



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

## University APPG weekly update

27 February – 3 March 2023

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

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# Parliamentary business

## Education oral questions

On Monday 27 February, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education, and her ministerial team, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Emma Hardy MP (Labour) cited concern over the [Department for Education's Equality Impact Assessment](#) which found that the small rise in student loans and grants would have a negative impact on students. She called on the government to ensure all students have the financial resources to succeed at university. In his response, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education, said any settlement needed to be fair to both students and the taxpayer. He further noted the £276 million available through the Office for Students, the freezing of tuition fees, and bursaries available from universities.

Anthony Higginbotham MP (Conservative) highlighted the importance of Institutes of Technologies (IoTs) in meeting future skills need. He asked how IoTs would facilitate reskilling. In his reply, the Minister confirmed the investment of £300 million in IoTs.

Alyn Smith MP (SNP) shared concern over the loss of European Social Funding (ESF) for skills providers and called on the Treasury to match this loss. Robert Halfon said this was a matter for the Treasury and cited the £3.8 billion additional investment in the skills agenda.

Margaret Ferrier MP (Independent) said that cost remained a barrier for upskilling and asked what plans the government had to seize the economic benefit of upskilling. In his reply, Robert Halfon reiterated his previous remarks on government investment in the skills agenda.

Matt Western MP, Shadow Higher Education Minister, raised YouGov polling that found 40% of workers wanted to learn new skills and supported greater investment in skills. In his reply, the Minister said that 'whichever way you look the government is giving a skills ladder of opportunity'.

At the beginning of topical questions, the Secretary of State for Education and Shadow Secretary of State for Education both celebrated the work of schools, colleges, and universities to support Ukraine following the invasion.

Afzal Khan MP (Labour) raised inadequacies of student housing in Manchester and said students were feeling the strain of the cost-of-living crisis given frozen maintenance loans. He asked why the government were 'punishing students.' The Secretary of State for Education clarified that the maintenance loan had been increased and hardship funding was available. She said there were 'crunch points' in accommodation provision at some cities, urging universities to consider this.

Carol Monaghan MP (SNP) described rumoured proposals to reduce the time that international students could remain in the UK after graduation as 'short-sighted' and 'reactionary'. She asked for reassurance that the Secretary of State would oppose these policies. Robert Halfon praised the targets of the International Education Strategy and noted that matters of immigration were the responsibility of the Home Office.

Clive Lewis MP (Labour) raised the 'severe financial crisis' facing the University of East Anglia which would have a dramatic impact on the regional economy. He asked whether the Secretary of State would meet him, and a delegation from the university, to discuss this matter. Robert Halfon agreed to meet 'sooner rather than later'.

Rt Hon Michael Ellis MP (Conservative) raised the importance of information sharing in cases of mental health crisis for students at universities, noting the Universities UK guidelines. He asked what steps the government were taking to ensure universities were adopting these policies. In his reply, the Minister outlined the government's multi-million-pound investment in mental health and said Professor Edward Peck, Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University, had been tasked to work on these issues.

Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP (Conservative) expressed concern that free speech at universities could be undermined by the proposed requirement that internal processes of appeal must be exhausted first. In her reply, Claire Countinho MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State responsible for freedom of speech in education, said that the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill had been returned to the House of Lords with the Tort unamended and the government would continue to make the Bill as 'strong as possible'.

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

## **Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill: Second reading**

On Monday 27 February, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons.

Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education, said that the Bill was part of the government's mission to revolutionise access to higher and further education.

She outlined how the Bill would adapt the student finance framework enabling meaningful fee limits to be set on periods of study shorter than a year. The Bill also aimed to address the lack of fairness in how learners chose to study by introducing a new method for calculating fee limits.

Gillian Keegan proceeded to outline three changes that the Bill would make. Firstly, it would enable tuition fee limits to be based on credits that could be set consistently across all types of courses. Secondly, it would introduce the concept of a course year, rather than an academic year, allowing charges for short courses and modules to be set with greater accuracy. Finally, she outlined how the Bill would allow the Secretary of State to set a cap on the total number of credits that could be charged for each type of course, preventing modules from being premium-priced.

Matt Western MP, Shadow Higher Education Minister, said the need for a flexible multi-skilled workforce was more important than ever before. He proceeded to outline significant questions that remained over the government's proposed policy.

He raised concerns that the government had not published their consultation response to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), denying parliament the ability to fully scrutinise the legislation.

On the feasibility of the reform, he asked if the Secretary of State genuinely believed it could be delivered from the start of the 2025 academic year.

He raised Universities UK recommendations to make eligibility criteria broad and consistent, and asked what plans the Minister had to extend lifelong learning to as many people as possible.

He noted the considerable powers the Bill gave to the Secretary of State for Education in deciding what fee method applied, the type of courses and activities it applied to, and the maximum amount of funding available for each module or course. He said there were few mechanisms to prevent the government from unilaterally deciding to redefine the nature of a credit or a module.

He said it was vital that sustainable and adequate funding was available to providers, and that fees were proportionate to a full qualification. He asked what plans the government had to consult the sector on fee limits.

He noted that sector bodies and universities were clear about the need to minimise additional burden through utilising existing regulatory and quality-assurance mechanisms.

Robin Walker MP (Conservative), Chair of the Education Committee, said that the Bill was an important step in creating the ladder of opportunity. He said that making level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications more widely available, and encouraging HE institutions to offer greater flexibility, were both worthwhile aims and, if done right, the legislation should stimulate greater competition and innovation in the market for lifelong learning.

He noted that the Education Committee had heard from a range of organisations across the university sector with concerns about the burden of regulation. He asked for assurances that the requirements of the Bill would not be overly onerous and that, rather than increasing the burden of regulation, it would create new freedoms for the sector to innovate and compete. He also asked when the government's full response to its consultation could be expected.

Munira Wilson MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Education, said she feared that the government's investment in lifelong learning over recent years did not meet the scale of the ambition that the Secretary of State for Education had outlined.

She said that they were debating the Bill in reverse, suggesting that parliament should debate and approve the policy framework and then allow the regulators to deal with the technical details.

She asked how maintenance support would work, describing the lack of any detail on supporting students with living costs as a significant oversight.

She asked if the Secretary of State would consider putting the notional hourly value of a credit in the Bill so that modules could not be devalued by a future government looking to save money.

She said that Universities UK and other stakeholders had raised concerns that clause 2 may allow the Secretary of State for Education to set differential fees based on course subject. She suggested amendments to prevent this and protect universities' institutional autonomy.

Sir David Evennett MP (Conservative) said that research by Universities UK suggested that 35% of those who considered part-time education in the past 10 years did not enrol because of their personal life or their employment situation. He welcomed the Bill in opening up higher and further education through the introduction of new methods and limiting the fees that could be charged based on credits.

David Johnston MP (Conservative) raised the current UCAS system. He said it had simplified routes to university but signalled to young people that if they did not apply to university at that point they were set on an ‘incredibly long road without the opportunity to come off at the next junction or go back and find that junction again.’

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, said the government had already clarified that it would publish the consultation’s response before Report stage. On fee limits, the Minister reiterated that the Secretary of State can set fee limits as a result of the Higher Education Act 2004. He added that the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 built on that and allowed for flexible and modular learning.

Robert Halfon said that the number of learning hours in a credit is an area that should continue to be governed from a quality standards perspective, rather than from a fee limits perspective.

On UCAS, the Minister noted that the government had introduced UCAS for apprenticeships and said it hoped to expand its scope in the future.

The Minister commented on the response to the Bill, highlighting that Universities UK called it a welcome step with a more flexible system of opportunity at its heart.

You can [read a helpful explanation of the Bill](#) here and [watch the session](#) here. UUK’s [briefing is available](#) here. The Committee dates have been confirmed as Tuesday 21 March, Thursday 23 March, and Tuesday 28 March.

## **Foreign Affairs Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 28 February, the Foreign Affairs Committee heard evidence for a non-inquiry session focused on UK universities’ engagement with autocracies.

The first panel of witnesses included Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK (UUK), Fiona Quimbre, Analyst at RAND Europe and Professor John Heathershaw, Professor of International Relations at the University of Exeter.



Alicia Kearns MP (Conservative), Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, began by questioning the witnesses on the main challenges of engaging with autocracies. Vivienne Stern said that challenges arose from operationalising existing measures to protect against risks. She highlighted the progress that universities had made and noted the challenges caused by the dynamic external environment and increasingly complex legislative landscape. Professor Heathershaw agreed that there had been greater awareness of risks within universities, but this was piecemeal and there was a need for greater transparency and accountability. He said this could be achieved by involving academics on the frontline of these issues as well as country specialists.

Asked about the effectiveness of the [Universities UK security guidelines](#), Fiona Quimbre said they were too narrow due to a lack of risk awareness in the sector. She noted that the guidance did not cover the Chinese talent recruitment programmes. She said that this was comparable to cybersecurity, where the risks are far greater than most people imagine, and the guidance needed to reflect this.

Alicia Kearns asked whether there should be greater concern about universities working with the Chinese military, highlighting an Imperial College partnership which was ended after licence applications were rejected by the government's Export Control Joint Unit (ECJU). Fiona Quimbre said that these concerns were clear and that the issue was more about talent programmes, start-up competitions, and new forms of donations which were more difficult forms of influence to counter. Vivienne Stern highlighted the architecture of legalisation, including export controls, due diligence and proactive sector-government collaboration which was helping to identify and tackle these risks. She highlighted that UUK had published a series of case studies on how universities were implementing this in practical terms.

Asked whether existing internal structures for managing risks at universities were effective, Professor Heathershaw said that there were processes for social sciences and the humanities in the form of ethics committees, but not for science and research. He suggested bringing in country specialists at an early stage to counter this.

Andrew Lewer MP (Conservative) asked about the importance of academic freedom and self-censorship. Professor Heathershaw said that the increasing financialisation of universities had put academic freedom at risk. However, he also recognised the progress that universities had made since the previous Committee inquiry in 2019. Vivienne Stern refuted the suggestion that universities prioritised financial considerations over academic freedom. She highlighted that universities had a moral and legal responsibility to protect academic freedom and that these considerations were woven through the UUK guidance. She said that universities were encouraged

to have 'red lines' in guidance and should be prepared to walk away when these were crossed.

Saqib Bhatti MP (Conservative) asked how universities distinguish between beneficial and harmful collaboration. Vivienne Stern highlighted due diligence processes but said a centralised resource would help universities navigate this. She cited the government's Research Collaboration Advisory Team (RCAT) as a positive step towards this. Fiona Quimbre recognised universities' efforts in due diligence but raised concern that available information was not grouped, and knowledge was concentrated in a small number of institutions. She suggested that Universities UK International could be a platform for centralising best practice.

Robin Walker MP (Conservative) asked about the increase in the numbers of Chinese students and efforts to diversify. Vivienne Stern clarified that there was a slowing down in recruitment from China and an increase in diversity, particularly from India. She stressed that it was important not to lose sight of the advantage in attracting Chinese students and to avoid straying into Sinophobia when discussing this topic. She asked the government to support diversification efforts through preserving the Graduate route for international students.

Robin Walker raised concerns of Chinese international students' 'under-performance' in higher education. Professor Heathershaw suggested this could be correlated to the lack of English language skills in a small set of international students, particularly for courses where English acuity was required. Vivienne Stern said she would refute this suggestion and would write to the Committee with the data underpinning this.

Regarding concerns of the sector's over-reliance on international students, Vivienne Stern highlighted that universities were losing money on both teaching and research and international student fee income was becoming vital rather than simply additional income. She said that the long-term funding system needed attention to resolve this.

Asked about contingency planning if relations with China deteriorated, Vivienne Stern noted that universities were performing due diligence and said this was not unique to universities.

Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP (Labour) asked about research collaboration with China. Vivienne Stern said that it would not be in the national interest to cut off from China given the rapid rise of its research outputs and that working in safe collaboration was important. She added that a lack of UK domestic funding meant that universities needed to collaborate internationally on research.

The second session heard from Sir Anthony Finkelstein, President of City, University of London, Dr Tim Bradshaw, Chief Executive of Russell Group, and Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice Principal of International and Director of Edinburgh Global at University of Edinburgh.

Graham Stringer MP (Labour) asked whether universities were receiving adequate support from government in dealing with risks from internationalisation. Anthony Finkelstein noted that improvements could be made, including a clearer UK-China policy in the form of a rewrite of the Integrated Review. He also expressed concern over the complexity of the legal and regulatory framework and described open-source due diligence as a 'valuable complement' to the current work of universities.

Asked on where universities could seek support, Anthony Finkelstein noted the 'excellent work' of Universities UK, expertise within universities, and international advice.

Liam Byrne asked how useful the current guidelines were and whether clearer 'red lines' from government would help universities navigate research collaboration. Anthony Finkelstein said managing risks was a 'complex business', and unlike risks that universities typically manage. Tim Bradshaw highlighted recent improvements including Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) and highlighted the need for this to be properly resourced as demand increased. Alan Mackay noted the complexity with lots of 'moving parts' and described the journey that universities were navigating to facilitate informed decision making.

Royston Smith MP (Conservative) raised the 2021 Civitas report that found 50% of Russell Group institutions had research partnerships with a Chinese military linked manufacturer/university. He asked Tim Bradshaw to outline the measures that Russell Group had taken since the report. Tim Bradshaw said the situation had moved on substantially with more informed decision-making that considers the benefits and costs of research collaboration. He stressed the importance of international research partnerships and called on the UK to be 'clear eyed' and 'confident' in engagement with China to ensure that the UK gets 'good value' from partnerships.

Asked on any examples of universities terminating international partnerships, Tim Bradshaw said there were many examples of universities performing extensive due diligence. He cited an example of a university security unit that reviews all potential partnerships. He highlighted the importance of sharing best practice across the sector such as dealing with the Higher Education Export Control Association. Anthony Finkelstein said universities needed to have the capacity to handle transactional risks.

Robin Walker raised the risk of reliance on Chinese students and asked for steps that universities were taking to diversify. Alan Mackay described a ‘structural vulnerability’ caused by losses incurred by research and teaching. He highlighted the importance of a mixed pool in recruitment. Anthony Finkelstein noted that diversification facilitated a more ‘robust’ financial situation. He stressed the link between the visa offering, including dependants, and efforts to diversify. Tim Bradshaw added that the Graduate route is a ‘key tool’ to diversify international student recruitment.

Regarding Confucius Institutes (CIs), Robin Walker asked the panel whether they were beneficial or harmful to the UK. Tim Bradshaw described them as ‘generally beneficial’ and said that CIs facilitated a much-needed understanding of China. He said they needed to be kept under review. Alan Mackay said that the ‘forensic’ review into their CI found no evidence of interference or infringement to academic integrity. He expressed concern over the lack of understanding on China and said the expertise in the higher education sector should be leveraged. Anthony Finkelstein described CIs as ‘ill-advised’ and called for them to be replaced by an alternative that would retain the protection of Chinese language learning. He said Universities UK International could provide information on how international counterparts have stepped-back from CIs while retaining Chinese language provision.

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

## **Prime Minister’s Questions**

On Wednesday 1 March, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, answered questions in the House of Commons.

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP (Conservative) celebrated the work of the Prime Minister in resolving the Northern Ireland protocol. He called for reassurance that that the Windsor Framework would allow negotiations to be resumed on the UK’s association with Horizon Europe.

In his reply, the Prime Minister paid tribute to the ‘incredible research community’ and provided assurance that the government would continue to work with the EU in a range of issues, including research collaboration.

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

## **Business Questions to the Leader of the House**

On Thursday 2 March, the Leader of the House of Commons, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, answered questions on the Business of the House.

Geraint Davies MP (Labour) raised the ‘funding cliff edge’ faced by universities as European Structural Funding ends in March. He said this would lead to a loss of 24 projects and 150 jobs in Swansea alone. He asked the Leader of the House to urgently raise this matter with Cabinet colleagues, particularly those from the Treasury, ahead of the Budget.

In her reply, Penny Mourdaunt said she would ensure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was aware of these issues.

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

# Forthcoming business

## **National Security Bill – report stage**

In the afternoon of Tuesday 7 March, the National Security Bill will continue its report stage in the House of Lords.

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

## **Lords Industry and Regulators Committee – the work of the OfS**

On Tuesday 7 March from 10:30am, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will hear evidence as part of their new inquiry into ‘the work of the Office for Students’. The committee will hear from:

- Dame Nicola Dandridge CBE, Former Chief Executive at Office for Students
- Sir Michael Barber, Former Chair at Office for Students

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

# Written Questions

## Students: Finance

**Damien Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is taking steps to help ensure that parents of students receive the full financial support to which they are entitled. [UIN 147267]

**Nick Gibb:** The Government spends around £1.5 billion per year so children have access to nutritious food during the school day and in the holidays.

Around 1.9 million pupils are claiming free school meals (FSM). This equates to 22.5% of all pupils, up from 20.8% in 2021. Together with a further 1.25 million infants supported through the Universal Infant Free School Meal policy, over one third of school children are now provided with FSM.

The Department provides an Eligibility Checking System to make the checking process as quick and straightforward as possible. The Department continues to use and refine a model registration form to help schools encourage parents to sign up for FSM.

The Department also provides guidance to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can make Universal Credit recipients aware that they may also be entitled to wider benefits, including FSM.

The Department is committed to continuing support for school breakfasts, and in November 2022 the National School Breakfast Programme was extended for an additional year until the end of the 2024 summer term. The Department is funding up to £30 million in this programme and it will support up to 2,500 schools in disadvantaged areas. This means that thousands of children from low income families will be offered free nutritious breakfasts to better support their attainment and wellbeing. Schools are eligible for the programme if they have 40% or more pupils from deprived households, as measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index.

The Department has also significantly expanded the Holiday Activities and Food programme and are contributing over £200 million per year in these free holiday club places for children from low income families. The programme provides enriching activities and a healthy meal for disadvantaged children in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. Local Authorities reported that over 685,000 children benefited from the programme last summer.

The Government has announced cost of living support worth £26 billion for the next financial year designed to target the most vulnerable households. This is on top of the £37 billion support provided by the Government this year. Much of this, including the £400 energy bills discount, the £150 Council Tax discount and the Energy Price Guarantee, is being applied automatically, ensuring eligible households receive the support they are entitled to. Cost of living payments are also paid automatically to support eligible people on means-tested benefits.

## **Work Experience**

**Charlotte Nichols:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help increase the number of (a) internship and (b) graduate scheme opportunities advertised to students by universities. [UIN 147282]

**Robert Halfon:** All students, regardless of their background, should benefit from high quality, world-leading higher education (HE) that leads to excellent outcomes. The department is committed to tackling low-quality courses and ensuring that students and the taxpayer see returns on their investment.

The Office for Students (OfS) introduced a revised condition of registration B3 in October 2022, which sets stringent minimum thresholds for student outcomes. This includes requirements for the proportion of students that progress on to positive graduate destinations such as professional or managerial employment.

HE providers are independent and autonomous, and have freedom over the methods used to support students to progress and achieve their goals. Internships and graduate scheme opportunities play a valuable role in preparing students for their careers. Degree apprenticeships also provide a route to professional qualifications.

All registered providers are required to meet the OfS's condition of registration. Where the OfS finds that a provider has breached a condition of registration, it will take the required action.

## **Visas: Students**

**Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to increase the 20-hour-a-week limit on work for Tier 4 students. [UIN 146800]

**Robert Jenrick:** Student visa holders who are studying a full-time course of study, at degree level or above, at a higher education provider with a track record of



compliance are already able to work up to 20 hours per week during term-time and full-time during vacation periods.

There are currently no plans to increase the number of hours international students on the Student route can work. The Student route is for international students who wish to study in the UK and is not designed as a means to live and work in the UK.

## **British Students Abroad**

**Sarah Olney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an estimate of the number of students in British universities who have opted to study abroad as a part of their degree in each of the last five years. [UIN 147208]

**Robert Halfon:** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes statistics on higher education (HE) at UK Higher Education Providers (HEPs). Latest statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year.

HESA has included a new table in their Open Data resources from this year, showing HE student enrolments by their location of study, which includes if the student was abroad for the whole or proportion of the year. This data item displays actual participation in a placement abroad rather than the students' intent at the start of the course, and the information is available for individual HEPs.

The numbers of student enrolments studying abroad in the latest five years is provided in table 60, which can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-60>.

## **Horizon Europe: Universities**

**Layla Moran:** To ask Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the UK becoming fully associated to Horizon Europe on universities in the UK. [UIN 148861]

**George Freeman:** Due to the EU's delays in implementing the UK's association to Horizon Europe, the Government introduced the Horizon Europe guarantee, which covers all Horizon calls that close on or before 31 March 2023. This has enabled successful UK-based Horizon researchers to receive the full value of their funding and means researchers do not need to relocate abroad. To the end of January 2023, guarantee awards have been made to 1,548 recipients totalling £751 million.

If the EU's delays continue, the Government will be ready to introduce a comprehensive alternative programme to support the UK R&D sector.

## **Visas: Graduates**

**Emily Thornberry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of graduate visa applications took longer to process than the service standard in each quarter from the start of January 2021 to the end of December 2022. [UIN 148574]

**Robert Jenrick:** Our published data can be found in the available Migration Statistics on GOV.UK, Immigration statistics, year ending September 2022 - GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-september-2022>)

Migration Statistics currently go up to September 2022 and the next quarter to cover up to December 2022 is due for release in the near future.

## **Universities: Admissions**

**Charlotte Nichols:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she had recent discussions with universities on taking steps to ensure that the statistics on the employment of former students on degree courses are accurate when universities offer courses to new students. [UIN 147476]

**Robert Halfon:** As autonomous bodies that are independent from the government, universities are responsible for their own course advertising. The Competition and Markets Authority has produced guidance for providers on their responsibilities under consumer protection law, including what material information about courses they should provide to prospective students.

The department is working with the sector to agree ways in which providers might incorporate key pieces of data into their course advertising, so that students can better understand what course outcomes they might expect at the point at which courses are being sold to them.

The department is clear that universities should be transparent about the content of their courses and the likely outcomes that students can expect from them. Discover Uni, a tool which is owned and operated by the four UK higher education (HE) funding and regulatory bodies, is the official, authoritative source of information and

guidance to HE courses in the UK. It is designed to help prospective students to make the right choices about what and where to study, by allowing users to search for and compare information and data for individual undergraduate courses across the UK. The Office for Students sets the expectation that HE providers will display a link to the Discover Uni website on their course website pages to help prospective students make informed decisions about the courses they sign up to.

## **Overseas Students: Sponsorship**

**Caroline Ansell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Office, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of allowing licensed student sponsors who are not eligible to register with the Office for Students to achieve a track record of compliance in England; and if she will make a statement. [UIN 147426]

**Robert Jenrick:** Student sponsors which are eligible to register with the Office for Students (OfS) as higher education providers in England continue to gain track record sponsor status once they have passed an annual basic compliance assessment conducted by UKVI for four consecutive years as set out in the Student sponsor guidance(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-sponsor-guidance>) which is published on gov.uk.

## **Students: Finance**

**Fleur Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of (a) linking student maintenance support to inflation, (b) changing eligibility criteria for Universal Credit to increase the number of students that are eligible, (c) capping student rent, (d) providing funding to education providers to deliver improved hardship funds and (e) adjusting maintenance loan thresholds, in the context of increases in the cost of living.

**Robert Halfon:** The government reviews the support provided to cover students' living costs on an annual basis and recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have impacted students.

The department has boosted our student premium by £15 million to help students who need extra support. This extra funding, now totalling £276 million, will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. The department works with the Office for

Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

In the 2022/23 academic year, there has been an increase of 2.3% in loans for living costs, and there will be a further increase of 2.8% for the 2023/24 academic year. Decisions on student finance have had to be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and that the costs of higher education are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university. Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the 2022/23 tax year has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

Loans for living costs are a contribution towards students' living costs while attending university. The highest levels of support are targeted at students who need it the most, such as students from low-income families.

The primary source of financial help for students is provided through the student support system. As such, students on full-time higher education courses cannot normally satisfy the entitlement conditions for Universal Credit.

Exceptions are only made where students have additional needs that are not met through the student support system, for example, if they are responsible for a child.

Further details on claiming Universal Credit as a student which includes a list of students who may qualify for Universal Credit can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-students>

The government plays no role in the provision of student residential accommodation. Universities and private accommodation providers are autonomous and are responsible for setting their own rent agreements. We encourage universities and private landlords to review their accommodation policies to ensure that 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.

More widely, the government does not support the introduction of rent controls in the private rented sector to set the level of rent at the outset of a tenancy. The White Paper, 'A Fairer Private Rented Sector', published on 16 June 2022 outlines the proposed reforms which will help prevent unfair rent increases for tenants, while ensuring landlords can continue to make necessary changes to rent. The measures include only allowing increases to rent once per year, ending the use of rent review

clauses, and improving tenants' ability to challenge excessive rent increases through the First Tier Tribunal.

## **Horizon Europe: Universities**

**Layla Moran:** To ask Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will make an estimate of the number of researchers who have left UK universities due to the delays to the UK's association to Horizon Europe. [UIN 148863]

**George Freeman:** The Government has been tirelessly pushing the EU to implement the UK's association to Horizon Europe, but the EU has continued to delay the UK's association.

During these delays the Government introduced the Horizon Europe guarantee, which was recently extended to cover all Horizon calls that close on or before 31 March 2023. This ensures that eligible, successful applicants to Horizon Europe will receive the full value of their funding at their UK host institution for the lifetime of their grant and do not need to leave the UK. The Government does not hold the information requested.

## **Apprentices: Degrees**

**Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships. [UIN 903756]

**Robert Halfon:** The department continues to see strong growth in degree-level apprenticeships with over 170,000 starts since 2014. We are making £8 million available to higher education providers to grow their degree apprenticeship provision and are partnering with UCAS, so young people can use their website to search and apply for these apprenticeships, alongside degrees.

## **Students: Fuels**

**Angela Crawley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the rising cost of fuel on students in the UK. [UIN 148721]

**Robert Halfon:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The department reviews the support provided to cover students' living costs on an annual basis.

We recognise the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have impacted students.

We have boosted our student premium by £15 million to help students who need extra support. This extra funding, now totalling £276 million, will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. The department works with the Office for Students to ensure universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

The department has continued to increase maximum loans and grants each year with a 2.3% increase for the 2022/23 academic year and a further 2.8% increase for 2023/24.

Loans can support with students' living costs while attending university. the highest levels of support is targeted at students who need it the most, such as students from low-income families. Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the 2022/23 financial year has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

All households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Act passed on 25 October 2022 includes the provision which requires landlords to pass any benefits they receive from energy price support onto end users, as appropriate. Further details of the requirements under this Act are set out in the legislation.

The Energy Bill Relief Scheme provides a price reduction to ensure that all businesses and other non-domestic customers are protected from high energy bills this winter, including universities and private purpose-built student accommodation providers.

## **Universities: Economic Growth**

**Rachael Maskell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she plans to take steps with universities to help those

institutions to develop local economies and identify areas where growth is possible.  
[UIN 142767]

**George Freeman:** Universities play important roles in their local economies including through education and skills, undertaking research, working with local businesses and also as large employers.

The Department supports universities to further this economic role. This includes funding streams such as Higher Education Innovation Funding which incentivises universities to work with business, public and third sector organisations to exchange knowledge and increase the economic and societal benefit from their work.

Additionally, the Government is committed to supporting regional growth across the UK and has pledged to increase domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East by at least 40% by 2030. Last year we launched 3 Innovation Accelerators (Glasgow, West Midlands and Greater Manchester) with £100m, and we are currently working on a new and interactive cluster mapping tool.

## **Overseas Students: Finance**

**Rupa Huq:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of allocating additional funding to support international students, in the context of the cost of living crisis. [UIN 147383]

**Robert Halfon:** To be eligible for home fee status and student support from Student Finance England, a student must be ordinarily and lawfully resident in England, and have 'settled' status or a recognised connection with the UK on the first day of the first academic year of the course. This includes persons who are covered by the EU Withdrawal Agreement, those who have long residence in this country or those who have been granted international protection by the Home Office.

Usually, students must also have been ordinarily resident in the UK throughout the three years immediately preceding that date. This ensures that the limited public funds available for student support are targeted at people with a lawful and substantial residential connection to the UK.

We have boosted our student premium by £15 million to help students who need extra support. This extra funding, now totalling £276 million, will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. The department works with the Office for Students to ensure

universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

All households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Act passed on 25 October 2022 includes the provision which requires landlords to pass any benefits they receive from energy price support onto end users, as appropriate. Further details of the requirements under this Act are set out in the legislation.

The Energy Bill Relief Scheme provides a price reduction to ensure that all businesses and other non-domestic customers are protected from high energy bills this winter, including universities and private purpose-built student accommodation providers.

## **Students: Cost of Living**

**Tulip Siddiq:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support his Department has provided to university students to help with the cost of living. [UIN 143793]

**Robert Halfon:** The government reviews the support provided to cover students' living costs on an annual basis.

On 11 January 2023, the department boosted this year's student premium by £15 million to support more students meaning this year we provided £276 million of support through student premium funding. This extra funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship, and hardship support schemes. The department works with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

We have continued to increase maximum loans and grants each year, with a 2.3% increase for the current 2022/23 academic year and a further 2.8% increase for 2023/24.

Loans that support with students' living costs are a contribution towards their living costs while attending university, with the highest levels of support targeted at students who need it the most, such as students from low-income families. Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the tax year 2022/23 has



dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

All households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Act passed on 25 October 2022 includes the provision which requires landlords to pass any benefits they receive from energy price support onto end users, as appropriate. Further details of the requirements under this Act are set out in the legislation.

## **Students: Loans**

**Lord Hampton:** To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to bring back a student loan forgiveness scheme for teachers, similar to that trialled between 2002 and 2004, in which 10 per cent of a new teacher's total student loan was paid off each year that they stayed in the profession. [UIN HL5600]

**Baroness Barran:** The Department has piloted two schemes in recent years which were designed to attract and retain teachers by repaying their student loans. The Repayment of Teachers' Loans (RTL) scheme was trialled in the mid-2000s and an evaluation was completed by University of Durham in 2004. This indicated that RTL influenced 11% of participating teachers' decisions to stay in teaching.

In 2017, the Department introduced the Teacher Student Loan Reimbursement (TSLR) scheme for science and languages teachers in 26 Local Authorities, which allows these teachers to claim back the student loan repayments they have made. The evaluation by CFE Research was published in January 2023, and found that TSLR exerts some influence on both retaining teachers and the areas where they choose to teach.

Both the RTL and TSLR evaluations found that offering bursaries for trainee teachers exerts the strongest influence on teacher recruitment. This is why the Department is offering increased bursaries worth £27,000 tax-free and scholarships worth £29,000 tax-free, to encourage talented trainees to key subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing.

# Sector News

## **HE sector responds to Windsor Framework**

On Monday 27 February, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced the Windsor Framework. This has been described as a ‘decisive breakthrough’ in discussions over Northern Ireland.

During the press conference, Ursula von der Leyen said the Windsor Framework was positive for scientists and researchers. Once the Windsor Framework was implemented, she said they could work on an association agreement for Horizon Europe.

The news has been welcomed by the research sector who are now calling for the UK’s rapid association. The Russell Group, Universities UK International, the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, the League of European Research Universities and 15 other organisations from across the R&D sector released a joint statement calling for both sides to put “renewed efforts into constructive dialogue to get association over the line.”

“Securing the UK’s place in EU programmes is crucial for shoring up the future of world-leading research, sustainable growth, and high-level skills. Failure to do so now will be a second-best outcome for both the UK and the EU, undermining our collective efforts to tackle the big challenges of our time.”

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

## **HE and research sectors call on suppliers to reduce prices**

On Tuesday 28 February, education and research sector organisations appealed to digital content, hardware, and software vendors to exercise “price constraint” in the face of growing cost-of-living pressures.

The statement describes a ‘perfect storm’ for sector finances caused by rising costs and the cap on domestic student fees.

It urges providers to ‘work alongside us and not impose price increases, bundle products or otherwise require conditions that limit our ability to meet our community’s needs or manage our spend.’

Signatories to the letter include Professor Stephen Decent, Chair of UUK/Jisc content negotiation strategy group, and Professor John Latham CBE, Chair of UUK/Jisc software negotiation strategy group.

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

## **CaSE report exploring public attitudes to R&D**

On Tuesday 28 February, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) published its findings on public attitudes to R&D spending. The findings are based on representative polls and focus groups conducted by Public First.

Although the public are broadly supportive of R&D, the report finds that support is fragile. Almost half (46%) of respondents would only choose to invest more in R&D when the economy is in better shape. It found that over a third of people can think of very few or no ways that investment in R&D improves their lives. The report highlights that the benefits of R&D must be made more visible, and suggests that tangible, local messages about R&D can change peoples’ minds.

Commenting on the findings, Professor Sarah Main, Executive Director, Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), said: “These findings challenge us to build a more far-reaching and compelling narrative for R&D, and they give us some hints as to how we might go about it.”

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

## **Student Money and Wellbeing Blackbullion 2023 report**

On Tuesday 28 February, Blackbullion published findings from their 2023 Student Money and Wellbeing report.

Key findings include:

- Gap in income: the gap between student loans and the amount needed to live is £548. This is higher among female students than male students (the gap has increased by 20% between females and males in the last year).

- Parental/guardian support: 32% of students are unable to get as much financial support as they previously could, due to the wider experience of hardship from rising living costs.
- Finances and wellbeing: 89% of students are worried about money.
- Impact on academic attainment: 76% are worried that the cost of living will have a negative impact on their final degree result.

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

## **University Alliance call to protect regional innovation programmes**

On Thursday 2 March, University Alliance co-ordinated a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, urging the government to ringfence £170m of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to provide bridging funds when EU structural funding for regional development runs out at the end of March.

The letter, signed by over 300 SMEs and 16 universities, warns that the withdrawal of EU funds means that innovation infrastructure, expertise and partnerships developed since 2014 are at ‘imminent risk of disappearing’.

This was accompanied by an insights and analysis piece written by Professor Paul Boyle CBE, Research and Innovation Policy lead at Universities UK. It states, “Stepping back from the cliff edge would save hundreds of jobs, support a range of cutting-edge innovation projects that are driving economic growth, and provide direct investment in areas that the UK government has stated are at the heart of its own levelling up ambitions.”

You can [read the press release](#) here and [read the insights and analysis piece](#) here.

## **Universities UK response to APPG for Students inquiry**

On Thursday 2 March, Universities UK published its response to the APPG for Students inquiry into the cost-of-living crisis.

The response covers:

- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students in terms of income and expenditure.

- The efficacy and extent of existing support to students from government, and education providers.
- The varying impact on different groups of students including mature, commuters, part-time, disabled, and international.
- Recommendations for further action to support students.

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

## **Lords Industry and Regulators Committee launch inquiry into OfS**

On Friday 3 March, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee launched a new inquiry into the work of the Office for Students (OfS).

The inquiry will scrutinise whether the statutory duties of the OfS are clear and examine its performance against those duties since its establishment. The inquiry will look at how the OfS' regulatory framework has developed since its inception, its independence from and relationship with the Government, and whether it has the necessary expertise and resources to carry out its functions.

It will also examine the OfS' work in relation to the financial sustainability of the higher education sector. This will include consideration of the extent of systemic financial risks in the sector, such as the reliance of some universities on overseas students, how the OfS considers and manages these risks, and the potential consequences of and processes for the failure of providers.

The first oral evidence session is scheduled for Tuesday 7 March. The committee will hear from former OfS chief executive, Dame Nicola Dandridge, and former OfS Chair, Sir Michael Barber.

The committee has also opened a call for evidence which closes on Friday 7 April.

You can [read more about the inquiry](#) here.