spin-out ecosystem to prioritise the rapid creation of spin-outs on market competitive terms.
- Academics are encouraged and better enabled to realise impact from their ideas through spin-outs.
- Universities develop an entrepreneurial culture throughout the entire institution.
- Founders can access the right commercial support to create successful spin-out.

Vivienne Stern MBE, CEO of Universities UK, commented: 'We welcome this review's recognition of the positive impact and important role that university spin outs have on driving growth and supporting the national and local economy...University spin outs create thousands of jobs across the UK and will play an important role in driving the economic growth and local regeneration that the country needs.'

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

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey – AdvanceHE

On Wednesday 22 November, Advance HE published the findings of its annual postgraduate experience survey. It is the largest annual survey of its kind in the sector and this year it drew from more than 37,000 responses from 105 institutions – including four in Australia.

Key findings include:

- 80% postgraduate researchers express overall satisfaction with their experience at their institution.
- Researchers working mostly or completely online were less satisfied than those who worked mostly or completely in-person.
- The largest gaps in satisfaction between ethnicities focused around the opportunities provided for development activity with Black students a lot less likely to have been offered (or taken up) teaching experience and other development opportunities.
- Among those considering leaving, cost of living is an increasingly important factor in how they view their challenges.

Jonathan Neves, Head of Business Intelligence and Surveys at Advance HE, said: ‘It is positive to see nearly four out of five PGRs satisfied with their experience and there is encouraging feedback about research. But we should note that this is not for all groups. Institutions will also wish to explore why some – females and minority groups, in particular – are experiencing lower levels of satisfaction and at the same time to look at ways to address a gradual fall in satisfaction over time.’

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

Government response to Nurse review

On Wednesday 22 November, the government responded to the Review of the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Organisational Landscape led by Sir Paul Nurse.

The response outlines actions that the government is taking to foster an RDI organisational landscape that is more diverse, more resilient and more attractive to investment, including through publishing the Science & Technology Framework (S&T) and creating the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

The response makes a wide range of commitments, such as:

- Maximising the impact of public sector RDI organisations, for example by providing £25 million to provide core small and medium-scale research infrastructure.
- Supporting RDI talent by, for example, establishing world-class Discovery Fellowships backed by a £250 million endowment.

- Making the UK a world-leader for philanthropic partnerships, demonstrated by the recently announced new consortium of philanthropic funders for UK Biobank.

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

Connecting the Dots – HEPI report

On Thursday 23 November, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report titled ‘Connecting the Dots – The Need for an Effective Skills System in England.’ It was written by Professor David Phoenix, Vice Chancellor of London South Bank University.

The report emphasises that to meet England’s ever more pressing skills needs and realise the country’s potential, a range of appropriately funded specialist educational institutions need to be supported. It argues that this will require a joined up post-16 education system with roles for sixth forms, colleges and universities clearly defined in a national framework. The national framework would encourage the creation of clear local learning pathways that support both employer and learner skills needs and help to tackle inequality and stagnant productivity.

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