



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

3 – 14 April 2023

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary business

Recess

On Thursday 30 March, the House of Lords and House of Commons rose for Easter recess. Both Houses will return on Monday 17 April.

Forthcoming business

Education Oral Questions

On Monday 17 April from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial team will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Tabled questions include:

- What steps her Department is taking to promote lifelong learning. [Peter Aldous MP, Conservative] [Stephen Metcalfe MP, Conservative]
- What steps her Department is taking to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships. [David Johnston MP, Conservative] [Siobhan Baillie MP, Conservative]
- What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the potential impact of international student visa restrictions on the higher education sector. [John McNally MP, SNP]

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

Research and development funding and Horizon Europe – Westminster Hall debate

On Tuesday 18 April, from 4:30pm, ‘research and development funding and Horizon Europe’ will be debated in Westminster Hall. This debate has been tabled by Paul Blomfield MP (Labour).

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

Lords Industry and Regulators Committee ‘the work of the OfS’

On Tuesday 18 April, from 10:30am, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will continue their inquiry into ‘the work of the OfS’. Witnesses include:

- 10:30am:

- Chloe Field (Vice President for Education, National Union of Students)
- 11:30am:
 - Martha Longdon (Former Chair at OfS Student Panel)
 - Mimi Harmer (Former member at OfS Student Panel)
 - Franci Masala (Former member at OfS Student Panel)

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

Commons Science and Technology Committee – Nurse, Grant and Tickell Reviews and Horizon Europe

On Wednesday 19 April from 9:30am the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee will hold a non-inquiry session on ‘Nurse, Grant and Tickell Reviews and Horizon Europe’. Witnesses include:

- 9:30am:
 - Sir Paul Nurse (Director at The Francis Crick Institute)
 - Sir David Grant (Former Vice Chancellor at Cardiff University)
 - Professor Adam Tickell (Vice Chancellor at University of Birmingham)
- 10:45am:
 - Sir Adrian Smith (President at Royal Society)
 - Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser (Chief Executive at UKRI)
 - Professor Irene Tracey (Vice Chancellor at University of Oxford)

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

Written Questions

Students: Finance

Kim Leadbeater: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is taking steps to provide alternative student finance options to people whose faith prohibits them from using interest-based loans. [UIN 172549]

Robert Halfon: The government is committed to delivering an Alternative Student Finance (ASF) product compatible with Islamic finance principles as soon as possible. To support the delivery of an ASF product to date, the government has taken new powers in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to enable the Secretary of State to provide alternative payments, in addition to grants and loans. We have further carried out work with specialist advisers, the Islamic Finance Council UK, on the design of an ASF model.

As set out in the answer of 25 July 2022 to Question 37600(opens in a new tab), the government is introducing the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE), which will significantly change the ways students can access learning and financial support.

Work is underway to assess how we can ultimately deliver an ASF product alongside the LLE. We are procuring advice from experts in Islamic finance and will be working with the Student Loans Company to better understand timescales for delivery of an ASF product.

In our response to the LLE consultation, published on 7 March 2023, we set out our aim that students will be able to access an ASF as part of the LLE as soon as possible after 2025.

Employment: Students

Alison McGovern: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant the Answer of 17 March 2023 to Question 162174 on Employment, whether his Department's review into workforce participation will look into the workforce participation of students. [UIN 171394]

Guy Opperman: The Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions was asked to lead work across Government to look in detail at the issue of participation in the labour market. As part of this work, the Department reviewed

data to better understand the reasons behind economic inactivity. This included looking at students.

Students: Finance

Julian Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to reform student finance. [UIN 174341]

Robert Halfon: The government announced that it will introduce a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) from 2025 to provide a streamlined funding system for provision across levels 4 to 6. The LLE will enable people to train, retrain, and upskill to meet the needs of the economy and advance their careers.

The LLE will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their working lives (for example £37,000 in today's fees). It will be available for both full years of study at higher technical and degree levels, and, for the first time, for modules of high-value courses, regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities.

Loans for living costs and targeted grants will be available in respect of all designated courses under the LLE, including part-time courses, subject to need.

Under this flexible skills system, people will be able to space out their studies and learn at a pace that is right for them, including choosing to build up their qualifications over time within both further education and higher education (HE) providers. They will have a choice in how and when they study to acquire new life-changing skills.

The government has legislated through the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 on the LLE. On 1 February 2023, building on these measures, it introduced the HE (Lifelong Learning) Fee Limits Bill as a further step towards delivery of the LLE from 2025.

As part of the pathway towards the LLE, as of the start of the 2022/23 academic year, the government began trialling loan-funded access to tuition fees for designated short courses at levels 4 to 6 at 22 providers across England through the HE Short Course trial, which tests a more flexible approach to funding learning at levels 4 to 6.

On 7 March 2023, the government published its response to the LLE consultation, providing a detailed conclusion to the consultation and a clear description of the key changes being brought in as part of the LLE.

Higher Education: Standards

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of establishing a statutory duty of care on higher education providers. [UIN 174397]

Robert Halfon: The mental health and wellbeing of young people is a high priority for this government. It is crucial that students get the effective mental health and wellbeing support they need to allow them to flourish at university.

There is already a general duty of care for higher education (HE) providers to deliver educational and pastoral services to the standard of an ordinarily competent institution and, in carrying out these services, HE providers are expected to act reasonably to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their students.

The law of negligence has been developed through case law over many years. Duty of care exists as one of the four key elements for liability in negligence to be found. The existence and application of a duty of care between HE providers and students has not been widely tested in the courts. However, it is understood across the HE sectors, and in legal circles, that the tort of negligence applies in the relationship between a provider and a student.

The department has made reference to the duty of care in relation to those with mental health issues in 'Prevent' guidance under 'When can a duty of care arise?'. This is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-prevent-duty-of-care-and-the-wellbeing-of-staff-and-students-in-higher-education-he/the-prevent-duty-of-care-and-the-wellbeing-of-staff-and-students-in-higher-education-he-notes-for-trainers>.

Students with disabilities, including mental health impairments, are also well protected under the Equality Act 2010, which prohibits discrimination and imposes a duty on HE providers to make reasonable adjustments where disabled students are put at a substantial disadvantage.

Given existing duties that apply, the department does not believe a further statutory duty would be the best approach to improve outcomes for students. We have instead made clear our ambition for all providers to back the University Mental Health Charter by 2026. We expect universities to create cultural change around mental health by embedding a whole-university approach to support, as advocated by the charity Student Minds, with student mental health and wellbeing considered across every aspect of university life. We have also asked the Office for Students to allocate

£15 million this academic year to support projects focussed on student mental health, such as the online wellbeing platform, Student Space, and establishing better partnership working between providers and NHS services.

Universities: Student Wastage

Cat Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the increases in the cost of living on university student dropout rates.[170644]

Robert Halfon: The department recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have impacted students.

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.

We are making ongoing assessments of the data available to us on student withdrawals. This includes the Student Loans Company (SLC) reports on notifications received of student withdrawal from higher education (HE), and this data is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/early-in-year-student-withdrawal-notifications-academic-year-201819-to-202223>.

Authoritative data on students not continuing or completing their HE studies by person characteristics is published by the Office for Students in the 'Student characteristics data: Outcomes data' dashboard. This can be accessed at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/student-characteristics-data/outcomes-data-dashboard/>.

The Office for National Statistics has twice surveyed students directly on the impact of cost-of-living pressures. The most recent report, published 24 February 2023 is available to view here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/bulletins/costoflivingandhighereducationstudentsengland/30januaryto13february2023>.

The next SLC report on student withdrawal from HE is due to be published on 30 March 2023.

Students: Suicide

Charlotte Nichols: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has had discussions with universities on publishing the annual suicide rate of enrolled students. [UIN 171577]

Robert Halfon: Every student death is a tragedy. The department is committed to doing all we can to prevent these devastating events, which we know have a profound and lasting impact on family and friends. The department regularly engages across the higher education (HE) sector, including with universities to ensure that student mental health is well supported.

Following a suicide prevention roundtable, co-chaired by the department and Universities UK, the department wrote to the National Statistician asking the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to publish an updated linked data analysis. The ONS published the refreshed dataset and analysis on May 31 2022, which included HE student deaths by suicide from the 2016/17 to 2019/20 academic years. This can be found here:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/estimating-suicide-among-higher-education-students-england-and-wales-experimental-statistics/2017-to-2020>. The sector-wide data publication by ONS is an important step in improving suicide prevention across HE.

The department expects all HE providers to take suicide prevention very seriously, providing information and places for students to find help, actively identifying students at risk, and intervening with swift support when needed. Where a tragedy does occur, this must be treated with the utmost sensitivity by a provider. The department supports the Suicide Safer Universities framework, led by Universities UK and Papyrus, which can be found at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/suicide-safer-universities>. As well as supporting universities to prevent student suicides and support students and families after the death of a student, this framework includes additional guidance on information sharing and postvention guidance (actions after a death by suspected suicide), which can be found here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/suicide-safer-universities/sharing-information>, and here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/suicide-safer-universities/sharing-information>. This provides practical advice on compassionate, confident, and timely support as well as a serious incident review template, which the department encourage providers to complete and learn from to improve their practice.

Supporting student mental health and ensuring action is taken to prevent future tragedies is a high priority for the government. That is why we continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Office for Students (OfS), and the HE sector to support the student population. The department has asked the OfS to distribute £15 million of funding to support students transitioning from school or college into HE, and to fund partnerships between universities and local NHS services to provide pathways of care for university students.

We have called on all providers to sign up to the University Mental Health Charter, led by Student Minds and developed in collaboration with students, staff, and partner organisations. The Charter aims to drive up standards of practice across the HE sector.

The department has also appointed university Vice-Chancellor Edward Peck as HE's first ever Student Support Champion. His role is to provide sector leadership and promote effective practice in areas including mental health and information sharing. Edward Peck has been speaking directly with the families of those who have tragically taken their own life whilst at university. Conversations with him have taken place about this work, so the department can benefit from this lived experience.

We will continue to work closely with experts to ensure that we are taking all necessary steps to prevent suicides among university students.

Students: Loans

Charlotte Nichols: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will increase the student loan repayment thresholds in line with inflation. [UIN 174460]

Robert Halfon: The student finance and funding system must provide value for money for all of society at a time of rising costs. It is important that a sustainable student finance system is in place, that is both fair to students and fair to taxpayers. The department is freezing maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years.

The repayment of student loans is governed by the Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) Regulations 2009 (as amended). These set out that borrowers starting full time undergraduate courses from 1 August 2023 on the new Plan 5 student loan will be required to make repayments from April 2026, once they have left study, and only then when they are earning over the repayment threshold of £25,000 per year, which will be adjusted annually by the Retail Price Index (RPI) thereafter.

For existing undergraduate borrowers on Plan 2 student loan, the annual repayment threshold will stay at £27,295 up to and including financial year 2024/25. Thereafter, annual adjustment of the Plan 2 repayment threshold will be based on RPI. The annual repayment threshold for Plan 3 postgraduate borrowers remains at £21,000.

We will continue to keep the terms of the student finance system under review to ensure that they keep delivering value for money for both students and taxpayers.

Student loans have significant protections for those making loan repayments, including for lower earners and borrowers who experience a reduction in their income. Borrowers are liable to repay only after leaving study when earning over the relevant repayment threshold. At any time, if a borrower's income falls below the relevant repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, their repayments stop. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off after the loan term ends, or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower. There are no commercial loans that offer this level of 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.

Students: Housing

Julian Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure student accommodation meets the necessary standard. [UIN 174340]

Robert Halfon: The government is committed to fundamentally improving the private rented sector and providing a better deal for renters, including by halving levels of non-decency in all rented homes by 2030. The 2022 Queen's Speech committed to introducing a Renters Reform Bill and the government will do so as soon as possible in this Parliament.

This bill includes the introduction of a new Property Redress Scheme (PRS) Ombudsman which all PRS landlords who rent out property in England will be required to join. The introduction of an Ombudsman to the sector will enable all tenants, including students, to challenge poor practice and standards and confidently hold landlords to account. We also want to give local councils strong and effective tools for enforcement, to crack down on non-compliant landlords and poor practice.

If a student in a purpose-built student accommodation has any concerns about their accommodation, they should in the first instance raise their complaint with their accommodation provider using that provider's own complaints process where relevant.

If their concerns remain unresolved, and their higher education (HE) provider is involved in the provision of the accommodation, students at providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE to consider their complaint.

If the accommodation provider is a member of one of the codes of practice, students can raise a complaint under these codes, which can be found here:

<https://www.thesac.org.uk/>, <https://www.unipol.org.uk/the-code/how-to-complain> and <https://www.nrla.org.uk/about-us/code-of-practice>.

Higher Education: Care Leavers

Baroness Eaton: To ask His Majesty's Government how many care leavers made applications to higher education institutions in each of the last three years for which data are available, broken down by individual institution. [UIN HL6919]

Baroness Barran: Data on applications, offers, and acceptances for care leavers by institution is not held by the department. This information may be available from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Turing Scheme

Baroness Randerson: To ask His Majesty's Government what are the causes of delays to payments to students on the Turing scheme; and what plans they have (1) to reduce the level of bureaucracy involved in applications, and (2) to mitigate the effect of these problems on poorer students. [UIN HL6832]

Baroness Barran: Turing Scheme grant recipients are organisations that are, in the main, education providers. The department is aware that some organisations have experienced issues navigating the process for claiming Turing Scheme funds, including providing the correct evidence on projects, which has led to delays in payment being processed. The Turing Scheme delivery partner, Capita, has already taken steps to help organisations better understand the process. This includes video instructions, written guidance and one to one telephone support when requested.

Department officials are also working with Capita to review how it can improve the overall customer experience while obtaining assurance that Turing Scheme funds are being appropriately spent, within the grant terms.

Under the current payment process, it is the responsibility of grant recipients to request grant funds on time, in line with project plans and to disburse funding to participants. To ensure this does not negatively impact disadvantaged students, Capita have made payments outside of its regular payment cycle where requests have been submitted late or were initially rejected due to incomplete evidence, especially if this puts student placements at risk.

The Turing Scheme continues to place great emphasis on providing opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Overseas Students

Lord Storey: To ask His Majesty's Government which countries international students studying in the UK have come from in each of the last three years. [UIN HL6767]

Baroness Barran: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes statistics on higher education (HE) at UK HE providers. Latest statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year and can be found at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-11>(opens in a new tab).

Table 11 of the HESA's Student Data includes the number of Non-UK HE enrolments broken down by country of domicile between academic years 2014/15 to 2021/22. Domicile refers to the permanent home address of the student prior to entry of the course.

Sector News

NUS launches Turn Up voter registration campaign

On Tuesday 4 April, the National Union of Students (NUS) launched its ‘Turn Up’ campaign to encourage students to register to vote in time for May’s local elections in England and Northern Ireland.

The campaign includes:

- Registering students en masse through university/college enrolment and with a nation-wide digital campaign.
- Ensuring every student has a voter ID and that any student without one can get one for free.
- Empowering voters by raising their voices and informing their choices.

Bernie Savage, NUS Vice President for Further Education, said: “This year photo ID presents a new barrier for young people and students to get their voices heard, but if they want to affect real change, then it’s vital they get involved, make sure they have valid ID, get themselves on the electoral register and turn up and vote.”

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

UCU marking and assessment boycott

On Wednesday 5 April, the University and College Union (UCU) served notice to employers of a marking and assessment boycott (MAB) to commence on Thursday 20 April.

The union are asking members to cease undertaking all summative marking and associated assessment activities/duties. The boycott also covers assessment-related work such as exam invigilation and the processing of marks.

You can [read more](#) here.

Pioneer prospectus published

On Thursday 6 April, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) announced the blueprint for 'Pioneer'. The programme will support research and innovation in the UK if association to Horizon Europe is not possible.

Association to Horizon Europe remains the government's preference and the Secretary of State for DSIT, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, recently held a meeting with the EU Commissioner, Mariya Gabriel, to discuss research collaboration including the UK's expectations around association to Horizon Europe.

The Pioneer prospectus sets out the proposals that would inform the alternative scheme, which is being developed with input from researchers, and businesses across the UK. It would focus on 4 main themes to complement existing R&D investment:

- Talent
- End to End Innovation
- Global Collaboration
- Investments in the R&D system

The Secretary of State for DSIT commented: "We must ensure we have an ambitious alternative ready to go should we need it and that our businesses and researchers have fed into it. Our top priority is supporting them to ensure their ground-breaking work can continue no matter what."

Professor Paul Boyle, Chair of the Universities UK Research & Innovation Policy Network and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Swansea said: "We are pleased to see that, with publication of the Pioneer prospectus today, the government has again reiterated its ambition to complete association to Horizon Europe... Universities UK has been consulted on the development of the Pioneer package, and we will continue to engage constructively in the coming months."

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

UCAS cost of living submission to APPG for Students

On Thursday 13 April, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) published their submission to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Students' inquiry into the cost of living crisis.

The submission outlines findings from a survey of prospective applicants on cost of living considerations, conducted in November 2022. The survey found:

- There is an opportunity to fill an information gap.
- Open day attendance is being affected due to rising living costs.
- The desire to go to university or college remains strong, with subject choice slightly affected.
- University or college choice may be revisited.
- Expectations about the student experience are being impacted.

Key recommendations include:

- Creation of a transition fund to support individuals in managing up-front costs before they can access student finance.
- UCAS, universities, and colleges to provide a 'constant drumbeat' of information and advice to build understanding and confidence about how to manage costs as a student.
- Engagement with prospective students should include information about the financial implications of higher education and available support.

You can [read the full submission](#) here and [an accompanying blog](#) here.