



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

22 – 26 January 2024

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

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

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Parliamentary business

Action Against Houthi Maritime Attacks – House of Commons statement

On Tuesday 23 January, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP gave a statement about military action against Houthi targets in Yemen. In the questions following, the issue of extremism in universities received a response from the Prime Minister.

Greg Smith MP (Conservative) cited BBC reports of senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) generals making extremist speeches filled with antisemitism and the promotion of violence to students at universities in the UK. He asked what steps are being taken to stop this. The Prime Minister responded by affirming: ‘universities have a duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, and where there is evidence that universities are failing in that duty, I am happy to reassure him that the Government will not hesitate to intervene to ensure that the right steps are taken.’

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

Forthcoming business

Education – oral questions

On Monday 29 January from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for the Department for Education (DfE), Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes to visa fees and conditions on the number of applications for postgraduate research. [Joanna Cherry MP, SNP]
- What steps she is taking to increase apprenticeship starts in SMEs. [Feryal Clark MP, Labour]
- What steps her Department is taking to encourage the take-up of degree-level apprenticeships. [Mr Louie French MP, Conservative]
- What assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of changes to visa fees and conditions on the number of applications for postgraduate research. [Chris Stephens MP, SNP]
- What steps her Department is taking to encourage further and higher education providers to work with businesses to help meet local skills needs. [Dr Jamie Wallis MP, Conservative]

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

Progress made since the UK re-joined Horizon Europe – Lords oral question

On Tuesday 30 January from 2:30pm, an oral question on ‘Progress made since the UK re-joined Horizon Europe’ will take place. This oral question has been tabled by Viscount Stansgate (Labour).

You can [watch the session](#).

Written Questions

Video Games: Degrees

Justin Tomlinson MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students took undergraduate degrees in Games and Animation in the academic year 2022-23. [UIN 9507]

Robert Halfon MP: The Higher Education Statistics Agency, which is now part of JISC, is responsible for collecting and publishing data about UK higher education. The latest statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year.

The number of full person equivalents [1] studying at undergraduate level in the subject area 'Games and Animation' [2] in 2021/22 was 13,430, including 4,820 first year enrolments. To note, figures have been rounded to the nearest five. An additional 4,075 full person equivalents, including 1,420 first year enrolments, were recorded in the 'animation' category [3], which falls under 'Cinematics and photography' subjects, and includes other forms of animation, not gaming animation specifically.

More information is available via the following link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-52>.

Updates on the timing of statistics for the 2022/23 academic year are available here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/upcoming>.

[1] Counts are on the basis of full-person-equivalents (FPE). Where a student is studying more than one subject, they are apportioned between the subjects that make up their course.

[2] Enrolments in Computer games and animation (code 11-01-06 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) tier 3). More information on CAH codes can be found at the following link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah>.

[3] Enrolments in Animation (code 100057 of the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS)). More information on HECoS codes can be found at the following link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>.

Turing Scheme

Baroness Randerson: To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to reduce delays in decisions on applications for funding under the Turing Scheme; and what assessment have they made of the impact of those delays on students from poorer backgrounds. [UIN HL1461]

Baroness Barran: The Turing Scheme is a demand led, competitive programme with an annual application cycle. Decisions on allocations of funding each year depends on the number of applications that are successful, and how much funding successful organisations apply for. That means the department can only confirm how much funding each organisation can receive once all applications have been assessed.

In the past three academic years, successful applicant institutions have been notified of their funding allocation according to the department's published timeline, before the start of the academic year and before the funding period for international placements commences. Once the grant agreement is in place, it is the responsibility of grant recipients to make timely requests for payments so that they can disburse funding to their participants at the point of need. All payments to grant recipients making valid payment requests have been disbursed to providers on time according to the agreed process.

The department has published information for 2024/25 applications to the Turing Scheme, which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/turing-scheme-apply-for-funding-for-international-placements>. Schools, colleges and universities, across the UK can now review the guidance and prepare their applications for funding ahead of the application window opening in February 2024.

Overseas Students: Employment

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps with relevant stakeholders to help support postgraduate international students find employment in the UK on completion of their studies. [UIN 10481]

Robert Halfon MP: The government recognises the significant economic and cultural contribution that international students make to the UK's higher education (HE) sector.

The government has set out its commitment to supporting international student employability in Action 6 of the International Education Strategy, which was launched

in 2021 and states that the “UK Council for International Student Affairs will collaborate with the Confederation of British Industry, Universities UK International, and key education and employer groups to support international student employability. This group will build understanding of the UK’s skills needs, international labour markets, and barriers to international graduate employability and share examples of best practice across the sector”. The strategy is available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/601d7475e90e0711caf57c70/International-Education-Strategy-2021-Update.pdf>.

The department engages regularly with stakeholder groups, such as the UK Council for International Student Affairs and Universities UK, on matters surrounding international student employability to ensure a joined-up approach between government and the HE sector.

Universities: Finance

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made a recent assessment of the most significant challenge to the financial health of universities. [UIN 10480]

Robert Halfon MP: The Office for Students (OfS), as the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, collects and analyses financial data from HE providers, as well as other intelligence, to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector. In their most recent report on the financial health of the HE sector, which was published in May 2023, the OfS stated that the overall aggregate financial position of the sector is sound.

The full report is available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/0b7d9daa-d6c7-477e-a0b2-b90985d0f935/financial-sustainability-report-2023-updated-june-2023.pdf>.

The department continues to work closely with the OfS, HE representative bodies and other government departments, as appropriate, to understand the ongoing financial sustainability in the sector.

Overseas Students: Developing Countries

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the news stories entitled Changes to student visa route will reduce net migration, published on 23 May 2023, and Home Secretary unveils plan to cut net migration,

published on 4 December 2023, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to international student visas on the (a) number and (b) experience of people from developing countries coming to the UK to study. [UIN 10482]

Robert Halfon MP: The government believes in a fair and robust migration policy, while maintaining the UK's place as a top destination for the best and brightest students from around the world. The department remains committed to the ambitions set out in the government's International Education Strategy to host 600,000 international students per year and to increase the value of our education exports to £35 billion per year, both by 2030.

The changes announced on 4 December 2023 strike the right balance between acting decisively on migration while protecting the UK's position as a world-leader in higher education (HE).

The department expects the UK to remain a highly attractive study destination. The UK has four universities in the top ten, and 17 in the top 100. The UK has a highly sought after HE experience, which is respected by students across the globe. The department is hugely proud to have met its international student recruitment ambition two years running.

The department continues to work closely with the Home Office, Department for Business and Trade, and other government departments to assess the impact of these changes on HE providers.

Counter-terrorism: Higher Education

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the statutory guidance entitled Prevent duty guidance: for higher education institutions in England and Wales (2015), updated on 31 December 2023, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of that guidance on (a) academic research, (b) the number of students applying to higher education institutions, (c) students' experience in higher education, (d) freedom of speech and (e) people with protected characteristics. [UIN 9649]

Tom Tugendhat MP: The updated and refreshed guidance places no additional burdens on the education sector. There are no new requirements as a result of the refresh or additional responsibilities for the sector. The guidance reinforces that settings should understand their Prevent duty requirements as part of their wider safeguarding and welfare responsibilities.

The Prevent duty should not limit academic research but encourage debate, challenge ideas and advance knowledge on contentious topics. The government has legislated to ensure that universities in England are a place where academics, students and visiting speakers can express a diverse range of views without fear of repercussion.

In the most recent published assessment by the Office for Students (OfS) on the implementation of the Prevent programme in the English higher education sector in 2019, they found no cause for concern that free speech was being undermined by Prevent in external speakers' policies and their implementation. The assessment is available here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/prevent-review-meetings-programme-findings/>.

Institutions should encourage students to respect other people with particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. Institutions should also be mindful of their commitments to protecting freedom of speech, provided that the speech is lawful.

A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in line with responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Home Office commissioned an independent research agency to conduct in-depth research with frontline staff, particularly those with Prevent-specific responsibilities, across the key sectors of education, healthcare, local authorities, police and prisons & probation, to make sure that the new guidance is as robust as possible. This consultation covered England and Wales.

Arts: Training

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she is taking steps to help establish partnerships with (a) private sector and (b) academic institutions to increase skills training in the creative industries. [UIN 9603]

Julia Lopez MP: The Creative Industries Sector Vision sets out the Government's ambition to maximise the potential of the creative industries. It details our plans to grow these industries by an extra £50bn and create a million extra jobs by 2030, and build a pipeline of talent and opportunity for young people through a Creative Careers Promise.

The Creative Industries Sector Vision sets out a range of interventions across education, skills and job quality to achieve this, working in partnership with the creative sector and those involved in education and training. The forthcoming joint

Department for Education and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Cultural Education Plan will support the provision of high quality cultural education for all school-age children, including careers advice and skills development. This will provide young people with a window into the sector, and access to important foundational skills.

Strengthening talent pipelines for young people is also a priority. This will be delivered through our Creative Careers Programme,, two new creative T-Levels rolling out in September 2024, and multiple national and regional opportunities to participate in apprenticeships and digital and creative Skills Bootcamps. Many of these initiatives are delivered in partnership with the private sector and academic institutions such as Netflix, the BBC and University of Birmingham.

These interventions complement the investment the sector is already making on skills. For example, the BFI's £9 million National Lottery funded 'Skills Clusters' which will support skills development and training across the UK; ScreenSkills' £19 million Future Film Skills Programme which has helped over 119,000 people progress in screen careers since 2018; and the work of the world-leading National Film and Television School, which received funding from DCMS.

Universities: Transphobia

Mr Gregory Campbell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will hold discussions with the Committee for Academic Freedom on its news story entitled Nine UK universities label gender-critical academics transphobes, investigation reveals, published on 15 January 2024. [UIN 10033]

Robert Halfon MP: Securing academic freedom is a high priority for this government. That is why the government introduced the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

The Act will ensure that universities in England are a place where academics, students and visiting speakers can express a diverse range of views without fear of repercussion. The main provisions of the Act will come into force on 1 August 2024.

This Act will require reasonably practicable steps to be taken to secure freedom of speech within the law. It will not change the current legal position on what speech is lawful and unlawful. The department wants academics to feel confident to express their lawful views and challenge received wisdom, even if their views are unpopular.

There are currently no plans to hold discussions with the Committee for Academic Freedom.

Overseas Students: Visas

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of changes to visas for international students and their dependents on the finances of universities. [UIN 10625]

Robert Halfon MP: The government has been successful in delivering the ambition in its International Education Strategy of hosting at least 600,000 students per year, by 2030, for two years running. The department expects that universities will adapt to reduced dependant numbers following the restrictions the government has introduced to control net migration.

The department's offer to international students remains very competitive and the department is committed to ensuring the UK remains a destination of choice for international students from across the globe. International students make a significant economic and cultural contribution to the UK's higher education (HE) sector, which is good for our universities and delivers growth at home. Those affected by these changes will predominantly be dependants of international students. Students coming to the UK to undertake postgraduate research courses will not be affected by the new restriction on dependents.

The Office for Students (OfS), as the regulator for HE in England, has responsibility for monitoring the financial sustainability of registered providers. The department works closely with the OfS to understand the ongoing impacts and changing landscape of financial sustainability in the sector.

Aviation: Training

Henry Smith MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she will consider designating pilot flight training as a higher educational course for the purpose of student loans. [UIN 10090]

Robert Halfon MP: The courses designated for Higher Education student finance are set out in secondary legislation. To attract funding, students studying in England must generally be undertaking a course leading to a designated qualification at a provider registered with the Office for Students (OfS).

Registration with the OfS is a requirement in place to provide assurance to the Secretary of State for Education that students are receiving a high-quality academic experience and value for money.

Flying schools are welcome to apply to be on the OfS register. The funding available for designated programmes, which include pilot training, does not normally extend to costs associated with the commercial pilot's licence and flying experience.

Research

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps her Department has taken in response to the recommendations of the UKRI Review of peer review, published on 3 July 2023. [UIN 9816]

Andrew Griffith MP: The Review of Peer Review was published in July 2023. UKRI is now using the findings to reflect on its processes, including how it can use more innovative peer review methods in an evidence-based way, whilst sharing learning with the broader sector.

Research: Staff

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page six of her Department's policy paper entitled Research and development (R&D) people and culture strategy, published on 22 July 2021, what steps her Department is taking to ensure (a) leadership and (b) management skills are actively developed and supported in (i) talent programmes and (ii) grant holders' terms and conditions. [UIN 9811]

Andrew Griffith MP: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has recently reviewed grant terms and conditions to be explicit that leadership and management skills development costs can be claimed in applications for its talent programmes and in grant holders' terms. UKRI's existing Future Leaders Fellows Development Network has been expanded to include holders of other UKRI fellowships and research leaders in UKRI's Centres Institutes and Units. The four UK National Academies' talent programmes support leadership and management skills to help researchers lead their teams and commercialise their ideas.

Innovation and Research: Skilled Workers

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to page 8 of the Government's R&D People and Culture Strategy, published in July 2021, what progress she has made on working with funders and the research and innovation community to co-design a joined-up talent offer. [UIN 9814]

Andrew Griffith MP: The Government is continuing to work closely with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the four UK National Academies and the wider R&D sector, including through the R&D People and Culture Strategy Ministerial Coordination Group, to ensure the UK has an attractive joined-up talent offer to support our science and technology superpower ambitions.

Students: Incomes

Claire Hanna MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of a Basic Student Income. [UIN 10299]

Robert Halfon MP: The government does not have plans to introduce a non-means tested basic income for students in England.

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

The devolved governments have responsibility for HE in their respective countries and determine the student finance arrangements and their sustainability for their students.

The partially means-tested loan for living costs is provided as a contribution towards a student's living costs while attending university rather than necessarily covering those costs in full, with the highest levels of support paid to students from the lowest income families who need it most. Financial support may be provided by the student's parents or partner, but there are several other sources of funding available for students such as part-time employment, university bursaries and scholarships and local authority support such as the HE bursary.

Students awarded a loan for living costs for the 2023/24 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

The government recognises the additional cost-of-living pressures that have arisen this year and that are impacting students. The department has increased loans for living costs each year for students in England, with a 2.8% increase for the current academic year, 2023/24 and further 2.5% increase announced for 2024/25.

The department has already made £276 million of student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year to support successful outcomes for students including disadvantaged students.

The department is now making a further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding. This funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes.

Over the 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years, the government is providing support worth £104 billion, or £3,700 per household on average, to help families throughout the UK with the cost of living, including help to meet increased household energy costs. This will have eased the pressure on family budgets and so will in turn enabled many families to provide additional support to their children in HE to help them meet increased living costs.

Universities: Technology

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath: To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the role of universities in supporting the development of public policy on artificial intelligence and other new technologies. [UIN HL1520]

Viscount Camrose: Government understands that academic expertise is critical for developing strong public policy on AI and emerging technologies. It is commonplace for teams working on AI and technology policy to consult with academic experts. The AI policy team has engaged with academic experts in many aspects of policy development. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **The AI Safety Summit.** Government convened other country leaders, industry, academia and civil society to share views on how to drive forward research on

AI safety, ensuring the benefits of this technology can be harnessed responsibly for good and for all.

- **The AI Regulation White Paper.** Government heard from over 400 individuals and organisations, with a wide range of views represented including those in academia. Such close engagement with academia was an integral part of the policy analysis that informed the AI Regulation White Paper. The newly established central AI risk function in DSIT will use expertise from academia, as well as from across government, industry, and the AI Safety Institute.
- **The AI Safety Institute.** The institute is engaging with the UK academic community to develop the tools to enhance the safety of AI and leading universities and academic groups welcomed the AI Safety Institute's launch.
- **Compute.** Government has confirmed that the University of Bristol will host the new AI Research Resource (AIRR), a national resource to support essential study into the potential and safe use of technology. This facility aims to help researchers maximise the promise of AI.
- **Skills.** Government continues to liaise closely with universities and educational institutions to deliver a broad package of AI skills and talent initiatives, broadening the supply of talent in the UK AI labour market. For example, through the £30 million AI and Data Science Conversion Course programme, government funded universities to develop masters level AI or data science courses suitable for non-STEM students, and up to 2,600 scholarships for students from backgrounds underrepresented in the tech industry.

Sector News

Higher education in facts and figures: 2023 – UUK publication

On Tuesday 23 January, Universities UK released an overview of the data on students, staff and university finances from its 141 member institutions up to 2022.

You can [read more](#).

Case summaries of complaints relating to accommodation – OIA publication

On Tuesday 23 January, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) released case summaries of complaints relating to student accommodation that is owned or managed by higher education providers.

The summaries illustrate the kinds of issues raised in complaints and the impact that problems with accommodation can have on students.

You can [read more](#).

The State of the State 2024 – Reform and Deloitte report

On Wednesday 24 January, Reform published a report in partnership with Deloitte exploring key issues facing the UK government and public services. The report contains insights from surveying the UK public and interviewing public sector leaders, including Vice-Chancellors.

The report highlights the higher education sector's global reputation but warns that policy disincentives and issues with the current financial model are holding universities back.

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

Artificial intelligence for higher education – QAA resource

On Wednesday 24 January, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) launched a new curated resource bringing together a wide range of materials relating to Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its uses and impacts across the higher education sector.

The resource describes the essentials of Generative AI and introduces its most commonly used tools. It presents an array of reports, policy papers, blogs, commentaries, webinars, websites, podcasts and projects on the uses of artificial intelligence in learning and teaching - and a similarly diverse set of publications exploring the ethical considerations these developments raise. It also offers a section devoted to the future direction of Generative AI and its implications for the future of higher education.

You can [read more](#).

Constraints and trade-offs for the next government – IFS report

On Thursday 25 January, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published a report which found the next government is likely to face some of the most difficult economic and fiscal choices the UK has faced outside of pandemics and major crises.

On universities, the report points to the tension between government targets of lowering net migration and higher education's increasing financial dependence on international students. The report names UCL, LSE, London Business School, Imperial College London, Teesside University and the University of Hertfordshire in its analysis. It concludes:

‘The trade-off here is relatively simple. If the government wants to reduce the number of international students (in order to reduce the headline net migration figure), it must either find additional support for the university sector (e.g. by increasing tuition fees for home students) or accept that less money is available for the sector, perhaps reducing the quality of provision for home students or, in extremis, accepting that some institutions are no longer financially viable and allowing them to fail. Again, a constrained fiscal environment makes this trade-off more acute.’

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

Higher Education Student Support – Written Statement

On Thursday 25 January, the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, released a written statement announcing student fees and support arrangements for the 2024/25 academic year. He also confirmed eligibility for student finance is being extended.

On student fees and support arrangements, the statement includes:

- £276 million of student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year.
 - A further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding.
- Investing hundreds of millions of pounds additional funding over the three year period from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to support high quality teaching and facilities including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships.
- Maximum tuition fees for undergraduate students for 2024/25 will remain at £9,250.
- Maximum undergraduate loans for living costs will be increased by forecast inflation, 2.5%, in 2024/25.
 - The same increase will apply to maximum grants for full- and part-time disabled students' allowance and full-time students with child or adult dependents.
- Maximum loans for master's and doctoral degree courses will also be increased by 2.5% for 2024/25.

On student finance eligibility, the statement announced home fee status and student support is being extended to:

- Students who have been granted indefinite leave to enter (ILE) as a victim of domestic abuse and their children who are granted ILE.
- British citizens born in the Chagos Islands and their direct descendants who are also British citizens.
- Students gaining settled status part-way through their course.

Finally, the statement sets out that for the 2025/26 academic year the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will create a single funding system which will extend the scope of loans for living costs and grants.

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

The SHAPE of Research Impact – British Academy report

On Thursday 25 January, the British Academy, in association with the Academy of Social Sciences, released a report that sheds light on the tangible impact of UK SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) research on the wellbeing of society, culture and the economy through a collection of case studies.

The report demonstrates how:

- SHAPE research is bolstering UK expertise and strength in areas of competitive advantage.
- SHAPE research is tackling societal challenges.
- SHAPE research helps to understand people and empower communities here in the UK.
- SHAPE research spreads beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries to create impact.
- SHAPE research is a smart investment, with impact providing value for money.

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