



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

20 – 24 October 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Department for Education - Oral Questions

On Monday 20 October, at 2.30pm the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, and her ministerial colleagues, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Damian Hinds (Conservative) sought clarity on government targets for expanding participation in higher-level training.

Peter Bedford (Conservative) raised concerns that too many young people are taking on significant debt for university degrees with limited career prospects. He argued that the government should cut funding for low-value courses and redirect resources towards apprenticeships, noting that taxpayers bear the cost of unpaid student loans.

In her response, the Secretary of State dismissed the proposal as “financially illiterate”, explaining that university and apprenticeship funding operate differently. She confirmed that the upcoming White Paper would strengthen regulation of degree courses to ensure value for students, adding that if young people have what it takes and they have the qualifications, university is a good option for them. They shouldn’t have their aspirations dismissed in such a “casual and snobbish way”.

Nick Timothy (Conservative) asked how many students had been expelled or disciplined for antisemitic behaviour in universities.

In response, the Secretary of State condemned antisemitism in all forms, stressing that there is no place for it in education. She confirmed that vice-chancellors have been reminded of their duties and stated that freedom of speech does not extend to harassment or intimidation of Jewish students.

Matt Vickers (Conservative) argued for capping “debt-trap” degree courses that fail to deliver strong employment outcomes and proposed using the savings to double the apprenticeship budget.

In his response, the Minister for Children and Families, Josh MacAlister MP emphasised that different forms of education should not be pitted against each other, noting that it is possible to be pro-university, pro-apprenticeship, and pro-skills simultaneously.

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

Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy – HoC Ministerial Statement

On Monday 20 October, a Ministerial Statement on the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy took place in the House of Commons.

Opening the debate, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, said the Government's new *White Paper* would "transform further and higher education," securing a "skills system that drives growth and opportunity." She announced inflation-linked rises to tuition fee caps and maintenance loans for undergraduates over the next two academic years, alongside new targeted maintenance grants for disadvantaged students, funded by an *international student levy*. The Secretary of State said this would "future-proof university finances" and ensure that "quality and access go hand in hand." She also pledged to legislate for an automatic link between tuition fee caps and quality, stating that "institutions that do not take quality seriously will not be allowed to charge full fees."

The Secretary of State reaffirmed her commitment to maintaining a "world-leading university system" and said that *pro-technical and pro-vocational does not mean anti-academic*. She emphasised that universities would "work with colleges to deliver more level 4 and 5 qualifications," tackling what she called "the missing middle" in skills provision. She also confirmed that universities would be challenged to "drive out low-quality provision, improve collaboration and push forward innovation," with a focus on research that "revitalises our economy."

The Shadow Secretary of State, Rt Hon Laura Trott MP, criticised the rise in tuition fees, arguing that Labour had broken its promise that "graduates will pay less." She described the increases as a "spending commitment that costs the taxpayer too," and said the Government was "boasting about fixing university finances" while students faced higher costs. The Shadow Secretary of State also questioned the logic of Labour's new target for two-thirds of young people to access higher-level learning, saying it would "increase the proportion going to university" and accused the Government of "abolishing a target that did not exist, then announcing a bigger one."

In response, **the Secretary of State** defended the reforms as essential to protecting higher education quality and access. She said that under Conservative rule, "universities were talked down and left financially unstable," and reaffirmed Labour's "world-leading university system alongside brilliant technical and vocational routes." She also defended the international student levy, arguing that "opening up access for domestic students from disadvantaged communities is my priority."

Ian Sollom MP, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Skills, welcomed the reintroduction of maintenance grants but warned that the international student levy

could have “self-defeating consequences,” potentially “cutting 135,000 domestic student places and reducing the economy by £2.2 billion.” He urged transparency in the modelling and questioned whether the levy might “narrow opportunity rather than expand it.” The Secretary of State replied that international students made an “important contribution” but that the levy would enable “reinvestment in domestic opportunity.”

Abtisam Mohamed MP (Labour) welcomed the rise in tuition and maintenance support, saying it would be “warmly received by the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University.” She asked for assurances that the Government would “continue to support disadvantaged students and maintain equal access.” The Secretary of State confirmed that maintenance loans would now rise annually with inflation and announced that care leavers would automatically qualify for the maximum maintenance loan, calling it “a major step to support the most vulnerable.”

Douglas McAllister MP (Labour) contrasted the UK Government’s approach with Scotland, noting that “college and university funding has been cut by 20%” under the SNP. He said Scottish Labour would “restore opportunity and investment in higher education.” The Secretary of State agreed, saying Scottish colleges and universities had been “systematically hollowed out.”

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

Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students - Education Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 21 October from 10:00am, the House of Commons Education Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Higher Education and Funding: Threat of Insolvency and International Students”.

Witnesses included:

- Neil Smyth, Partner, Mills and Reeve LLP
- Adam Leach, National Civic Impact Director, Civic University Network
- Carol Prokopszyn, Chief Financial Officer, University of Manchester, British Universities Finance Directors Group
- Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive, Universities UK
- Professor Brian Bell, Chair, Migration Advisory Committee
- Dani Payne, Head of Education and Social Mobility, Social Market Foundation
- Rachel MacSween, Director of Client Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement, UK International and Europe, IDP Education UK and Ireland
- Dr David Pilsbury, Secretary, International Higher Education Commission

Opening the session, Chair Helen Hayes MP asked witnesses about the causes of financial distress in higher education. Vivienne Stern said the sector across all four nations was under “enormous pressure,” with costs rising faster than income. She explained that universities had relied on international student fees to cross-subsidise research and teaching but that this source of income had come under strain due to government policy and global market changes. Carol Prokopyszyn, said structural underfunding and reliance on international recruitment had left many institutions vulnerable. Those experiencing the sharpest drop in international enrolments were now in the most acute financial difficulty.

Neil Smyth said it cost around £12,000 per student to educate an undergraduate in the UK, while domestic fees remained capped below £10,000. The shortfall had been masked for years by international income. Adam Leach warned that civic and regional engagement work—often subsidised through international income—was being undermined, weakening local economies and government levelling-up ambitions.

On the legal implications of insolvency, Neil Smyth said there was no clear process for universities incorporated by Royal Charter. If such institutions became insolvent, they might have to be “wound up as unregistered companies,” a process that would not allow them to continue trading. Vivienne Stern said a special administration regime was not ideal but agreed there was a need for clearer mechanisms to prevent “disorderly exits.” She proposed an early-intervention *transformation fund* for struggling institutions rather than post-crisis support.

Witnesses highlighted that university insolvency would have devastating regional effects. Vivienne Stern said universities were “deeply embedded in local economies,” often employing large sections of the public sector workforce and supporting local businesses. Adam Leach warned that civic infrastructure could collapse if universities failed.

On government support, Vivienne Stern said the inflation-linked rise in domestic tuition fees was “exceptionally necessary and important” to stabilise the sector, though it did not address all underlying financial risks.

Discussing protections for students and staff, Vivienne Stern said *student protection plans* required by the Office for Students were insufficient to guarantee continuity if an institution collapsed. She welcomed proposals for “break points” within degrees to help students exit with partial qualifications but warned that postgraduate research students were particularly exposed.

Turning to the Government’s target for two-thirds of young people to enter higher education, Vivienne Stern said it was “right but ambitious.” Achieving it would require new, flexible routes into higher education, including level 4 and 5 provision. Carol Prokopyszyn cautioned that the international student levy would make this harder,

adding new costs for institutions already underfunded. She said universities could not pass the levy on to students without harming recruitment. Vivienne Stern described the levy as “a big mistake,” estimating it would cost universities £600 million this year, rising further next year—offsetting much of the benefit of the tuition fee uplift.

In the second half of the session, witnesses examined the importance of international students. Dr David Pilsbury, Secretary of the *International Higher Education Commission*, said international students provided “around 50% of university revenues” and their decline was a major factor in the current crisis. Rachel MacSween cited research estimating their economic contribution to the UK at £37 billion. Professor Brian Bell said universities made a loss on both domestic teaching and research; “international students are the only profitable business universities have.”

On student trends, Professor Brian Bell said 435,000 Student visas had been issued up to September 2025—below the 2023 peak but well above pre-pandemic levels. He noted declines among Nigerian and Chinese students due to currency crises and job market shifts, while Indian recruitment remained strong. Dr Pilsbury said policy volatility had hit postgraduate numbers hardest.

Questioned on the international student levy, witnesses gave mixed views. Dr Pilsbury said it could “rebalance benefits between regions” if well designed, while Rachel MacSween warned that the UK’s already high international fees meant the levy would “reduce numbers.” Dani Payne supported maintenance grants funded by a levy as a “progressive” redistributive measure but urged transitional support for lower-ranked, internationally reliant universities. Professor Brian Bell said a 6% levy might reduce enrolments by 7,000 but doubted it would significantly change long-term numbers. However, he called the policy “half-baked,” arguing it removed resources from universities “on the assumption that the DfE knows better than institutions how to spend their money.”

Witnesses compared international models: Australia’s targeted regional approach and New Zealand’s smaller levy (0.5–0.89%) funding pastoral care and dispute resolution rather than large-scale grants. Dani Payne said any UK levy should be ring-fenced for disadvantaged domestic students and research, to sustain public confidence in higher education’s social value.

On visa and compliance reforms, Professor Brian Bell and Dani Payne supported tougher oversight to maintain public confidence. Bell endorsed the publication of compliance metrics by universities. Rachel MacSween said stricter rules would most affect institutions reliant on “higher-risk” source countries, but a staggered transition could mitigate the impact.

Asked about reducing Graduate visa duration from 24 to 18 months, Dr Pilsbury said it would have “minimal impact” if graduates were successfully linked to UK

employers, especially SMEs. Rachel MacSween and Dani Payne said post-study employment opportunities mattered more than visa length.

Discussing the impact of international students on communities, Dani Payne and Dr Pilsbury stressed that institutions must plan with local councils to manage housing and service pressures. Professor Brian Bell said growth in international recruitment could strain accommodation and recommended that local authorities approve expansion plans before student caps were lifted.

On net migration, Professor Brian Bell insisted that international students should remain in migration statistics, as they “add to the population while here.” He said reducing net migration without addressing asylum and family routes would push ministers toward curbs on students. Dani Payne and Dr Pilsbury agreed that removing students from figures would make little difference and risked undermining public trust.

Finally, on the forthcoming International Education Strategy review, witnesses called for clearer governance, diversification of source countries, and better coordination between departments. Dr Pilsbury proposed regional higher education champions; Rachel MacSween urged continued focus on transnational education; and Dani Payne warned against a funding model that made international recruitment a “financial necessity rather than an academic strength.”

You [can watch the session](#).

Negotiations with the European Union for the UK to rejoin Erasmus – HoL Oral Question

On Tuesday 21 October, an oral question titled “Negotiations with the European Union for the UK to rejoin Erasmus” took place in the House of Lords. This question was tabled by Baroness Coussins (Crossbench).

You [can watch the session](#).

Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy - HoL Ministerial Statement

On Wednesday 22 October, the House of Lords debated the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy following the Ministerial Statement made in the House of Commons earlier that week.

Opening the debate, Baroness Barran, Shadow Education Minister, welcomed the Government's "ambitious and wide-ranging" White Paper, but raised concerns about implementation and long-term accountability. Turning to **higher education**, she said that while the *lifelong learning entitlement* and modular degrees were "welcome in principle," universities might face financial risks from moving away from the traditional three-year model. She asked how the Government would incentivise employers and ensure higher education institutions were protected during the transition. The Shadow Minister also questioned whether *higher technical qualifications* and *institutes of technology* would be fully integrated into the new system and pressed for clarification on how "quality will be guaranteed" across higher-level courses.

Lord Storey, Liberal Democrat Lords spokesperson for Education, said the Statement contained "too much rhetoric and not enough detail," but welcomed "the section on universities." He praised the Government for "facing up to the funding crisis" in the higher education sector, though he described the international student levy as "disappointing," arguing that "more money could have been available for universities had they not slapped on the levy for overseas students." He urged ministers to ensure that the levy "does not drain a vital income stream" from universities and warned that cuts to International Baccalaureate (IB) funding in state schools could reduce access to "an internationally recognised programme trusted by universities around the world."

Responding for the Government, **the Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern**, said the White Paper set out plans for a "world-leading higher education sector that drives innovation and growth and delivers high quality and good value for students." She described the reforms as "the blueprint for delivering the Prime Minister's bold new target for two-thirds of young people to participate in higher-level learning, academic, technical or apprenticeships, by age 25." On university funding, the Minister defended the Government's decision to index tuition fees with inflation, saying it would provide "certainty of funding that few organisations could hope for."

Addressing concerns about the international student levy, the Minister said it was "a fair contribution" designed to "reintroduce targeted maintenance grants for domestic students" removed by the previous Government. She added: "We will ensure that our world-leading higher education system remains open to all who can benefit, while closing the access gap that has persisted for too long." The Minister confirmed that details of the levy's design would be announced at the next Budget.

Lord Willetts (Conservative) welcomed the "bold decision to index fees with inflation," calling it "absolutely the right thing to do after a decade of real-terms freezes." However, he warned that the international student levy "will take away quite a bit of that resource," arguing that "the real resource available for educating students overall will continue to fall." Lord Willetts also called for the Department for

Education to “energetically explain to young people how the student finance system actually works,” saying that misconceptions about debt were deterring applicants. Smith disagreed that the levy would leave universities worse off, emphasising that fee increases and new grants would “balance stability with fairness.”

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) also welcomed the inflation-indexed fee rises but criticised the “decision to take away with the other hand what the Government have just given on the fees front.” He asked whether the international student levy would apply to “online provision and transnational education,” and urged the Government to “pause or shelve it altogether” until there was stronger evidence on its effects. The Minister reiterated that the Government had “a clear evidence base on international student demand” and confirmed that full design details would be set out in the Budget.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green) questioned the impact of higher fees on student debt, citing figures showing that only 56% of graduates were expected to repay their loans in full. She asked what the inflation-linked increases would mean for those already facing “40 years of repayments.” The Minister replied that “what a student repays is dependent neither on the size of the debt nor the interest rate but on their level of income once working,” stressing that the system was “not comparable to credit card debt.”

Baroness Alexander of Clevedon (Labour) raised concerns about “excess profits and poor provision” in parts of the university franchising system, and asked whether the Government would extend registration requirements to all providers to protect students and taxpayers. The Minister confirmed that the Government would “register providers of franchised provision and strengthen the Office for Students’ powers to tackle poor-quality teaching.”

In closing, **the Minister** reaffirmed that the Government’s reforms would create a “coherent, world-class higher education system,” supported by “stable, fair funding and stronger oversight.” She said the international student levy would “fund maintenance grants for those who need them most,” and the indexed fee rises would “ensure our universities remain sustainable, innovative, and globally competitive.”

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

Forthcoming business

Department for Work and Pensions - Oral Questions

On Monday 27 October, at 2.30pm the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, and his ministerial colleagues, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant questions include:

- Helen Hayes (Labour), Baggy Shanker (Labour), and Toby Perkins (Labour): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure that post-16 education provides the necessary skills to support the economy.

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

UK-EU youth mobility scheme - HoL Oral Question

On Wednesday 29 October, an oral question titled “UK-EU youth mobility scheme” will take place in the House of Lords. This question has been tabled by The Earl of Clancarty (Crossbench).

You [can watch the session](#).

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Simon Opher (Labour): (UIN77723) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of Exchequer on adopting a stepped repayment system for student loans.

Josh MacAlister: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education regularly engages with my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a range of matters, including higher education (HE) finance and funding. We are aiming to publish our plans for HE reform as part of the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy White paper soon. As part of this, we will need to ensure that the student finance system is financially sustainable and works for students, taxpayers and the HE sector.

Department for Education: Postgraduate Education: Loans

Olivia Blake (Labour): (UIN77687) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has any plans to increase the yearly income threshold for postgraduate student loans to above £21,000.

Josh MacAlister: The postgraduate loans schemes were introduced to help remove the financial barrier faced by those wishing to step up to achieve a postgraduate level qualification. They are part of the long-term commitment to make the UK more globally competitive by increasing the number of those with high level skills and knowledge. As part of the department's ongoing work, we always consider a range of factors which can affect repayment thresholds and recognise the importance of ensuring that the system remains fair for borrowers, as well as being financially sustainable.

The department will announce the postgraduate loan threshold applicable from 2026/2027 financial year in due course.

Department for Education: Graduates: Employment

James McMurdock: (UIN77454) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to publish an analysis of (a) Higher Education Statistics Agency and (b)

Office for National Statistics data on graduate employment to inform higher education (i) curriculum and (ii) skills policy.

Josh MacAlister: The department publishes employment and earnings outcomes of graduates and postgraduates each year, based on data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Authority, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and the Department for Work and Pensions. The publication includes breakdowns by subject studied, as well as graduate characteristics, and detailed information about which industries graduates worked in after studying a particular subject and their movements between industries after graduation. The publication can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/leo-graduate-and-postgraduate-outcomes/2022-23#dataBlock-d7be0f33-0ec5-4b78-98ed-ba6f25dfb414-charts>. This data has been available since 26 June 2025.

The department also publishes graduate labour market statistics. This publication uses data from the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey to compare employment and earnings outcomes between graduates, postgraduates and non-graduates. The publication can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/graduate-labour-markets/2024>. This data has been available since 5 June 2025.

The department uses these publications as part of the evidence base to inform higher education and skills policy.

Department for Education: Universities: Students

Tom Hayes (Labour): (UIN77346) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to support students affected by (a) course closures and (b) redundancies at universities in financial deficit.

Josh MacAlister: The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, monitors the financial health of providers to ensure it has an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector.

Its latest report, published on 8 May 2025, highlighted a decline in financial performance across the sector in 2023/24, with 44% of institutions forecasting a deficit in 2024/25.

The government recognises the financial pressures facing the sector and acknowledges that some providers are making difficult restructuring decisions to safeguard long-term sustainability. As autonomous institutions, universities must take appropriate financial decisions to remain viable. However, we expect providers to

work with staff, using their knowledge and experience to help identify how best to operate efficiently. All efficiency measures taken by the sector should provide a better long-term future for staff, students and the country.

Grouped Questions: 77345

Department for Education: Higher Education: Costs

Abtisam Mohamed (Labour): (UIN77813) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of the use of the Transparent Approach to Costing methodology by the higher education sector.

Josh MacAlister: The data collected using the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) methodology is an important part of the evidence base, which the department uses to understand the financial sustainability of the higher education sector and the teaching of UK students who are publicly funded.

The TRAC sector analysis, published annually by the Office for Students, was most recently used to support the strategic case for uplifting tuition fees for the 2025/26 academic year. This was set out in the regulatory impact assessment, published in January 2025 and accessible

at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2025/40/pdfs/ukia_20250040_en.pdf.

The department continues to consider the interaction between TRAC and policy decisions in our policy development.

Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance

Abtisam Mohamed (Labour): (UIN77814) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of the number of higher education institutions that are forecast to have a deficit in the 2024-25 financial year on the economy.

Josh MacAlister: The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, monitors the financial health of providers to ensure it has an up-to-date understanding of the sustainability of the sector. Its latest report, published in May 2025, highlighted a decline in financial performance across the sector in 2023/24, with 44% of institutions forecasting a deficit in 2024/25. HE

providers are independent from government and as such must continue to make the necessary and appropriate financial decisions to ensure their long-term sustainability.

The department is committed to creating a secure future for our universities so that they can deliver for students, taxpayers, workers and the economy. To put the sector on a firmer financial footing, Professor Edward Peck has been appointed as substantive chair of the OfS to continue its focus on financial sustainability and increasing opportunities in HE. We also took the difficult decision to increase tuition fee limits by 3.1% in the 2025/26 academic year, in line with inflation.

We will continue to work closely with the OfS and other relevant parties to understand the sector's changing financial landscape.

Home Office: Visas: Skilled Workers

Ben Goldsborough (Labour): (UIN77332) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed changes to the Skilled Workers visa route on recruitment in (a) the biological sciences research sector, (b) universities and (c) the NHS.

Mike Tapp: On 12 May, we published our Immigration White Paper, outlining our future approach to legal migration routes. We have now made Immigration Rules changes to bring the first of these reforms into effect.

It is our intention to publish an Impact Assessment (IA) at the earliest opportunity. A technical annex (www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-technical-annex) was published alongside the Immigration White Paper setting out the impact of some of the key policy changes.

Home Office: Students: Palestinians

Victoria Collins (Liberal Democrats): (UIN77831) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support Palestinian students from Gaza who have been accepted onto UK university courses with (a) access to secure (i) English language testing (ii) visa processing and (b) other (A) administrative, (B) financial and (C) logistical travel requirements.

Mike Tapp: The Government has outlined plans to support the departure from Gaza of a group of Chevening Scholars so they can take up university places in the UK in the Autumn for the 2025/26 academic year. We are extending this support to students in Gaza with full scholarships, meaning students who have their course fees

and living costs fully funded by an official sponsor, as specified in the Immigration Rules.

For further information, please see the policy papers published by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Department for Education, on 14 September 2025 and 15 September 2025 respectively, on GOV.UK.

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Andrew Snowden (Conservative): (UIN79123) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of student loan interest rates on the total repayment amount for graduates earning below the repayment threshold.

Josh MacAlister: Student loans are subject to interest so that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree.

Interest rates on student loans do not affect monthly repayments made by borrowers. Regulated repayments are linked to income not to interest rates or the loan balance. Borrowers will be liable to repay at a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold. Those earning below the student loan repayment threshold repay nothing. Outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off after the loan term ends, or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower.

A full equality impact assessment of how the student loan reforms may affect graduates, including detail on changes to average lifetime repayments under Plan 2 and Plan 5, was produced and published under the previous government in February 2022 and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Jess Brown-Fuller (Liberal Democrats): (UIN80896) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when the international student levy will be introduced.

Josh MacAlister: This government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to attend higher education (HE). We must, therefore, reform the HE system to better support disadvantaged students.

That is why the government will introduce targeted means-tested maintenance grants for students in low-income households studying on courses that support our missions and industrial strategy, funded by a levy on income from international student fees.

The government will set out further details on the International Student Levy and targeted means-tested maintenance grants at the Autumn Budget.

Department for Education: Students: Mental Health

Lee Anderson (Reform UK): (UIN78595) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with the university sector on the mental health of students.

Josh MacAlister: This government is committed to ensuring students in higher education (HE) have access to effective mental health support. This is why my noble Friend, the Minister for Skills has recently appointed a new HE Student Support Champion to lead a reconvened HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. Full details of the new champion will be announced shortly.

The Minister for Skills, met with the new champion earlier this month to set out her strategic priorities for mental health in HE, and on 10 October the champion reconvened the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. The taskforce will be a key vehicle for discussions with the university sector around driving forward improvements.

Updates on the work of the taskforce will be published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/higher-education-mental-health-implementation-taskforce>.

Sector news

Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper

On Monday 20 October, The Government published its **Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper**, outlining the Government's ambition for **two-thirds of young people to enter higher-level learning** by age 25 - whether through academic routes, technical qualifications or apprenticeships - backed by investment in teaching, skills and research.

Central to the reforms is a new **inflation-linked rise in undergraduate tuition fees and maintenance loans**, designed to stabilise university finances after years of real-terms decline. Alongside this, a new **targeted maintenance grant** will be introduced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, funded by an **international student levy** on overseas tuition fees. The Education Secretary said this will "ensure that opportunity is driven by talent, not by family income."

The White Paper also confirms the creation of **V-levels** — a new post-16 qualification to sit alongside A-levels and T-levels — enabling young people to mix academic and vocational study. Universities will work with local colleges and employers to design and deliver new **Level 4 and 5 courses**, strengthening technical education and aligning higher education with national skills needs.

A £994 million investment will expand **Technical Excellence Colleges** and applied research centres, linking universities, colleges and industry to support innovation, job creation and regional growth. The Government said these new hubs will "anchor universities in local economies and help turn research into real-world impact."

To drive quality and accountability, universities will face **new performance-linked funding rules**. From 2026, institutions will be required to demonstrate strong teaching outcomes, value for money and social mobility performance to access the full tuition fee uplift. Those failing to meet standards could face restrictions on growth or funding.

The White Paper introduces a **Higher Education Resilience Framework**, ensuring early intervention where providers face financial difficulty. Universities will be required to publish sustainability plans and strengthen student protection measures to prevent disorderly institutional exits.

Further measures aim to make higher education more **flexible and accessible**, including modular learning options, recognised exit points within degrees, and improved pathways for adult learners to return to study. The Government said this

would “modernise the traditional university model” and ensure lifelong access to higher-level skills.

The reforms build on the Government’s wider **Skills for Growth Strategy**, linking education more closely with labour market demand and regional development.

In our response, Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK said:

"Today's white paper offers a much-needed reset for our university system. It makes clear that universities are a huge national asset, rightly admired around the world. We need them to be in great shape if we want national renewal."

"The Government has ambitions for our universities to make a stronger contribution to economic growth and individual opportunity, and we share that ambition. It also recognises the financial challenges which are putting pressure on that strength. The decision to raise undergraduate fees in line with inflation in England will help to halt the long-term erosion of universities’ financial sustainability, following a decade of fee freezes."

"A weight of evidence shows the UK will need more high-level skills in the future, and many of these proposals will help universities to turbocharge growth and opportunity, as part of a broader skills system."

"We strongly support the emphasis on collaboration in the national interest, which we have promoted in our own Blueprint and more recently through our Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce."

"This opportunity to reset is about focusing on what is best for the country, not just for individuals. Universities are up for this change. They want to work more closely, instead of purely in competition with one another. Higher and further education, with government, can build a more collaborative and sustainable future with universities at the heart of national renewal."

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

Changes in Select Committee Membership

There have been several changes in Committee memberships, including:

- **Public Accounts Committee:** **Peter Fortune** (Con, Bromley and Biggin Hill) and **James Murray** (Lab, Ealing North); **Rupert Lowe** (Ind, Great Yarmouth) and **Dan Tomlinson** (Lab, Chipping Barnet)

- **Work and Pensions Committee:** **Danny Kruger** (Reform UK, East Wiltshire) discharged; **Joy Morrissey** (Con, Beaconsfield) added
- **Business and Trade Committee:** **Gregor Poynton** (Lab, Livingston) and **Rosie Wrighting** (Lab, Kettering) discharged, **Daniel Aldridge** (Lab, Weston-super-Mare) and **Justin Madders** (Lab, Ellesmere Port and Bromborough) added
- **Home Affairs Committee:** **Jake Richards** (Lab, Rother Valley), **Shaun Davies** (Lab, Telford) and **Connor Rand** (Lab, Altrincham and Sale West) discharged; **Lewis Atkinson** (Lab, Sunderland Central), **Peter Prinsley** (Lab, Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) and **Jo White** (Lab, Bassetlaw) added
- **Science, Innovation and Technology Committee:** **Steve Race** (Lab, Exeter) and **Jon Pearce** (Lab, High Peak) discharged; **Samantha Niblett** (Lab, South Derbyshire) and **Daniel Zeichner** (Lab, Cambridge) added
- **Work and Pensions Committee:** **David Pinto-Duschinsky** (Lab, Hendon), **Gill German** (Lab, Clwyd North) and **Frank McNally** (Lab, Coatbridge and Bellshill) discharged; **Lee Barron** (Lab, Corby and East Northamptonshire), **David Baines** (Lab, St Helens North) and **Rushanara Ali** (Lab, Bethnal Green and Stepney) added
- **Education Committee:** **Amanda Martin** (Lab, Portsmouth North) and **Dr Marie Tidball** (Lab, Penistone and Stocksbridge) discharged; **Peter Swallow** (Lab, Bracknell) and **Chris Vince** (Lab, Harlow) added

You can read the full list of changes.

The Royal Society - UK immigration costs: an international comparison of skilled worker, researcher and student visas in 2025

The UK now has some of the most expensive visa fees globally for international students, researchers and skilled workers, according to new analysis published by the **Royal Society** on Monday 20 October.

The report, *UK immigration costs: an international comparison of skilled worker, researcher and student visas in 2025*, shows that total upfront visa costs in the UK have risen by up to **128% since 2019** and remain significantly higher than all other leading science nations. When excluding the UK, British visa costs are now **up to 22 times higher** than the international average.

The analysis found that a **five-year stay** in the UK now costs thousands more than comparable nations, largely due to the **Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)**, which was increased in 2024 to **£1,035 per person per year** — meaning a typical five-year visa incurs an extra £5,175 in charges.

The cost of the **Global Talent Visa**, used by leading researchers and innovators, is **over 2,000% higher** than equivalent routes overseas, while a **Student Visa** costs around **£2,852**, more than **1,000% above** the international average. Settlement fees for long-term residency have also risen sharply, with UK charges now more than **300% higher** than those in other science economies.

The report estimates that a family of four applying for a five-year Skilled Worker visa could face upfront costs of up to **£29,700**, covering visa fees, health surcharges and related charges.

The report warns that the UK's high visa and surcharge regime risks **undermining its global competitiveness**, deterring international students and world-class researchers from choosing the UK over other destinations. The report cautioned that these costs could reduce diversity, limit collaboration, and make it harder for universities and research institutions to attract and retain top talent.

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

UK regions given extra £20m science and tech cash boost as new investment kicks off landmark growth summit

New boosts of £20m each for Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Glasgow City Region will help to deliver more of the regions' game-changing local innovations like robotics to unlock new medicines or AI that can spot illnesses earlier, the Science and Technology Secretary has announced on Sunday 19 October.

The funding package will give local leaders in these three areas access to a total of £50m each to fund innovations in science and technology in their local areas, like the next lifesaving medicine or cheaper fuels that can keep bills down.

The new funding for three regions is the latest commitment from the Government's £500m Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF) and builds on the initial £30m earmarked for each place in June's Spending Review, along with seven others across the UK, including Cardiff City Region, Belfast-Derry/Londonderry and West Yorkshire.

This additional funding will enable more spinouts like Chemify in Glasgow, which was backed by Government funding, to help create the world's first 'Chemputation' facility – merging AI-powered molecular-design engines with industrial robotics to speed up discovery of medicines and materials.

Elsewhere, regional funding has boosted Greater Manchester's growth into a global AI hub, connecting university technical expertise to start-ups and SMEs so they can turn early-stage ideas into viable products – from tech which can predict disease progression earlier to work on net zero innovations to decarbonise buildings.

And in the West Midlands, the additional funding could enable more projects like Biochar CleanTech, taking organic residues like sawdust or fallen trees and converting them into usable low-carbon products.

The projects launched under the predecessor Innovation Accelerators programme has delivered more than £140 million of private investment and hundreds of jobs, creating more opportunities for people to get on.

This comes ahead of the Regional Investment Summit which will bring together business leaders, major investors, policymakers, regulators, regional mayors and other local leaders to showcase the breadth and depth of opportunities to invest, expand and create jobs right across our nations and regions.

Ahead of the Summit, the Chancellor has pledged that no region will be locked out of the investment, jobs and growth being delivered as part of the government's Plan for Change.

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

