



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

24 - 28 February 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

The draft Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 – HoL First Delegated Legislation Committee debate

On Monday 24 February, the Draft Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 was considered by the First Delegated Legislation Committee in the House of Commons.

Minister for Early Education, Stephen Morgan MP, highlighted the value of the higher education sector and the financial challenges currently facing universities, citing the OfS' analysis that up to 72% of providers could be in deficit. He emphasised that the tuition fee increase 'is intended to fix the foundations and put this vital sector on a more secure footing' and outlined higher education's contribution to economic growth, research, communities and opportunity. He acknowledged that students may be concerned about affordability, but explained that graduates would not face higher monthly repayments due to this change and that government 'will also be working with the sector to ensure that it does more to improve access for those from disadvantaged backgrounds'. He further outlined that the statutory instrument 'also focused on improving efficiency and delivering value for students' with lower fee limits for foundation year courses in classroom-based subjects.

Shadow Education Minister, Neil O'Brien MP, raised concern that if fees are raised in the same way throughout this Parliament, students will be facing up to £76,900 of debt. He criticised the national insurance hike erasing any benefit to the sector from raising tuition fees. He highlighted the 'incredibly high marginal rates for young people' that the current system produces, with those that have a postgraduate loan and/or high-income child benefit charge having up to 51% of income 'taxed away' at £50,000 earnings and 58-73% at £60,000. '[T]he kind of rates that used to apply only to super-taxes on the very wealthy'.

O'Brien went on to cite LEO data showing that graduate earnings five years after graduation are higher for level 4 apprenticeships than university graduates. He cited IFS analysis that total returns on investment in higher education are negative for 30% of graduates, and that there is a large variation in which subjects are worthwhile studying. He said [the Times report on SLC data](#) demonstrates 'the whole process of assessing public spending on higher education needs to be more radically transparent' and their analysis shows some courses are 'not that great for either the

taxpayer or the student'. He criticised the government for rising fees without addressing courses that offer low value for money.

O'Brien ended his speech by recognising the difficult position universities are in, which he indicated was caused by mismanagement, and expressed a preference for a wider reform of the system to make it work better for young people.

Rachel Maskell MP (Labour) said she understood why the government is pursuing a tuition fee increase, but that this was not a long-term solution and asked for assurance that there would be no further fee increases in this Parliament. Maskell pointed to the impact of student visa changes on York's universities, decreasing overseas students numbers and causing universities to reschedule their costs. She called for students to be allowed to bring their dependents to the UK, citing their economic benefits for local communities as well as university finances. She highlighted the value of universities as anchor institutions in their communities and the role they can play in addressing inequality and regional divides. She outlined that NICs and rising the national minimum wage has had an impact on the sector and urged the government to feed this back to the Treasury and call for more nuance in how these changes could have applied to universities. She also raised concerns about Brexit and the Turing programme not matching Erasmus; the costs placed on students and problems they face with cost-of-living, including working long hours to sustain their studies; shortfalls in current funding around hardship resourcing and research and innovation. She asked again whether there will be further increases, how the government will ensure those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not impacted and what future planning there will be for HE funding.

Minister Stephen Morgan reiterated the need for the tuition fee increase to put the sector on a secure financial footing, outlining the real-terms decline in income the sector has faced following seven years of frozen fees. He defended the NICs increase as the fairest way for government to fund vital services in need of investment. He repeated that students would not be paying more in monthly repayments after the increase. On graduate earnings, he cited that graduates benefit from over £100,000 in their lifetime as a result of going to university. He highlighted Labour's commitment to raising university teaching standards in its manifesto and the Education Secretary's commitment to welcoming international students to the UK. He agreed that more work needed to be done around access and participation and said '[i]t is vital that all higher education providers play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students'. He outlined that government would announce its plans for higher education reform by the summer and these would ensure universities are 'engines of opportunity, fairness and growth'.

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

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill [Lords] – HoC second reading

On Tuesday 25 February, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill [Lords] had its second reading in the House of Commons.

The Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, argued the establishment of Skills England was necessary to create a more responsive and employer-aligned system. Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs raised concerns around the overemphasis on university degrees at the expense of vocational education and the centralisation of decision-making with the Secretary of State, rather than establishing Skills England as an independent statutory body. The Bill proceeded to committee stage.

Key points covered in the debate include:

- Lack of skilled workers affecting economic growth.
- Establishment of Skills England to address skills shortages.
- Overemphasis on academic routes to employment.
- Apprenticeships essential to meeting construction demands.
- Periodic reviews of Skills England's effectiveness.
- Need for in-person careers advice.
- Over centralisation of technical education.
- Calls for Skills England to be legislated as an independent body.
- Success of trade union involvement for past apprenticeship.
- Low apprenticeship completion rates.
- Breaking down barriers for young people.
- Creating apprenticeship opportunities for people with additional needs.

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

Government support for future skills programmes at universities – WH debate

On Wednesday 26 February, there was a Westminster Hall debate on government support for future skills programmes at universities. This debate was tabled by Ed Davey MP (Liberal Democrat).

Ed Davey MP (Liberal Democrat) presented Kingston University's Future Skills programme, designed to equip students with nine key skills: creative problem-solving,

digital competency (including AI), adaptability, questioning mindset, empathy, collaboration, enterprise, resilience, and self-awareness. He highlighted the value of this programme in boosting skills, driving economic growth and facilitating social mobility and social justice. He pointed to industry partnerships with IBM, Deloitte, John Lewis, NHS, and the Met Police, and emphasised the global interest in the programme from Korea and Singapore, urging the government to adopt and expand it nationally. He called on the government to provide funding, research support and pilots in secondary schools and other universities to expand the programme.

Jim Shannon MP (DUP) highlighted that Queen's University Belfast already runs similar skills programmes and emphasized the importance of Government support.

Tahir Ali MP (Labour) praised the programme, highlighting that many academic students lack practical skills that apprenticeships provide.

Gideon Amos MP (Liberal Democrat) stressed the need for Government-backed skills training to support major employers like Tata's gigafactory in Somerset.

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP, praised the programme, acknowledging its innovation and impact and agreed that skills development should begin in secondary school. She outlined the Government's strategy on skills development, including Post-16 education reform to break barriers to opportunity; Higher Education reform focused on employability and economic growth; establishing Skills England to align workforce training with industry needs; and expanding Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

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

Support for drama schools and other creative courses in higher education – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 26 February, there was an oral question in the House of Lords on support for drama schools and other creative courses in higher education. This question was tabled by The Earl of Clancarty (Crossbench).

The Earl of Clancarty (Crossbench) expressed concern about widespread cuts to creative courses, including the recent closure of undergraduate courses at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, and questioned how the government planned to reverse the trend. He emphasised the significance of these courses for the arts industry and the representation of diverse voices.

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, affirmed the importance of creative subjects and outlined existing support, including £12.9 million in high-cost subject funding and £58 million in strategic priority grants for specialist providers. She acknowledged financial instability in the sector and the impact of past funding cuts but stressed the government's efforts to stabilise higher education funding.

Lord Lemos (Labour) highlighted the decline in arts and humanities at GCSE and A-level, calling for stronger links between education and creative employment. He criticised the outdated divide between arts and sciences.

Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie (Conservative) raised concerns about funding disparities, particularly for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which faces financial disadvantages compared to London-based institutions.

Baroness Garden of Frognal (Liberal Democrat) criticised past policies that deprioritised creative subjects in state schools, such as the EBacc, arguing that this had damaged the talent pipeline and contributed to social inequalities in the arts.

Baroness Bull (Crossbench) noted that creative graduates contribute to innovation beyond the arts, including in product design and communications. She questioned whether the government had assessed the economic impact of creative course closures.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay (Conservative) questioned why the government had ceased funding for national youth music organisations like the National Youth Orchestra, despite its stated commitment to widening arts access.

Baroness Smith of Llanfaes (Plaid Cymru) raised concerns about proposed job cuts at Welsh universities, including the closure of music courses at Cardiff University, and asked how the Welsh Government and university staff would be involved in the upcoming HE review.

In response, Baroness Smith of Malvern reiterated the government's commitment to creative subjects, acknowledging concerns but citing financial constraints. She defended continued support for arts education and promised further discussions on funding stability across the UK.

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

Forthcoming business

Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 – HoL debate

On Monday 3 March, the Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 will be considered in the House of Lords.

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

Pre-appointment Hearing: The Chair of The Office for Students (OfS) – HoC Education Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 4 March from 10am, the Education Select Committee will hear oral evidence from Professor Edward Peck CBE, the government's preferred candidate for Chair of the OfS, in a pre-appointment hearing.

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

Access to international exchange opportunities for youth work and adult education organisations, following withdrawal from the Erasmus programme – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 5 March, there will be an oral question in the House of Lords on access to international exchange opportunities for youth work and adult education organisations, following withdrawal from the Erasmus programme. This question was tabled by Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Labour).

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

International Women’s Day and the promotion of women’s participation and leadership in science and technology in the UK and internationally – HoL debate

On Thursday 6 March, there will be a House of Lords debate on International Women’s Day and the promotion of women’s participation and leadership in science and technology in the UK and internationally. This debate was tabled by the Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, and Minister for the Future Digital Economy and Online Safety, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch.

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

Written questions and statements

Students: Loans

Baroness Garden of Frognal (Liberal Democrats): To ask His Majesty's Government what was the cash outlay for English domiciled students in the financial years (1) 2022–23 and (2) 2023–24 for fee and maintenance loans for (a) full-time and part-time 'foundation degree' students and (b) full-time and part-time 'other undergraduate' students. [UIN HL4748]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: For English domiciled students in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years for fee and maintenance loans, the following breakdown of outlay is provided:

For the 2022/23 financial year:

Full-time students studying for foundation degrees:

- Fee loans: £164.4 million
- Maintenance loans: £159.5 million

Part-time students studying for foundation degrees:

- Fee loans: £9.6 million
- Maintenance loans: £0.0 million

Full-time students studying for 'other undergraduate' qualifications:

- Fee loans: £332.0 million
- Maintenance loans: £397.8 million

Part-time students studying for 'other undergraduate' qualifications:

- Fee loans: £27.2 million
- Maintenance loans: £1.3 million

For the 2023/24 financial year:

Full-time students studying for foundation degrees:

- Fee loans: £149.8 million

- Maintenance loans: £149.0 million

Part-time students studying for foundation degrees:

- Fee loans: £8.7 million
- Maintenance loans: £0.0 million

Full-time students studying for 'other undergraduate' qualifications:

- Fee loans: £329.6 million
- Maintenance loans: £424.2 million

Part-time students studying for 'other undergraduate' qualifications:

- Fee loans: £25.2 million
- Maintenance loans: £1.4 million

'Other undergraduate' includes all undergraduate courses not classified as first degrees and covers a wide range of qualifications from levels 4-6 as defined by the Higher Education Standards Authority (HESA). More information on HESA's classification standards can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions>.

'Other undergraduate' qualifications include all 'foundation degree' qualifications. Funding for courses at levels 3-6 is also available through Advanced Learner Loans.

Universities: Pay

Julian Lewis MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will commission an assessment of the value for money of vice-chancellors' salaries in universities which are in receipt of public money. [UIN 30565]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Higher education (HE) providers are independent and therefore responsible for decisions around pay, including for Vice-Chancellors and other senior staff. The government does not have a role in intervening in pay and staffing matters.

The department acknowledges that Vice-Chancellors manage large and complex organisations, and therefore, deserve a salary that reflects the responsibilities and challenges of their roles.

However, Vice-Chancellors' salaries should not be excessive or disproportionate. Where providers are facing financial challenges, we expect them to work with staff and unions to help identify how best to reduce unnecessary spend. All efficiency measures taken by the sector should provide better long-term value both for students and for the country.

In addition, transparency is crucial for students, staff, and the public. Therefore, the Office for Students, the independent regulator in England, requires HE providers to provide and publish justifications for Vice-Chancellors' remuneration. If concerns arise regarding senior staff pay, the Office for Students has the authority to conduct independent reviews to ensure that a provider's governance arrangements are appropriate and effective.

Apprentices

Lauren Edwards MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of functional skills requirements on access to apprenticeships; and what the cost of Functional Skills training for people who already have a degree was in each of the last five years. [UIN 29672; Grouped Question: 29668]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government has announced changes to the rules relating to achievement of English and mathematics qualifications as part of an apprenticeship for those aged 19 or over at the start of their programme. Upskilling in English and mathematics will continue to remain a key feature of all apprenticeships, and we have listened to employers and will be offering more flexibility over when a standalone qualification is required in addition to this.

All apprentices will be required to secure and be assessed on the job-specific skills English and mathematics they need, but moving forward employers will have more flexibility over whether adult (19+) apprentices are required to achieve a standalone English and mathematics qualifications.

In future, adult apprentices will be able to complete their apprenticeship if they have demonstrated they have the skills, including relevant English and mathematics skills, to be effective in the role without undertaking a standalone English and mathematics qualification.

All apprentices who are aged 16 to 18 at the start of their apprenticeship will continue to be required and funded to secure up to a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics if they do not hold one, consistent with our expectation that all young people should have a meaningful further opportunity to secure a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics post-16.

This delivers the flexibility that employers have long called for and we expect it to lead to thousands more qualified apprentices in a range of key sectors, including in social care and construction.

The changes were made effective from 11 February 2025.

Lifelong Education: Finance

Michael Wheeler MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure that (a) people enrolling on a second undergraduate degree course, (b) people enrolling on a five-year degree course and (c) other returning learners receive adequate support via the additional entitlement within the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement scheme. [UIN 28846]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, new learners will be able to access a full entitlement equal to four years of full-time tuition. This is currently equal to £38,140 based on the fee rates for the 2025/26 academic year. Returning learners who have previously received government support to undertake higher-level learning will have a reduced entitlement that is dependent on the level of funding they have already received.

For example, a typical graduate who completed a 3-year degree worth £28,605 based on current fees will have a £9,535 residual entitlement (or 1 year of full-time study). This amount will be adjusted should the modern fee limit change.

An additional entitlement above the core four year entitlement will be available for some priority subjects and longer courses, such as medicine. This will ensure that learners can always gain skills in priority areas, regardless of remaining entitlement or previous qualifications.

The government will publish a list of subjects eligible for additional entitlement in 2025. This will include information on degrees longer than 4 years. We will also work with the Student Loans Company and the sector to ensure that learners have access to high-quality information, advice and guidance which supports them to make informed decisions about their entitlement and learning journey.

Research: Finance

Clive Jones MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to incentivise R&D investment in the United Kingdom. [UIN 29744]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: R&D investment in the UK is 2.8% of GDP, ahead of the OECD average of 2.7%. To further incentivise R&D investment, we are supporting innovators with a record £20.4 billion in R&D spending for 2025/26, which on average leverages £2 of private R&D investment for every pound of public investment. The UK is also a leader in attracting international R&D investment, with the second highest number of R&D inward investment projects in Europe. We are backing high-growth firms through reforms to the British Business Bank and pensions to unlock £80 billion of investment. Our generous R&D tax relief rates are projected to support £56 billion of business R&D expenditure annually by 2029-30.

Medicine: Overseas Students

Peter Prinsley MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to review the 7.5% cap on international student numbers at medical and dental schools in England. [UIN 31304]

Minister for Secondary Care, Karin Smyth MP: There are currently no such plans. We have launched a 10-Year Health Plan to reform the National Health Service. The plan will set out a bold agenda to deliver on the three big shifts needed to move healthcare from the hospital to the community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention.

A central part of the 10-Year Health Plan will be our workforce and how we ensure we train and provide the staff, technology, and infrastructure the NHS needs to care for patients across our communities.

This summer we will publish a refreshed Long Term Workforce Plan to deliver the transformed health service we will build over the next decade, to treat patients on time again.

Institutes of Technology

Baroness Barran (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support Institutes of Technology in future. [UIN HL4862]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The department values the collaborative approach between further education, higher education and employers developed by Institutes of Technology (IoT) which has allowed them to develop and deliver a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of employers in the area they serve. The work of IoTs looks to address both immediate skills gaps and also create

sustainable pathways for talent development, which are essential for economic resilience.

We will continue to work with the IoT Network as we develop our strategy for post-16 education and skills.

Lifelong Learning

Baroness Barran (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government whether the condition B3 continuation metric used by the Office for Students will be reviewed ahead of the rollout of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. [UIN HL4861]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The Office for Students (OfS) strategy sets out their plans to develop a new integrated approach to quality regulation following recommendations in the OfS Public Bodies Review. It is considering how to integrate B3 student outcomes data into the system and will engage with institutions and students as it develops its new approach. It is also considering measures for student outcomes from modular provision as part of wider work to prepare for the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

Artificial Intelligence: Skilled Workers

Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated): To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address the AI skills gap, particularly regarding universities. [UIN HL4908]

Minister for Science, Lord Vallance of Balham: Reducing the AI skills gap is critical for increasing the UK's productivity and delivering long-term growth. DSIT regularly reviews the status of the UK's AI labour market and has commissioned Gardiner & Theobald LLP to conduct a survey of the labour market, published later this year. We are also working with DfE and Skills England to assess the AI skills gap and map pathways to fill it.

As set out in the AI Opportunities Action Plan, government will further address the AI skills gap by working with universities to increase the number of AI courses, expanding educational pathways into AI, and establishing a prestigious AI talent scholarship.

Apprentices

Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support intermediate and advanced apprenticeships. [UIN 29641]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government has a driving mission to break down barriers to opportunity. Meeting the skills needs of the next decade is central to delivering all of the government's five missions on economic growth, opportunity for all, a stronger NHS, safer streets, and clean energy. Through delivering the opportunity and growth missions, the department will ensure that we have the skilled workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs.

There are over 360 apprenticeships at intermediate and advanced levels which are supporting people to train in occupations such as adult care worker, bricklayer or cyber security technician. A wide range of apprenticeships are also available at higher levels including data analyst, nuclear technician and registered nurse.

So far this academic year, between August and October 2024, there have been 132,560 apprenticeship starts across all levels; this is 1.3% higher than the same period in the previous year.

To support the development of skills at all levels, the government will reform the apprenticeships levy into a more flexible Growth and Skills levy that is aligned to the Industrial Strategy. This will create routes into good, skilled jobs in growing industries.

As a first step, flexibilities will include shorter duration and foundation apprenticeships in targeted sectors, helping more people learn new high quality skills at work, fuelling innovation in businesses across the country and providing high quality entry pathways for young people. The department will set out more detail on these plans in due course.

Student Wastage: Mental Health

James McMurdock MP (Reform UK): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of university students left their university courses early due to mental health issues in the 2024-25 academic year. [UIN 31317; Grouped Questions: 31295, 31296]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government is breaking down barriers to opportunity by ensuring young people receive the mental health support

they deserve. It is vital that higher education (HE) students are supported to achieve and thrive during their time at university.

Figures on non-continuation following year one of entry to HE are published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for full-time first-degree entrants starting courses between the 2014/15 and 2019/20 academic years. Further information is available in Table T3 at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation>.

More recent information on continuation rates, which are the inverse of non-continuation, for first year full-time degree entrants entering HE are published by the Office for Students (OfS). This is available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/>.

The proportion of UK domiciled student enrolments to HE providers who declared a mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder, was 5.6% in the 2022/23 academic year, compared with 1.8% in 2014/15. Although specific data on the number of students who have left their course due to a mental health issue is not known, we are determined that action is taken so students can maximise the opportunity to study in HE.

This government has committed to recruiting 8,500 additional staff across children and adult NHS mental health services.

To drive meaningful change in HE mental health support, the HE Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck, is chairing the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. The taskforce includes representatives from students, parents, mental health experts and the HE sector. The taskforce published its second stage report in December, which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/higher-education-mental-health-implementation-taskforce>.

We appointed the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health to undertake a National Review of HE Student Suicides. This review has seen excellent engagement from universities and will publish its report in the spring, with a focus on highlighting lessons learned and recommendations for better prevention of student suicides.

Security: Postgraduate Education

Iain Duncan Smith MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential implications for her policies of

the findings of the report by Freedom from Torture entitled No Questions Asked: UK universities provide postgraduate security education to security personnel from torturing states, published in February 2025. [UIN 30963]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Universities are independent from government and manage their own admissions decisions. However, the department expects the higher education sector to be responsible and alert to regulatory risks when collaborating with international partners, conducting appropriate due diligence to comply with all legislation, including the Human Rights Act 1998, and the registration conditions set by the Office for Students (OfS).

Any international arrangements made by registered higher education providers in England must be within the law and must comply with the registration conditions set by the OfS, including a commitment to their public interest governance principles.

Mature Students

Joe Robertson MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to provide support for UK mature students. [UIN 31707; Grouped Question: 31701]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Data published by Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) on full-time undergraduate higher education (HE) applications for the 2025 admissions cycle shows the overall number of applicants to UK HE is slightly higher than last year, with demand remaining strong.

UCAS data from the equal consideration deadline, which was in January, shows applications from mature UK applicants, those aged over 21, are down 6.4% on 2024, and down 21.3% on 2020. However, acceptances at end of cycle are not always reflective of these earlier trends.

In 2024, UK domiciled mature applicants were down 15.8% on 2019 at the January deadline but were up 1.3% at end of cycle. Acceptances at end of cycle were up 2.2%. There has been long-term growth in the number of UK domiciled mature acceptances reported at end of cycle between 2006 and 2024. This is shown in the green line in the attachment.

Eligible full-time and part-time undergraduate students, including mature students, qualify for up-front fee loans to meet the full costs of their tuition. Full-time students also qualify for partially means-tested loans as a contribution towards their living costs, which are paid at four different rates depending on where a student is living and studying. In addition, vulnerable groups of students who are eligible for benefits, such as lone parents, qualify for higher rates of loans for living costs. Full-time

students aged 60 or over on the first day of the first academic year of their course qualify for a single rate fully means-tested loan for living costs.

Full-time undergraduate students with adult or child dependants can apply for fully means-tested dependants' grants.

Part-time undergraduate students attending eligible courses also qualify for partially means-tested loans for living costs.

Students undertaking postgraduate master's or doctoral degree courses can apply for loans to help them with fee and course costs.

Maximum loans and grants for living and other costs for undergraduates and postgraduates will increase by 3.1% for the 2025/26 academic year with the largest cash increases to means-tested support for students from low-income families.

In terms of additional support available, all HE providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) that intend to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan (APP) approved by the OfS. APPs articulate how HE providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups, including mature students.

There are many excellent examples of interventions that show a real commitment to widening access into HE for mature students, but we want the sector to go further. By summer, the department will set out our plan for HE reform and the part we expect providers to play in improving access and outcomes for all under-represented students.

Finally, from January 2027, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will transform the student finance system in England. Under the LLE, new learners will be able to access a full entitlement equal to 4 years of full-time tuition. Returning learners who have previously received government support will have a reduced entitlement. This will depend on previous funding received. Learners will be able to use this new entitlement more flexibly than ever before to fund individual modules as well as full courses at levels 4 to 6, regardless of whether they are provided in colleges, universities or independent providers. The government expects to see the LLE being taken advantage of by mature students, those wishing to change career and retrain, or those wanting to move up in their existing career and upskill. Mature students may particularly benefit from the additional flexibility that LLE will bring as they frequently study part-time while combining paid work and other familial and financial commitments.

Apprentices: Disadvantaged

Alison Taylor MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can access Level 7 apprenticeships. [UIN 31104]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The government is committed to spreading opportunities and economic growth with the support of a strong skills system.

To support young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to access apprenticeships in England, the department is promoting apprenticeships to students in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme and targeting young people through the Skills for Life campaign.

The department is also transforming career opportunities and advice to increase awareness of the range of high-quality options available to young people, including apprenticeships. The department has committed to improve careers advice and guarantee two weeks' worth of work experience for every young person, as well as establish a national jobs and careers service to support people into work and help them get on at work.

This government has an extremely challenging fiscal inheritance. There are tough choices that need to be taken on how funding should be prioritised in order to generate opportunities for young people that enable them to make a start in good, fulfilling careers. In 2023/24, 65% of level 7 starts were by people over 25 years old. The future funding for apprenticeships at level 7 is under review and we will be asking more employers to step forward and fund these themselves. The department is taking advice from Skills England, who engaged with employers over the autumn, and the department expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships shortly.

To support more young people, who have the most to gain from apprenticeships, to access high-quality training, the department is developing new foundation apprenticeships. These will give more young people a foot in the door at the start of their working lives whilst supporting the pipeline of new talent that employers will need to drive economic growth.

Medicine: Students

Bayo Alaba MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to improve funding for (a) post-graduates and (b)

all other medical students while they are doing mandatory university placements at hospitals. [UIN 32716]

Minister for Secondary Care, Karin Smyth MP: In the first and fourth years of an undergraduate medical course, and in the first year of a graduate-entry course, domestic students can access support from Student Finance England (SFE). This includes a partially means-tested loan for living costs. In addition, this group of students can apply to SFE for a fully means tested grant for travel to attend a hospital or other premises in the United Kingdom at which facilities for clinical training are provided.

During these years, the Education and Training Tariff also provides support for travel and dual accommodation costs incurred as a result of practice placements.

From the fifth year of an undergraduate course, and from the second year of a graduate-entry course, medical students can access the NHS Bursary. This is non-repayable and comprises of payment towards tuition fees and, where eligible, further grants and allowances. During practice placements, medical students can also claim reimbursement towards travel and accommodation via the NHS Bursary. Students eligible for the NHS Bursary can also apply for a reduced rate loan for living costs from SFE.

Funding arrangements are reviewed annually ahead of the start of each academic year.

Young People: EU Countries

Sarah Olney MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps his Department is taking to remove barriers to young people in the UK wishing to study and work in the EU. [UIN 33052]

Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: The Government recognises the value to young people of the opportunity to experience different cultures and work or study elsewhere. UK nationals can travel visa-free to the EU, for example for short-term study, for up to 90 days in a rolling 180-day period. If travelling for the purposes of work, they may need permission from the relevant Member State. The Government introduced the Turing Scheme in 2021, which provides grants for students to study and work anywhere in the world, including Europe, supporting tens of thousands of UK students since its launch.

Sector news

Update on IP-related and commercialisation activities in England in 2022 to 2023 – UKRI report

On Monday 24 February, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) published a report discussing the knowledge exchange activities conducted by providers, with a particular focus on IP-related and commercialisation activities in England.

The data used is drawn from university returns to the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) survey.

The report also makes comparisons of the performance of the sector with that during previous reporting periods, and makes high-level international comparisons with the US sector.

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

Student loan repayment data by Higher Education Provider attended – SLC data

On Monday 24 February, the Student Loans Company (SLC) published data in response to a series of Freedom of Information Act 2000 requests for information relating to student loan repayment data broken down by Higher Education Provider attended by student loan borrowers.

You can [explore the data in full](#).

Submission to Education, Children and Young People Committee; inquiry into widening access – US submission

On Tuesday 25 February, Universities Scotland (US) published its submission to the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People's Committee inquiry into widening access.

Within their submission, US highlights the progress that has been made in widening access and achieving the 2030 goal of 20% of those from the most deprived areas making up 20% of entrants to university by 2030. However, US outlines that there are some signs that progress is plateauing and therefore, the timing of this inquiry is significant and important.

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

Mission Critical R&D: How R&D can support delivery of the UK Government's priorities – CaSE report

On Wednesday 26 February, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) published a report setting out evidence on the integral role of R&D in driving progress on the UK Government's missions.

They identify R&D is critical to government missions because:

- **R&D generates new knowledge and technologies.** R&D can help the UK Government meet its objectives across its missions by producing new knowledge, discoveries and ideas that underpin innovation and technological advancement. Synthesis of existing R&D knowledge can support rapid progress towards mission objectives. The R&D sector can also increase the efficiency of policy processes underlying mission agendas.
- **Uptake and adoption of innovation from R&D improves public services.** Supporting and incentivising the adoption of both existing and upcoming R&D-based innovations into UK public services has the potential to catalyse rapid progress on mission objectives.
- **R&D and innovation generates high-skill jobs.** R&D and innovation are crucial in generating high pay and high skill jobs that drive economic growth and better opportunities across the UK.

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

Student Generative AI Survey 2025 – HEPI and Kortex report

On Wednesday 26 February, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Kortex published a report showing an unprecedented increase in the use of generative AI tools among undergraduate students from the rates recorded in [last year's](#) survey.

Key findings include:

- The proportion of students using generative AI tools such as ChatGPT for assessments has jumped from 53% last year to 88% this year.
- The proportion of students reporting using any AI tool has jumped from 66% last year to 92% this year.
- Just under half of students (45%) said they had used AI at school.
- A third of students (34%) would put in more effort if exams were assessed partly or mainly by AI
- The main reason students use AI is to save time (said by 51% of students), closely followed by improving the quality of their work (50%).

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

Unequal treatment? Access to medical schools for students from disadvantaged backgrounds – Sutton Trust report

On Thursday 27 February, the Sutton Trust published a report revealing only a fraction of medical students are from working class backgrounds despite efforts to widen access to the profession.

The research, including analysis by academics at UCL, finds that although the proportion of medical students from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds more than doubled since 2012, they still accounted for just 5% of entrants in 2021. In contrast, 75% were from higher socio-economic backgrounds, based on their parents' occupation.

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

Preferred candidate to lead Office for Students confirmed – DfE press release

On Thursday 27 February, the Department for Education (DfE) announced Professor Edward Peck CBE as the preferred candidate to be the next Chair of the Office for Students.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said:

Professor Peck has played a key role in supporting students and has a wealth of experience that will be instrumental in guiding the OfS forward. I look forward to finalising his appointment.

He will play a vital part in supporting higher education providers' financial sustainability and breaking down barriers to opportunity. Through our Plan for Change we want to ensure students from all backgrounds are at the heart of the higher education system, and receive a high quality education that will help them drive growth as we fix the foundations of our economy.

I would like to thank Sir David for his independent review and the work he has done as interim chair which will inform the strategic direction of the OfS as it implements his core recommendations.

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

Participation measures in higher education: Academic year 2022/23 – DfE data

On Thursday 27 February, the Department for Education (DfE) published statistics measuring higher education (HE) participation by school cohorts. These figures calculate the proportion of the population aiming to complete a qualification at HE level.

Key insights include:

- HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (Overall) was 49.0%, up from 48.6% for the previous cohort and the highest in the series.
- HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (Females) was 54.9%. which was 11.7 percentage points higher than for males at 43.2%.
- HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (First Degrees) was 44.0%, up from 43.4% for the previous cohort and the highest in the series.
- Regional HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (Highest) was 62.2% in London, 13.2 percentage points above the England average of 49.0%.
- Regional HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (Lowest) was 44.8% in the South West, 4.2 percentage points lower the England average of 49.0%.
- HE Entry Percentage by Age 25 (Full Time) was 45.9%, up from 45.5% for the previous cohort and the highest in the series.

You can [explore the data in full](#).

Student Loans Forecast Modelling Pipeline – DfE data

On Thursday 27 February, the Department for Education (DfE) published forecasts for the Department of Education's expenditure on, and the repayments it expects to receive from, higher education and further education student loans in England.

Key insights include:

- Full-time undergraduate higher education students starting in academic year 2023/24 are expected to borrow on average £42,800 over the course of their studies.
- Of full-time undergraduate higher education students starting in academic year 2023/24, 65% are expected to repay their loan in full. Up from 27% for the 2022/23 cohort.
- The government is forecast to subsidise 29% of the full-time undergraduate higher education Plan 5 loans issued in financial year 2023-24.
- The number of total undergraduate entrants expected to take out loans in 2028/29 is 567,000. Up 8% on 2022/23.
- Government is expected to issue £24,580m in student loans in 2028-29. Up £4,410m (in nominal terms) on 2023-24.
- Half of undergraduate loan borrowers starting in academic year 2023/24 are expected to repay their loan in full within 31 years.

You can [explore the data in full](#).

Evaluation of the TEF 2023 – OfS report

On Thursday 27 February, the Office for Students (OfS) published an independent report evaluating the early impact of the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise on providers, and the effectiveness of their processes.

The report found that most providers care about doing well in the TEF and the reputational impacts of their ratings. This increases providers' focus on student experience and outcomes, often adding weight to work that is already occurring within an institution.

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

UK's global science and tech ambitions refreshed under new banner – DSIT and FCDO press release

On Friday 28 February, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) announced the worldwide team championing UK science and tech partnership as a force for good, is to be re-launched as the Science and Technology Network.

UK Science Minister Lord Vallance said:

Britain is stronger when it works together with others and nowhere is that more true than when it comes to science and technology. Genius is not bound by geography, and by building international ties, we stand the best chance of developing new ideas and breakthroughs to solve the toughest challenges that all societies face.

The UK has a long track record as a global leader, when it comes to research and innovation. We are uniquely placed to convene international work that brings scientific expertise to bear on improving health, adoption clean sources of energy, and more. It is only right that we put the critically important role of technology, at the centre of those efforts.

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