



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

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University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Lords debate on Higher Education Reform Ministerial statement

On Monday 28 February, a Lords debate took place on the Secretary of State for Education's statement on Higher Education Reform.

Baroness Sherlock (Lab) opened the debate by commenting on two proposed reforms, firstly the interest rate to be changed to RPI, which she questioned as the government expressed concern over the methodology of using RPI as an official statistic. Secondly, the reduction of the repayment threshold, which Baroness Sherlock felt was regressive and hit the lowest earners hardest. She went on to criticise the government's approach to reforming the loan system which "profoundly benefits higher earners and hits those on lower incomes".

Baroness Sherlock then drew particular attention to the equality analysis which showed that women, disabled people, some ethnic minorities and those from certain regions are likely to face increased lifetime payments. Finally, Baroness Sherlock also briefly touched on the consultations, including student number controls, minimum eligibility requirements and the proposal to limit funding for foundation years.

In reference to the proposals on lifelong learning, Lord Addington (Lib Dem) suggested more consideration be given to how to get people into further education courses, asking what was being done to improve careers guidance. He said that BTECs provided an established way into higher education and their removal, along with the introduction of T-levels, had not made providing career guidance easier.

Lord Addington also suggested a special education review needed to take place, he questioned why a requirement for English and maths GCSE are being considered, when those with dyslexia and dyscalculia would be most affected. Finally, on the student finance reforms, he said the repayment structure may be slightly better for the Treasury, but he did not think it made much difference to anyone else.

The Minister, Baroness Barran, responded that the government had tried to balance fairness to students with fairness to the taxpayer. On the limitations on student numbers and minimum entry requirements, she said this would drive towards higher quality courses, and that only 1 percent of students would be affected by the proposed GCSE requirements.

Conservative peers and former Universities Ministers, Lord Johnson and Lord Willetts, both questioned the consultation on student number controls. Lord Willetts noted that there was already a consultation from the Office for Students on minimum thresholds. He suggested that these "different, highly intrusive and detailed interventions" would not boost the quality of universities but erode their ability to run their own affairs, and therefore threaten the quality of universities. He concluded that if all the measures were imposed on universities, it would be hard to describe the system as one of university autonomy. The minister responded that the aim of reforms was not to restrict university autonomy, but to improve transparency.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (CB) said that the higher education sector needed a root-and-branch review of the university business model. She drew attention to the strike action and said the USS administrators were using valuation scenarios that were so risk averse that they lacked credibility.

Baroness Fox of Buckley raised that the linking of quality to good jobs alone was an undermining of knowledge for its own sake. Baroness Morris of Yardley suggested that successive policy papers have undermined the creative sector within universities. Baroness Bennett (Green) questioned whether the Lifelong Learning Entitlement would be putting more debt on a generation already carrying an enormous weight of debt.

You can read a transcript of the debate [here](#).

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

On Monday 28 February, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee held a committee session on the 'Levelling up White Paper'.

During the committee session, Andy Haldane, Head of the Levelling Up Taskforce at Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, noted that the White Paper set out a new model of government—rewiring Whitehall—but also to a new model of governance. He said this referred to how Whitehall interacts and partners with local leaders, not just government leaders but with vice-chancellors of universities, local businesses, local members of civil society. He told the committee that many of the best things he had seen happening across the UK arose from partnership working between the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

You can read a transcript of the committee [here](#).

Health and Social Care Committee session on workforce: recruitment, training and retention

On Tuesday 1 March, the Health and Social Care Committee held an evidence session on workforce recruitment, training and retention in health and social care. The sessions covered issues related to care staff, GP and nursing recruitment, social care labour market and knock-on impacts of the social care worker shortage on quality of care and the shortages in NHS recruitment and on the use of temporary and locum workers.

Committee Chair, Jeremy Hunt MP asked Dr Emma Hayward, GP and clinical teacher, University of Leicester to comment on issues facing GP recruitment. Dr Hayward responded that GPs were working in highly pressurised environments, leading to burnout. She said it also impacted the ability of GPs to train new medical students and led to students dismissing general practice as a career.

The Chair asked for comment on nursing shortages, Gamu Nyasoro, clinical skills and Simulation Manager, Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, said there had been a shortage of nurses as long as she had worked as a nurse.

Gamu Nyasoro said the issue was being made worse by the ageing population and the new demands on nursing staff placed by medical advancement related to the wider range of technology available to preserve life. She said the scrapped NHS bursary had helped encouraged people going into nursing, and that it was clear the number of trainee nurses at universities were declining. She also said pay for nurses needed to increase and that immigrants' skills gained in other countries were still not recognised by the NHS.

A transcript of the meeting will be published [here](#).

Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry session on 'delivering a UK science and technology strategy'

On Tuesday 1 March, the Science and Technology Committee held a session on 'Delivering a UK science and technology strategy'.

Baroness Sheehan (Lib Dem) asked about establishing links with universities and what more could be done to facilitate collaborations. Dr Paul Bate, CEO at UK Space Agency, replied that they had relationships with many universities contributing to space science and astronomic research. They also recognised that the space industry had many links with many universities. He continued that they were funders, directly or indirectly, of universities.

Chris Wigley, CEO at Genomics England, said that they had great interactions with universities and they worked with over 80 UK universities. To facilitate such collaborations ever further, they needed the infrastructure to allow them to scale. Sir Adrian Smith, Director and Chief Executive at The Alan Turing Institute, also said that Turing had excellent links and serious engagement with universities.

They were currently trying to expand their network and work with 25 more universities in the UK. He felt the problem was the financing which was getting in the way of an even more fruitful collaboration.

Lord Patel (CB) asked what the UK's place was internationally in terms of competitors and collaboration in research and innovation. Sir Adrian Smith answered that the UK was probably third in the world in terms of its research capability and its ability to attract and nurture talent in AI and data science. Going forward, the key was to encourage the flow of talent and be able to recruit and retain talent. Dr Bate agreed that talent was very important, as well as access to global capital, particularly for industrial partners. Finally, Chris Wigley added that the UK had contributed to viral and human sequencing more than any other country in the world during the pandemic.

Opening the second session, the Chair asked what role universities were playing in the UK's ambition to become a science and technology superpower. Professor Chris Pearce, Vice Principal for Research at the University of Glasgow, replied that it was important that the government had recognised the centrality of science and technology to the UK's prosperity. He thought that universities had to be at the heart of this endeavour because of strengths of research taking place in universities which was globally recognised.

Professor Anne Ferguson-Smith, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of Cambridge, answered that the UK already was a science superpower and continued to make a huge impact globally and nationally. It was important to create structures that were cross-disciplinary because research looked different now than it did ten years ago. She finished by saying that she thought that the government was lacking a national strategy for its research not only short-term, but also longer-term.

On funding for research in UK universities, Professor Ferguson-Smith said that UKRI was central to the national research infrastructure. The UK had been quite slow in realising its ambitions which had led to some bad press, but it was important to consider that these ambitions did take time. Professor Pearce said that UKRI was still fairly new and it had not fulfilled its potential yet. It was also important to consider that UKRI was also only funding a proportion of university research in the UK.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab) wanted to know more about universities developing commercial partnerships. Professor Pearce replied that the research impact agenda and the innovation agenda were truly embedded in universities. The mix of applied and fundamental research was part and parcel of what they were doing. Professor Ferguson-Smith answered that the Cambridge Cluster was an example of a successful partnership between academia and industry and beyond. Buying that ecosystem took a very long time, and it took consistent investment and consistent commitment.

Finally, Lord Mitchell (Lab) asked how researchers in British institutions found collaborating with international partners, especially post-Brexit. Professor Ferguson-Smith replied that international collaboration for global academic institutions was central to what they were doing. In most instances, this was conducted as usual – driven by common research goals. As they developed more partnerships with more sensitive countries, the emphasis was on having a risk aware structure, which was progressing well. She finished by saying that there could be a closer dialogue between the government and academic institutions on partnerships post Brexit.

Professor Pearce agreed and added that Horizon Europe was the most successful internationally collaborative research funding framework out there. However, the UK was no longer included in some projects because it was considered a risk.

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

Forthcoming business

Backbench debate on DfE speaking on the national tutoring programme and adult education

On Wednesday 9 March, a backbench debate will take place on ‘the spending of the Department for Education on the National Tutoring Programme and Adult Education’.

The debate is being led by Education Committee chair Robert Halfon (Con), and Education Committee members Kim Johnson (Lab) and Miriam Cates (Con).

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

Lords question on the Horizon Europe programme

On Wednesday 9 March after 3pm, the Viscount Stansgate (Lab) will ask a question on joining the Horizon Europe programme.

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

Written Questions

Horizon Europe

Greg Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans the Government has to replace the international opportunities for young people previously accessed through the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ programmes.

Nigel Huddleston: In light of the changing needs of young people and due to the pandemic, DCMS reviewed its programmes and funding for out-of-school provision to ensure it achieves maximum impact and levelling up opportunities. As a result, at the 2021 Spending Review, the government decided that DCMS should continue to focus on domestic youth provision through a National Youth Guarantee for young people and DfE will continue to offer the Turing Scheme, an international educational exchange scheme that has a genuinely global reach and increases social mobility.

The Turing scheme is backed by £110 million, providing funding for over 41,000 overseas placements for students in universities, colleges and schools, starting in September 2021.

48% of the overseas placements receiving Turing Scheme funding are for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas which did not previously have many students benefiting from Erasmus+, making life-changing opportunities accessible to everyone across the country. The second year of the Turing Scheme will open for applications shortly, at which point youth organisations will be able to review the eligibility criteria when considering applying for funding.

Turing Scheme

Jessica Morden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many education establishments in (a) 2020-21 and (b) 2022-23 were part of the Turing Scheme; how many of those education establishments have tuition fee waiver agreements; and in which countries do those waivers apply.[127347]

Alex Burghart: The Turing Scheme is providing funding for 372 eligible organisations who successfully applied for the 2021/22 academic year, with over 41,000 expected participants. Of these,

13 organisations were Welsh, and these were provided with £5,170,829 of funding. Data on expected participant numbers at these Welsh institutions is not currently available. More details of the funding provided for the 2021/22 academic year is available here: <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/project-community/funding-results/>.

Regarding the number of educational establishments in Wales receiving Turing Scheme funding for 2022/23 and student numbers for 2022/23, we have no data on this yet as applications for the 2022/23 academic year have yet to be made. Data on this will only be available after bids are considered and results are known.

The timetable for applications for Turing Scheme funds for the 2022/23 academic year will be published on the Turing Scheme website on 28 February 2022, along with the programme guide and application guide for this year. The Turing Scheme website is available here: www.turing-scheme.org.uk.

The Turing Scheme is a genuinely UK-wide scheme. There is no proportioning of funds between nations; all will be considered on a competitive basis, as set out in the programme guide.

Fee waivers for Turing Scheme participants are managed on an institutional level.

The Erasmus+ UK National Agency publishes information on the amount of funding received by institutions for Erasmus+ projects from the UK National Agency and the European Commission. Data for each institution, across academic years 2014/15 to 2020/21 is available here: <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/funding-results.html>. Figures on Erasmus+ student participation will also be published here: <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/statistics.html>.

At the above statistics website, selecting "Project Mobilities & Outputs", Table 2 of the file "2014-2019 Higher education mobility statistics" contains the number of outgoing Erasmus+ students by country of provider for academic years 2014/15 to 2018/19. Data for academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 is not published.

Innovate UK annual core funding

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to page 172 of the Levelling Up in the United Kingdom White Paper which states that there will be a 36 per cent real terms increase for Innovate UK annual core funding between 2021-22 and 2024-25, how much of that funding money will be spent outside the Greater South East. [127399]

George Freeman: The Levelling Up White Paper set out the Government's mission to increase domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East by at least one third over the Spending Review period and at least 40 percent by 2030.

In support of this, BEIS will make levelling up one of the objectives of its R&D investment strategy and will aim for the regions outside the Greater South East to receive at least 55% of its R&D budget by 2024/25.

The Department is currently working to set detailed R&D budgets through to 2024/25. Further details about how the funding is allocated across the Spending Review period will be announced in due course.

R&D investment outside of Greater South East

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to page 172 to the Levelling Up White Paper, whether the expectation that at least £7 in

every £10 his Department invests will be invested outside the Greater South East will also be met by (a) UKRI, (b) InnovateUK, (c) ARIA, (d) Research England and (e) Research Councils. [127394]

George Freeman: BEIS will aim for the regions and nations outside the Greater South East to receive at least 55% of its research and development (R&D) funding by 2024/25.

To support this BEIS will make levelling up one of the objectives of its R&D investment strategy to ensure its £39.8bn settlement between 2022/23–2024/25 boosts R&D and economic growth across the whole of the UK.

In some areas like Net Zero, BEIS expects at least £7 in every £10 it invests will be invested outside the Greater South East over the spending review period.

Access to student finance for British National Overseas students

Bim Afolami: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to improve access to student finance for British National Overseas students. [127515]

Michelle Donelan: To qualify for student finance in England, a person must have settled status or a recognised connection to the UK. This includes persons who are covered by EU law, have long residence in this country, or who have been granted international protection by the Home Office.

Subject to meeting the normal eligibility requirements, Hong Kong British Nationals (overseas) status holders will qualify for student finance once they have acquired settled status in the UK, as is the case for the majority of persons who are on a five-year route to settlement.

Ability of graduates to meet student loan payments

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the ability of graduates to meet the new payment of student loans regime in the context of the rise in the cost of living. [129846]

Michelle Donelan: The student finance and funding system must provide value for money for all of society at a time of rising costs.

While our reforms will ask graduates to repay for longer, they will also increase certainty for borrowers by reducing interest rates to match inflation only. This means that, under these terms, borrowers will not have to repay more than they have borrowed, when adjusted for inflation.

The student finance system will continue to protect lower earners and borrowers who experience a reduction in their income. If a borrower's income is below the new repayment threshold of £25,000 per year, or the weekly or monthly equivalent, they will not be required to make any repayments at all. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, will also be written off at the end of the loan term at no detriment to individual borrowers. No commercial loans offer this level of borrower protection.

The new loan terms will be introduced for entrants to higher education starting on 1 September 2023 onwards. Students studying three-year degrees commencing in autumn 2023 will be required to make repayments only from April 2027, and only then when they are earning over the repayment threshold.

This student finance package is fair and sustainable for both students and the taxpayer, and our reforms ensure that higher education in England remains open to those with the ability and the ambition to benefit from it. We will continue to keep the terms of the system under review to ensure this remains the case.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the oral contribution of the Minister for Universities of 15 July 2021, Official Report, column 646, that the Government will provide an update on alternative student finance as it concludes the post-18 review of education and funding, what plans he now has to introduce a system of alternative student finance . [129057]

Michelle Donelan: The government's priority, in our response to the report of the Independent Panel of the Review of Post 18 Education and Funding, is to put the student finance system on a sustainable footing for the long term.

As part of our response, we are introducing the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). We are considering if and how Alternative Student Finance (ASF) could be delivered as part of the LLE.

We believe it is sensible to align future delivery of an ASF product with these major reforms to ensure fair treatment for all students.

Access to student finance for Muslim students

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he plans to take to provide an alternative student finance product for Muslim students who are unable to access student loans owing to their beliefs on interest. [128252]

Michelle Donelan: The government's priority, in our response to the report of the Independent Panel of the Review of Post 18 Education and Funding, is to put the student finance system on a sustainable footing for the long term.

As part of our response, we are introducing the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). We are considering if and how Alternative Student Finance (ASF) could be delivered as part of the LLE.

We believe it is sensible to align future delivery of an ASF product with these major reforms to ensure fair treatment for all students.

Participation in Horizon Europe

Emma Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, when he expects to reach agreement on participation in Horizon Europe; what estimate he has made of the number of current UK based research project bids that are reliant on participation; and what plans he has made to support those bids should agreement not be reached before their commencement dates.[127527]

George Freeman: The UK is committed to and stands ready to formalise our association to Horizon Europe at the earliest opportunity. At the recent EU -UK Specialised Committee the EU confirmed they were unwilling to move on UK association but we continue to push the EU to formalise our association.

We recognise that delays by the EU have led to uncertainty for researchers, businesses and innovators based in the UK. To provide reassurance the Government has guaranteed funding for all of the eligible, successful applicants in the first wave of Horizon Europe calls. The guarantee is a short-term measure to support the UK sector while delays to our association continue. The UK Government has stated that it will monitor the situation closely and may consider whether it is appropriate to change the scope of the guarantee, in which case, it will provide updated guidance. The EU have not yet publicly published full results for applications into all parts of Horizon Europe so it is not possible to estimate the number of current UK based bids.

R&D spending by region

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much and what proportion of its research and development budget did his Department spend in each region of the UK in (a) 2018-19, (b) 2019-20 and (c) 2020-21. [127400]

George Freeman: In the Levelling Up White paper BEIS committed to work to collect data at a regional level for all of its R&D spend.

UKRI publish detailed breakdowns of their funding data at a regional level annually, the latest available data is on UKRI's website at <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/what-we-have-funded/regional-distribution-of-funding/> (opens in a new tab). In addition, the UKRI Gateway <https://gtr.ukri.org/>

provides data on publicly funded research and innovation which is searchable by year and region.

Face-to-face teaching during the covid-19 restrictions

Matthew Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish guidance for universities on refunding students whose face-to-face teaching contact was reduced during the covid-19 restrictions. [126619]

Michelle Donelan: The unprecedented and unique nature of the COVID-19 outbreak necessitated changes to the way higher education (HE) providers delivered their teaching.

HE providers have delivered new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Some providers continue to use some of these approaches alongside in-person provision. However, online learning should only be offered to enhance the student experience, not to detract from it, and it should not be used as a cost-cutting measure.

In line with all other settings, HE providers should continue to conduct risk assessments for their particular circumstances. Risk assessments should take account of the approach to managing COVID-19 in wider society, particularly now that all restrictions have been removed and the vaccine programme continues to be rolled out. Risk assessments should never be used to prevent providers delivering a full programme of face-to-face teaching and learning.

HE providers are independent and autonomous bodies which are responsible for the management of their own affairs. If students have concerns about the delivery of their university courses, they should first raise them with their provider. If their concerns remain unresolved, students at providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE to consider their complaint.

Research and development funding in Havering

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Levelling Up White Paper's commitment to fund Research and Development Hot Spots across the country, what plans his Department has to promote research and development in the London Borough of Havering. [126580]

George Freeman: The success of London strengthens our national research and development (R&D) ecosystem, benefitting all UK regions. To this end, the Government is fully committed to the continued success of London's world-class centres of R&D excellence.

The 2021 Spending Review sees record levels of investment in the UK's world-leading research base with public spending on R&D increasing by £5 billion per annum to £20 billion in 2024-25.

The substantial uplift to research and science funding will not only allow the UK to build on our existing strengths but will also provide opportunities to grow research and innovation investment across the entire country.

Public R&D funding will continue to be awarded competitively and will be open to universities, businesses and organisations across the whole UK.

Science and technology subjects in vocation education

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to promote the uptake of science and technology subjects to students in vocational education. [125019]

Alex Burghart: The department recognises that the demand for skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is growing, and we are proud to be encouraging more pupils into STEM at all key stages. We have put employers at the heart of the technical education system, asking them to set out the skills and knowledge that they need now and in the future. This has formed the basis of new occupational standards. So far, STEM employers, including those in construction, digital, engineering and manufacturing, and health and science sectors have developed 343 apprenticeships based on these standards.

We are introducing T Levels, boosting access to high quality technical education for thousands of young people, which are also based on the same occupational standards. T Levels in Digital, Construction and Health and Science are now being taught and T Levels in Engineering and Manufacturing will launch this September. A new campaign, 'Get the Jump', has been launched to help young people aged 14 to 19 to understand their education and training choices. More information on this can be found here: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-your-education-and-training-choices>. T Levels are featured heavily in the campaign as an exciting new option for young people alongside apprenticeships, traineeships and Higher Technical Qualifications

Alongside this, we are investing up to £290 million to establish a comprehensive network of Institutes of Technology across England. These are unique collaborations between further education colleges, universities and employers specialising in delivering higher technical education and training in key STEM subjects such as cyber security, artificial intelligence, robotics, precision farming and health and life sciences. A key objective of the programme is to increase participation from under-represented groups to support the long-term STEM skills pipeline.

For those earlier on in their education, we are proud to have made substantial spending commitments to improve the teaching and uptake of STEM subjects in schools. We are offering a bursary worth £24,000 tax-free or a prestigious scholarship worth £26,000 tax-free to train to teach the highest priority subjects of chemistry, computing, mathematics and physics and a £15,000 tax-free bursary for design and technology. In line with the Gatsby Benchmarks for good career guidance, all schools are expected to provide at least one meaningful encounter with employers per pupil per year, with an emphasis on STEM employers.

We have improved the quality of technical awards. These non- GCSE qualifications are intended to equip 14-16 year olds with applied knowledge not usually acquired in general qualifications. They are intended to focus on a sector or occupational group and enable the development of knowledge as well as associated practical skills where appropriate.

Schools have access to the STEM Careers toolkit which provides ideas and practical suggestions on how STEM specific content might be used to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks. This includes useful resources, examples of good practice and sharing STEM careers resources, such as job profile examples, further study route information and labour market information with teachers.

Graduate skills relevant to the game development sector

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the accreditation system introduced by The Independent Game Developers' Association in ensuring that universities and colleges can provide graduates with skills relevant to the game development sector. [125151]

Michelle Donelan: Driving up quality of higher education (HE) provision is a key priority for this government, and we are working with Office for Students to ensure all students receive high quality outcomes and are supported to progress to high skilled employment or further study through their HE course.

We expect higher and further education providers to ensure their courses at level 4 to 7 support students to progress into the workplace. Professional standards and progression frameworks like those developed by The Independent Game Developers' Association can help providers design and deliver courses and work experience and ensure students can progress in professions. Assessment of the benefit of these standards is a matter for the provider.

As part of our technical education reforms, we want to make sure that the majority of technical qualifications at level 3 and below are based on employer-led occupational standards.

Review of Belarusian and Russian beneficiaries of UK R&D

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will (a) review all Belarusian and Russian beneficiaries of UK R&D spending and (b) assess how much R&D investment in the UK comes from Russia or Belarus. [131179]

George Freeman: As I noted on 27 February, BEIS is rapidly reviewing all Russian beneficiaries of UK science, research, technology and innovation funding. This is a fast moving policy area and the Government will provide an update in due course.

Student loan repayments for those who take maternity leave

Luke Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the command paper entitled Higher Education Policy Statement & Reform Consultation, CP 617, published on 24 February 2022, what plans the Government has to ensure that those who take maternity leave are not penalised with higher-than-average increases in lifetime student loan repayments. [129241]

Michelle Donelan: We want a sustainable student finance system that is fair to students and taxpayers – and which continues to enable anyone with the ability and the ambition to benefit from higher education to do so. The student finance system will continue to protect borrowers, including women on maternity leave, or any person on any form of parental leave, if they see a reduction in their income.

Student loan repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed, and no repayments are made for earnings below the relevant repayment threshold. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold - if a borrower's income drops, so do their repayments. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower. No commercial loans offer this level of borrower protection.

If, at the end of the year, the borrower's total income is below the relevant annual threshold, they may reclaim any repayments from the Student Loans Company made during that year.

Chevening Scholarships Programme

Alan Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 24 February 2022 to Question 126521, on Afghanistan: Chevening Scholarships Programme, what steps his Department is taking to support Chevening students from Afghanistan whose biometric residence permits have expired to find secure accommodation and employment in the UK.
[131027]

James Cleverly: We are aware that there are Chevening scholars from Afghanistan for the academic year 2020-21 whose biometric residence permits have expired. We are working with the Home Office to clarify options for this group to regularise their stay. Hardship funds have been provided to eligible scholars from this cohort this financial year.

Sector News

Office for Students new conditions confirmed

On Wednesday 2 March, the Office for Students (OfS) has today confirmed new conditions that allow the regulator to tackle poor quality provision, following a consultation on quality and standards which ran from July to September last year.

The new requirements will allow the OfS to intervene more robustly where courses fall below expectations, or where the rates of top degrees awarded continue to rise without good reason.

The conditions, which apply to courses at all levels offered by universities and other higher education providers registered with the OfS, come into force on 1 May 2022.

You can find out more [here](#).

Commons Library briefing on the response to Post-18 Education and Funding Review

On Tuesday 1 March, the House of Commons Library published a research briefing on the government's conclusion to the Post-18 Education and Funding Review.

The briefing gives a summary of the Augar report, explains each of the policies and proposals for consultation, including the changes to the student finance system, the lifelong learning entitlement, funding, and student numbers and outcomes. The briefing also includes sector responses to the review and the financial impact of the proposals.

You can find the research briefing [here](#).

Lords European Affairs Committee letter to the Foreign Secretary

On Thursday 3 March, the House of Lords European Affairs Committee wrote to the Foreign Secretary on the UK's participation in Horizon Europe.

The letter raised concerns over the ongoing delay in the UK's association to the EU's Horizon Europe programme and strongly endorsed the view of witnesses that securing the UK's association to Horizon Europe is critical for the UK science and research community. The letter also outlined that the delay to finalising the UK's association is causing uncertainty and eroding confidence among researchers.

The committee raised concern that "a 'non-association' outcome would disrupt the funding stability that UK researchers rely on; diminish the UK sector's attractiveness to global talent; and render the

government's stated desire for the UK to become a 'science superpower' far more difficult to achieve." The letter also called for the need to de-politicise the issue and noted that there had been some unease with the government "talking up" a Plan B outcome.

Finally, the letter asked the foreign secretary to address nine questions. The committee also wrote to Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation, Culture, Education and Youth; to João Vale de Almeida, EU Ambassador to the UK; and to Cristian-Silviu Buşoi MEP, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy in the European Parliament.

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

Birmingham, Erdington by-election

On Thursday 3 March, Labour candidate Paulette Hamilton won the Birmingham, Erdington by-election with a majority of 3,266. The by-election was triggered by the death in January of the Labour MP Jack Dromey, who had held the seat since 2010.

Conservative backbench policy committee chairs

On Thursday 3 March, a list of chairs and vicechairs of the new MP-led Conservative policy committees was published by website Guido Fawkes. A full list can be found below:

Chairman, Vice Chairman

- Education: Miriam Cates MP
- Treasury: Anthony Browne, Aaron Bell
- BEIS: Andrea Leadsom, Jo Gideon
- LUHC: Cherilyn MacKrory, Sally-Ann Hart
- Home Affairs: Tom Hunt
- Health & Social Care: Caroline Johnson, Chris Green
- FCDO: Giles Watling, Mark Logan
- Justice: Gordon Henderson
- Transport: Chris Loder Simon Jupp
- DCMS: Philip Davies, Tom Hunt
- Defence: John Baron, Sarah Atherton
- Union: Andrew Bowie, Robin Millar
- International Trade: Bob Blackman
- DEFRA: Chris Grayling
- Work & Pensions: Nigel Mills

You can find a live list [here](#).