



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

23 – 27 June 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Further Education and Skills - Education Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 24 June, the House of Commons Education Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Further Education and Skills”.

Witnesses included:

- The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Minister for Skills, Department for Education)
- Julia Kinniburgh (Director General for Skills, Department for Education)

Baroness Smith discussed the Government’s intention to rebalance the UK’s skills and education system, highlighting a need to reduce reliance on international students to fund higher education. She acknowledged that there had been “over-dependence on international students to fill funding gaps”, which was largely a result of previous underfunding decisions. While she reaffirmed the value of international students, she suggested that domestic upskilling should take priority, and indicated that the Government was exploring the introduction of a levy on the income higher education institutions receive from international students, as proposed in the Immigration White Paper. She stated that this levy could potentially be “reinvested in higher education and skills”, although the design of such a levy was still under discussion.

She also addressed the potential reduction of the Graduate visa from two years to 18 months, reaffirming that the visa route would be retained to remain internationally competitive. However, she emphasised that the UK’s approach to migration must align with domestic skills development.

The Committee expressed concern about the impact of proposed changes on the UK university sector’s financial resilience. In response, Baroness Smith reiterated that the Government was listening to feedback from the sector and would continue to engage with higher education providers on any developments related to the levy and international student policy.

Julia Kinniburgh noted that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) had begun to include more information about apprenticeships and vocational routes, to improve the transition between school and higher education or training.

You can watch the [session](#).

Debate on the Estimate of the Department for Education - HoC

On Tuesday 24 June 2025, the House of Commons considered estimates of spending of the Department for Education as part of the Estimates Day debate.

During the debate, **Helen Hayes MP (Labour), Chair of the Education Committee**, warned of a growing risk of university insolvency, stressing that many institutions are facing serious financial strain. She argued that higher education funding should be seen not just in economic terms, but in the context of its impact on young people's life chances. Helen Hayes stated that universities play a critical role in providing secure foundations and opportunities for students to grow into active citizens. While acknowledging that the main estimates cover a wide range of education spending, she highlighted the absence of a clear strategy for supporting universities at risk, and called for government action to protect the higher education sector from long-term decline.

Ian Sollom MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Universities & Skills, raised concerns about a disconnect between the Government's economic growth targets and its funding decisions for post-18 education. He noted that although the Government aims to support 65,000 additional learners a year by 2028-29, recent cuts to the adult skills fund directly undermine that goal. He cited data showing that up to 72% of higher education institutions could be running deficits by 2025-26 unless urgent steps are taken. He also drew attention to the economic role of universities, pointing out that they are often major local employers and contribute significantly to regional economies through student presence and spending. Ian Sollom highlighted the case of Anglia Ruskin University, which has delivered over 5,000 degree apprenticeships, and called for more detailed plans to secure financial stability across the sector.

Neil O'Brien MP, Shadow Education Minister, focused on student finance and tuition fees, highlighting Labour's previous promise to reduce graduate repayments. He claimed that the Government's silence on tuition fees during the spending review implies annual increases are likely, warning that fees could exceed £10,000 per year by 2027. He outlined how this would increase average student debt from £59,000 to £66,000 outside London, and from £69,000 to £77,000 in London. Neil O'Brien also questioned how universities would benefit from these increases when additional costs - such as higher National Insurance contributions - offset any gains. He criticised Labour's policy direction as contradictory and damaging to both students and institutions.

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

Universities in Wales - Welsh Affairs Committee oral evidence session

On Wednesday 25 June, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee heard oral evidence on the topic of “Universities in Wales.”

Witnesses included:

- Professor Rachael Langford (Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff Metropolitan University)
- Dr Ben Calvert (Vice-Chancellor, University of South Wales)
- Professor Elwen Evans KC (Vice-Chancellor, University of Wales Trinity Saint David)
- Professor Joe Yates (Vice-Chancellor, Wrexham University)
- Ben Lewis (Director, Open University in Wales)
- Professor Jon Timmis (Vice-Chancellor, Aberystwyth University)
- Professor Edmund Burke (Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University)
- Professor Wendy Larner (Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University)
- Professor Paul Boyle CBE (Vice-Chancellor, Swansea University)

The Welsh Affairs Committee called on the UK Government to think again on how universities are supported at a systemic level and to work with the Welsh Government to put them on a sustainable footing.

Following yesterday's session with leaders of all nine Welsh universities on their finances and the systemic challenges they face, the Committee says that universities need funding security and long-term policy stability.

The Committee concluded that universities in Wales are in an acutely precarious position, as they face up to wide-ranging challenges including falling admissions among Welsh young people, declining international student numbers and tuition fees lagging far behind inflation.

The Committee notes that this week's Industrial Strategy acknowledged the critical role universities play in driving skills and innovation, while they also hold huge economic and civic importance to communities up and down Wales.

Professor Wendy Larner, of Cardiff University, told the Committee that this is ‘an existential moment for universities’ and that universities ‘need to be different for the

future'. Professor Paul Boyle CBE, of Swansea University, added that universities are working towards financial sustainability within a system that 'does not lend itself to that sustainability'.

"The status quo is unsustainable. It's therefore crucial that the UK Government acts, together with its Welsh Government partners, as part of its promised major reforms for higher education." – said the Commons Welsh Affairs Committee.

You can watch the [session](#).

Forthcoming business

Innovation showcase – Science, Innovation and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 1 July from 9:30am, the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee will hear oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Innovation showcase”.

Witnesses include:

- Neil Daly (CEO and Founder, Skin Analytics)
- Dr Periklis Pantazis (Director, Imperial–Leica Microsystems Imaging Hub, Imperial College London)
- Professor Donal Wall (Head of Bacteriology, University of Glasgow)
- Professor Cait MacPhee CBE (Professor of Biological Physics, University of Edinburgh; Co-Director, National Biofilms Innovation Centre)
- Professor Tony Kenyon (Professor of Nanoelectronic & Nanophotonic Materials, University College London)
- Professor Callum Littlejohns (Coordinator, CORNERSTONE Photonics Innovation Centre)
- Professor Ilaria Bellantuono (Professor in Musculoskeletal Ageing; Co-Director, Healthy Lifespan Institute, University of Sheffield)

You [can watch the session](#).

Written questions and statements

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Artificial Intelligence: Research

Imran Hussain (Labour): (UIN59403) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to take steps to improve (a) knowledge transfer and (b) applied AI research through regional university-business partnerships.

Feryal Clark: Government is investing up to £500 million in the Local Innovation Partnerships Fund, a new programme to grow high potential innovation clusters across the UK. This will empower local partnerships of government, universities and businesses to decide how to target R&D investment in their region and unleash their full innovation potential. Alongside this, UKRI continues to support knowledge transfer and AI adoption through consortia of universities and local businesses across the UK. Investments such as the AI research hubs, AI centres for doctoral training and flagship BridgeAI programme are already catalysing local partnerships and driving local innovation and prosperity.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Artificial Intelligence: Research

Imran Hussain (Labour): (UIN 59402) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what plans his Department has to support university-led innovation programmes that boost (a) AI capacity and (b) research and development activity activity in partnership with local businesses in (i) West Yorkshire and (ii) other regional economies.

Feryal Clark: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) plays a crucial role incentivising collaboration and knowledge exchange between universities and other sectors and has supported numerous high-impact collaborations in artificial intelligence. For example, Higher Education Innovation Funding supports engagement with the space industry through the University of Bradford's Bradford-Renduchintala Centre for Space AI.

UKRI also supports partnerships between universities and businesses through opportunities like Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and consortia investments such as the AI research hubs, AI centres for doctoral training and the flagship BridgeAI programme, catalysing local partnerships and driving local innovation and prosperity.

The AI Action Plan emphasises building a robust AI ecosystem that supports research, skills development, and business engagement, and at Spending Review £2 billion was allocated to implement the Action Plan.

Grouped Questions: 59401

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office: UK Soft Power Council: Finance

Wendy Morton (Conservative): (UIN 59024) To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 12 March 2025 to Question 27532 on UK Soft Power Council: Finance, what the annual budget is for the Soft Power Council, in the context of the Spending Review 2025.

Stephen Doughty: All Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office allocation decisions for the Spending Review period will be taken over the coming months.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Research: Tax Allowances

Peter Bedford (Conservative): (UIN 59964) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the potential impact of tax reliefs for research and development on economic growth.

Feryl Clark: The Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have regular discussions on a range of issues. Research and development (R&D) tax reliefs play a vital role in the Government's mission to boost economic growth and drive innovation in the UK. Overall, R&D reliefs will support an estimated £56 billion of business R&D expenditure in 2029-30, roughly a 20 per cent increase from £47 billion in 2022/23.

Department for Education: Antisemitism: Universities

Oliver Dowden (Conservative): (UIN 59383) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential implications for her policies of StandWithUs UK's Voice of Students 2024 Report into antisemitism on UK university campuses, published on 7 May 2025.

Janet Daby: Antisemitism has absolutely no place in universities or wider society. Universities must be places where all students feel safe, respected and able to thrive.

Earlier this month, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education brought together vice chancellors and community leaders to hear testimonials from Jewish students and discuss next steps to ensure safer, more inclusive campuses for all.

The department remains committed to working with universities, sector partners and stakeholder groups to tackle the unacceptable level of antisemitism on our campuses.

Grouped Questions: 59342

Department for Education: Higher Education: Cooperation

Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrats): (UIN 58354) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing funding to incentivise collaboration between universities, colleges and schools; and if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of doing so on levels of participation in tertiary education.

Janet Daby: The department allocated £20 million in 2025/2026 to the Office for Students through the Strategic Priorities Grant for the Uni Connect programme.

Uni Connect brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information to help young and adult learners from underrepresented groups to make informed choices about their higher education options.

An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact, conducted by Public First, can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/uni-connect-a-review-of-collaborative-support-in-access-to-higher-education/>.

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: UK Research and Innovation: Finance

Alan Mak (Conservative): (UIN 60921) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will list the (a) project titles, (b) amount awarded, (c) date of award and (d) recipients of UKRI funding since 5 July 2024.

Feryal Clark: The Gateway to Research (GtR) website <https://gtr.ukri.org/> has been developed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to enable users to search for and analyse information about funded research and innovation.

GtR publishes award data quarterly, and the website is open and free for all to use, and has been developed using open , open standards and an Open Government Licence (OGL) to enable the code to be reused by third parties.

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mark Hendrick (Labour): (UIN 58926) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to reinstate the Erasmus+ scheme.

Janet Daby: The government has agreed to work towards association to the Erasmus+ programme on much better financial terms for the UK. We will ensure that any agreement reflects a fair balance between the UK financial contribution and the number of UK participants who receive funding from it.

Participation in Erasmus+ on acceptable terms for both sides would be of mutual benefit, providing opportunities for collaboration and cultural exchange across education, youth and sport.

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour): (UIN 57351) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 30 May 2025 to Question 50912 on Students: Loans, what demographic data her Department holds on borrowers whose loan balances have increased.

Janet Daby: Below is a table of the number of borrowers whose loan balance has increased between the start and end of the financial year 2024/25, broken down by age group and sex. This table covers Student Finance England loan borrowers only, whereas the previous number provided to Question 50912 included borrowers from all UK funding bodies.

Age group

Sex 25 and under 26 - 35 36 - 45 46 and over

Female 279,484 806,398 235,598 97,671

Male 204,496 603,617 132,563 49,426

These figures cover Plan 2, 5 and 3 undergraduate and postgraduate loan borrowers funded by Student Finance England. It has been generated by comparing borrowers' loan balances on 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. These numbers include all borrowers whose loan balance has increased, regardless of the number of payments they have made across the financial year. There were a small number of borrowers (<5) for whom age and sex were unknown. These borrowers have been suppressed.

At the end of a borrower's loan term, any outstanding loan balance, including interest built up, will be written off. This write-off, a government subsidy, is a deliberate investment in our people and the economy.

Department for Education: Universities: Finance

Ian Sollom (Liberal Democrats): (UIN 60591) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many universities are classified by the Office for Students as being at material risk of financial failure.

Janet Daby: The government has not provided emergency funding to any university since 4 July 2024.

Universities are independent from government and as such must continue to make the necessary financial decisions to ensure their long-term sustainability. If a university was at risk of failure, the department would work with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure that students are protected, recognising the significant impact university closure would have on their future.

The OfS dedicates significant res to ensuring the sector's financial sustainability but does not provide emergency financial support to universities. It assesses financial sustainability on a case-by-case basis and does not disclose the identity of institutions deemed to be at material risk, as this is considered highly commercially sensitive. The OfS' most recent report on the sector's financial condition can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/financial-sustainability-of-higher-education-providers-in-england-2025/>.

While the sector is autonomous, we are committed to creating a secure future for our world-leading universities.

The department has appointed Professor Edward Peck as OfS Chair, where he will play a key role in strengthening the commitment of the OfS to monitoring the financial health of the sector. Additionally, we made the difficult decision to uplift

tuition fee limits by 3.1% (in line with inflation) from the 2025/26 academic year. The department will publish its plans for higher education reform as part of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper this summer.

Grouped Questions: 60589, 60590

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: UK Research and Innovation: Loans

The Lord Nash (Conservative): (HL7965) To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of the £1.3 billion in co-investment reported by UK Research and Innovation in the report Annual Report and Accounts 2023–24, published on 24 July 2024, was independently verified after project award.

The Lord Vallance of Balham KCB: UKRI verifies co-investment commitments at several stages of the grant lifecycle. Verification processes are managed according to the terms and conditions of specific grant awards and vary depending on the size of the awards. For large co-investment commitments, UKRI engages third parties to conduct verification.

At the application stage, UKRI portfolio managers verify co-investment commitments as part of usual due diligence checks, with host research organisation also undertaking due diligence to confirm that information included in applications is accurate. For completed awards, grant holders are able to report actual co-investment values via the research outcomes process.

The co-investment figure of £1.3 billion provided in the 2023-24 UKRI Annual Report and Accounts reflects project partner contributions declared at the point of application.

Higher Education Regulation Information - Statement

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities (HCWS741):

One of our country's proudest achievements is our world-leading higher education sector, that expands horizons, fosters research breakthroughs and promotes rigorous academic enquiry. Our universities and higher education providers must be supported to continue in their transformative work.

In January, I set out for the House my commitment to protecting the rights of academic staff, external speakers and students to explore and express new ideas, and my intention to implement, amend and repeal elements of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 to make it workable. In that announcement, I also stated my intention to publish a policy paper that would set out my proposals in more detail.

I am therefore pleased to inform you that the technical policy paper ‘The future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023’ has been published today. The paper details the future of each provision in the Act, with additional detail and information on the rationale for my decisions.

The policy paper will ensure the sector has full clarity on the provisions I commenced on 28 April, which will come into force from 1 August 2025, and on the remaining provisions that will either be repealed or amended via primary legislation as soon as government has identified a suitable legislative vehicle. The paper also provides further reasoning on my decision to keep the overseas funding measures under review until later this year.

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

Sector news

Government publishes Industrial Strategy

On Monday 23 June, the UK Government published its new *Industrial Strategy*, setting out a long-term plan for economic growth centred on eight priority sectors. The strategy places renewed emphasis on research, innovation, regional growth, and high-level skills, with **universities positioned as key delivery partners** across these areas.

A key theme of the strategy is the alignment of government investment and policy levers—including R&D funding, skills development, and local growth initiatives—with the needs of high-growth industries. While some elements remain to be clarified, particularly around the role of higher education in skills, the strategy confirms several positive developments for universities.

Key announcements relevant to universities include:

- **Research and Innovation:**
The strategy commits to refocusing the UK's R&D system on long-term economic growth. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will be expected to pivot its programmes and budgets toward the industrial strategy's eight growth sectors, while still supporting basic, curiosity-driven research. Continued funding for the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) in England is confirmed, and new investment vehicles such as the National Wealth Fund and Local Innovation Partnerships Fund will create further opportunities for university-led innovation.
- **Place-based growth:**
A new **£500 million Mayoral Recyclable Growth Fund** will support local growth projects, and Investment Zones and Freeports will be rebranded as **Industrial Strategy Zones** with an enhanced offer. Universities are expected to play a central role in shaping and delivering local growth plans, particularly in partnership with local authorities and industry.
- **Skills and Education:**
While the strategy offers more clarity on the role of further education providers, it also outlines plans for **short modular courses**—including those delivered by universities—funded through the Growth and Skills Levy. These will focus on priority areas such as AI, digital, and engineering. The **Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)** is referenced as a key tool for enabling progression into growth sectors, and a review of the **Strategic Priorities Grant** will consider how funding can better support high-level skills.

- **Global Talent:**

To strengthen the UK's research base, the government will launch a **Global Talent Taskforce** and introduce **two new fast-track research grant routes** aimed at attracting world-leading researchers. Universities will continue to play a leading role in drawing international talent and supporting national innovation objectives.

In response to the government's industrial strategy, Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

"Today's announcement sets a clear direction for the government's priorities on economic growth in which universities have a vital role to play.

UK universities have forged strong partnerships with businesses across all major growth sectors and are central to developing the workforce and innovations of the future.

From equipping students with advanced skills to upskilling those already in the labour market, universities are committed to driving economic growth across the UK. Our recent analysis shows that the government's growth sectors depend on the high-level skills graduates provide, and this need is projected to increase further in the years ahead.

Our report, 'Why universities are critical to an industrial strategy', also outlines how universities offer flexible and technical qualifications to support industry with its training needs. Both reinforce the fact that if the government wants to maximise the potential of its growth sectors, universities are essential to the success of its industrial strategy

As anchor institutions in communities nationwide, our universities are not only widening access and opportunities by helping individuals gain new skills or enhance existing ones, but are also centres of research and innovation, driving the UK forward. We're pleased to see that the government recognises this and will continue to support universities through Higher Education Innovation Funding which is critical to driving knowledge exchange between universities and businesses."

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

UK launches Global Talent Drive to attract world-leading researchers and innovators

On Sunday 22 June, the UK Government unveiled a new Global Talent Drive, featuring a £54 million fund and a dedicated taskforce aimed at attracting world-class

researchers and innovators to the UK. The initiative forms a key part of the Government's upcoming Industrial Strategy and its broader Plan for Change, positioning universities as central players in driving economic growth, innovation, and global leadership in science and technology.

At the heart of the initiative is the newly established Global Talent Taskforce, which will actively identify and engage top international talent - including researchers, entrepreneurs, engineers, investors, and creatives - to relocate to the UK. The £54 million Global Talent Fund, administered by UKRI and delivered through leading universities and research organisations, will cover full relocation and research costs over a five-year period, starting in 2025. This includes visa expenses for researchers and their dependants, removing significant barriers to mobility and allowing institutions to recruit more freely from the global talent pool.

The initiative builds on existing schemes such as the £25 million Turing AI Global Fellowships and new fast-track international research funding routes from the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering. Together, these programmes represent a total investment of over £115 million dedicated to enhancing the UK's international research base and reinforcing universities' capacity to attract, support, and retain exceptional talent.

Key details include:

- Direct investment into universities and research institutions, empowering them to lead the recruitment of global research leaders aligned with industrial strategy priorities
- Funding covers 100% of eligible costs, including relocation, research expenses, and visa support, with no match-funding required from institutions
- Enhanced global engagement, with the Taskforce working through the UK's international networks to build strong pipelines of academic talent interested in relocating to the UK
- Stronger links between immigration and research policy, building on the Immigration White Paper's proposal to expand eligibility for the High Potential Individual visa

Universities are expected to play a central role in delivering the initiative, both in selecting candidates and integrating them into key sectors of the Industrial Strategy. This aligns with recent moves to reassert the UK's global standing in R&D, supported by the renewed association with Horizon Europe and increased access to European funding streams.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, welcomed the announcement, highlighting the essential role universities will play in delivering its objectives:

"The government's Global Talent Taskforce and Fund will play a vital role in supporting the delivery of the industrial strategy. These initiatives will attract the best

and brightest from around the world to accelerate growth across the UK's key sectors, which are underpinned by our great universities.

UK universities are already pivotal players in attracting global talent, and the creation of the Taskforce and Fund will further leverage their role in building our future technologies and driving long-term growth.

Attracting global talent is a goal that ultimately benefits communities across the country, making us all better off. We look forward to working closely with government to deliver these important initiatives and to help realise the full ambition of the UK's industrial strategy.”

The Global Talent Drive represents a coordinated national effort to make the UK the destination of choice for top-tier researchers. It reinforces the Government’s message that universities are not only centres of knowledge, but also key engines of economic development and innovation - capable of turning ideas into industries, and talent into national progress.

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

The Future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 - Department for Education

On 26 June, the Department for Education published *The Future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023*, a policy paper setting out the government's reformed and streamlined implementation of the 2023 Act. The paper aims to ensure robust protections for academic freedom and lawful free speech within a balanced and workable regulatory framework.

The report’s central theme is recalibrating the Act to uphold free speech without imposing undue burden or chilling controversial yet lawful discourse. Following a review—prompted by concerns about minority welfare, cost implications, and regulatory overlap—the government retained core duties while pausing or repealing contentious provisions.

Key confirmed provisions include:

- Commencing from **1 August 2025**, universities will be legally bound to take “reasonably practicable steps” to secure freedom of speech within the law, maintain and communicate a free-speech code of practice, and actively promote academic freedom.

- Non-disclosure agreements related to bullying, harassment, or sexual misconduct will be banned within HE institutions.
- The Office for Students (OfS) will acquire statutory duties to promote free speech, share best practice, advise providers, and continue funding the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.
- Duties apply equally to whole higher education providers and their constituent institutions (e.g., colleges within universities).

Simultaneously, the government has removed or delayed certain elements, notably repealing the statutory tort (which would have allowed civil claims against providers) and duties imposed directly on students' unions. The OfS's obligation to apply free-speech conditions under registration has been recast as a discretionary power - not a duty - enabling a more flexible approach to complaints and enforcement.

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

The positive impact of international students on domestic living standards in the UK - Public First research

On 26 June, Public First released a new report, *Global Talent, Local Growth: The Positive Impact of International Students on Domestic Living Standards*, the second in a two-part series exploring the economic impact of international students in the UK. While the first note examined international students' overall contribution to UK GDP, this second report focuses on the improvements they bring to the living standards of those already living and working in the UK.

International students generate measurable economic benefits for domestic residents across every part of the UK, through increased wages, job creation, and enhanced public service funding.

A key theme of the report is the importance of measuring *domestic living standards* - specifically the per capita income of UK residents - rather than just GDP per capita, which can be distorted by the inclusion of the international student population. The analysis shows that while the student population inflates headline GDP figures, the real gains accrue to long-term UK residents.

Key findings include:

- International students make the *average UK resident* (including workers, retirees, and children) £355 better off per year in real terms.

- For full-time workers, the benefit is higher: £466 per year, largely due to wage growth driven by increased demand in local economies.
- In over 100 parliamentary constituencies, international students are estimated to boost the median worker's earnings by the equivalent of more than 2.5 weeks' salary.
- All UK nations and regions benefit from international students. The North West sees the highest average wage gain at £520 per full-time worker, followed by London and Scotland.
- These economic gains have significant political implications: 80 of the top 100 constituencies benefiting most from international students are currently Labour-held, including seats represented by six Cabinet ministers.

The report also addresses recent political concerns about the impact of immigration on wages and public services, arguing that international students actually do the opposite: they raise pay, support jobs, and ease pressure on taxpayers by contributing disproportionately to the public purse.

The report identifies three main channels of economic benefit:

- International students spend significantly on housing, food, travel, and leisure, creating jobs and increasing demand for local goods and services.
- The knock-on impact of student-led economic activity leads to higher productivity and higher pay for domestic workers, especially in regions with a strong university presence.
- Student-related spending generated approximately **£1.15 billion in VAT revenue** in 2023/24 alone, helping fund schools, hospitals, and transport.

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

ResearchPlus - HEPI and partner universities

On 26 June, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a manifesto by ten research-intensive universities launching ResearchPlus - a new collaborative aiming to strengthen the voice and influence of high-performing research universities outside the Russell Group. The group will advocate for research, innovation, and skills development as central drivers of UK growth and societal wellbeing.

A key theme of the manifesto is the need for a new, coordinated voice for research-focused institutions not currently represented by existing mission groups.

ResearchPlus universities deliver nationally competitive research, foster innovation and knowledge exchange, and play a critical role in regional economic development, civic life, and social mobility.

Key aims include:

- Providing a collective, visible voice in national policy discussions
- Strengthening collaboration across universities, government, and industry
- Advancing excellence in research-informed education and advanced skills
- Supporting regional growth, inclusion, and cultural development

Several members are identified by Research England as “large, highly research-intensive” institutions, while others have strong specialisms or technological missions. What unites them is a commitment to using research to serve the public good - locally and nationally.

Founding members include:

Brunel, City St George’s, Keele, Royal Holloway, SOAS, Essex, Hull, The Open University, Sussex, and Ulster.

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

The Cashpoint Campus Comeback – The Post-18 Project

On 26 June, the Post-18 Project published *The Cashpoint Campus Comeback*, a new report raising urgent concerns about the rapid growth of franchised higher education provision in England. Drawing comparisons with past failings in the further education (FE) sector, the report warns that franchising poses a major financial and reputational risk to the higher education system without immediate regulatory reform.

A key theme of the report is the lack of oversight and accountability in franchising arrangements, which allow universities to out course delivery to unregistered or loosely monitored partner providers. The authors estimate that by 2028, over 200,000 students could be enrolled on franchised courses, with more than £2 billion in student loans at stake - and potentially hundreds of millions lost due to poor outcomes and non-completion.

Key findings and risks include:

- Franchised provision is growing rapidly, often with low continuation rates and limited quality assurance.
- In 2022/23, over half of all identified student loan fraud (£2.2m of £4.1m) was linked to franchised providers.
- The current Department for Education (DfE) reforms are deemed too slow and too weak—regulatory thresholds won't apply fully until 2028/29.
- There is no clear data on the true scale or location of franchised delivery, making oversight difficult.

To address these risks, the report recommends a series of immediate regulatory reforms. First, it calls for a halt to any new franchising partnerships involving more than 50 students. It also urges the Office for Students (OfS) to lower the current oversight threshold from 300 to 50 students, ensuring that smaller providers fall within the regulatory framework. Franchise partners should be required to submit monthly data on attendance, recruitment, and retention to improve transparency and early risk detection. The report also calls for a ban on per-student recruitment commissions, which are seen as a driver of poor-quality recruitment practices. Existing partnerships with continuation rates below 70% should be subject to review. Additionally, the report recommends limiting delivery to providers located within an hour's travel of the lead university to ensure closer oversight. Finally, it proposes capping the proportion of a university's student body enrolled through franchising at 25%, falling to 15% by 2029.

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

LEO Graduate & Postgraduate Outcomes 2022/23 - Department for Education

On Thursday 26 June, the Department for Education published new *Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO)* data for the 2022–23 tax year, reporting on the employment and earnings of higher education leavers in England. The data track outcomes one, three, five, and ten years after graduation, with a primary focus on the 2016–17 cohort five years on.

A key theme of the release is the contrast between nominal earnings growth and real-terms earnings decline, driven by inflation. While graduate earnings have risen compared to the previous tax year, the value of those earnings has fallen once adjusted for cost-of-living increases.

Key findings include:

- **Median earnings for first-degree graduates five years after graduation** increased in cash terms, but fell in real terms due to inflation.
- **Postgraduates (taught master's and research degrees)** also saw nominal pay increases, but real-terms earnings dropped year-on-year.
- **Graduates from STEM and high-demand vocational subjects** (e.g. medicine, engineering, computing) generally report higher earnings and stronger employment outcomes.

Persistent disparities remain across key student characteristics:

- Graduates eligible for **free school meals** earn significantly less on average.
- A **gender pay gap** persists across most subject areas and qualification levels.
- **Ethnic and regional differences** in outcomes are also evident.
- **Employment and further study rates** remain high across all qualification levels, though slightly lower for international graduates due to data matching limitations.

The statistics also highlight changes to future reporting:

- The **Graduate Labour Market Statistics** will be discontinued, with LEO becoming the main source for earnings and employment data.
- Provider-level outcomes will be made available via a new **interactive dashboard** rather than separate spreadsheet releases.
- Future iterations will increase focus on **comparisons with non-graduates** to better assess the return on higher education.

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