



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**3 – 7 February 2025**

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

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Click on the items in the table of contents to go straight to debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.



# Contents

Parliamentary business	4
The economic impact surrounding major defence contracts – HoL oral question	4
Value of apprenticeships and National Apprenticeships Week – WH debate	4
Renters' Rights Bill – HoL second reading	5
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – HoL report stage	7
National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill – HoL committee stage	7
Social, economic and personal values of life-long learning – HoL debate	8
Forthcoming business	9
Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoL committee stage	9
Work of the Science Minister – HoC SIT Committee oral evidence	9
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – HoL third reading	9
DSIT – HoC oral questions	9
The work of the Minister and the Minister of State for Women and Equalities – HoC Women and Equalities Committee oral evidence	10
Written questions and statements	11
Higher Education: Artificial Intelligence	11
Office for Students	11
Students: Hearing Impairment	12
Students: Fees and Charges	13
STEM Subjects: Women	13
STEM Subjects: Women	14
Higher Education: Disadvantaged	15
Higher Education: Asylum	16
Higher Education: Low Incomes	17
Private Rented Housing: Students	17
Private Rented Housing: Students	18
Confucius Institutes: Higher Education	19

Visas: Overseas Students	20
Overseas Students	20
<hr/>	
Sector news	21
<hr/>	
AI and creative technology scaleups: less talk, more action – HoL Communications and Digital Committee report	21
Letter from Baroness Brown of Cambridge to Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP and Lord Vallance of Balham, ref Science visa policy – HoL Science and Technology Committee correspondence	22
Open data about research management: a landscape review – Jisc report	22
Supporting higher education providers to understand T Levels – DfE guidance	23
How to approach digital transformation in higher education – Jisc report	23
The Minister of State for Skills answers your questions – UCU interview	24
Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee inquiry into innovation, growth and the regions – London Higher response	24
Consultation on reforms to OfS registration requirements – OfS consultation	24

# Parliamentary business

## The economic impact surrounding major defence contracts – HoL oral question

On Monday 3 February, Lord Harlech (Conservative) asked an oral question on the economic impact surrounding major defence contracts in the House of Lords.

Lord Stirrup (Crossbench) and Baroness Goldie (Conservative) both raised concerns that defence companies were unable to recruit on university campuses.

Lords Minister for the Ministry of Defence, Lord Coaker, noted in his response:

The Secretary of State for Defence, and I think the Business Secretary, wrote to the universities concerned and asked them to ensure that obstructive factions within the student unions in their universities did not prevent the legitimate recruitment, with respect to the RAF, and the legitimate activities of defence companies as well to try to recruit. It is extremely important for all universities to understand that of course we accept the right of students to protest, and all the rights and freedoms that come under a democracy—that is what we are standing for in many of the conflicts in which we are involved across the world. But with that comes the universities' responsibility to do what they can to ensure that people pursuing legitimate activities—which will help the defence and security of our nation and our allies—are protected, and this Government will do all they can to ensure that they are.

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

## Value of apprenticeships and National Apprenticeships Week – WH debate

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

Adam Thompson MP (Labour) spoke of the value of degree apprenticeships as they 'strongly complement a traditional format of degree-level education and powerfully support the Government's skills agenda'. He called for widening access to degree-level apprenticeships and reversing the recent decline in apprenticeships.

Other topics covered in the debate include:

- Creative industries identified as a growth-driving sector and skill shortages in the theatre sector.
- Scrapping of the apprenticeship levy and the Government reform the levy.
- Benefits of apprenticeships in helping combat rural depopulation and areas with a low inward migration.
- Expertise of apprentices in the defence sector.
- Stigma around apprenticeships compared to university.
- Devolution of adult skills funding.
- Concerns about funding and accessibility of the SME sector in securing apprenticeships.
- Success of T-levels.
- Calls to simplify the apprenticeship levy and the complexity of the current system.
- Timeline of the phased development of Skills England.
- Apprenticeships helping disabled people find work.
- Fall in the take-up of intermediate-level qualifications.
- Barrier of grade 4 English and maths at GCSE.
- Pay disparity of apprentices compared with other workers.
- Support for care leavers to undertake apprenticeships.

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

## **Renters' Rights Bill – HoL second reading**

On Tuesday 4 February, the second reading of the Renters' Rights Bill took place in the House of Lords. Several Peers raised concerns including the unintended consequences of exempting landlords renting to students in one- and two- bedroom properties from using the new ground for possession.

The Minister for Housing, Baroness Taylor of Stevenage opened the debate by outlining how the Government has tried to ensure that the Bill works for everyone renting in the private rental sector, including students. She spoke about the new possession ground 4A which allow landlords renting to students in HMOs to seek possession ahead of each new academic year, facilitating the yearly cycle of short-term student tenancies. To further protect the student market, she said that purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) will be removed from the assured tenancy system in recognition of the 'limited market such accommodation focuses on', and the differences between purpose-built accommodation and "off-street" private housing rented to students. She said that in order to be removed from the new tenancy regime introduced by the Bill, PBSA providers must sign up to government-approved codes of practice.

Speaking on behalf of the opposition, Baroness Scott of Bybrook said she intends to table amendments to address the most pressing concerns including student landlords, who she said need certainty of length of tenure.

Baroness Warwick and several other peers raised concerns about student landlords not being able to use the new ground 4A for one- and two-bedroom properties. She echoed UUK's concerns that this could result in these properties leaving the student market.

Several peers, including Lord Willetts and Lord Truscott criticised provisions in the Bill that would prevent upfront payment of rent as there will be no scope for landlords to offer tenancies structured around maintenance loan payments. Peers warned that restrictions on the use of guarantors meant that students with no credit history, overseas students and students with no guarantor may have the funds to pay rent in advance but will be overlooked in preference of tenants with regular incomes. Lord Northbrook noted that the Bill's potential to close off the market to people from overseas is in direct contrast with the Chancellor's ambition to encourage more high-skilled workers to UK and the Education Secretary's recent message welcoming international students to the country.

Lord Willetts welcomed the exemption for PBSA but echoed Baroness Warwick's criticism of exempting one- and two-bedroom properties from the new ground for possession. He asked if the Minister would consider the case for continuing to allow 12-month academic year tenancies, a system he said had worked well overall. He warned that the Bill could result in barriers for lower-income students accessing the diminishing amount of low-rent accommodation and that these students would choose to stay at home as commuter students.

In her response, the Minister said that that new ground for possession for student landlords does not intend capture every type of student. She noted that it would not be right for a parent who lives alone with their children to be evicted just because they are studying at university. She said those tenants should have the same security as everyone else.

She said the Government believes ground 4A covers the majority of the market, and there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. She said it is reasonable that the ground will apply to full-time students in larger house-share situations. Students studying part-time alongside work or who live in smaller properties should enjoy the same security as other tenants.

Dates for committee stage are to be confirmed.

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

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

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

An opposition amendment requiring the Bill to be enacted within a year of Skills England's creation was agreed.

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

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

On Thursday 6 February, the National Insurance Contributions (Secondary Class 1 Contributions) Bill had its fourth day of committee stage in the House of Lords.

Lord Altrincham (Conservative) put forward amendment 35, to delay the commencement of Clause 2 until an impact assessment had been published to fully assess the impact that this tax will have on schools and universities. He highlighted the current financial sustainability challenges facing the sector and the risk of placing additional costs on institutions.

Baroness Lawlor (Conservative) and Lord Sharkey (Liberal Democrat) both spoke in support of this amendment.

Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Lord Livermore, reiterated the government's commitment to securing the financial sustainability of the university sector, but this amendment would place additional pressure on public finances.

Amendment 35 was withdrawn.

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

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

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

The debate covered:

- Establishing Skills England.
- Reforming the apprenticeship levy.
- Implementing the lifelong learning entitlement (LLE).
- Impacts of an ageing population and rapid technological change.
- Financial challenges faced by universities due to capped domestic student fees.
- Including arts, humanities and personal development as a part of the LLE.
- Role of local partnerships and mayoral authorities in supporting lifelong learning and careers systems.
- Directing careers education towards future job markets.
- Reforming the apprenticeship levy to make it more flexible.
- Social benefits of lifelong learning.
- Ensuring access to learning for disadvantaged groups.
- Role of further education colleges and universities in community and business partnerships.

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



# Forthcoming business

## **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoL committee stage**

On Monday 10 and Wednesday 12 February, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will have its third and fourth day of committee stage in the House of Lords.

You can [read more](#) and watch the [third](#) and [fourth](#) sessions.

## **Work of the Science Minister – HoC SIT Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 11 February from 9:45am, Minister for Science, Lord Vallance of Balham, will give evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee in a regular ministerial accountability session on the work of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

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

## **Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – HoL third reading**

On Tuesday 11 February, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill will have its third reading in the House of Lords.

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

## **DSIT – HoC oral questions**

On Wednesday 12 February from 12:30pm, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, and his ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- Whether his Department has set a target for research and development expenditure in 2030.

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

## **The work of the Minister and the Minister of State for Women and Equalities – HoC Women and Equalities Committee oral evidence**

On Wednesday 12 February from 2:20pm, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP will appear in front of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee to give oral evidence on her work as Minister of State for Women and Equalities.

The work of the Social Mobility Commission will be covered in this regular evidence session.

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

# Written questions and statements

## Higher Education: Artificial Intelligence

**Alasdair Pinkerton MP (Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help tackle academic dishonesty arising from the use of generative AI in higher education. [UIN 25550]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** Universities are independent and autonomous bodies responsible for decisions such as admissions, diversity of provision, course content, teaching and assessment. As such, they are responsible for designing their own policies regarding the use of artificial intelligence and for taking steps to prevent academic misconduct, as set out in the Office for Students' regulatory framework.

Academic integrity is crucial to protecting the reputation of the UK's world-class higher education sector.

## Office for Students

**Richard Holden MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what changes the Office for Students has made to the regulatory framework to (a) ensure value for money and (b) good outcomes for students since January 2024. [UIN 24948]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** There has been one significant change to the Office for Students (OfS) regulatory framework, which was announced last year. This introduced the registration condition on harassment and sexual misconduct. The main condition will not come into force until 1 August 2025, however the provisions relating to the banning of non-disclosure agreements apply from 1 September 2024. This condition is important in ensuring higher education students are free from harassment and sexual misconduct that would otherwise adversely affect their ability to benefit from their studies.

The OfS has been actively regulating within the current framework, ensuring positive outcomes for students, including through undertaking targeted quality assessments for existing registered providers. Additionally, the OfS has conducted assessments against new initial quality conditions for providers joining the register.

The OfS is currently consulting on a five year strategy which sets out its plan to implement and focus on the recommendations of Sir David Behan's independent

review of the OfS, and the interrelated priorities which will support better quality, student interest, financial sustainability and protecting public money.

This consultation, which opened on 12 December 2024 and closes on 20 February 2025, is available on the OfS website here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-strategy-for-2025-to-2030/consultation-on-ofs-strategy-for-2025-to-2030/foreword/>.

## Students: Hearing Impairment

**Lord Patten (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of support for profoundly deaf students in higher education in England. [UIN HL3759]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department wants to break down the barriers to opportunity, ensuring that people of all ages and backgrounds can undertake activities which provide them with the skills and knowledge to support them throughout their education and into employment.

Higher education providers (HEPs) have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for all their disabled students. Wherever possible, disabled students should expect to have their needs met through inclusive learning practices and individual reasonable adjustments made by their HEPs.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is available to help students with the additional costs they may face in higher education (HE) because of their disability.

DSA can be used for the purchase of specialist equipment, for travel or to pay for non-medical help, which is the human support provided to students to enable them to access their studies. DSA is not means tested and does not have to be repaid.

DSA support for deaf students can include, for example, British Sign Language support, a specialist notetaker, computers, assistive software and specialist equipment, such as radio aids.

All HEPs registered with the Office for Students (OfS) that intend to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan (APP) approved by the Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS. APPs articulate how HEPs will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. HEPs should consider the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register published by the OfS which details 12 key risks to equality of opportunity within HE and the student groups most at risk, including disabled students.

## Students: Fees and Charges

**Paula Barker MP (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the increase in university tuition fees on university enrolment. [UIN 26515]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** An Equality Impact Assessment of changes to tuition fees and student support for the 2025/26 academic year was published on GOV.UK on 20 January when the Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 were laid before Parliament. These regulations increase maximum tuition fee limits in 2025/26 by 3.1%, based on forecast inflation using the RPI All Items Excl Mortgage Interest (RPIX) inflation index.

The government expects that a 3.1% increase in maximum tuition fees, which will be accompanied by a similar increase in fee loans in 2025/26 for full-time, full-time accelerated and part-time undergraduate courses, will have a broadly neutral impact as the total level of debt for students who qualify for up-front tuition fee loans should remain unchanged in real terms.

The government also considers that the increase in maximum tuition fees will not significantly alter participation decisions for most students as the value of tuition fees will remain unchanged in real terms.

The government plans to lay further regulations in February increasing maximum fee loans for 2025/26 by 3.1%.

## STEM Subjects: Women

**Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage more girls to study 'science, technology, engineering, and mathematics' subjects in higher education. [UIN HL4219]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department continues to support the take up of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects by girls and women in higher education (HE).

Skills, including STEM skills, are crucial for the delivery of the government's missions. This is why the department is building a coherent, flexible, high quality skills system to break down barriers to opportunity and drive economic growth, underpinned by a new Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy.

To boost quality, encourage more students into STEM across schools and further education, and therefore ensure a strong pipeline of qualified students into HE and careers in STEM areas, the department has committed substantial spending on mathematics, digital and technical education. For instance, the government funds the Advanced Mathematics Support Programme, which provides professional development to teachers in state-funded schools and colleges in England, including strategies to raise girls' participation in mathematics post-16. Support is focused in areas of low social mobility so that, whatever their location, background or gender, students can choose their best post-16 mathematics pathway and access high quality teaching.

Funding is also provided to the National Centre for Computing Education to support the teaching of computing and increase participation in computer science qualifications. This support includes programmes designed to encourage greater participation by girls and industry-led events that raise pupils' awareness of careers in computing and digital.

The department is also supporting schools to deliver STEM-related careers education through programmes such as STEM ambassadors. Such initiatives raise young people's awareness of the high quality options available for technical and academic routes into STEM and the careers STEM pathways offer.

The government will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through its technical education offer, with a range of high quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels. Examples of this include 12 T Levels in STEM subjects, including engineering, science, digital and media. T Levels are promoted to young people via the Skills for Life national communications campaign.

The government has also created over 370 employer-designed apprenticeship standards in STEM, including level 3 Cyber Security Technician, level 4 Software Developer and level 6 Civil Engineer (degree). Apprenticeships are a great way for anyone, regardless of their background or gender, to receive high quality training and skills to begin, or progress in, a successful career in STEM. The department is promoting STEM apprenticeships to girls in schools through our Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge Programme. In 2023/24, 17.7% (17,220) of STEM apprenticeship starts were by women, compared to 15.8% (15,170) in 2022/23.

## **STEM Subjects: Women**

**Baroness Owen of Alderley Edge (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what percentage of girl school leavers have gone on to study 'science, technology, engineering, and mathematics' subjects in higher education compared to boys in each of the past five years. [UIN HL4218]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The department is not able to identify the percentage of school leavers who have gone on to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects in higher education (HE) at a reasonable cost or within the required timeframes.

The department has access to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. HESA is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK HE sector. These data are shared with the department and include a wide range of information on students from the UK studying in UK higher education providers (HEPs), including their sex and subject of study. These data are only collected in relation to their HE attendance and do not cover any school data.

The department is able to supply the number of UK-domiciled students studying STEM subjects at UK HEPs broken down by sex, based on HESA data. Due to the change in subject classification from 2019/20 to 2020/21, the department is only able to provide a comparable time series from 2020/21 onwards.

These data are provided in the attached spreadsheet. There is no single official definition of which subjects make up STEM. The HESA science grouping includes subjects like medicine, nursing and agriculture that may not be included in other definitions of STEM.

## Higher Education: Disadvantaged

**Helen Maguire MP (Liberal Democrats):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) maintenance grants and (b) other policies to help improve the level of participation of disadvantaged students in higher education. [UIN 26667]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The department is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background.

The government continues to provide means-tested non-repayable grants to low income full time undergraduate students with children and/or adults who are financially dependent on them. We have announced an increase to maximum dependants' grants for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, based on forecast inflation using the RPIX inflation index. Students undertaking nursing, midwifery and allied health profession courses also qualify for non-repayable grant support through the NHS Learning Support Fund.

The department is also increasing the maximum maintenance loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of inflation, to

ensure that more support is targeted at students from the lowest income families. Higher rates of loan for living costs are also paid to students eligible for benefits such as lone parents and some disabled students as well as care leavers, who are normally assessed as low income independent students. In addition, care leavers are also entitled to a £2000 statutory bursary, paid via their local authority.

However, the department recognises that there is much more to do to expand access and improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. Too many people across our country do not get the opportunity to succeed. We will act to change this. We are calling for providers to go further and play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students, making sure that they are delivering robust and ambitious access and participation plans. By the summer, the department will set out our plan for higher education (HE) reform and the part we expect HE providers to play in this.

## Higher Education: Asylum

**Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on the number of asylum seekers enrolled in university access programmes in each of the last five years. [UIN 26529; Grouped Question: 26527]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** The UK has a longstanding and proud tradition of providing a safe haven to those who have no choice but to leave their home country because of endangerment to their lives or to those of their families. Higher education (HE) student support is available to those recognised as refugees, as well as their spouses, civil partners and children who were family members on the date the refugee applied for asylum, provided they have been ordinarily, i.e. lawfully, resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man) since being recognised by the government as a refugee and are ordinarily resident in England on the course start date. They are exempt from the three-year ordinary residence requirement.

Individuals seeking asylum are not entitled to student support in England whilst they are seeking asylum.

The department does not hold data on the number of asylum seekers that have started or are currently enrolled on an HE course at a UK HE provider in any of the last five years.



## Higher Education: Low Incomes

**Lee Anderson MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase the number of students from low income backgrounds enrolled on university access programmes. [UIN 26528]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** Access to higher education (HE) should be based on ability and attainment, not background. Opportunity should be available to all and it is the department's aspiration that no groups are left behind.

Grants and loans are available for students to undertake access to HE courses, subject to eligibility. The Adult Skills Fund, previously the Adult Education Budget, fully funds or co-funds education and skills training up to and including level 3 for eligible adults aged 19 and above. Where grant-funded provision is not available, individuals can choose to access Advanced Learner Loans, which can support them to access a level 3 qualification.

The government also provides financial support through the Office for Students (OfS) to support student access and success, including for disadvantaged students. £301 million was provided for the 2024/25 academic year.

All HE providers registered with the OfS that intend to charge higher level tuition fees must also have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the OfS. Access and Participation Plans articulate how HE providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, including how they will support greater access. In creating their plans, providers should consider the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, which details 12 key sector risks across the student lifecycle and the student groups most likely to experience these, including students from low-income backgrounds.

There are already many excellent examples of activities to support access to HE that providers are delivering, but the department wants the sector to go further. We are calling on providers to play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students, making sure that they are delivering robust and ambitious Access and Participation Plans.

By the summer, the department will set out its plan for HE reform and the part it expects HE providers to play in this.

## Private Rented Housing: Students

**Kevin Hollinrake MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment she has made of the potential

impact of the end of fixed term tenancies on student accommodation in the private rented sector. [UIN 26549]

**Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP:** We want all tenants renting privately, including students, to benefit from the increased security and flexibility the Renters' Rights Bill will provide.

Students will benefit from the removal of fixed term tenancies. Fixed terms mean that renters are obliged to pay rent regardless of whether a property is up to standard, and they reduce renters' flexibility to move when they need to. The government is clear that there is no place for fixed terms in the future assured tenancy system.

To facilitate the yearly cycle of short-term student tenancies, the Bill introduces a new ground for possession which will allow landlords renting to full-time students in Houses of Multiple Occupation to seek possession ahead of each new academic year.

The department has engaged with a range of stakeholders in the student accommodation market and will continue to do so.

## Private Rented Housing: Students

**Claire Hanna MP (Social Democratic and Labour Party):** To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps she is taking to ensure that the provisions of the Renter's Rights Bill do not negatively impact students from (a) Northern Ireland and (b) other devolved nations renting accommodation in England. [UIN 27473]

**Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP:** All tenants renting privately in England, including students, will benefit from the protections in the Renters' Rights Bill, wherever they are from.

The abolition of section 21 'no fault' evictions will end chronic insecurity in the private rented sector, and the abolition of fixed term tenancies will enable tenants to leave tenancies by giving two months' notice, ending the injustice of being trapped paying rent for substandard properties or unable to respond to their changing circumstances.

We recognise the cyclical nature of the student lettings market, which is why the Bill introduces a new mandatory ground for possession which will allow landlords renting Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) to full time students in England to seek possession ahead of each new academic year, facilitating the ongoing yearly cycle of

short-term student tenancies and ensuring there is a supply of properties for incoming groups of students.

## Confucius Institutes: Higher Education

**Alicia Kearns MP (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 on Confucius Institutes. [UIN 25751; Grouped Question: 25750]

**Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP:** This government is committed to ensuring our world leading universities remain free from foreign interference.

Any international arrangements English higher education (HE) providers who are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) make, including Confucius Institutes, should be within the law and comply with OfS registration conditions. These include a commitment to the public interest governance principles, which include academic freedom and freedom of speech. The OfS may take regulatory action if HE providers allow foreign governments to interfere in free speech or academic freedom.

The department expects the UK HE sector to be alert to a range of risks when collaborating with international partners and to conduct appropriate due diligence to comply with legislation and consider risks, including potential threats to freedom of speech and academic freedom.

The department's proposals regarding the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 have reinforced our clear expectations that HE providers must uphold the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom. The OfS can request information from HE providers registered with them about overseas arrangements, including financial transactions, if they believe registration conditions may have been breached. The measures we are now implementing through the Act will further strengthen opportunities for the OfS, by providing a new focused way for complaints about foreign interference on academic freedom to be escalated.

The department is also carrying out a full and comprehensive audit on the breadth of the UK's relationship with China. This government, through the ongoing China audit, will take a consistent, long term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in the UK's and global interests. We will co-operate where we can, compete where we need to and challenge where we must.

## Visas: Overseas Students

**Rupert Lowe MP (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of excluding (a) family members and (b) dependents from student visas. [UIN 27488]

**Minister for Migration and Citizenship, Seema Malhotra MP:** The Student route already restricts most students from bringing their dependants to the UK. Partners and children are the only family members which can be sponsored by students as dependants and only if the relevant student meets certain relevant criteria, such as studying for a PHD or other doctoral qualification, or a research-based higher degree.

## Overseas Students

**Lord Marlesford (Conservative):** To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of total admissions of undergraduates were international students in each university in England for the academic year 2024–25. [UIN HL4381]

**Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern:** UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) publishes data on the number of full-time undergraduate acceptances by domicile and provider. However, around 40% of non-European Union international full-time undergraduate entrants enter outside of UCAS and this will vary by provider. The latest data covers the 2023 admissions cycle and is published here: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2023>.

UCAS data for the 2024 admissions cycle will be published on 30 January.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) publishes data covering all international undergraduate entrants. The latest HESA data covers the 2022/23 academic year and is available here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>.

# Sector news

## **AI and creative technology scaleups: less talk, more action – HoL Communications and Digital Committee report**

On Monday 3 February, the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee published a report warning that the UK is at risk of becoming an ‘incubator economy’ unless it does a better job supporting UK AI and creative tech startups to grow into global competitors.

The report sets out key recommendations for change including:

- Ensure join-up – The Government’s industrial strategy should provide a coherent, cross-sector vision for how technology scaleups will be supported to drive economic growth.
- Accelerate financial reforms – Unlocking domestic growth capital is key to boosting institutional investment in UK innovation. This needs to happen quickly to keep up with technological change.
- Champion entrepreneurial success – We must do more to celebrate successful wealth creators and foster a culture where founders are incentivised to stay in the UK to grow their businesses, or fail and try again.
- Streamline public support for innovation – The current regime is too complex and should be consolidated to provide innovative companies with a clear pathway along their growth journey.
- Commit to AI Delivery – The AI Opportunities Action Plan is welcome, but a plan on its own is not enough. Delivering the plan will require a laser sharp focus on removing obstacles to growth for homegrown AI companies and robust political commitment.
- Sustain investment in the creative industries - The sector’s growth potential, driven by creative technology businesses in particular, won’t be realised without longer-term commitments and an increased commercial focus.

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

## **Letter from Baroness Brown of Cambridge to Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP and Lord Vallance of Balham, ref Science visa policy – HoL Science and Technology Committee correspondence**

On Tuesday 4 February, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee published a letter sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary and Minister for Science, arguing the UK's visa and immigration policy needs to adapt to recognise that we are in a global competition for talent in science and technology.

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

## **Open data about research management: a landscape review – Jisc report**

On Tuesday 4 February, Jisc published a landscape review of open data in research management and administration in the UK, as part of their work leading the implementation of the digital and data recommendations of the independent review of research bureaucracy.

Key findings include:

- Establishing a foundational step towards shared efficiencies and simplified approaches to managing research in the UK - reducing bureaucracy, removing unnecessary complexity and technical debt, lowering costs.
- Collaborative efforts coordinated by Jisc, BRRIN includes representation from all UK nations and aims to enhance the research management ecosystem with efficient, sustainable, low-bureaucracy solutions.
- The importance of an audit of open data which could reveal further value, highlighting significant opportunities to leverage open data for research management.
- The suggestion to adopt common data standards to support APIs that can lead to a more integrated and streamlined system.
- The opportunity to use existing open data infrastructure and policies from across the public sector offers immediate opportunities for improvement.

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

## **Supporting higher education providers to understand T Levels – DfE guidance**

On Wednesday 5 February, the Department for Education (DfE) published guidance for higher education providers, to help them understand more about T Levels and how they can support students to progress onto higher education qualifications.

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

## **How to approach digital transformation in higher education – Jisc report**

On Wednesday 5 February, Jisc published a report showing how their digital transformation toolkit was used to support a wide range of digital change initiatives.

The report provides case studies of different ways the toolkit has been utilised:

- To assist with the redevelopment of organisational digital strategy (Royal Northern College of Music and University of Worcester)
- To benchmark whole-organisation digital maturity (Bath Spa University)
- To consider how organisational digital culture might impact the successful integration of new digital infrastructure (University of Chester, University of Hull and the University of Manchester)
- To reflect and support the development of new learning and teaching programmes (University of St Andrews)
- To explore ways to achieve organisational strategic goals for educational excellence (Queen's University Belfast's development of an AI strategy and Sheffield Hallam University to support their digital learning transformation project)
- To support international partnership development (Liverpool John Moores University and Université Côte d'Azur, France)
- To provide evidence to inform decision-making and identify priorities (University of Westminster)

- To benchmark current digital maturity in specific areas as a baseline against which to measure future improvement (City George's, University of London)

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

## **The Minister of State for Skills answers your questions – UCU interview**

On Wednesday 5 February, the University and Colleges Union (UCU) published a video interview with the Minister for Skills, Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern.

General Secretary of the UCU, Jo Grady, put questions on the state of UK universities, and what the Labour government should urgently do about the sector, directly to the minister.

You can [watch the interview](#).

## **Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee inquiry into innovation, growth and the regions – London Higher response**

On Thursday 6 February, London Higher published its response to the Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee inquiry into innovation, growth and the regions.

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

## **Consultation on reforms to OfS registration requirements – OfS consultation**

On Thursday 6 February, the Office for Students (OfS) opened a consultation on two new initial conditions of registration to replace four that were put in place when the OfS was created in 2018, as well as changes to the registration process.

The consultation closes on 23 April 2025.

You can [view the full consultation](#).