



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

27 – 31 January 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Education – HoC oral questions

On Monday 27 January, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, and her ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Christine Jardine MP (Liberal Democrat) asked what discussions had taken place with other Cabinet colleagues about support for artificial intelligence (AI) research and development in the higher education sector. She expressed concern at the cancellation of the exascale computer at Edinburgh University and asked whether this would go ahead and how the benefits of AI will be spread to universities across the UK. The Secretary of State said the Department for Education was collaborating across government through the AI working group. She said the government was considering the exascale computer, but full funding had not been allocated, and a 10-year strategy for the country's needs would be published alongside the spending review.

Peter Prinsley MP (Labour) asked what action was being taken to retain clinical academics, outlining their importance to the health service and issues with universities being financially unable to match NHS pay structures. The Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP, stated that as autonomous institutions, universities were responsible for staffing decisions, but the government was working to restore the university sector and working with education partners to ensure clinical academia is accessible to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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

Wales – HoC oral questions

On Wednesday 29 January, the Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Jo Stevens MP, and her ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons. The following exchange about universities took place:

Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP (Plaid Cymru): We have heard this week that it is growth for Heathrow but decline for Welsh universities. Cardiff University in the Secretary of State's home city is axing 400 full-time jobs due to a funding crisis, with nursing, music and modern language degrees on the chopping block. This is an education disaster playing out in real time. Will the

Government scrap their national insurance hikes to ease the strain on universities?

Secretary of State for Wales: The potential job losses at Cardiff University are deeply concerning and will come as a significant blow to university staff and their families. I hope that there will be sufficient volunteers for a voluntary redundancy programme, so that we avoid compulsory redundancies, and that support will be provided to those impacted. The right hon. Lady will know that the last 14 years of Conservative policies have seen the university sector decimated across the United Kingdom.

Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP (Plaid Cymru): On Conservative policies, the Secretary of State will know that universities are also being hammered by Brexit. The number of EU students starting full-time undergraduate courses in the UK fell by 68% between 2020 and 2024 to the lowest level in 30 years. Surely she agrees that our rejoining the single market would help universities to attract more students, as well as boosting economic growth.

Secretary of State for Wales: This Government have made economic growth their No. 1 mission. The Prime Minister is leading from the front in resetting the UK's relationship with the EU. However, the right hon. Lady's question highlights the stark risks associated with separatism. Those risks are why I will always be a strong and passionate advocate for a Wales that thrives as part of the United Kingdom.

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

Office for Students 2025-2030 strategy and decision to pause applications – HoL short debate

On Thursday 30 January, there was a House of Lords short debate on discussions with the Office for Students (OfS) about its 2025-2030 strategy and decision to pause applications regarding registering institutions, degree-awarding powers and university titles to allow greater focus on the financial sustainability of the sector. This debate was tabled by Lord Willetts (Conservative).

Lord Willetts opened the debate by outlining the OfS consultation on its new strategy and the subsequent announcement to pause some of its activities, including registering providers and considering new candidates for degree-awarding powers and for university status. He described this as a misunderstanding of the implications of its priorities and a 'regrettable failure' to discharge one of its statutory obligations.

Coupled with the announcement to tackle franchising provision, he warned that the OfS would have a registration backlog. He highlighted that the hardest hit by the pause would be providers that were in the process of applying for degree-awarding powers that he feared would have to start over again.

Lord Willetts noted the connection between this decision by the OfS and the financial resilience of the sector. He said that degree-awarding powers and university titles were assets that a university could deploy if they were trying to avoid the 'total disaster' of bankruptcy, citing examples of a rescue package that included the reallocation of degree-awarding powers, or a new entity being created that required registration.

His final remarks focused on the global higher education business which he hoped that UK universities could play a greater role in as Australia, Germany, and France had done. He said that the spirit of the Chancellor's recent speech should be followed and the OfS should not stand in the way of attracting international investment if businesses were seeking to register a new provider.

Baroness Garden of Frognal (Liberal Democrat) opened her remarks by outlining the impact on the further education sector. Turning to financial sustainability in the higher education sector, she warned of course closures and asked why more had not been done to safeguard higher education providers. She echoed criticism from Alex Proudfoot, CEO of Independent Higher Education, that the decision to suspend registration and degree-awarding processes was a 'clear enough dereliction of their statutory duty' and that 'what the OfS is actually doing is picking winners and losers.'

Baroness Stedman-Scott (Conservative) said that while the strategy was framed as strengthening the financial sustainability of higher education, they raised important questions about innovation, access, and diversity in the sector. She highlighted the financial fragility of the sector, particularly the pressures facing small, medium, and specialist providers. She asked the Minister how the OfS intended to balance the need for financial stability with the need for ongoing innovation and diversity in the sector in light of the strategy. She also warned of declining recruitment numbers and probed how the Minister was intending to address this issue.

Responding on behalf of the government, Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent opened her remarks by speaking positively about the role of universities and stating that they act as 'one of the country's greatest enablers of two of this government's missions.' She said that the OfS was fundamental to the activity of higher education as an effective and independent regulator of the sector.

Turning to the strategy, she first highlighted the 'stark assessment' made in the Industry and Regulators Committee report as well as Sir David Behan's review of the regulator which sought to create a platform for change. She explained the growing

concern of the sector's finances which prompted the recent decision for the regulator to refocus resources. She acknowledged this was 'not the ideal decision for the OfS to make' and said she did not underestimate the impact this could have on providers whose business models relied on registration or progressing with degree awarding powers. However, she stressed that the decision was in line with the recommendations of the independent review and with expectations set out in the regulator's code to prioritise resource to manage the greatest risk.

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

New youth mobility scheme with European countries – HoL debate

On Thursday 30 January, there was a House of Lords debate on a new youth mobility scheme with European countries. This debate was tabled by The Lord Bishop of St Albans (Bishops).

During the wide-ranging debate, many peers, including Lord Bishop of St Albans, Baroness Bull (Crossbench), Lord Berkeley of Knighton (Crossbench), and the Earl of Dundee (Conservative) spoke about the importance of rejoining the Erasmus Scheme given the Turing Scheme did not replicate all elements of the scheme.

Baroness Smith of Llanfaes (Plaid Cymru) used the debate as an opportunity to talk about the broader context at universities with proposed course closures such as modern languages at Cardiff University. She highlighted that Cardiff University were not alone in this struggle and many universities were warning of a crisis looming.

The Earl of Effingham (Conservative) spoke to the challenges that a EU-UK youth mobility would pose, including to UK universities. He warned that the proposal, which would include provision for equal treatment between EU and UK citizens on tuition fees, would place further strain on the finances of universities. He shared comments made by Jamie Arrowsmith, Director of Universities UK International, that 'at a time when tuition fees don't cover the full cost of teaching ... it's difficult to see how this could work without exacerbating concerns over financial sustainability or imposing a significant cost on the government.'

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

Forthcoming business

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoL committee stage

On Monday 3 and Wednesday 5 February, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will begin its committee stage in the House of Lords.

You can [read more](#) and watch [day 1](#) and [day 2](#) of committee stage.

Value of apprenticeships and National Apprenticeships Week – WH debate

On Tuesday 4 February from 9:00am, there will be a Westminster Hall debate on the value of apprenticeships and National Apprenticeships Week. This debate was tabled by Andrew Pakes MP (Labour).

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

Renters' Rights Bill – HoL second reading

On Tuesday 4 February, the Renters' Rights Bill will have its second reading in the House of Lords.

You can [read the House of Lords Library briefing](#).

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

National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill – HoL committee stage

On Tuesday 4 February from 3:45pm and Thursday 6 February from 1:00pm, the National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill will continue its committee stage in the House of Lords.

You can [read more](#) and watch [day 3](#) and [day 4](#) of committee stage.

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – HoL report stage

On Wednesday 5 February, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill will have its report stage in the House of Lords.

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

Social, economic and personal values of life-long learning – HoL debate

On Thursday 6 February, there will be a House of Lords debate on the social, economic and personal values of life-long learning. This debate was tabled by Lord Knight of Weymouth (Labour).

You can [read the House of Lords Library briefing](#).

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

Written questions and statements

Universities: Freedom of Expression

Richard Holden MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her oral statement on 15 January 2025 on Higher Education Regulatory Approach, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of encouraging higher education institutions to adopt The Chicago Principles on freedom of speech and academic freedom. [UIN 24259; Grouped Question: 24258]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP (Labour): As my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Security said in the House of Lords on 16 December, the Home Office plans to lay the regulations that underpin the scheme in early 2025, ahead of the scheme going live in the summer. The department is keeping implementation of the overseas transparency measures under review whilst we work with the sector to assess their approaches to managing these risks, and to ensure that any new reporting requirements are proportionate and add value to existing and upcoming protections. We expect a decision on the overseas measures to be made before the implementation of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has not conducted an assessment of the potential merits of encouraging higher education (HE) institutions to adopt The Chicago Principles. HE providers are independent institutions and adopting the principles would be a matter for them individually.

However, the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, in the manner set out by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education in her oral statement on 15 January 2025, will seek to achieve many of the same underlying values, including commitment to free and open enquiry in all matters, ensuring the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn, and a solemn responsibility to debate and protect freedom of expression when others attempt to restrict it.

Growth Corridor Strategy

Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP: I am today updating the House on the government's plans to supercharge growth in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor and the high-potential sectors within it, as part of our ambitious Plan for Change.

The Oxford-Cambridge region is already home to world leading universities and globally renowned science and technology firms. It has the potential to become one of the most innovative and economically dynamic areas in the world but numerous constraints, from inadequate transport connections to a lack of affordable housing, prevent it from realising its true potential. This government is determined to do what's necessary to drive sustainable economic growth in the region to the benefit of local communities and national prosperity.

The Chancellor has today announced the appointment of Lord Patrick Vallance as a champion for the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. His extensive experience across life sciences, academia and government makes him ideally suited to identify and maximise growth opportunities in the region. He will work with me and other Ministers to ensure the corridor makes a significant contribution to kickstarting economic growth.

Working with local partners, Peter Freeman and the Cambridge Growth Company are progressing the development of an ambitious plan for delivering high-quality sustainable growth in Cambridge and its environs. Their work will continue in earnest.

In Greater Cambridge, the benefits of decisive government intervention are already evident. As a result of close working with local authorities and regulators, the Environment Agency has lifted objections to development in the area, paving the way for 4,500 additional homes, new schools and new office, retail and laboratory space to be built.

The government welcomes the University of Cambridge's proposal for a new flagship innovation hub in the centre of the city, which will attract global investment and foster a community that catalyses innovation. The Chancellor has today also confirmed the prioritisation of a new Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital as part of the New Hospitals Programme, bringing together Cambridge University Hospital cancer services, with researchers from AstraZeneca and Cancer Research UK.

To ensure we can realise Oxford's full potential, we intend to take forward a new Growth Commission to explore how we can best unlock and accelerate nationally significant growth for the city and the surrounding area. The Commission builds on the government's commitment to making Culham in Oxfordshire the country's first AI Growth Zone as part of the government's AI Opportunities Action Plan. This is the government's modern Industrial Strategy in action.

Across the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, we are demonstrating our commitment to investing in the delivery of major transport infrastructure and public services to boost the region's economic prosperity and contribute to national economic growth. The government are:

- delivering the acceleration of phase 2 of East West Rail, connecting Oxford to Bedford from 2030. The full new railway to Cambridge will support vibrant new and expanded communities. We have already received 18 submissions for large-scale new developments within the corridor, each of which will be considered by the New Towns Taskforce;
- moving quicker at Tempsford to deliver an East Coast Mainline station 3-5 years earlier than planned, which will link services directly to London in under an hour;
- committed to upgrading ten miles of the A428, improving journeys between Milton Keynes and Cambridge; and
- unlocking £7.9 billion investment in the next 5 years for water companies, by agreeing their water resource management plans. This will improve our water infrastructure and provide a foundation for growth and includes nine new reservoirs, such as the new Fens Reservoir serving Cambridge and the Abingdon Reservoir near Oxford.

We will continue to update Parliament on the work of the government in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. [UIN HCWS396]

UK Research and Innovation: Staff

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, pursuant to the Answer of 17 January 2024 to Question 23744 on UK Research and Innovation: Staff, how many business growth advisors operate in each region. [UIN 25209; Grouped Question: 25208]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The funding for IUK Business Growth core advisory activities for 2024-25 is £41.8m, servicing approximately 10,000 innovative businesses a year with light touch **Growth**, or more intensive **High Growth/Scaling** support, this data is published as part of Innovate UK's "Transparency data".

The Business Growth advisors (Full Time Equivalent) per region is as per the table below, the group marked national work cross-regionally:

Region	Approx. FTE	% split
National	44	9%
Wales	22	5%

Scotland	16	3%
Northern Ireland	6	1%
North	73	16%
Midlands	44	9%
East	88	19%
South West	53	11%
South East	48	10%
London	71	15%
Total	464	

Apprentices

Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department plans to take to provide (a) educational and (b) training support to apprentices, in the context of of recent trends in the level of Level 7 funding. [UIN 24479]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government is committed to spreading opportunities and economic growth with the support of a strong skills system. The government is reforming the current apprenticeship offer to ensure that more young people can benefit from high quality training.

The new growth and skills offer will deliver greater flexibility for both learners and employers in England and will be aligned with the government's industrial strategy, creating routes into good jobs in growing industries. As a first step, the department will be introducing new foundation apprenticeships for young people, as well as shorter duration apprenticeships, in targeted sectors. These flexibilities will provide high quality entry pathways for young people, help more people learn new high quality skills at work and fuel innovation in businesses across the country. The department will set out more detail in due course.

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. The government will therefore be asking more employers to step forward and fund a significant number of level 7 apprenticeships themselves. The

department is taking advice from Skills England, who engaged with employers on funding for level 7 apprenticeships over the autumn, and the department expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships shortly. Learners who have started these apprenticeships will be funded through to completion.

Overseas Students

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential benefits and disbenefits for (a) prospective and (b) current students of international student recruitment agencies operating in the UK. [UIN 25214]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government welcomes international students, who enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and make a significant economic contribution to the UK.

Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous institutions, which have the choice to use education recruitment agents when recruiting international students. Agents provide valuable services including marketing, promotion and support in identifying qualified students.

The department is working with the Home Office to ensure that education recruitment agents meet the needs of prospective and current international students. This will include requiring HE providers who use them to adhere to the stringent Agent Quality Framework, a code of practice developed by the HE sector which sets out overarching principles for how providers should manage their commercial arrangements with agents.

Strengthening oversight of partnership delivery in higher education

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: I am today announcing the publication of a consultation which sets out the government's proposals to strengthen oversight of partnership delivery in higher education. This consultation is one of the actions the government is taking to protect public money. It was developed in response to the recommendations made by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee last year about the regulatory oversight of student loan funding for study at franchised providers.

English higher education providers are amongst the most highly regarded in the world, supporting learners to succeed for themselves, their communities and our

country, and driving the economic growth we need. They also play a key role in this government's missions to break down barriers to opportunity and to drive economic growth. Higher education can open the door to opportunity for many, but only where that education is good quality and subject to effective management and governance.

The Office for Students (OfS) is the regulator responsible for higher education in England. Higher education providers must register with the OfS for their courses to be designated for publicly funded student finance. Some registered providers subcontract or 'franchise' delivery of courses to partners that are not subject to the same regulatory requirements. Whilst there are many good examples of franchised provision being used to expand access and participation and deliver high quality provision, franchised higher education is one area where we have seen too many examples of abuse of public money in recent years and some concerning indicators of poor quality.

Students make a significant investment in higher education and they deserve to have confidence that in return they will receive excellent teaching, strong support and value for money. Taxpayers too deserve to know that the public money invested in student loans to help students access higher education is properly protected from fraud and misuse.

The proposals we are consulting on aim to bring franchised providers under greater scrutiny to help safeguard against the risks of misuse of public money and low-quality provision. This consultation proposes a requirement that franchised providers with 300 or more students should be directly regulated by the Office for Students if they want their students to access student loan funding.

The government is committed to supporting innovation and competition. We recognise that franchising can provide smaller, innovative providers with the opportunity to enter the higher education sector. Setting a size threshold will still allow new and smaller providers who may find registration disproportionately burdensome to access the higher education market.

Whilst the OfS has currently paused registration of new higher education providers to support the sector with financial sustainability concerns, we expect this pause to cease before the Department's proposed changes would come into effect.

The Office for Students announced last September that they had opened formal investigations into some universities' and colleges' subcontractual arrangements and that their next cycle of quality assessments would largely focus on the academic experiences of students studying through subcontractual arrangements. The Office for Students is consulting on proposals to strengthen expectations on providers wishing to join their register. This includes strengthening requirements that protect student interests and ensure effective governance and management of higher

education. They have also communicated plans to publish student outcomes for all subcontractual partnerships on an annual basis from this year.

As a whole, I believe that these proposals will bring about the changes that are necessary to ensure that student loan funding is protected from misuse and students studying at franchised providers can have confidence that their courses are subject to rigorous quality requirements.

Sector news

Degree Apprenticeships in England: What can we learn from the experiences of apprentices, employers and education and training providers? – Edge Foundation report

On Tuesday 28 January, Edge Foundation published a report evaluating degree apprenticeships within broader apprenticeship and education policies and explore the existing challenges in design, recruitment, and delivery.

The report recommends government should help employers to fully engage with degree apprenticeships, simplify their design and regulation through the new [Skills England](#) and adopt flexibility in apprenticeship standards.

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

Industrial Strategy inquiry – HoC Business and Trade Committee

On Tuesday 28 January, the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee announced an industrial strategy inquiry, taking a comprehensive look at the Government's proposals for a 10-year modern industrial strategy, as set out in Invest 2035. The Committee will scrutinise the proposals in the Government's Green Paper, and its forthcoming White Paper, and make recommendations for the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The call for evidence is open until COP Friday 21st February.

You can [read the full call for evidence](#).

Higher Education Staff statistics and data 2023/24 – HESA data release

On Tuesday 28 January, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) published new open data showing demographic and contract characteristics of academic staff in UK higher education.

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

Towards an ambitious FP10: Shaping Europe's role in the world through research and innovation – CEPS report

On Wednesday 29 January, the Centre of European Policy Studies (CEPS) published a report presenting a vision and possible pathways towards a truly ambitious FP10.

The report recommends:

- FP10 will have to juggle a multiplicity of objectives.
- FP10 will have to be more agile and future-proof than Horizon Europe.
- The current pillar structure of Horizon Europe needs to evolve for FP10.
- FP10 hemispheres should feature different rules.
- The two hemispheres of FP10 would enable stronger and more coherent links with other EU and national policies.

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

Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2024 – UCAS data release

On Thursday 30 January, UCAS published sector-level end of cycle data resources covering applicants and applications to courses recruited through UCAS.

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

UK redoubles Horizon push as Peter Kyle forges deeper R&I links with EU – DSIT press release

On Thursday 30 January, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) announced a renewed push to turbo-charge UK-EU science and technology links, to tackle shared global challenges.

UK Science and Technology Secretary Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP said:

‘There is no question about it: we stand our best chance of tackling the great challenges of our era, from climate change to public health, to growing

economies that work for everyone, by bringing the brightest minds from across the UK and the European Union, together.

The UK is determined to give our researchers, innovators and businesses the opportunities and platforms they need to bring their great ideas to life, to the benefit of us all – all of which is highlighted by our new Horizon ad campaign. I'm pleased to have had such fruitful conversations with my European friends and colleagues, on taking this vital partnership even further.'

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

‘There was nothing to do but take action’: The encampments protesting for Palestine and the response to them – HEPI report

On Thursday 30 January, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report on student protests based on interviews with nearly 60 student protestors, senior institutional leaders – including three vice-chancellors – students’ union officers and Jewish students.

The report recommends that institutions should, if similar protests take place again:

- Consider carefully whether the encampment should be allowed to remain, and set clear expectations of protestors which are followed up with disciplinary action if not adhered to, which may include shutting down the encampment entirely.
- Establish a working relationship with the encampment, to enable the institution to protect the welfare of protestors and others.
- Take steps to prevent ‘externals’ from joining the encampments.
- Work to protect student and staff wellbeing.
- Establish robust communication processes with Jewish students and staff and other groups which may be significantly affected.

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

Clinical researchers in the UK: reversing the decline – UKRI report

On Thursday 30 January, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) published a report evaluating the current decline in clinical researchers, determines underlying causes and defines necessary actions across stakeholders at a national level.

It calls for a series of measures to be taken to address the decline, which include:

- Establishing a national clinical research career framework.
- Enabling more flexible training pathways.
- Encouraging leaders and mentors.
- Ensuring more equitable pay and opportunities.

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

Government aims to crack down on rogue higher education operators – DfE press release

On Thursday 30 January, the Department for Education (DfE) released a press release to tighten controls of university franchise arrangements in England.

Under new plans published for consultation, delivery partners with 300 or more students would be required to register with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure their courses meet rigorous quality standards, in order to be eligible to access to student finance.

If the OfS finds that a provider is not meeting the standards required of registered providers, they will be publicly held to account and could risk facing fines and the suspension of their registration, in the most extreme circumstances. The OfS will also publish student outcome data for all subcontracted partnerships every year.

The Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, said:

‘We are committed to cracking down on rogue operators who misuse public money and damage the reputation of our world-class universities.

Franchising can be a valuable tool to widen access to higher education, and these proposals will ensure students can trust the quality of their courses, no matter where or how they choose to study.

The credibility of our universities is at stake, but these proposals seek to protect students and safeguard taxpayer’s money, as part of our work to drive growth through our Plan for Change.’

You can [read the full press release](#) and [written ministerial statement](#).