



# The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

## University APPG weekly update

24 – 28 July 2023

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

## **International Higher Education and Research Bill**

On Monday 24 July, the International Higher Education and Research Bill received its first reading in the House of Lords. This Private Members Bill is sponsored by the Earl of Dundee (Conservative).

The date for the second reading is still to be confirmed.

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

## **House of Commons recess**

On Thursday 20 July, the House of Commons rose for Summer recess. It will return on Monday 4 September.

## **House of Lords recess**

On Wednesday 26 July, the House of Lords rose for Summer recess. It will return on Monday 4 September.

# Forthcoming business

## **Turing Scheme – Westminster Hall debate**

On Tuesday 5 September from 11:00am, the Turing Scheme will be debated in Westminster Hall. This debate has been tabled by Wendy Chamberlain MP (Liberal Democrat).

## **LLE Bill – report stage**

On Tuesday 5 September, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill will be scrutinised at Report Stage in the House of Lords.

You can [read the latest amendments](#) here.

## **Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – oral evidence**

On Tuesday 5 September (9:25am and 2:00pm) and Thursday 7 September (11:30am), oral evidence will be heard on the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill. The witnesses are to be confirmed.

You can read [additional information on the Bill](#) here.

# Written Questions

## Overseas Students: Visas

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 17 July 2023 to Question 193678, what advice her Department provides to students living in the UK on a student visa and who need to apply for a new student visa without departing the UK because the award for their current course has been deferred as a result of the University and College Union marking and assessment boycott. [UIN 194773]

**Robert Jenrick:** Students and sponsors should refer to paragraph 5.32 onwards of the sponsorship duties guidance. Where a formal award has not yet been issued, a student on a course at degree level or above at a sponsor which is a Higher Education Provider with a track record of compliance, can request formal written confirmation from their sponsor stating that they are highly likely to complete their course successfully.

The Department for Education will continue to engage with the HE sector over the coming weeks to help better understand the boycott's impact on students and the mitigating actions HE institutions are taking to protect their students' interests.

## Students: Housing

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure an adequate supply of affordable accommodation for students in further and higher education. [UIN 194548]

**Robert Halfon:** The government is aware of the increasing cost of living pressures on students. The department has put in place a significant amount of support to support students in England to tackle this.

The department has continued to increase living costs support each year for English-domiciled students with a 2.3% increase to maximum loans and grants for living and other costs for the 2022/23 academic year, and a 2.8% increase for the 2023/24 academic year.

The department has also earmarked £276 million of student premium funding this year to support disadvantaged students who need additional help.

In addition, the department has frozen maximum tuition fees for the 2022/23 academic year, as well as for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By the 2024/25 academic year, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years. The department believes that a continued fee freeze achieves the best balance between ensuring the system remains sustainable, while offering good value for taxpayers, not all of whom have benefitted from a university education.

As well as keeping tuition fees flat, the department has introduced and boosted degree apprenticeships, where, if people want to earn and learn, they can get their degrees paid for by their apprenticeship.

The government plays no direct role in the provision of student residential accommodation, whether it is managed by universities or private companies. The department encourages universities and private landlords to review their accommodation policies to ensure they are fair, clear, and have the interests of students at heart. This includes making accommodation available at a range of affordable price points where possible. The student funding system also targets the most support for living costs to those who need it most, from the lowest income families.

## **Students: Cost of Living**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment has she made of the affordability of (a) housing and (b) other cost of living costs for university students. [UIN 194544]

**Robert Halfon:** The government is aware of the increasing cost of living pressures on students. The department has put in place a significant amount of support to support students in England to tackle this.

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## **Higher Education: Overseas Students**

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with (a) Universities UK and (b) UK universities on (i) diversifying international student recruitment and (ii) the potential risks arising from reliance on international students from a small number of countries. [UIN 194547]

**Robert Halfon:** The government appreciates the significant economic and cultural contribution that international students make to the UK's higher education (HE) sector and their positive impact on our society as a whole. The department is proud to have met its international student recruitment ambition two years running by attracting 600,000 international students.

Ministers and officials regularly speak to the HE sector, including sector bodies such as Universities UK and HE providers, on a range of issues.



The government's International Education Strategy makes clear that the internationalisation of the HE sector cannot come at any cost. A key element of that strategy is diversification. Universities must ensure they have appropriate processes in place to manage risks associated with dependence on a single source of funding, whether that is from a single organisation or a single country.

The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator of HE in England, monitors the risk of over-reliance on overseas income at a sector level. The role of the OfS is not to direct how HE providers manage themselves or to limit their recruitment from a particular country of origin, but to ensure they understand where there is greater reliance and how any risks are being managed, and to take action to protect students from the consequences of unmanaged financial risk, if necessary.

## **Higher Education: Overseas Students**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of international students on the financial viability of higher education institutions. [UIN 194542]

**Robert Halfon:** The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England. The OfS monitors the financial viability and sustainability of providers registered with them.

In May 2023, the OfS published a report stating that the overall aggregate financial position of universities is sound. However, there continue to be significant differences between individual providers, both across the sector and within peer groups. The OfS also assessed the key risks facing the financial sustainability of the HE sector. The report sets out the main risks of those within different peer groups.

The OfS expects that any provider relying on overseas fees and growth in overseas students has contingency plans to protect its financial sustainability. The OfS has written to providers that are particularly exposed to this risk to ask them to share these contingency plans.

The government's International Education Strategy and its recent update make clear that the internationalisation of the HE sector cannot come at any cost. Universities must ensure they have appropriate processes in place to manage risks associated with dependence on a single source of funding, whether that is from a single organisation, or a single nation.

The department continues to work closely with the OfS and other stakeholders to keep abreast of the financial health of the sector. It is important to note that HE providers are autonomous and continue to remain responsible for the decisions they make regarding their business model and financial viability.

## **Universities: Finance**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential differences in financial risk affecting (a) pre and (b) post 1992 universities. [UIN 194541]

**Robert Halfon:** The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England. The OfS monitors the financial viability and sustainability of providers registered with them.

In May 2023, the OfS published a report stating that the overall aggregate financial position of universities is sound. However, there continue to be significant differences between individual providers, both across the sector and within peer groups. The OfS also assessed the key risks facing the financial sustainability of the HE sector. The report sets out the main risks of those within different peer groups.

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## **Universities: Finance**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many universities she has assessed as carrying a financial risk over their future viability. [UIN 194540]

**Robert Halfon:** The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England. The OfS monitors the financial viability and sustainability of providers registered with them.

In May 2023, the OfS published a report stating that the overall aggregate financial position of universities is sound. However, there continue to be significant differences between individual providers, both across the sector and within peer groups. The OfS also assessed the key risks facing the financial sustainability of the HE sector. The report sets out the main risks of those within different peer groups.

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The department continues to work closely with the OfS and other stakeholders to keep abreast of the financial health of the sector. It is important to note that HE providers are autonomous and continue to remain responsible for the decisions they make regarding their business model and financial viability.

## **Higher Education: Admissions**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to widen access to higher education. [UIN 194545]

**Robert Halfon:** An English 18-year-old from a disadvantaged background today is 86% more likely to go to university than in 2010, and the department wants this success to continue.

The Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017 established the Office for Students (OfS) as the regulator for higher education (HE). It has a statutory duty to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to the whole student lifecycle for disadvantaged and traditionally under-represented groups, not only access, but also student success and progression. The Director of Fair Access and Participation at the OfS has a specific role in overseeing this work and driving it forward.

In November 2021, the department issued guidance to the OfS, tasking it to refocus the entire access and participation regime to create a system that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The system should ensure students are able to make the right choices, accessing and succeeding on high-quality courses which are valued by employers and lead to good graduate employment.

This work aims to drive up standards in education and focus in on genuine social justice by making getting on at university as important as getting in.

Prior attainment is a key determinant of successful participation in HE. That is why the department has asked universities to take on a more direct role in driving up the standards in schools.

The department wants to see universities working with schools to drive up the standards and encourage aspiration and attainment, not for their own benefit by increasing numbers at their own institutions but to support students through paths that benefit them the most, including through apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications or vocational education.

Uni Connect, which the department is funding at £30 million for 2023/2024, brings together partnerships of universities, colleges, and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college.

The department knows that diversifying modes of study in HE can be an important method of broadening access and participation. We have tasked the OfS to strongly encourage providers to set themselves ambitious, measurable targets to significantly increase the proportion of students on higher and degree apprenticeships, Level 4 and 5 courses and part time study. Examples of this can be found at both universities in York as well as the Yorkshire and Humber Institute of Technology.

All approved HE providers who are intending to charge fees above the basic amount are required to fully rewrite their access and participation plans to be in place for September 2025 to reflect government priorities. The OfS has identified

approximately 40 HE providers who will be the first to complete this rewrite and have their new plans in place for September 2024.

In March 2023, the OfS launched its Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). This will empower providers to deliver interventions for groups of students least likely to experience equal opportunity in HE settings by highlighting 12 key sector risks and the groups most likely to experience these. The department welcomes the EORR as a key marker for social justice which will help ensure that no student groups are left behind.

## **Overseas Students: Visas**

**Kim Leadbeater:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to share with universities the number of dependents linked to an individual's study visa. [UIN 194111]

**Robert Jenrick:** Information related to applications and dependants is contained across multiple systems and we do not publish data relating to the number of dependants per student by institution.

Universities have a direct relationship with their students during the academic application and enrolment process and the Home Office encourages institutions to use these mechanisms if they wish to gather data regarding family members of students.

We keep our immigration policies under constant review to ensure they serve the UK's best interests and reflect our priorities.

## **Immigration Controls**

**Stephen Kinnock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will publish an Impact Assessment for the changes outlined in the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules published by her Department on 17 July 2023. [UIN 194413]

**Robert Jenrick:** There is likely to be no, or no significant, direct impact on business, charities, or voluntary bodies as a result of the changes to the Student route. Any impacts, including significant impacts on universities and the public sector, are being assessed for the purposes of the Impact Assessment which has been prepared to assess the impact of these Rules changes.

The Impact Assessment is still to be finalised and is subject to final Departmental clearances and will be published in due course.

## **Students: Loans**

**Tulip Siddiq:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support individuals on student loan plans (a) 2 and (b) 4. [UIN 194062]

**Robert Halfon:** Decisions on student finance have to be taken alongside other spending priorities 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 government has continued to increase maximum loans and grants for living and other costs for plan 2 student loans each year. Maximum support has been increased by 2.3% for the 2022/23 academic year, with a further 2.8% increase announced for 2023/24. In addition, the department is freezing maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years to deliver better value for students and to keep the costs of HE under control. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years.

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and that are impacting students. The department has 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.

Student loans are available to all eligible students, irrespective of background or financial history, and include significant protections. Monthly student loan repayments are calculated by income rather than by interest rates or the amount borrowed. If a borrower's earnings are below the relevant repayment threshold, they will not be required to make any repayments. At the end of the loan term, or in case of death or disability, any outstanding loan debt, including interest accrued, will be written off at no detriment to the borrower. No commercial loans offer this level of protection. To further protect borrowers, where the government considers that the student loan interest rate is too high in comparison to the prevailing market rate, it will reduce the maximum plan 2, plan 3 and plan 5 interest rate.

Plan 4 student loans are issued by the Scottish Government, which has responsibility for HE in Scotland and determines the student finance arrangements for Scottish students.

## **Higher Education: British National Abroad**

**Sarah Olney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make it his policy to grant an exemption to siblings of UK nationals living in Europe and studying at UK universities prior to 1 January 2028 to allow them to qualify for (a) home fee status for university tuition and (b) student finance for courses starting after 1 January 2028. [UIN 194236]

**Robert Halfon:** The Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 define a family member of a UK national as either the person's spouse or civil partner, direct descendants of the person, or the person's spouse or civil partner who are either under the age of 21, or dependants. There are no plans to amend this definition to include siblings.

UK nationals and their family members who were living in the European Economic Area (EEA) (excluding the UK and Gibraltar) or Switzerland on 31 December 2020, or who returned to live in the UK on or after 1 January 2018 following a period of ordinary residence in the EEA or Switzerland, continue to be eligible for home fee status, tuition fee loans and maintenance support for courses commencing before 1 January 2028. This measure was introduced so as to ensure a substantial transition period for those UK nationals who had moved to the EEA or Switzerland prior to the end of the transition period. The department has no plans to extend this period further.

## **Mathematics: Universities**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of reductions to university mathematics departments budgets on the UK's ambition to become a global science and technology superpower by 2030. [UIN 193654]

**Robert Halfon:** Higher education (HE) providers are independent, autonomous institutions, responsible for their own decisions on staffing issues, including how they structure themselves to deliver research and teaching priorities. Where it is necessary to reshape their activities, it is important that universities carefully consider the

impact of job losses on staff and students, and the overall sustainability of teaching and research in this country.

The department will continue to work closely with the Office for Students (OfS) and various parties, including a variety of HE providers across the sector, mission groups and other government departments, to understand the ongoing impacts and changing landscape of financial sustainability in the HE sector.

We want to provide a ladder of opportunity for everyone to get the education and skills they need for job security and prosperity and to support levelling up across the country. Access to HE should be based on a student's attainment and their ability to succeed, rather than background.

The government has issued guidance to the OfS, asking it to refocus the entire access and participation regime to create a system that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring students are able to make the right choices and to access and succeed on high quality courses that are valued by employers and lead to good graduate employment.

John Blake, as the Director for Fair Access and Participation, is driving forward this important change. Using his experience and expertise from the schools' sector, he is supporting and challenging HE providers to identify what will ultimately help students progress on their course and obtain good outcomes from their degree, such as programmes of intervention in schools, summer schools, and targeted bursaries to assist with living costs.

The government is committed to cementing the UK's status as a science and technology superpower, levelling up across the country.

To achieve this, the UK needs talented people with the right knowledge, skills, and experience. The department is investing in programmes that do this at all levels of education.

The Prime Minister has set a new mission for all young people to study maths to age 18, equipping them with the skills they need for the modern economy. Our driving principle is to ensure that all young people are equipped with the right maths knowledge and skills to thrive, whatever their chosen pathway.

On 17 April 2023, the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education set out how we will take the next steps towards delivering this mission. This includes:



Convening an expert advisory group to advise on the essential maths knowledge and skills young people need to study to the age of 18.

Commissioning research on post-16 maths provision around the world, ensuring the curriculum in this country rivals that of the highest performing countries.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education working with employers to review the maths content in apprenticeships.

The department is investing an additional £750 million 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. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade.

Several government strategies are in place to support our science and technology superpower ambition, in specific areas including the 2023 Science and Technology Framework , which sets out our approach to making the UK a science and technology superpower by 2030. The 2021 National AI Strategy, and the 2022 UK Digital Strategy set out how we will strengthen our reserves of talent and skills in order to drive success.

## **Universities: Finance**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help support the financial position of universities in the long term. [UIN 194543]

**Robert Halfon:** The government has supported English and EU domiciled students with £10.7 billion in subsidised higher education (HE) tuition fee loans paid out in the 2022/23 financial year. The government believes that freezing fees at their current level for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years achieves the best balance between ensuring that the system remains sustainable, offering good value for the taxpayer, and controlling debt levels for students.

The government is also investing approximately £750 million in 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. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade.

The Strategic Priorities Grant is funding supplied by the government on an annual basis to support teaching and students in HE, including expensive to deliver subjects, such as science and engineering, students at risk of discontinuing their studies, and world-leading specialist providers. The recurrent Strategic Priorities Grant budget is £1,454 million for the 2023/24 financial year. This is an increase of 4% from last year.

## **Apprentices: Degrees**

**Claudia Webbe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to take steps to support (a) De Montfort University and (b) the University of Leicester to increase the availability of degree apprenticeships. [UIN 194087]

**Robert Halfon:** Degree apprenticeships provide people with high-quality training and are important in supporting productivity, social mobility and widening participation in higher education (HE) and employment.

The department has seen year-on-year growth of degree-level apprenticeships (Levels 6 and 7), with over 188,000 starts since their introduction in the 2014/15 academic year, and wants to further accelerate the growth of degree apprenticeships.

The department invested £8 million in the 2022/23 financial year through the Strategic Priorities Grant to enable HE institutions to grow degree level apprenticeship provision and form new employer partnerships. Both De Montfort University and the University of Leicester were successful in receiving funding.

The University of Leicester also recently launched the Space Systems Engineer degree level apprenticeship, which will offer new, exciting opportunities for people wanting to start or progress in the space industry.

To support providers to further expand their existing apprenticeship offers, the department is now providing an additional £40 million over the next two years through the Strategic Priorities Grant, and encourages both universities to apply for this funding when the competitive bidding process is launched later this year.

## **Migrants: Health Services**

**Paul Blomfield:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department has undertaken an impact assessment on the potential fiscal impact of increases of the (a) immigration health surcharge and (b) student visas on the (i)

number of international students, (ii) economy and (iii) higher education sector. [UIN 194748]

**Robert Jenrick:** Regulations will be laid in Autumn to amend the Immigration Health Surcharge (Heath Charge) Order and a full economic impact assessment will be prepared.

The expectation of the Government is that migrants coming to the UK to work should be able to maintain and support themselves, reflecting the need to maintain the confidence of the general public that immigration brings benefits to our country.

The Immigration Health Surcharge rates have not increased since 2020, and the cost of providing public services has increased in that time. It is right that we keep the IHS level under review to ensure that it reflects the genuine cost to the NHS of providing healthcare to those who pay it.

## **Universities: Strikes**

**Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has held discussions with representatives of higher education institutions on the potential impact of the University and College Union marking and assessment boycott (a) the experience of students at affected institutions, (b) the reputation of the higher education sector and (c) international students who wish to continue studying in the UK and require an award decision to apply for a visa from the UK. [UIN 193680]

**Robert Halfon:** The department understands that the vast majority of students will remain unaffected by the industrial action and, in most cases, will receive their full results on time and progress and/or graduate as normal.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) has published research findings which surveyed 49% of higher education (HE) institutions in the New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff. These institutions provided updated feedback on the impact of the marking and assessment boycott on students at their institutions:

- Over 70% of HE institutions said that ‘less than 2% of students’ will be unable to graduate this summer due to the boycott.
- A further 20% were ‘unsure’ of the number.

- 4% of HE institutions said ‘between 2% and 9% of students’ would be impacted.

These research findings can be accessed at: <https://www.ucea.ac.uk/news-releases/23june23/>(opens in a new tab).

On 22 June 2023, I met with Universities UK (UUK), the Russell Group, and UCEA to better understand the impact that this boycott will have on students and the mitigating actions their members are taking to protect students’ interests.

I have also written to the Russell Group and UUK, encouraging them to continue to do everything within their powers to protect the interests of students during this phase of industrial action. On 27 June 2023, I met with a number of HE representative groups to discuss the marking and assessment boycott, including the mitigating actions HE institutions are taking to protect their students’ interests.

HE institutions are working on minimising the disruption to their students in a variety of ways, including reallocating marking to other staff members, and hiring external markers. Many HE institutions can award degrees when they have enough evidence of a student’s prior attainment to do so. Others will be able to assign provisional grades to students to allow them to progress.

The government believes students should be at the heart of the HE system. This is why we set up the Office for Students (OfS) to regulate the HE sector in England, protect student rights, and ensure the sector is delivering real value for money. The OfS has published guidance to students on their rights during industrial action at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/student-rights-and-welfare/student-guide-to-industrial-action/>(opens in a new tab).

On 12 June 2023, the OfS wrote to institutions affected by the boycott to reiterate its expectations in relation to its conditions of registration. The OfS will continue to monitor this ongoing situation through their normal regulatory mechanisms.

Students who have complaints about their HE experience should contact their provider in the first instance. Students in England and Wales may also raise a complaint with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), which was set up to provide an alternative to the courts and is free of charge to students. Further information is available at: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/>(opens in a new tab).

We are exercising operational discretion to ensure students can still apply to the graduate route whilst the marking and assessment boycott continues.

If it is necessary for a student who intends to apply to the ‘graduate’ route to apply to extend their permission whilst waiting for their results due to the boycott, they will be exceptionally exempt from meeting academic progression requirements. All other requirements of the ‘student’ route, including having a new confirmation of acceptance for studies, will still need to be met.

This a discretionary arrangement and not a concessionary policy. It is being communicated in a way that is proportionate to the nature and type of the issue covered. We encourage the sector, including sponsors, to drive the dissemination of this flexibility, as the circumstances are the result of a dispute between institutions and their employees.

We have a world class university sector, with four institutions in the world’s top 10, and the government fully expects the UK to continue to be a major destination of choice for international students.

We hope all parties can reach an agreement that delivers good value for students, staff and universities, so further industrial action can be avoided. The department will continue to engage with the HE sector over the coming weeks to help better understand the boycott’s impact on students and the mitigating actions HE institutions are taking to protect their students’ interests.

## **Horizon Europe and Pioneer**

**Marquees of Lothian:** To ask His Majesty's Government what progress they have made on negotiations to re-join the EU Horizon programme, including agreement on the UK’s financial contribution; and whether the Horizon programme or the UK-based Pioneer programme is their preferred choice to fulfil their goal of the UK as science superpower. [UIN HL9332]

**Viscount Camrose:** The Government is moving forward with discussions on the UK’s involvement in Horizon Europe and hope these will be successful. That is the UK’s preference. While the Government hopes negotiations will be successful, participation must work for UK researchers, businesses and taxpayers.

Talks are ongoing and therefore a deal has not yet been agreed. A deadline for these talks has not been set but to provide the industry with certainty, the UK must come to a resolution as quickly as possible. The Government has set out Pioneer, the UK’s bold alternative, which we are ready to implement if association cannot be secured.

## Students: Debt

**Claudia Webbe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an estimate of the median level of student debt held by people in Leicester East constituency. [UIN 193964]

**Robert Halfon:** The median debt of full-time undergraduate borrowers funded by Student Finance England whose postcode is within the Leicester East constituency and who entered repayment within the last five years is £41,493.29. The median debt includes tuition fee and maintenance loans.

The borrowers' postcode refers to the current contact or home address supplied by the borrower to the Student Loans Company.

As student loan repayments are income contingent, the amount of loan debt repaid varies with earnings. At a national level amongst borrowers starting study in the 2022/23 academic year, individuals in the lowest forecast earnings decile (who earn less than 90% of other loan borrowers over their lifetime) are estimated to repay 7% of loan outlay borrowed. Those in the top 30% of lifetime earners are expected to repay their loans in full in under 30 years. More information is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-loan-forecasts-for-england/2022-23>(opens in a new tab).

# Sector News

## **New Higher Education Institutions in England – Edge report**

The Edge Foundation recently published a report titled ‘New Higher Education Institutions in England: A real chance to innovate?’

The report examines the new providers that emerged as a result of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. It explores the process of setting up and developing a new higher education institution (HEI) in England, how their approaches differ from existing practices at other universities, in for example, programme development and recruitment, and how they attempt to develop students ready to respond to the twenty-first century’s challenges.

The qualitative research includes semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders from some of these new HEIs, in particular, founders, directors, senior leadership team and those involved in the setting up a new university and developing the first programmes. Policy makers were also interviewed.

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

## **Sharia-compliant alternative student finance – DfE policy paper**

On Friday 21 July, the Department for Education published a policy paper on how alternative student finance will work in England.

The new finance system will be certified as being Sharia-compliant. It will use the Islamic finance principle of Takaful, to provide a form of group based mutual support. After they leave their studies, students will repay contributions which are then ‘ringfenced’ meaning that the funds are only used for providing alternative student finance.

The government says it is working with the Islamic Finance Council UK to make sure that the alternative student finance system introduced is compliant with Sharia law.

The government will have to create secondary legislation to set out the details of how alternative student finance will work.

You can [read the policy paper](#) here.

## **Guidance on degree awarding powers – OfS**

On Thursday 27 July, the Office for Students (OfS) published guidance setting out the process for universities and colleges to apply for new powers, or to vary existing Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs).

The guidance sets out how the OfS will undertake assessments for DAPs, including how it will draw on the judgements of academic experts in relevant fields of study, and on advice from its independent Quality Assessment Committee.

Jean Arnold, Director of Quality at the OfS, said: ‘Today’s new guidance underlines the OfS’s work to facilitate diversity and innovation within English higher education. Granting degree awarding powers to new and existing providers results in greater choice of high-quality courses for students and introduces new approaches to learning and teaching to the sector.’

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

## **Higher Technical Qualifications – OfS consultation**

On Thursday 27 July, the Office for Students (OfS) launched a consultation on a proposal to separate higher technical qualifications (HTQs) from other Level 4 and 5 qualifications.

In the OfS’s current measures, HTQs are classified alongside Level 4 and 5 courses as ‘other undergraduate’. To better understand students’ performance on HTQs and safeguard their interests on these courses, the OfS is proposing to regulate them in the same way as undergraduate degrees and measure the extent to which they deliver positive student outcomes.

The OfS’s proposals to measure performance for these courses separately, as a ‘split indicator’ would allow it to:

- Increase understanding of the growing profile of HTQs.
- Assess the extent to which a different numerical threshold for student outcomes may be appropriate.
- Take regulatory action, where necessary, in relation to the outcomes of students on HTQ courses.





The consultation closes on 9 November 2023.

You can [read more](#) here.