



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

26 – 30 June 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

Horizon Europe – Lords oral question

On Wednesday 28 June, the House of Lords considered the ‘benefits to the UK’s economy arising from scientific discoveries or advances achieved as a result of the UK’s former participation in Horizon Europe.’ This oral question was tabled by Lord Moylan (Conservative).

Viscount Camrose, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology, opened his remarks by outlining the government’s preference for association with Horizon Europe but noted that ‘participation must work for UK researchers, businesses, and taxpayers.’

Lord Moylan said that the government was struggling to ‘quantify the benefits to the economy’ of the UK’s former participation in Horizon Europe and called for the government to explain why they were ‘so keen to rejoin’. He particularly asked the Minister to consider opting out from clusters 2 and 3 of Pillar 2 which he could not see ‘any advantage at all.’ In his reply, Viscount Camrose said the government ‘really do see benefit in [the UK’s] past’ and he hoped ‘future association to Horizon and its predecessor programmes.’ He said that under the terms of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) the UK opted out from Pillar 3 equity fund but otherwise elected to join all the remaining pillars.

Lord Liddle (Labour) said the main benefits that universities gain from Horizon association are international partnerships for which there was no domestic substitutes. Viscount Camrose said the government recognised the benefits of collaboration within the EU and worldwide.

Lord Patel (Crossbench) highlighted the economic benefits of social sciences and humanities research through Horizon Europe, particularly citing research activity at the University of Oxford. The Minister said he understood this economic benefit.

Probed on cost-benefit analysis of rejoining Horizon Europe, Viscount Camrose said the negotiations had reached a ‘crunchy’ point and would not discuss any of the details of the UK’s negotiating position.

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

Higher Education: Arts and Humanities – Lords oral question

On Wednesday 28 June, the House of Lords considered what steps the government were taking to ‘support the study of the arts and humanities in higher education’ in the context of staff cuts at the University of East Anglia (UEA). This oral question was tabled by the Earl of Clancarty (Crossbench)

The Earl of Clancarty noted that the cuts to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at UEA were the latest in a pattern of cuts at universities across the UK. He said they were the result of a ‘long term downgrading...of arts education from primary school to university.’ Baroness Barran, Minister for the School System and Student Finance, highlighted that the proportion of full-time arts and humanities undergraduates had remained almost unchanged between 2019 and 2022. She further noted that the percentage of disadvantaged young people undertaking such qualifications had also remained stable.

Lord Morgan (Labour) said the case at UEA demonstrated a very limited appreciation by the government and funding councils of the balance and way of assessing the merits of different university subjects.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat) raised the importance of studying humanities, particularly languages, in order to ‘really understand other countries and cultures’. In her reply, the Minister agreed that modern foreign languages are ‘critically important’ and noted the emphasis on EBacc in schools.

Baroness Bull (Crossbench) raised the findings of the [Communications and Digital Committee ‘At risk: our creative future’ report](#). She asked the Minister whether she agreed with the Committee’s recommendations to change the ‘sweeping rhetoric’ around low-value courses to reflect the realities of work in the sector. Baroness Barran said she recognised the points made but said it was important that students were informed about the choices they made, particularly in relation to debt. She also highlighted the opportunities available through degree apprenticeships.

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

Forthcoming business

Home Office – Oral Questions

On Monday 3 July from 2:30pm, the Home Secretary, Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP, and her ministerial team, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – Second Reading

In the afternoon of Monday 3 July, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will receive its second reading in the House of Commons.

You can [read more information on the Bill](#) here and [watch the session](#) here.

At Risk: our creative future – Lords debate

On Friday 7 July, the report from the Communications and Digital Committee, '[At Risk: Our creative future](#)' will be debated in the House of Lords.

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

Written Questions

China Scholarship Council

Baroness Helic: To ask His Majesty's Government what advice they have provided to UK Universities on any national security risks associated with scholarships and funding from the Chinese Scholarship Council. [UIN HL8434]

Baroness Barran: The government regularly assesses threats posed to UK academia and works closely with the higher education (HE) sector. As a matter of longstanding policy, the department is unable to release information regarding threat assessments on the grounds of national security.

The government is now going further in the Integrated Review Refresh 2023, launching a new and comprehensive review of legislative and other provisions designed to protect our academic sector, to identify what more we could or should be doing.

No advice has been issued from the department to HE providers about scholarships and funding from the Chinese Scholarship Council.

The government will not accept collaborations which compromise our national security.

Students: Ukraine

Royston Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 19 May 2022 to Question 304 on Refugees: Ukraine, whether her Department has made a recent assessment of whether people who were granted leave under the (a) Ukraine Sponsorship scheme, (b) Ukraine Family scheme and (c) Ukraine Extension scheme are likely to repay their student loans. [UIN 190092]

Robert Halfon: Student Finance England have paid 617 persons granted leave under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme student support for the 2022/23 academic year up to 18 June 2023. It is not possible to separately identify those on the Ukraine Extension Scheme in the data. The net amount paid out as of 18 June 2023 was £9,155,573, accounting for interest and any repayments received.

The granting of home fee status is a matter for universities. It is therefore not possible to provide full information on how many people who have been issued Ukraine scheme leave have received home fee status, although all those who have been granted student finance will be eligible for home fee status. There were no Ukraine Family Scheme applicants identified who have received payments.

The department has not made a separate assessment of the likelihood of people who were granted leave under (a) the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, (b) the Ukraine Family Scheme and (c) the Ukraine Extension Scheme repaying their student loans. Borrowers in receipt of student funding under the Ukraine schemes are subject to the same repayment terms and conditions as all other borrowers.

STEM Subjects: Education

Martyn Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to attract foreign students to study STEM subjects. [UIN 189965]

Robert Halfon: As part of the UK Science and Technology Framework, a cross-government strategy which aims to cement the UK's status as a science and technology superpower by 2030, the department is committed to establishing a competitive advantage in attracting international talent to the UK. Details from the Framework on attracting talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-science-and-technology-framework/the-uk-science-and-technology-framework#talent-and-skills>(opens in a new tab).

The UK higher education (HE) sector has been successful for two years running in delivering on the government's ambition, set out in our International Education Strategy, of hosting at least 600,000 students per year by 2030, which includes many international students studying STEM subjects.

Our offer to international students, including those wishing to study STEM subjects, is extremely competitive. With our world class universities that excel in both teaching and research, the department is committed to ensuring the UK remains a destination of choice for international students from across the globe.

International students make a significant economic and cultural contribution to the UK's HE sector, which is beneficial for our universities and delivers growth at home.

Universities: Regulation

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of higher education providers under investigation by the Office for Students relating to breaches of their conditions of registration. [UIN 189872]

Robert Halfon: The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education in England and is an arms-length body. The OfS have confirmed that they have opened over 30 investigations at universities and colleges. Decisions to publish information about their investigation work are a matter for the OfS.

Universities: Strikes

Luke Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of universities deducting wages of staff that engage in industrial action on levels of participation in industrial action in that sector. [UIN 189869]

Robert Halfon: The full impact of the marking and assessment boycotts will not be known until the end of June 2023, which is after the exam boards are due to have convened. This is because some institutions will not know until then whether their staff are participating in the boycotts.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) has surveyed its members to gain an estimate of the impact of the marking boycott. 58% of its members responded, to outline that:

- Half of the institutions who responded were confident that less than 5% of academic staff would partake in the marking boycott. 22% reported that between 5% and 10% of academics were likely to be taking part.
- 38% of institutions who responded were unsure of the level of impact.
- Half of the institutions who responded expected that less than 10% of students would be impacted.

Universities are taking a variety of measures to mitigate the impact of the marking boycott and minimise the disruption, including by reallocating marking to other staff members and hiring external markers. The specific mitigating actions will be different for every institution, as each institution will be impacted in different ways.

Turing Scheme

Wendy Chamberlain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the (a) shortest, (b) longest and (c) average time for (i) processing applications and (ii) confirming funding under the Turing scheme was in each academic year from 2021 to date. [UIN 190242]

Robert Halfon: The UK government is supporting access to study abroad through the Turing Scheme. The scheme provides grant funding for education providers and organisations to offer their students, learners and pupils undertake study or work placement across the globe. Participants can study or work anywhere in the world, subject to Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office travel advice.

Education providers and other eligible organisations are able to apply to the Turing Scheme. Organisations that have been awarded funds are responsible for planning projects that will see their students undertake international placements funded through the Turing Scheme. Students do not apply directly to the Turing Scheme. This is the same institution-led model used for international placement schemes like the Erasmus+ Programme.

The Turing Scheme allocated funding for international study and work placements for 41,024 students, learners, and pupils in the 2021/22 academic year and 38,374 in the 2022/23 academic year. Funding results by sector are published on the Turing Scheme website: <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/> (opens in a new tab). Application outcomes for the 2023/24 academic year will be announced in July 2023.

Whilst the Turing Scheme focuses on study and work placements for students, the Erasmus+ Programme also included some staff mobility, and youth and adult educational mobilities. However, the European Commission does not break down the total number of UK participants in any other sector than Higher Education (HE) between staff and students. The department is therefore unable to provide all the information requested. HE student participant numbers in Erasmus+ from the UK were 15,784 in the 2015/16 academic year, 16,559 in 2016/17, 17,048 in 2017/18, 18,305 in 2018/19 and 16,596 in 2019/20. The Turing Scheme is providing funding for 23,472 HE placements in the 2022/23 academic year and provided funding for over 28,000 HE placements in 2021/22.

The Turing Scheme has an annual application window in which eligible organisations can apply for funding:

For 2021/22 placements, the application window opened on 12 March 2021 and closed on 16 April 2021. Applicants were notified of the outcome of their application and funding amounts by 4 August 2021. There were no appeals. The period between the closing of the application window to the notification of results was 15 weeks and 5 days, during which time the applications were assessed.

For 2022/23 placements, the application window opened on 31 March 2022 and closed on 29 April 2022. Applicants were notified of the outcome of their application by 30 June 2022 and of their funding amounts by 17 July 2022. Successful appellants were notified of their funding amounts by 16 Aug 2022. The period between the closing of the application window to the notification of initial application results was 8 weeks and 6 days, during which time the applications were assessed. Notification of funding amounts were issued 2 weeks and 3 days later. The duration of the appeals process was 15 weeks and 4 days from the initial notification to the notification of the final outcomes of the appeal.

For 2023/24 placements, the application window opened on 14 February 2023 and closed on 6 April 2023. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their applications and funding amounts in July 2023. Appeal outcomes will be confirmed to appellants in August 2023.

Under the Turing Scheme, participants receive grants to help cover the general costs of living while they are abroad. The amount of funding provided towards the cost of living for each participant will vary depending on the sector and destination country/territory. Destination countries/territories are grouped into three categories: Group 1 (high cost of living), Group 2 (medium cost of living) and Group 3 (lower cost of living). These categories were determined with reference to the World Bank's International Comparison Program which compares countries' Price Level Indexes, the country groupings used by the European Commission for the Erasmus+ Programme, and data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Horizon Europe

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether it her Department's policy to extend the Horizon Europe Guarantee scheme if the UK has not received association status with Horizon Europe by September 2023.
 [UIN 189243]



George Freeman: The Government's priority remains to support the UK R&D sector. The Horizon Europe Guarantee provides certainty to UK researchers and business in all scenarios and will be kept under review going forwards.

Sector News

Robert Halfon writes to OfS, Russell Group, and UUK

On Friday 23 June, the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, wrote a letter to the Office for Students (OfS), Russell Group and Universities UK, regarding the marking and assessment boycott (MAB). This was shared on the Minister's twitter account on Monday 26 June.

In the letter to Universities UK, he said 'it is imperative that higher education providers and their staff do all they can to minimise the disruption to students.' He asked UUK to share insight on the impact of the boycott and the mitigations that members were taking to protect students' interests.

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

Clearing information – DfE Hub

On Monday 26 June, the Department for Education (DfE) released a blog outlining information on clearing ahead of 2023 results day.

The blog details what clearing is, the process, the timelines, and alternative options to university.

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

Impact of universities in numbers – UUK report

On Thursday 29 June, Universities UK (UUK) produced a report setting out the most compelling evidence behind the impact of universities.

Key evidence includes:

- Graduates are around 3 times more likely to reach the top 20% of earnings (an annual income of at least £33,500 in 2018 prices) at age 30 than non-graduates.
- There are one million more professional jobs in the UK than workers with degrees to fill them.

- Between 2021-2026, universities will train 191,000 nurses, 84,000 medical specialists, and 188,000 teachers.

You can [read the full publication](#) here. A digital toolkit is available for members on the [UUK Comms Hub](#).

OfS to establish Disability in Higher Education Advisory Panel

On Thursday 29 June, the Office for Students (OfS) announced that it is to establish a new Disability in Higher Education Advisory Panel to provide expert advice on enhancing disabled students' experiences in higher education.

The panel will consider and review how universities and colleges currently support disabled students, drawing on evidence, research and analysis from the sector to make recommendations on how to support their educational experience. Disabled students will be invited to describe their own experiences, which will be fundamental to inform the panel's discussions and provide valuable insight into the panel's work.

John Blake, Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS, will chair the panel. Commenting on the new panel, John Blake said: 'The OfS is committed to supporting an inclusive experience of higher education for disabled students. Our 2022-25 strategy focuses on quality and standards and equality of opportunity in higher education, with an emphasis on evaluating interventions to understand what does and doesn't work in improving equality of opportunity.'

The OfS plans to launch the panel in autumn 2023.

You can [read more](#) here.

Student loan forecasts for England – 2022/23

On Thursday 29 June, the Department for Education (DfE) published the latest forecasts of student borrower numbers, student loan expenditure, and student loan repayments in England.

Headline figures include:

- On average, full-time undergraduate higher education borrowers are expected to take out loans for three years and, for those starting in academic year 2022/23, borrow on average £42,100 over the course of their studies.

- In total £20.1 billion was issued in financial year 2022-23, as published by the Student Loans Company.
- Total undergraduate loan-borrowing entrants are expected to grow by 7% over the forecast period, from 544,000 in academic year 2021/22 to 580,000 in 2027/28.

You can [view the complete data](#) here.

Graduate labour market statistics – DfE

On Thursday 29 June, the Department for Education (DfE) published the latest graduate labour market statistics, providing information on graduate, postgraduate and non-graduate employment rates and earnings for England in 2022.

Key facts and figures include:

- Working-age graduates and postgraduates continue to have higher employment rates than non-graduates. The employment rates for both graduates and postgraduates increased in 2022 compared to 2021, with postgraduates having the largest increase.
- In 2022, 66.3% of working-age graduates were in high-skilled employment, compared to 78.3% of postgraduates and 23.6% of non-graduates.
- In 2022, the median nominal salary for working-age graduates was £38,500. This was £11,500 more than working-age non-graduates (£27,000), but £6,500 less than working-age postgraduates (£45,000).

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

NHS Long Term Workforce Plan for England

On Friday 30 June, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, and NHS England Chief Executive, Amanda Pritchard, unveiled the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan for England.

The targets for 2031 include:

- Doubling medical school places for student doctors, to 15,000 a year.

- A 50% increase in GP trainee places for junior doctors.
- 24,000 more nurse and midwife student places a year.

In the next five years, the proportion of NHS staff, including physios, podiatrists, and maternity staff, trained through apprenticeships will double, to one out of every six. An apprenticeship for doctors was launched.

A consultation on whether five-year medical degrees could be shortened by a year was announced.

Professor Sir Steve West, President of Universities UK, said 'Universities UK welcomes the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan as a major milestone, and we thank all those involved in its development. Universities stand ready to help implement the plan's ambitious commitments not just to expand health student numbers but also to offer new routes into the clinical professions and new skills for the future. We look forward to working in partnership with government and NHS leadership to deliver the plan for the future of our NHS.'

You can [read the Workforce Plan](#) here.