



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

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University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill - Remaining Stages

On Monday 21 February, the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill received its Report Stage in the House of Commons.

The Minister for Skills, Alex Burghart MP, spoke to new clause 12 and amendments 9 and 10, tabled by the Government. He explained that the government announced their intention to table NC12 in Committee last November, and that the Office for Students (OfS) required an explicit power to publish information about its compliance and enforcement activity in relation to higher education providers. He explained that NC12 would protect the OfS from defamation claims – similar to the powers and protections offered to other regulators, such as the Competition and Markets Authority, Ofsted, and the Children's Commissioner.

Toby Perkins MP, Shadow Minister for FE and Skills, spoke to amendments 12 to 16 in his name and in the name of shadow universities minister Matt Western. He argued the Bill was silent on apprenticeship reform and any recognition that the apprenticeship levy had, according to the CIPD, "failed by every measure". Their amendment would ask the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to perform a review of the operation of the apprenticeship levy.

Munira Wilson MP, Lib Dem education spokesperson, also spoke to new clause 11 in her name, which sought to address the gap in support for 16-year-olds as they transitioned within the education system.

Former universities minister, Chris Skidmore MP, spoke to several new clauses in his name, including:

- **New clause 4**, would require the Education Secretary to publish a green skills strategy.
- **New clause 6** would require the Education Secretary to publish an annual report on overall skills levels and economic output across England and Wales.
- **New clause 7** and **amendment 3**, would place the Government's lifetime skills guarantee on a statutory footing. He also argued that ELQ rules should be "explicitly removed as a condition for claiming a lifelong loan entitlement." Amendment 3, which would expand financial support for higher and further education courses to include means-tested grants.
- **New clause 8** would require the Education Secretary to publish a national strategy for integrated education
- **New clause 9** would require the Education Secretary to "set out a framework of national guidelines for the unbundling, stacking and transfer of modular course credits between institutions.
- **New clause 10** covered the role of employers and employees reskilling, requiring businesses to offer their employees a minimum amount of in-work skills development and redundancy training to be funded by a skills tax credit along very much the same lines as research and development tax credits.
- **Amendments 4, 5 and 6**, pertained to lifelong learning as part of the future devolution of skills.

Stephen Timms MP (Lab), chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, spoke to new clause 13 in his name, which would introduce Sharia-compliant education loans. He noted the government had pledged to introduce alternative student finance nine years ago, but still hadn't delivered, which he argued was barring large numbers of Muslims from higher education.

The Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, begged to move that the Bill be now read the Third time.

He stated that the Bill and government's wider skills reforms were their opportunity to tackle the challenges and unlock the "full potential of our people and the productivity of our economy". He added that the Bill would deliver on the government's plans to level up across the country, as people would be able to get the "quality education and training that they need for work at any stage of their lives in all communities across the country".

Toby Perkins MP said that it was "a matter of tremendous regret" that previous proposed amendments were removed by the government. Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

You can read a transcript of the Report Stage [here](#).

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions

On Tuesday 22 February, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng and his ministerial team answered questions from MPs in the Commons.

A number of Conservative MPs asked questions on support for the growth of science and innovation through the government's levelling up agenda. Notably, Aaron Bell MP (Con) asked the minister if he could confirm the role of universities in levelling up will be supported. In response, the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, George Freeman MP said he could "absolutely confirm" that the government were taking the role of universities in innovation and the levelling up agenda importantly. He added that this would be reflected in the allocation of £40bn to UKRI and Innovate UK over the next three years.

The Shadow Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, Chi Onwurah MP suggested that the proposals in the Levelling Up White Paper would only freeze the current proportion of regional science spend. She said that while funding in the 'golden triangle' of the South East and London was increasing rapidly, not enough had been offered in the White Paper to rebalance both public and private research and innovation funding. The minister responded saying that the White Paper set out exactly how this rebalancing would happen, and cited the investment in clusters of research and innovation activity. He also warned against removing diverting funding away from the golden triangle.

Maria Miller MP (Con) praised the government's work to tackle the misuse of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) at universities. She then asked whether the minister would be taking this work forward in the Employment Bill and suggested a meeting with organisations like Can't Buy My Silence. In response, the Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets, Paul Scully MP welcomed Conservative colleague's work in this area and said that he would happily discuss this further with Maria Miller MP and Can't buy my silence.

You can read a transcript of the oral questions [here](#).

Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry session on 'delivering a UK science and technology strategy' – session one

On Tuesday 22 February, the Lords Science and Technology Committee held an oral evidence session as part of their inquiry on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'.

The Chair, Baroness Brown of Cambridge, asked what the strengths and weaknesses were of UK research and innovation, and what we could learn as a nation from best practice overseas. Professor James Wilsdon, Digital Science Professor of Research Policy at The University of Sheffield, answered that, while it was good to see investment rising, the UK underinvested relative to other similar countries in Europe. Dr Beth Thompson, Associate Director, Policy at Wellcome

Trust, added that there was an implementation gap, with lots of talk and not much action, that she believed needed sustained action to correct.

The Chair asked whether we had the right incentive structure and academic culture more generally. Dr Thompson argued this needed to improve – there was too much focus on what is achieved rather than how it's been done, while the environment more generally has not been inclusive enough in terms of diversity, openness and transparency. Lord Willetts added that the focus on highly cited research was good, but that the UK was less good at application, with weak networks of institutes outside of universities. Baroness Blackwood asked how one might encourage more private sector investment in UK research and development. Professor Wilsdon pointed away from ARIA, which he called a 'silver bullet' at the expense of discussion. Dr Thompson believed the bureaucracy needed simplifying, to which Lord Willetts agreed.

Lord Mitchell (Lab) asked what the panel believed were the chances of successful strategic reform, and what could be learnt from past attempts. Lord Willetts replied that the new cabinet sub-committee on science and technology was an important innovation and could be very valuable going forwards. He was cautiously optimistic that a combination of extra money, 'scraping off the barnacles' and UKRI reform could provide long-term gain – however Dr Thompson warned against trying for quick wins. Professor Wilsdon added that one-year spending reviews hindered past reform and hoped new ones would offer greater stability. Major levers to support the wider research sector going forwards included procurement, standard setting, pro-innovation regulation and other toolkits, according to Lord Willetts.

Baroness Manningham-Buller (CB) asked what it meant that the Government wished for the UK to become a 'science superpower'. Dr Thompson replied that being a science superpower meant more than being 'top of the league', but rather it was about how the UK used its position to make a difference in the pressing issues of the scientific global community – for example, in antimicrobial resistance, climate change, etc. Professor Wilsdon agreed, noting 60 percent of UK papers came from collaborations abroad and hoped the direction of the system would orient towards shared global objectives.

Asked whether the aim for 2.4 percent of GDP to be allocated to science was enough, Lord Willetts noted that the OECD average had already increased above 2.5 percent.

The Chair asked whether we did enough research in universities, and whether an increase in funding might also go to other organisations. Dr Thompson believed it was not so straightforward an answer, as universities had seen a significant cut to its QR funding in recent years. Professor Wilsdon added that the benefits of increased budgets hadn't yet filtered through.

A transcript of the debate will be published [here](#).

Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry session on 'delivering a UK science and technology strategy' – session two

On Tuesday 22 February, the Lords Science and Technology Committee held an oral evidence session as part of their inquiry on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'.

Professor Graeme Reid, Chair of Science and Research Policy at University College London (UCL), opened by commenting on the UK's relentless focus on excellence from comparatively modest levels of public spending. He hoped the new cabinet committee would create the administrative machinery to help discuss the pressing issues of the community.

Professor Sarah Main CBE, Executive Director at Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) discussed the strength of academic research as attractive to business and investment, with the breadth of expertise being a characteristic that performed well over a variety of disciplines. However,

she saw weaknesses in how R&D investment was underpowered generally and that the UK's goal on research and innovation still had a long way to go in terms of funding, looking to the USA, China, South Korea and Germany for best practice.

Gavin Costigan, Chief executive at Foundation for Science and Technology, added that science was not just citations and papers but had greater effects on society as well as wealth creation. He pointed to issues of diversity and a balance between 'top down' and 'bottom up' agendas as challenges, amidst a generally positive scientific environment.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab) asked how the increase in public funding should be allocated and who would decide this. Professor Reid replied that the decision was made by the Treasury at a higher level, but that some departments might act as funding agents within this to commission specific research. Professor Main added that it wasn't just funding models, but the capability of institutions to use that budget that was important. During austerity, R&D funding had fallen 30%, which crucially included a loss of 'people' capability, which also occurred during the pandemic.

Baroness Walmsley (Lib Dem) asked what we had learnt from previous attempts at reform and what were the consequences of frequently changing science and tech strategy. Professor Reid answered that each strategy was posited as a new direction, but set against history didn't diverge so much. He hoped to see every strategy going forwards include a sizeable portion devoted to delivery, rather than simple blue sky thinking. Professor Main used the industrial strategy of 2016 as an example of the above, adding that the scale of ambition must be something that works for successive governments, the R&D and, crucially, the public at large.

Baroness Sheehan (Lib Dem) asked whether the subcommittee would help coordinate development across departments. Professor Reid answered we couldn't tell how well it would function or operate yet, however he believed the administrative design felt right. Professor Main agreed it was helpful to bring together the leadership of varied departments, while Gavin Costigan added that the relationship between the committee and the UKRI was crucial, as well as that between the committee and the Government Office for Science.

Lord Rees of Ludlow (Crossbench) asked whether we risked taking on too much. Professor Reid agreed it was wise to exercise caution and that the UK could not 'own' domains of science. Professor Main hoped for more cooperative effort between nations with the UK as a reliable partner – the UK's decision to withdraw from international aid budgets had harmed its reputation abroad. Gavin Costigan agreed the UK had to repair relationships in some areas.

Lord Mitchell (Lab) wondered if the government should take a more hands-off approach. Professor Reid argued that releasing the curiosity and expertise of scientists was what underpinned the UK's excellence while ensuring quality and competition, however Professor Main added that greater funding was very welcome, as it combined freedom of enquiry with accountability over public money.

A transcript of the debate will be published [here](#).

Women and Equalities Oral Questions

On Wednesday 23 February, members of the government with a women and equalities brief answered questions from MPs in the Commons.

Diane Abbott MP asked whether the minister is concerned that proposals that would limit access to tuition fees unless students meet certain grades at GCSE and A-level would impact on social mobility.

The Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch MP, responded that the Department for Education had done an equalities impact assessment and this would have been taken into account to make sure that

people who are most at risk and most vulnerable are not prevented from taking up education in any way.

You can read a transcript of the oral evidence session [here](#).

Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry session on 'diversity in STEM'

On Wednesday 23 February, the Commons Science and Technology Committee held an oral evidence session as part of their inquiry on 'diversity in STEM'.

The Chair Greg Clark (Con, Tunbridge Wells) asked Professor Sanders, Chair, Diversity Committee at Royal Society, to summarise what the conclusions were of the Diversity Committee by the Royal Society. Professor Jeremy Sanders said that the Royal Society was committed to increasing diversity in STEM. In their opinion, the current under-representation of various groups meant a loss of opportunity and waste of talent for them, but also translated to a loss of opportunity for society as a whole.

The Chair asked Professor Sanders to explain the under-representation of disability, socio-economic deprivation and sexuality in STEM. He replied that disability was a complicated issue, as many people with disabilities were reluctant to declare them. Only a small proportion of the older workforce self-identified as having a disability. Among students, many declared having a disability, often around neuro-diversity, or mental health (as opposed to physical disabilities).

On percentages of women graduating in STEM, Professor Sanders said that the Royal Society did not observe a decrease in the participation of women between a first degree and a PhD. Moreover, there was not much attenuation between PhD and post-doctoral research positions. However, there was a significant drop-off in the number of women in independent fellowships and academic positions.

The Chair asked a question about the low number of Black STEM professors, Clare Viney, CEO at Careers Research Advisory Centre-Vitae, explained that this represented an increase in the number of Black STEM professors. In her opinion, there was something wrong with the progression of UK-domiciled Black scientists.

Graham Stringer (Labour) asked what the cause was for the limited progress in promoting representation in universities. Clare Viney responded said there were many well-meaning interventions that were perhaps not as effective, due to a lack of cohesiveness. Professor Sanders said that many institutions and people working in institutions were inherently reluctant to change.

The Chair asked if any interventions or policy directions taken in the last few years had a positive impact. Katherine Mathieson, Katherine Mathieson, Chief Executive at British Science Association, explained that the nature and extent of the under-representation was systemic, meaning that any single policy or intervention could not make a significant difference.

At the moment, there was a dramatic under-representation at all levels, from education to industry. In her opinion, the 'leaky pipeline' metaphor was unhelpful as it suggested that the people responsible for the attrition were the people leaking out at each stage (finding STEM unattractive, not worth the while). In her opinion, it would be helpful to recognise that the system itself was flawed, with higher barriers to entry for some social groups

Carol Monaghan (SNP) asked Katherine Mathieson how the UK could incentivise marginalised groups to come up with initiatives that would increase representation. She replied that in her opinion, it was critical to recognise and reward proper diversity and inclusion work. The British Science Association were supporting these groups to rediscover their own science identity, their own

entitlement to STEM and the relevance of STEM in their everyday life. As a result, their funding and support needed to be flexible and responsive, as opposed to having a one-size-fits-all solution.

Katherine Fletcher (Conservative) asked the witnesses how they could improve the 'pull factors' attracting people to STEM. Dr Anna Zecharia, Development Board Member at Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Science and Health (EDIS) began by explaining that STEM had reach into all aspects of society. Investing in STEM was good for productivity, creativity and innovation. Therefore, the UK should not do anything that restricted the talent pool. She completely agreed with the framing of the levelling up paper, which said that talent was distributed equally, while opportunity was not.

A transcript of the debate will be published [here](#).

Oral question on the impact of Covid-19 on the education of school children

On Wednesday 23 February Lord Storey (Liberal Democrat) asked a question on the government's assessment of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of school children in the most deprived communities.

The Minister, Baroness Barron, responded that pupils were one to three months behind. Pupil premium pupils were around half a month further behind in reading and maths at primary level and 1.7 months further behind in reading at secondary level, which is why, as well as the universal offer to students and staff, they are targeting £5 billion of education recovery funding at pupils who most need support to recover their lost learning.

Lord Bishop of Gloucester noted that due to the effect of the pandemic on university experience, greater numbers of young people deferred university places. He said this particularly affected students who would leave school this year, as university capacity is limited. He asked what is being done so that those from deprived backgrounds seeking university places this year do not become further disadvantaged in their education and future life choices, having often been the most affected by the pandemic.

The Minister responded that the government been working with the Office for Students to ensure that there is the strongest possible approach to fair access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and that more announcements will be made imminently in that regard.

You can read a transcript of the question [here](#).

Secretary of State for Education Oral Statement on Higher Education reform

Today (Thursday 24 February), the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP, made a statement in the Commons on the government's proposed plans to reform higher education.

The Education Secretary began by stating that the government are addressing a core recommendation from the Augar report, a lifelong learning loan allowance, by launching a consultation on the Lifelong Learning Allowance. He confirmed that under the proposed new and flexible skills system, individuals would be entitled to a loan entitlement equivalent to four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime.

The Secretary of State repeated that it is important that the higher education funding system is fair for both students and the taxpayer. He noted that if no reforms take place, only 23% of students will pay the full cost of their loan. Reforms announced include:

- Retaining the repayment threshold at its current level for the current Plan 2 graduates until 2025. Those who took out loans after 2012.

- Reducing the repayment threshold to £25,000 and extending the repayment period from 30 years to 40 years for students starting their studies in the autumn of 2023.
- Reducing interest rates for students starting next year to RPI+0%, ensuring that graduates under these terms will not have to pay more than they have borrowed in real terms.
- A freeze to tuition fees for the next two years.

The Education Secretary stressed that no student would repay more than what they borrowed in today's prices, thanks to the interest rate being capped at inflation. He concluded that without these interventions the student loan book would balloon to half a trillion pounds by 2043.

The Secretary of State went on to outline other investments including:

- £900 million into the higher education system
- £750million in high-quality teaching and facilities, including STEM, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships
- £75million for a national scholarship programme to support high achieving disadvantaged students.

He referred to work with the Office for Students to drive up outcomes and help students to access high-value employment that will benefit them and the economy. This will include setting minimum expectations around completion and progression to graduate jobs.

He also announced that the government were consulting on student number controls and a minimum eligibility to access student finance. He said that less than 1% of entrants would be affected by the proposals. He said proposals to reduce fees on Foundation Years and to establish a national scholarship programme will help those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, to compliment the LLE, the Education Secretary confirmed the roll out of Higher Technical Qualifications and extending student finance access in the future, including allowing part-time learners to access maintenance loans.

The Shadow Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson MP, noted that 1000 days had passed since the Augar review had been published. She criticised the Education Secretary for freezing fees, rather than changing them, for tying interest rates RPI, which are being phased out and not making any statement on living costs for students. The Shadow Education Secretary criticised the government's track record with education over the past decade and said children were an afterthought for the government and an opportunity for the Treasury to find a saving.

Chair of the Education Committee, Robert Halfon MP, welcomed the government's proposals – particularly the cut in interest rates. He urged caution on the minimum entry requirements, and suggested functional skills qualifications be taken alongside a degree where needed, similar to the current approach with apprenticeships and T Levels.

He advised the government to consider introducing an International Baccalaureate qualification to stop the system from narrowing so early in young peoples' pathways. Finally, he welcomed the £900 million investment and asked the Secretary of State to allocate a significant proportion to degree apprenticeships.

A transcript of the statement can be found [here](#).

Backbench business debate on the UK's relationship with Russia and China

On Thursday 24 February, the House of Commons held a backbench business debate on the UK's relationship with Russia and China.

The debate was brought forward by the Conservative MP Bob Seely, who argued for the UK government to develop a new approach to Russia and China that, while recognising their separate legitimate interests, ensures a "robust" defence of both UK interests and democratic values.

The debate focused mainly on Russian influence over the UK in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, while speaking about the influence of China in the UK, he called for a move towards an era of "smart containment" to tackle new forms of covert and overt influence at universities and other high-profile institutions citing Chinese influence of academics and universities by Huawei as an example of this new form of influence. He also suggested that dual-use military research, collaboration with Chinese military universities, and "front organisations" such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association should all be banned. Finally, he said that Confucius Institutes should "stop spying" on Chinese students, and be willing to discuss Hong Kong and Tiananmen Square, if they are to remain in the UK.

A transcript of the debate can be found [here](#).

Lords Oral Question on the acceptance of T-Levels by Higher Education Institutions

On Thursday 24 February after 11am, Lord Bishop of Coventry asked a question on the assessment the government have made of the acceptance of T Levels by Higher Education institutions for candidates for admission to universities via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in the current application cycle.

The Minister, Baroness Barran, responded that the department had published a list of higher education providers that will accept T-levels. 118 higher education providers, of which 78 are English universities, had agreed to accept applications from T-level students. This overall figure had increased from 75 since December last year. She went on to say that the department were hosting roundtables with higher education providers to ensure they are engaging with the sector directly.

Members questioned how the government were going to ensure there were adequate placements, particularly in rural areas, for the nine weeks of work experience required for T-levels. Baroness Barran responded that as the qualifications are designed with employers, the government are confident these opportunities will emerge.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie said that for T-levels to be a success they need to have recognition from universities. He welcomed the 118 higher education providers on the list, but noted that only 10 of the 24 Russell Group universities are on that list. Baroness Barran responded that they are working closely and engaging actively with a number of universities, including those in the Russell group.

However, she said that the point of T-levels is to give students choice, some students that will be university, for some it will be Russell group, for others it will be going straight into employment, and for others it will be further qualifications at different levels.

A transcript of the question can be found [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

On Monday 28 February at 4pm, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee will be holding a committee session on the 'Levelling up White Paper'.

Witnesses for this session include:

- Neil O'Brien MP, Minister for Levelling Up, the Union and Constitution
- Andy Haldane, Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce at Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

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

Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry session on 'delivering a UK science and technology strategy'

On Tuesday 1 March at 10:15am, the Science and Technology Committee will be holding a session on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'.

Witnesses for this session include

- Sir Adrian Smith, Director and Chief Executive at The Alan Turing Institute
- Dr Paul Bate, CEO at UK Space Agency
- Chris Wigley, CEO at Genomics England
- Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and the Arthur Balfour Professor of Genetics at University of Cambridge
- Dr David Richards, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) at University of Hull
- Professor Chris Pearce, Vice Principal for Research at University of Glasgow

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

Written Questions

Horizon Europe

Lord Stevens of Birmingham: To ask Her Majesty's Government by what date they expect British universities to have a definitive answer as to whether the UK has succeeded in formally associating with the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme.

Lord Callanan: The UK stands ready to formalise our association to Horizon Europe at the earliest opportunity. At the recent EU -UK Specialised Committee the EU confirmed they were unwilling to move on UK association due to broader political issues. We continue to push the EU, by whatever means possible, to formalise our association but the EU is not living up to the commitments it made in 2020.

We recognise that delays by the EU have led to uncertainty for researchers, businesses and innovators based in the UK, including British Universities. To provide reassurance the Government has guaranteed funding for the first wave of eligible, successful applicants to Horizon Europe .

Given the EU 's persistence in delaying our association, it is only right and responsible that we are prepared for all outcomes, including one where we are not able to associate. Our priority is to support UK researchers and provide immediate stability and continuity for the sector. To this end, we are developing a coherent, compelling and high-quality programme to provide the fellowships, collaborations and industry engagement so valued in Horizon.

Large donations from foreign billionaires linked with regimes with poor human rights records

Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what his policy is on the acceptance of large donations by University colleges from foreign billionaires closely linked with regimes with poor human rights records; how that policy would apply to the proposed acceptance by Linacre College, Oxford of £155 million from a billionaire based in Vietnam, with close links to the Vietnamese government; and what recommendation his Department will make to the Privy Council on whether Linacre College should be permitted to rename itself after the Chairwoman of the company making the donation as a condition of receiving the money. [124938]

Michelle Donelan: The security guidelines, commissioned at my request and published by Universities UK in October 2020, entitled 'Managing risks in internationalisation: security-related issues', advise universities on engaging in secure international collaborations. This includes a recommendation that due diligence should be conducted on all international partnerships, including donations. Universities due diligence processes should consider reputational, ethical and security risks. As autonomous institutions, universities will have their own fundraising and gift acceptance policies in place.

In line with the offer that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office extends to all organisations and businesses looking to work with Vietnamese entities, Linacre College and the University of Oxford have received background information, at their request, on working with Vietnamese entities.

If the Privy Council asks the department for advice, we will consider the case based on the facts before us.

As my right hon Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has recently stated, we intend to further explore the issues raised in the proposed Report Stage amendment to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, seeking to introduce transparency and public reporting of foreign donations to universities.

Rejection of T Level qualifications by universities

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the FE Week article 'Confused and frustrated: Most universities reject first cohort of T Level students', published on 14 January, what steps they are taking to ensure that T Level qualifications are accepted by universities, both this year and in future years.

Baroness Barran: We have undertaken an extensive programme of activities to encourage universities to consider the suitability of T Levels for entry to higher education (HE). As well as agreeing the allocation of UCAS tariff points, we have delivered numerous briefings to universities, collectively and individually, to explain the benefits of the programme and to answer their questions. We have also made available materials that will allow them to compare the content of T Levels with other established qualifications, such as A levels. We recently published a list of HE providers that will accept T Levels, which currently includes 74 universities and we expect this to continue to grow.

However, universities are autonomous institutions that set their own entry requirements. At this stage, their decisions are likely to be based on the first three T Level subjects, which will necessarily restrict the institutions and courses for which a T Level is suitable. As the remaining T Levels are rolled out, we will continue with our targeted engagement until all HE providers have had the opportunity to make an informed decision about the suitability of T Levels for their institution.

Mental health training for lecturers

Colleen Fletcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to improve the provision of mental health training for (a) schoolteachers and (b) lecturers in (i) universities and (ii) colleges. [121787]

Will Quince: The government is progressing well on its commitment to offer quality assured training to help develop all state-funded schools and colleges' approaches to mental health and wellbeing in England by 2025. The department has invested over £9.5 million during the financial year 2021-22.

As of 14 January 2022, over 8,000 eligible schools and colleges have applied for a senior mental health lead training grant. On 8 February 2022, the government announced that an additional £3 million has been provided to extend access to training, enabling eligible parties to access training before the end of May. Information on this can be accessed [here](#).

The government provides practical ways to support schools in teaching about mental health and wellbeing through training modules. Details on the training modules can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing> Additionally, the department's Leading Behaviour and Culture national professional qualification supports teachers to improve the wellbeing, motivation, and behaviour of pupils in the classroom.

Higher education providers are autonomous bodies, independent from the government. The government supports various organisations calling for universities and colleges to adopt mental health as a priority, such as Universities UK 's Stepchange and the University Mental Health Charter.

Training places for medical and dentistry undergraduate courses

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of the number of training places that will be offered for (a) doctors, (b) nurses, (c) allied health professionals and (d) scientists in each of the next five years.

Edward Argar: In the 2022/23 academic year 7,571 places will be offered for medical undergraduate courses and 809 places for dentistry courses, in England. These are intake targets set by the Office for Students (OfS). These targets are set annually and thus we do not hold information about the number of medicine and dentistry places to be offered in subsequent years.

The Department does not hold the specific number of places offered in the next five years for courses in nursing, allied health professions and healthcare science.

Race awareness training for students and staff

Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage university accommodation providers to introduce race awareness training for students and staff.

Baroness Barran: The government does not play a role in providing or running student residential accommodation. Universities and private accommodation providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own rent agreements.

We encourage accommodation providers to review their policies to ensure they are fair, clear and have the interests of students at heart. There should be no tolerance of any form of racism.

If a student thinks their accommodation provider is treating them unfairly, they can raise a complaint under the accommodation codes of practice if the provider is a code member. The codes can be found [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Student Finance Maintenance Loans

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason Student Finance Maintenance Loans are counted as income for universal credit calculations. [121691]

David Rutley: Student loans and grants have a £110 disregard in each Universal Credit monthly assessment period. After this threshold is met, they are treated as income and Universal Credit is deducted accordingly. Special Support Elements or Grants are fully disregarded, as these specifically cover the cost of an educational course.

Financial support for students primarily comes from grants and the student loans system, which is specifically designed for their needs, unlike the wider benefits system. It is right that Universal Credit does not duplicate support already being given. In this respect, Universal Credit mirrors other benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, and new-style Jobseekers Allowance.

Student Finance Maintenance Loans

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason students' funding received from student finance funded maintenance loans is deducted from their overall universal credit payments. [121690]

David Rutley: Student loans and grants have a £110 disregard in each Universal Credit monthly assessment period. After this threshold is met, they are treated as income and Universal Credit is deducted accordingly. Special Support Elements or Grants are fully disregarded, as these specifically cover the cost of an educational course.

Financial support for students primarily comes from grants and the student loans system, which is specifically designed for their needs, unlike the wider benefits system. It is right that Universal Credit does not duplicate support already being given. In this respect, Universal Credit mirrors other benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, and new-style Jobseekers Allowance.

Sector News

Department for Education updated Covid-19 guidance for higher education providers

On Monday 21 February and Thursday 24 February, the Department of Education updated its Covid-19 guidance for higher education providers.

On Monday 21 February, the guidance was updated to reflect the end of the asymptomatic testing programme. The guidance made reference to UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) guidance on contact tracing and isolation which comes into effect from Thursday 24 February 2022.

On Thursday 24 February, the guidance was updated to reflect the new public health guidance tracing close contacts, isolation and when someone has symptoms or a positive test.

You can find the guidance [here](#).

Commons library briefing on the Turing Scheme

On Tuesday 22 February, the House of Commons Library published a briefing on the Turing Scheme.

The paper provides background to the change from the Erasmus+ scheme to the Turing Scheme, outlines how the Turing Scheme works and details responses to the new scheme from the devolved administrations, the Labour party and the sector.

You can read the briefing [here](#).

Commons library briefing on HE student numbers

On Wednesday 23 February, the House of Commons Library published a briefing on Higher education student numbers.

The paper looks at the trends in the size of the student population, changes in the number of entrants overall and for different types of students/courses and entry rates for different groups and areas.

The paper shows that the headline student numbers have increased to new record levels in recent years following a short dip related to the 2012 reforms in the sector. There have been continued increases in entry rates for different groups of students, including those from disadvantaged areas/backgrounds where rates have also hit new record levels. However, it raised concern about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on student numbers, particularly those from overseas and uncertainty about the impact of Brexit on EU student numbers.

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

Department for Education consultation on higher education reforms

On Thursday 25 February, the Department of Education published an open consultation on higher education reform.

The consultation is seeking views on

- student number controls
- minimum eligibility requirements
- foundation years
- eligibility for a state scholarship
- growing high-quality level 4 and 5

The consultation document also sets out:

- how the department are investing in higher education to prioritise provision that results in better outcomes for students, the economy and society
- how the department plan to tackle the rising cost of the system to taxpayers, while reducing debt levels for students and graduates

The consultation closes on 6 May 2022.

You can find the consultation [here](#).

Department for Education consultation on the lifelong loan entitlement

On Thursday 25 February, the Department of Education published an open consultation on the lifelong loan entitlement.

The consultation is seeking views on a lifelong loan entitlement for use on modular or full-time study at higher technical and degree levels, in higher and further education providers.

From 2025, the lifelong loan entitlement will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of 4 years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime. It will be available for both modular and full-time study at higher technical and degree levels (levels 4 to 6), regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities.

The Department for Education are seeking views on our ambition, objectives and coverage, together with aspects such as:

- modularity
- maintenance
- quality provision
- flexible learning
- credit transfer
- restrictions based on previous study

The consultation closes on 6 May 2022.

You can find the consultation [here](#).

Department for Education consultation response on post-qualification admissions

On Thursday 25 February, the Department of Education published the response to the consultation on post-qualification admissions

The document outlined that the consultation responses indicated that this reform would be a significant undertaking for both the HE and the school and college systems. Many respondents point out a need for the sector to focus on educational recovery and exam recovery as a priority, rather than wholesale system reform. Whilst there was support for post-qualification admissions, the department of education decided it is not strong enough to indicate that this is the right time for a major upheaval.

The consultation response confirms that the government will not be pursuing a policy of post-qualification admissions but will focus on working with sector bodies to address identified problems within the current arrangements in a way which is supportive of all students.

You can find the consultation response [here](#).

Home Office updated guidance on temporary visa concessions for Ukrainian nationals

On Thursday 24 February, the Home Office updated its guidance on support for family members of British nationals in Ukraine, and Ukrainian nationals in Ukraine and the UK.

Those on a Student visa that is due to expire can apply to extend leave or switch to a Graduate visa, if they meet the Immigration Rules.

You can find the updated guidance [here](#).

Universities Minister speech on post-18 review of higher education

On Thursday 24 February, as part of the launch of the Government's response to the post-18 review into higher education, Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan MP delivered a speech at the Centre for Policy Studies.

The Minister repeated announcements made on the lifelong loan entitlement, student finance and investments in the sector by the Secretary of state for Education.

You can read the speech [here](#).

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's Mais Lecture 2022

On Thursday 24 February, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, gave the annual Mais lecture at Bayes Business School.

In the speech, the Chancellor referred to the government's plan on skills and lifelong learning. He said that with four in five of the 2030 workforce already in work the additional contribution education can make to productivity and growth is through adult skills. He referred to the recent announcements on Lifelong Learning Entitlement, Skills Bootcamps, T Levels and improved funding for post 16 education and colleges but said more needs to be done to improve awareness and perception of the quality of technical qualifications, and link them more closely to good employment outcomes.

On innovation and research and development, the Chancellor said that to accelerate growth, innovation must be our highest priority. He said that they will use the freedoms and flexibilities of being outside the EU to ensure the regulatory systems in technology, life sciences, financial services and beyond support innovation. He referred to the R&D pledge to increase public investment in R&D

to £22bn a year, but said his overriding challenge is increasing the amount of business investment in R&D, noting that self-financed business R&D as a % of GDP is less than half the OECD average.

Finally, the Chancellor said the government should examine whether the current system – including the operation of the Apprenticeship Levy – is doing enough to incentivise businesses to invest in the right kinds of training. As the tax strategy for the years ahead is delivered, the Chancellor said it would be sensible to make sure the tax regime for innovation is globally competitive and so properly incentivises higher business investment in R&D.

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

ARIA Bill receives Royal Assent

On Thursday 24 February, following agreement by both Houses on the Bill text, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill has formally received Royal Assent. It is now an Act of Parliament as the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Act 2022.

You can find out about the Bill [here](#).