



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

26 – 30 September 2022

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

The House of Commons and House of Lords are currently in recess.



Forthcoming business

The House of Lords will not sit until Monday 10 October.

The House of Commons will not sit until Tuesday 11 October.

Written Questions

Visas: British National (Overseas)

Charlotte Nichols: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Government's visa support for young people from Hong Kong will extend to allowing those people to include years spent in the UK on a student visa toward the five year route to settlement for British National (Overseas) visa holders. [UIN 53550]

Tom Pursglove: On 24 February 2022, the Government announced in a Written Ministerial Statement a change to the Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) route which will allow adult children of BN(O) status holders born on or after the 1 July 1997, who are currently unable to apply for the BN(O) route independently to do so. The statement is available at: [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#).

The change to allow adult children of BN(O) status holders born on or after 1 July 1997 to apply to the route independently of their parents is currently scheduled to come into effect this Autumn at which point further information, including full eligibility criteria, will be published on GOV.UK.

Under the new provisions, children born on or after 1 July 1997, whose deceased parent held BN(O) status, will be able to qualify for the route, providing they meet all other requirements for the route. Applicants will need to show evidence of the BN(O) status of at least one parent.

As is the case on the BN(O) route now, those who enter the UK with a Student or Visitor visa will be able to apply to switch into the BN(O) route. They will need to apply before the expiry of their current visa or grant of permission. Under the Immigration Rules, individuals applying for the BN(O) route must not be in breach of immigration laws. This includes overstaying, except where certain limited circumstances apply as set out paragraph 39E of the Immigration Rules.

Only time spent in the UK on either the BN(O) route or another route which leads to settlement can count towards the five-year qualifying period for settlement as a BN(O), with the most recent grant of permission required to be on the BN(O) route. Time spent in the UK on a Student visa does not count towards settlement.

All applicants to the BN(O) route need to demonstrate they can maintain and accommodate themselves and their family members for at least six months without access to public funds. Applicants can rely on credible offers of financial support and/or accommodation from a third party (for example, a relative or friend) to meet this requirement.

Individuals with an outstanding asylum claim must write to the Home Office to withdraw their claim before they can apply to the BN(O) route. Further information is available here: [Withdrawing asylum applications - GOV.UK](#).

Apprentices: British National (Overseas)

Charlotte Nichols: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether young people from Hong Kong on the extended British National (Overseas) visa will be able to immediately access apprenticeship schemes in the UK without having to wait for three years of residence. [UIN 53542]

Andrea Jenkyns: Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa holders are required to meet the same residency requirements as most other non-UK nationals. The residency requirements ensure that public funding for apprenticeships is targeted at those with established ties to the United Kingdom.

They are able to live, work and study in the UK, but will not have access to public funds.

They may start an apprenticeship, and access government funds for training and assessment, once they meet the residency requirement, and can do so before they are able to apply for indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.

Dentistry: Training

James Wild: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many dentistry training places have been funded by Health Education England in each of the last five years. [UIN 46168]

Robert Jenrick: The Office for Students' target for the number of dental school places taken up each year is 809, with scope for marginal variation each year averaged over five years.

The Government temporarily lifted the cap on dental school places in 2020 and 2021 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on A-Levels. Consequently, more places were funded above the 809 annual target in those years. In 2020/21, there were 895 places and 970 in 2021/22. From 2022/23, the target reverts to 809.

Medicine: Education

Helen Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of university places for UK medical students. [UIN 47609]

Robert Jenrick: In England, the Government has funded an additional 1,500 undergraduate medical school places each year for domestic students in England – a 25% increase over three years. This expansion was completed in September 2020 and has delivered five new medical schools. In addition, the cap on medical school places was lifted for students who completed A-Levels in 2020 and in 2021 and had an offer from a university in England to study medicine, subject to their grades. While there are no current plans to further increase the number of places, it is kept under review.

The number of university places for medical students in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland is a devolved matter.

Nurses: Training

Wes Streeting: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what data his Department holds on the number of qualified nurses trained in England who have graduated in each of the last six years. [UIN 48431]

Robert Jenrick: The information requested is not held centrally.

However, the Higher Education Statistics Agency 's data on nursing undergraduate qualifiers by higher education providers in England in 2019/20 and 2020/21 is shown in the following table.

2019/20: 21,730

2020/21:20,620

Higher Education: Admissions

Emma Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many applications were there for places on the Higher Education Short Courses trial; how many and what proportion of these applications were accepted; and how many and what proportion of those that were accepted applied for (i) fee and (ii) maintenance loans. [UIN 51914]

Andrea Jenkyns: The Higher Education Short Course Trial is testing flexible short courses at 22 providers across England. These courses are brand new, and they will be rolling out over the 2022/23 academic year.

The nature of these short courses means they are not tied to the concept of the academic year and providers have discretion on when to deliver these courses. The department expects the majority of courses to start from January 2023.

At this early stage in the trial, the Student Loans Company (SLC) has received 12 applications for tuition fee loans to date.[1] However, we expect more students to be participating in these courses, as they can choose to self-fund or receive funding from their employers for their tuition fees.

Students apply directly to providers for these courses. The exact number of applications for Higher Education Short Course Trial courses is held by each individual provider.

Maintenance loans are not provided as part of the trial. However, those who need additional support may be eligible for the short course study-costs bursary.

The department will be monitoring the overall number of students on courses and the number of applications for loans at various points throughout the trial.

As a new type of learning, the department is expecting demand for short courses to increase over the course of the three-year trial, as more learners become aware of these opportunities and realise the benefits flexible learning can bring.

Horizon Europe

Dr Matthew Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent progress the Government has made on the UK's application to associate to Horizon Europe [UIN 49618].

Nusrat Ghani: Our preference remains association to the EU programmes as agreed under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), including Horizon Europe, and we continue to do everything we can to secure this. The EU is in breach of the agreement reached under the TCA for the UK to participate in EU programmes and these unjustified delays are causing uncertainty for our research and business communities. That is why we entered into formal consultations with the EU, which are a mechanism set out in the TCA to resolve issues between the UK and the EU. At the UK-EU Specialised Committee meeting on 22 September, which marked the end of the consultations period, the UK once again requested that the EU fulfil its obligation to finalise the UK's association to EU Programmes. It is regrettable that the EU continues to decline this request. The UK government is now considering next steps. Our priority is to support the UK's world leading R&D sector and we have already outlined potential options for doing so.

Innovate UK: Expenditure

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to the Answer of 26 July 2022 to Question 38656, whether the Total Award by Innovate UK and Award to Academic Institutions will recover to similar sums spent in the years (a) 2017, (b) 2018, (c) 2019 and (d) 2020 during this current award year. [UIN 53396]

Nusrat Ghani: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) allocations were published on 30 May 2022, with total of £25.1 billion for 2022-25 and funding will reach its highest ever level in 2024-25 (over £8.8 billion). UKRI's strategy sets out long-term, high-level priorities for an outstanding research and innovation system in the UK and funding will be allocated in line with this strategy. The proportion of Innovate UK funds that are awarded to academic institutions is not determined in advance, but they will continue to play an important role in delivering Innovate UK's mission.

Sector news

Labour Party Conference pledges

On Monday 26 September, Rachel Reeves MP, Shadow Chancellor, announced that a Labour government would double the number of medical school places from 7,500 to 15,000 if elected. They also pledged to double the number of district nurses qualifying every year, train 5,000 more health visitors, and create an additional 10,000 nursing and midwifery clinical placements every year.

Responding to the pledge, Universities UK said, “We welcome this significant commitment from the Labour Party to invest in the next generation of doctors and nurses. We would be happy to work with the Labour Party to set out the steps needed to make this ambitious policy a reality.”

As part of the Industrial Strategy, the Labour Party committed to a 3% R&D target, continued participation in Horizon Europe, and a start-up review to include university spinouts. You can [read the full strategy document here](#).

The Labour Party also announced that it would devolve adult education skills spending to combined authorities, and establish a new expert body, Skills England, to oversee this. You can [read the announcement here](#).

Department for Education confirms ministerial titles and briefs

On Tuesday 27 September, the Department for Education confirmed ministerial titles and their briefs.

Andrea Jenkyns MP, has been appointed as Minister for Skills, where she previously held the title Minister for Skills, Further and Higher Education. “Universities and higher education” reform is absent from her new responsibilities.

You can read a full list of ministers, and their responsibilities, on the [Department for Education website](#).

Office for Students plans for access and participation

On Tuesday 27 September, the Office for Students (OfS) announced plans for access and participation at an event with the Social Mobility Foundation. John Blake, director for fair access and participation, announced a new “equality of opportunity risk register” to identify students who need extra support to access universities and colleges. He said, “this register will help ensure that sector-wide risks are properly addressed by higher education providers, while also respecting the autonomy and pluralism of the sector.”

Responding to the plans, the Russell Group said, "there is no one size fits all solution to raising attainment and creating opportunity, so we welcome a more flexible approach from the OfS that supports universities to factor in the circumstances and needs of their local area when considering how best to tackle inequality.”

Lords Science and Technology Committee letter to PM

On Tuesday 27 September, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee wrote to the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Liz Truss MP. The committee urged the new Prime Minister to acknowledge the central importance of science and technology in delivering economic growth and to embed science and technology at the heart of government.

The letter made several specific recommendations to the new administrations, including:

- A science minister should be appointed at the earliest opportunity, and this should be a Cabinet-level position.
- The UK should maintain efforts towards reaching 2.4% of its GDP spent on research and development by 2027.
- The government should reconsider its decision to disband the National Science and Technology Council.

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

King's Policy Institute: free speech in UK universities

On Thursday 29 September, the Policy Institute at King's College London published the findings of a new survey of UK university students on free speech and academic freedom.

It shows that there is strong agreement among students that their university is protecting freedom of expression and robust debate but growing minorities feel that free speech is under threat at their institution, with perceptions of a "chilling effect" also increasing.

Professor Bobby Duffy, Director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said: "Universities should have confidence that the starting point on free speech is not as dire as it's sometimes painted, but also recognise that it is too important an issue to overlook. The government, in turn, need to ensure any measures are applied carefully and proportionately, including looking for positive measures to support free speech, not just regulating against it being curtailed".

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

Government and Ofqual confirm A level exam arrangements

On Thursday 29 September, it was announced that GCSE, AS, and A level exams in England would largely return to pre-pandemic arrangements for 2023, including a return to pre-pandemic grading.

Clare Marchant, chief executive of UCAS, said: "This decision will support teachers and advisors in giving the best guidance to their students, as well as enable universities and colleges to make offers with certainty."

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

Office for Students sets new expectations for student outcomes

On Friday 30 September, the Office for Students (OfS) announced that new thresholds will be introduced on w/c 3 October setting minimum expectations for the proportion of students on higher education courses who continue their course, graduate, and go on to further study or find a professional job.

Universities and colleges that perform below these thresholds could face investigation to allow the OfS to understand the reasons for their performance. The OfS has the power to intervene and impose sanctions for a breach of its conditions of registration.

Susan Lapworth, chief executive of the OfS, commented: “Too many students, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, are recruited onto courses with weak outcomes which do not improve their life chances. We can now intervene where outcomes for students are low, and where universities and colleges cannot credibly explain why.”

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

