



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

**30 – 04 July 2025**

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, please contact:

Andrea Rezman | [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

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# Parliamentary business

## Spending Review 2025: Scotland – Westminster Hall Debate

On Wednesday 2 July 2025, the House of Commons held a Westminster Hall debate on the implications of the UK Government's 2025 Spending Review for Scotland. Several MPs highlighted the effects on higher and further education, with a particular focus on universities.

Graeme Downie MP (Labour) raised concerns about the future of post-16 education in his constituency. He reported that Fife College, a key provider of further and higher education, had warned of course cuts and potential campus closures due to financial pressures stemming from Scottish Government mismanagement. Graeme Downie criticised what he described as a betrayal of young people's potential, accusing the SNP of diverting res away from working-class students in Fife to cover failures elsewhere in the higher and further education sector.

Stephen Gethins MP (SNP) focused on the impact of UK immigration policy on Scottish universities. He cited the University of Dundee as an institution that had suffered financially from a fall in international student numbers, linking this decline directly to recent policy changes. He emphasised the value of internationalisation in higher education, drawing on his experience at the University of St Andrews, and argued that such diversity enriches both research and student experience. He criticised the UK Government for failing to consider the consequences of abrupt shifts in migration rules and urged ministers to visit Scottish campuses to hear from affected institutions directly.

Harriet Cross MP (Conservative) pointed to evidence from her recent visits to universities, stating that institutions across Scotland were also grappling with real-terms funding cuts from the Scottish Government. She argued that, while UK policy plays a role, the Scottish Government must also take responsibility for financial decisions affecting university budgets.

Martin Rhodes MP (Labour) welcomed the establishment of the Glasgow Investment Zone, which will focus on advanced manufacturing and research innovation. He underlined the importance of the city's world-class universities to the zone's success, suggesting that the initiative could generate thousands of jobs and drive investment in regional higher education and R&D.

Gregor Poynton MP (Labour) celebrated the £750 million commitment to a new exascale supercomputer at the University of Edinburgh, describing it as a major boost

for Scotland's research and innovation capacity. He stated that the investment would support high-skill, high-wage jobs in emerging sectors such as medtech, life sciences, and clean energy.

Christine Jardine MP (Liberal Democrat) also welcomed the supercomputing investment, noting that many of her constituents work at the University of Edinburgh. However, she expressed frustration that despite UK Government support, projects and services often fail to deliver results for the public due to Scottish Government inefficiencies.

Kirsty McNeill MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, confirmed the £750 million funding for Edinburgh University's supercomputing project and reiterated the Government's support for Scottish universities. She acknowledged the pressures created by migration policy but argued that some issues stemmed from university-level and devolved decisions. She pledged to maintain dialogue with the sector and encouraged Scottish institutions to work constructively with the UK Government.

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

# Forthcoming business

## **Financing and Scaling UK Science and Technology: Innovation, Investment, Industry – HoL Science, Innovation and Technology Committee oral evidence sessions**

On Tuesday 8 and Wednesday 9 July, the House of Lords Science, Innovation and Technology Committee will hear oral evidence as part of their inquiry into “Financing and Scaling UK Science and Technology: Innovation, Investment, Industry”.

Witnesses include (Tuesday 8 July):

- Tom Adeyoola (Executive Chair at Innovate UK)
- Charlotte Deane (Executive Chair of EPSRC at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI))
- John Flint (CEO at National Wealth Fund)

Witnesses include (Wednesday 9 July):

- Marcus Stuttard (Head of AIM and UK Primary Markets at London Stock Exchange Group)
- Professor Dame Fiona Murray (Associate Dean of Innovation at MIT School of Management)

You can watch the session ([Tuesday 8 July](#) and [Wednesday 9 July](#))

# Written questions and statements

## Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance

**Mary Glendon (Labour):** (UIN61157) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of levels of funding in the higher education sector on the performance of British universities in the QS World University Rankings 2026, published on 19 June 2025.

**Janet Daby:** To maintain the UK higher education (HE) sector's world-leading status, universities need a stable financial footing. This government is committed to securing our universities' future, which is why we have acted quickly to address the sector's financial challenges.

The Office for Students (OfS) continues to dedicate significant res to ensure the sector's financial sustainability. The department has appointed Professor Edward Peck as OfS Chair, where he will play a key role in strengthening this commitment. Additionally, we made the difficult decision to uplift tuition fee limits by 3.1% (in line with inflation) from the 2025/26 academic year. The department will publish its plans for HE reform as part of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper this summer.

We also recognise that research funding is integral to universities' financial sustainability. This government has committed to record funding of research and development (R&D). The Department for Science, Technology and Innovation's (DSIT) R&D budget has increased in real terms by 8.5% from 2024/25 to 2025/26, and DSIT's allocation to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is £8.8 billion, sustaining unprecedented levels of investment to support the UK's R&D ambitions.

This government is determined to work with the sector to transition to sustainable research funding models, including by increasing research grant cost recovery, as announced by UKRI in March.

## Department for Education: Universities: Standards

**Andrew George (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 60415) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she plans to take with the Office for Students to ensure that

universities provide prospective students with transparent data (a) in general and (b) on what proportion of courses are delivered online.

**Janet Daby:** Higher education providers must be transparent in how they advertise and deliver their courses. The Competition and Market Authority has published advice for providers on complying with consumer law, including informing students about the quantity and type of contact hours. All registered providers must pay due regard to this guidance as part of their registration conditions with the Office for Students (OfS).

Online learning offers significant benefits to students, but it must support the quality of a student's learning experience. The OfS's Blended Learning Review urges providers to clearly communicate course expectations and assess students' blended learning experiences. Students dissatisfied with their university's service should use their provider's complaints process. If a provider is not meeting the OfS's registration requirements, this can be raised to the OfS by submitting a notification.

## Treasury: Research: Investment

**Chris Coghlan (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 61659) To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of issuing research and development bonds of up to £20 billion per year.

**Emma Reynolds:** Government investment in research and development (R&D) underpins the UK's excellence in its universities and research institutes and stimulates private sector innovation, driving growth and higher living standards. On average, every £1 of government spending delivers £7 of economic benefits in the long term. At the recent Spending Review, the government therefore prioritised R&D – increasing R&D funding to £22.6 billion per year by 2029-30, an above-inflation increase.

Our core gilt programme is the most stable and cost-effective way of raising finance to fund the day-to-day activities of the government, owing to the depth and liquidity of the market. This is, in part, down to the fungibility of the instruments issued to the market. Issuing bonds aimed at financing specific areas of spending risks fragmenting the gilt market, which would not be consistent with the government's debt management objective of minimising the long-term cost of financing, taking into account risk.

The government keeps under regular review the introduction of new debt instruments. The government would however need to be satisfied that any new instrument would meet value-for-money criteria, enjoy strong and sustained demand in the long term, and be consistent with wider fiscal objectives.

## Department for Education: Plagiarism

**Neil O'Brien (Conservative):** (UIN 61232) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the level of plagiarism in the education sector; and what steps her Department is taking to tackle plagiarism.

**Janet Daby:** Cheating of any kind is unacceptable. It threatens to undermine the reputation of our world-class education sector and devalues the hard work of those who succeed on their own merit.

Ofqual require Awarding Organisations to have robust policies and procedures in place to prevent, detect, and deal with malpractice, including plagiarism.

The Joint Council for Qualifications have published guidance to support schools and colleges to identify and address concerns about plagiarism in exams and assessments, which can be found at: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/malpractice/plagiarism-in-assessments---guidance-for-teachersassessors/>.

Higher education providers are independent bodies responsible for their own approaches to preventing academic misconduct by students, including plagiarism, but are regulated in relation their assessment practices by the Office for Students (OfS). The OfS sets the expectation that assessments must be designed in a way that minimises opportunities for misconduct and facilitates its detection where it does occur.

## Department for Education: Apprentices

**Damian Hinds (Conservative):** (UIN 59310) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Spending Review 2025, CP 1336, published on 11 June 2025, what the constituent parts are of the commitment to making at least 5% savings and efficiencies other than the changes already announced to Level 7 apprenticeships.

**Janet Daby:** Spending Review 2025 delivers on the Plan for Change and sets out spending plans for the rest of the Parliament. The settlement for the department ensures that we can invest in excellence for every child, so that we break the unfair link between background and success.

As set out in the Department for Education's section of the Departmental Efficiency Delivery Plans, the department will deliver efficiencies in both its frontline and non-frontline spending.

95% of the department spending goes to the frontline and we will continue to support frontline providers in getting maximum value from every pound spent.

In relation to children's social care, for example, the programme (joint with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to reform the sector focuses on preventative activity which avoids families' needs escalating, reducing costs and demand in the system. In relation to schools, the department will work alongside the sector to go further to get best value from their res and is expanding the suite of productivity initiatives available. We will also work with the further education (FE) sector to improve the value for money of government spend by providing FE Commissioner support to colleges and other relevant providers. We are seeking to provide opportunities for economies of scale arising from more 16 to 19-year-olds moving into post-16 education and training, simplifying processes and reducing data collection burdens, and providing greater certainty of capital funding to enable colleges with estate planning, and exploring commercial efficiencies. Further information can be found in the Departmental Efficiency Delivery Plans.

## **Department for Education: Higher Education: Disability**

**Liz Jarvis (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 59526) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help ensure that disabled students entering higher education receive (a) timely and (b) appropriate support from Student Finance England.

**Janet Daby:** The department and the Student Loans Company (SLC) are committed to ensuring that disabled students domiciled in England and entering higher education receive timely and appropriate support through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Eligible students undergo a Study Needs Assessment (SNA), which identifies their individual needs. These are then compiled into a Needs Assessment Report and are submitted to SLC for approval, helping to ensure that students receive the right support efficiently, and enabling them to access higher education with confidence and the res they need to succeed.

In previous years, approximately 40% of DSA applications are submitted at the start of the academic year. However, this year, SLC has worked with UCAS to encourage earlier applications. This has resulted in a higher volume of submissions ahead of the 2025/26 academic year. To manage this, SLC has increased resourcing to improve processing times and ensure students receive funding promptly.

Additionally, SLC's suppliers, Capita and Study Tech, have recruited more Needs Assessors to offer flexible assessment scheduling. SLC continues to monitor demand and capacity throughout the academic cycle to maintain effective support for students.

Current processing times for DSA and other applications can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sfe-current-application-timescales>.

## Department for Education: Universities: Applications

**Ben Spencer (Conservative):** (UIN 60230) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of (a) the prevalence of the use of large language models in the preparation of UCAS personal statements and (b) the potential impact of the use of large language models in UCAS personal statements on the likelihood of applications being successful.

**Janet Daby:** The personal statement is an opportunity for applicants to showcase their ambitions, skills and experiences. As such, it is important that students use their own words to accurately reflect their unique qualifications and suitability for the chosen course.

The department is in regular contact with UCAS and have been assured that plagiarism is taken seriously, with methods and guidance in place to caution against using artificial intelligence tools, including large language models, to write personal statements.

UCAS have also consulted on future reform of the personal statement, and have worked with students, teachers and universities to devise a new format. In splitting the statement into a series of sections, this reform is aimed to simplify the process for students, and to ensure that universities hear from students in their own words.

## Department for Education: Higher Education: Admissions

**Sarah Gibson (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 59602) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the higher education admissions system takes into account the frequent relocations of military service children.

**Janet Daby:** Universities are autonomous bodies, independent from government and are responsible for their own admissions decisions.

Universities and colleges decide who to offer a place to by considering a range of factors detailed within an applicant's UCAS application. In addition to their predicted grades, this can include their personal statement, teacher references, contextual factors and, for certain courses that have an October application deadline, their performance in admissions tests. This is a process that differs between providers and even between different courses at the same providers.

Admissions teams are accustomed to considering a wide range of personal circumstances when making decisions.

Higher education (HE) providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) intending to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the OfS. Providers are expected to take into account the OfS Equality of Opportunity Risk Register in developing a plan. The Register identifies service children as a group in particular need of support.

The government takes a close interest in ensuring that the system is fair. We work closely with HE providers and sector bodies to make sure the system works well for students.

## **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Research: Wales**

**David Chadwick (Liberal Democrats):** (UIN 62124) To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to ensure that the proportion of research and development funding spent by the UK Government in Wales aligns with the population share of Wales in the United Kingdom.

**Feryal Clark:** This government is committed to supporting R&D excellence wherever it is found. UKRI has a specific objective to develop world-class places by supporting outstanding institutions, infrastructures, sectors and clusters across the UK. In 2023-24, UKRI invested £168 million in Wales, supporting activity from the Compound Semiconductor Applications Catapult in Newport, to the Agri-tech and Food Technology Launchpad in Mid and North Wales, to the Media Cymru project in Cardiff Capital Region. Looking ahead, we are working closely with the Welsh Government to earmark at least £30 million for region in Wales from the new Local Innovation Partnerships Fund.

## Department for Education: Degrees: Artificial Intelligence

**Lee Anderson (Reform UK):** (UIN 60897) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of AI on undergraduate degree integrity.

**Janet Daby:** There are huge opportunities for artificial intelligence (AI) as it becomes more sophisticated, particularly through generative AI, and the department knows higher education (HE) and the industries they work with are at the forefront of this. There will be many benefits, and we are already seeing these, but there are also challenges in how the HE sector incorporates AI, particularly for teaching, learning and assessment.

The Quality Assurance Agency has been exploring the implications of AI, particularly in relation to academic integrity and published a briefing for its members in February 2024 focusing on the challenges. The briefing was underpinned by insights from HE sector leaders.

The experience and expertise of the sector is contributing to the department's evidence base for how generative AI is used in education. In January 2024, the department published research entitled 'Generative AI in education: Educator and expert views', containing insights from interviews with teachers and experts in HE and the education technology industry. The full research paper is available here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b8cd41b5cb6e000d8bb74e/DFE\\_GenAI\\_in\\_education\\_-\\_Educator\\_and\\_expert\\_views\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b8cd41b5cb6e000d8bb74e/DFE_GenAI_in_education_-_Educator_and_expert_views_report.pdf).

The Office for Students set out its approach to the use of AI in HE in a recent blog post entitled 'Embracing innovation in higher education: our approach to artificial intelligence'. The full blog post is available here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/embracing-innovation-in-higher-education-our-approach-to-artificial-intelligence/>.

## Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Investment Zones: Northern Ireland

**Gavin Robinson (Democratic Unionist Party):** (UIN 62611) To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress her Department has made on developing the Enhanced Investment Zone for Northern Ireland.

**Alex Norris:** Since confirmation at Autumn Budget of the continuation of the Enhanced Investment Zone, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has worked in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive to drive forward the co-development of the design and delivery of the Enhanced Investment Zone. Further detail on the focus of the Enhanced Investment Zone will be confirmed later this year, following significant progress on developing proposals for the sectoral focus.

## Department for Education: Universities: Fees and Charges

**Mike Wood (Conservative):** (UIN 60489) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the UK-EU Summit - Common Understanding of 19 May 2025, what changes she plans to make to the university home fee status of students of EU/EEA nationality studying in (a) England, (b) Wales, (c) Scotland and (d) Northern Ireland; and what changes she plans to make to the fee status of previously overseas British citizens who intend to study in the United Kingdom.

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

On 19 May 2025, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, welcomed Presidents Von Der Leyen and Costa for the first ever summit between the UK and the EU and a deal was agreed which will deliver on what the British public voted for last year. This package delivers for the British people, without compromising on our red lines, no return to the customs union, no return to freedom of movement, and no rejoining the single market.

On home fee status, most new EU/EEA students who were not lawfully resident in the UK before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 will pay international fees.

The Withdrawal Agreement provides that current EU principles of equal treatment continue to apply for those covered by the citizens' rights provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement. This means that EU nationals lawfully resident in the UK before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 are eligible in England for support on a similar basis as previously, subject to meeting the usual residency requirements, which are unchanged. Similar agreements have been signed with the European Economic Area (EEA) European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states and Switzerland.

UK nationals and their family members, living in the EEA or Switzerland at the end of the transition period will generally be eligible for home fee status, tuition fee and

maintenance support from Student Finance England for courses starting on or after 1 August 2021 and before 1 January 2028, subject to meeting all other eligibility requirements.

There are no plans to make any changes to the fee status for these persons.

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**Juliet Campbell (Labour):** (UIN 61860) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the eligibility of the long course loan to (a) estranged and (b) care experienced students.

**Janet Daby:** Full-time undergraduate students who are estranged from their parents or who are care leavers qualify for a long courses loan in the same way as other full-time undergraduate students.

Full-time students who attend their courses for more than 30 weeks and three days in an academic year qualify for additional means-tested long courses loan to help them with their living costs. This is paid for each week or part-week from 30 weeks and three days up to 45 weeks' attendance. Students attending their courses for 45 weeks or more in any 52 week period are paid as if they are studying for the full 52 weeks, meaning that they qualify for 22 weeks additional living costs support. The weekly rates of long courses loan vary depending on where a student is living and studying during an academic year.

The government has increased maximum loans for living costs, including long courses loans, by forecast inflation (3.1%), for the 2025/26 academic year.

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**The Lord Cashman CBE (Non-affiliated):** (HL8524) To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to address high levels of interest some graduates pay on student loans.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** Student loans are subject to interest so as to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree.

Interest rates on student loans do not affect monthly repayments made by borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or the rate of interest. If income is below the relevant student loan repayment threshold, or

a borrower is not earning, then they do not have to make repayments at all. Any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off after the loan term ends or in case of death or disability, at no detriment to the borrower.

Interest rates are set annually in relation to the Retail Price Index. The government caps maximum student loan rates when needed to ensure that student loan interest rates do not exceed market rates for comparable unsecured personal loans.

A full equality impact assessment of how the student loan reforms may affect graduates, including detail on changes to average lifetime repayments under Plan 5, was produced and published in February 2022 and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

## Department for Education: Training: Taxation

**The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett (Labour):** (HL8470) To ask His Majesty's Government when they intend to announce the revised formula for allocating the growth and skills levy (formerly the apprenticeship levy), including (1) the total for each year of the spending review period, and (2) the amount to be held back by the Treasury.

**The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern:** This government is transforming the apprenticeships offer into a new growth and skills offer, which will offer greater flexibility to employers and learners, and support the industrial strategy.

The growth and skills offer is vital in delivering the government's Plan for Change and achieving its missions of driving growth and breaking down barriers to opportunity. The department will work through all of its budgets at departmental business planning and set out more detail on the approach to the growth and skills offer in due course.

His Majesty's Treasury are responsible for the operation of the UK wide apprenticeships levy and for allocating funding to England and the devolved administrations through Spending Review settlements.

# Sector news

## International students in UK higher education - Research Briefing

The House of Commons Library published a new research briefing, *International students in UK higher education*, exploring student numbers, government policy, and the economic impact of overseas students in the UK. The briefing underscores the critical role of international students in boosting university finances, contributing to soft power, and fuelling broader economic growth.

At the heart of the briefing is the recognition that the UK met its **2030 target of 600,000 international students a decade early**, with 732,285 studying in 2023/24—23% of all higher education enrolments. This milestone highlights the sector's global appeal and the strategic importance of international student flows.

The briefing builds on existing initiatives such as the International Education Strategy and the post-Brexit Turing Scheme, while also discussing the new Labour government's review of policy. It acknowledges ongoing tensions around net migration targets and visa reforms—such as adjusting stay periods and sponsor responsibilities—but emphasises the government's reaffirmed commitment to valuing international students.

### Key details include:

- Overseas students made up 732,285 enrolments in 2023/24—second highest ever—but 4% down from the previous year
- India is now the top country (107,500 students), followed by China (98,400) and Nigeria (34,500)
- The International Education Strategy's goals—£35 billion in export value and 600,000 students by 2030—have been met early; a full strategy review is underway
- Brexit led to a 50% drop in new EU undergraduate entrants in 2021/22, as fees and visa access changed
- The graduate visa route offers 2–3 years' post-study stay, but the May 2025 immigration white paper proposes reducing it to 18 months and introducing a levy on universities
- EU research income (£614 m) and other overseas income (£756 m) made up 18% of university research funding in 2023/24; international fees accounted for £12.1 billion (23% of total income)
- Net economic benefit of international students from 2021/22 intake estimated at £37.4 billion—a net gain of £560 per local resident—and a key driver of UK soft power, with 39% of global senior leaders educated in the UK since 2017

Universities are positioned at the centre of this dynamic, with their reliance on international fee income helping to offset funding pressures. However, stakeholders warn of financial risks—particularly from fluctuations in student numbers from countries like China—and question the implications of immigration policy changes.

This briefing represents a comprehensive snapshot of the challenges and opportunities surrounding international students in UK higher education. It reinforces the message that universities are not just educational institutions, but vital economic and diplomatic assets—instrumental in sustaining research, funding, and global influence for the long term.

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

## Financial Sustainability Survey - ARMA

The Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) released an update on its “Financial Sustainability Survey”, exploring how research institutions are responding to financial pressures. While covering the broader landscape of UK research organisations, the update underscores significant impacts on universities and higher education research capacity.

At the heart of the update is evidence that cost-control measures are increasing in scale and intensity compared to the Summer 2024 survey. Key responses include recruitment freezes (73%) and staff reductions (63%), with a growing share of institutions halting some research or knowledge exchange activities (23%, up from 18%). Additionally, nearly half (48%) report choosing not to bid for certain funding opportunities—often due to restrictive conditions or match-funding demands—while 41% are restricting specific types of funding applications.

The update builds on ARMA’s earlier survey and the Task & Finish Group’s wider work (including summer 2024 data), set against a backdrop of a £5.4 billion research income deficit reported by the Office for Students in 2023/24. Though covering all research institutions, the update particularly highlights vulnerability in higher education—especially regarding charitable funding, fellowships, and early-career researcher support.

### Key details include:

- 73% of institutions enforce recruitment freezes; 63% have implemented staff reductions
- 23% report stopping research or knowledge exchange in some areas (up from 18%)
- 48% are opting out of bidding for some funding; 41% are restricting types of funding

- Charitable funders (55%) and fellowships (32%) are most frequently restricted due to onerous conditions or matching requirements
- Many respondents noted pressure on morale, wellbeing, and research culture, with risks particularly acute for early-career researchers

Universities and research managers are at the forefront of efforts to balance financial sustainability with research excellence. The sector's response includes streamlining costs, reassessing internal funding, and increasing the use of AI tools (34% adoption) to enhance efficiency—all while wrestling with cultural and operational strains.

Stakeholders stress that while immediate cost-cutting may offer short-term relief, longer-term risks include erosion of research capacity, diminished support for early researchers, and weakened knowledge exchange. ARMA is now working with Research England to run focus groups, aiming to delve deeper into these issues and inform funders and policymakers.

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

## **Science Committee writes to Secretary of State on higher education and research resilience**

On Monday 30 June, the House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee published a letter sent by its Chair, Dame Chi Onwurah MP, to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, urging coordinated action to support financially vulnerable universities and protect the UK's research capacity.

The letter highlights the growing pressures facing higher education institutions, including the potential closure of courses and departments critical to national research priorities. It calls on the Secretary of State to clarify how his department will work with the Department for Education to ensure the stability of the university sector and safeguard disciplines such as mathematics and engineering.

The Committee also requests details on the Government's broader strategy for supporting university-based research, in light of planned R&D investment and recent discussions on a possible levy on international student income.

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

## Export led growth: Trade with the Asia-Pacific region

On Monday 30 June, the Business and Trade Committee published a new report, *Export-led Growth: Trade with the Asia-Pacific region*, outlining the strategic value of higher education in strengthening the UK's trade relationships and global influence. The report highlights universities as critical contributors to the UK's export economy, innovation ecosystem, and international soft power, particularly across Asia-Pacific—a region central to the UK's future growth strategy.

At the heart of the report is a call for a more coordinated, cross-government approach to international education and research collaboration. The Committee urges the Government to fully recognise and harness the potential of UK universities as export drivers—through transnational education (TNE), research partnerships, spin-outs, and consultancy. It also recommends that embassies actively engage with universities as part of five-year soft power business plans, positioning them alongside the BBC World Service and British Council in advancing UK interests abroad.

The report builds on existing strategies such as the International Education Strategy and the Integrated Review, but finds that delivery has so far lacked coherence. Stakeholders including Universities UK stressed the need for stronger alignment across departments, particularly involving the FCDO, Cabinet Office, and DfE, to elevate education as a priority sector in the UK's trade offer. The Committee welcomed the creation of the new Soft Power Council as a step toward this ambition.

### Key details include:

- Recognition of higher education as a vital export sector and key element of UK soft power
- Recommendation that embassies include universities in long-term engagement strategies with Asia-Pacific nations
- Support for expanding transnational education (TNE) as a sustainable model for UK education exports
- Proposal for a cross-Whitehall dialogue, potentially via the re-established Industrial Strategy Council, to embed education and research into trade policy
- Emphasis on the role of universities in facilitating regional influence through skills, innovation, and long-term partnerships

Universities are expected to play a central role in delivering the report's recommendations, both in expanding education provision overseas and in building research-led commercial and diplomatic links across the Asia-Pacific region. This aligns with wider efforts to integrate the UK's soft power assets into its global trade and foreign policy strategy.

The report represents a significant step toward embedding higher education into the UK's global trade strategy. It reinforces the message that universities are not only engines of knowledge and skills, but also vital components of the UK's economic diplomacy—building connections, creating opportunities, and shaping global engagement for the long term.

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

## A year in metascience (2025) – Independent Report

On Monday 30 June, the UK Government's Metascience Unit—jointly supported by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)—published *A Year in Metascience (2025)*, its first annual report exploring how scientific methods can be used to improve the way research itself is funded, evaluated and organised. While the report covers a broad spectrum of reforms across the UK's research ecosystem, it highlights the unique role of universities in leading and scaling many of these innovations.

At the heart of the report is a commitment to applying rigorous, experimental approaches to longstanding challenges in research funding and assessment. The Unit trialled a range of novel methods—including Distributed Peer Review, partial randomisation in funding decisions, and new AI-powered evaluation tools—many of which were tested in partnership with higher education institutions. These reforms aim to reduce bureaucracy, improve fairness, and enhance the efficiency of UK research systems, with universities central to their delivery.

The report builds on wider agendas including the Research Bureaucracy Review, UKRI's strategic transformation, and global initiatives in research culture. It notes that universities are both key beneficiaries and drivers of metascientific reform, particularly through their role in piloting new peer review models, hosting fellowships, and enabling open data practices. Higher education stakeholders have welcomed the findings, calling for long-term investment and institutional alignment to embed these approaches across the sector.

### Key details include:

- £5 million awarded to 23 international research teams—many based in universities—to test new ways of evaluating and funding science
- Successful trials of Distributed Peer Review, with 88% of academic participants reporting improved grant-writing skills and 84% reporting broader insight into research assessment

- Launch of 18 early-career fellowships examining the impact of AI on research culture and practice, co-funded by university and international partners
- Opening of UKRI award data to academic analysis, enabling university-led insights into funding patterns and equity
- Observational studies on novel funding schemes such as Cross-Council Responsive Mode, with strong involvement from higher education institutions

Universities are expected to play a central role in expanding these innovations, both as laboratories for metascience experimentation and as long-term stewards of reform. Their engagement is critical to embedding approaches like narrative CVs, open peer review, and AI-supported assessment into standard practice. This aligns with broader ambitions to modernise the UK research landscape and enhance global competitiveness through smarter, more agile systems.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, welcomed the report, emphasising the importance of higher education in driving cultural and systemic change:

“Universities have a unique opportunity to lead by example in the reform of research. Metascience provides the tools—and the evidence—to improve how we evaluate, fund, and support great ideas. This report is a vital step in ensuring our systems work better for researchers, institutions, and society.”

While the report addresses reform across the entire research system, it reinforces the message that higher education institutions are critical engines of change. Through active participation in metascience, universities are helping to shape a more transparent, efficient, and inclusive research future for the UK and beyond.

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

## Education Not Immigration – Policy Exchange report

On Tuesday 1 July, Policy Exchange released *Education Not Immigration*, a new report highlighting how the UK’s international student regime has evolved into a pathway to long-term migration, calling urgently for reforms to refocus universities on education over settlement.

According to the report, international students have become the biggest driver of international migration to the UK. 425,000 visas were issued to international students in the last year – 43% of all non-travel visas. The numbers moving to other visas have rapidly expanded, with 40% of those on study visas in 2023 moving onto another visa within 12 months – up from 3% in 2019. 15% of all asylum claims now come from those who arrived in the UK on student visas.

Key points include:

- International students are crowding out British students, with universities such as Oxford, Southampton, Coventry and East London increasing international student places whilst cutting domestic places in real terms
- Rapid growth in international student numbers has been driven by demand for short postgraduate courses at lower tier universities. Yet the value of cross-subsidy for domestic students and research at these universities averages just £2900 per student
- Were the Government to open student loans back up to EU students as part of the proposed 'Youth Experience Scheme' this could cost the Treasury £2 billion in loan debt within 5 years
- Universities are running their own English language assessments, with 18% reporting no international student has failed their internal qualifying tests
- The report calls for the Graduate Visa route to be scrapped, for tougher English language requirements for international students, and for a flat £1000 annual International Student Levy – with students at top universities exempted

Universities UK commented: "Britain's world-leading universities are a national asset on the global stage. Every UK resident is £355 a year better off, on average, as a result of the international students universities attract. The soft power Britain gains from attracting international students is immeasurable. They help to broaden the perspectives of domestic students and the fees international students pay support the education of British students. For the UK to remain competitive the Graduate Route is essential. It allows our international graduates to gain a bit of work experience here, and competitor countries have similar visa offers. It is a time limited visa which does not lead to a permanent path to settlement."

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

## **From Research to Productivity: A Systems Analysis of UK Innovation Pathways – CaSE report**

On Wednesday 2 July, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE), alongside the British Academy, published *From Research to Productivity: A Systems Analysis of UK Innovation Pathways*, based on research by Cambridge Econometrics, offering a full-system review of how the UK turns research into economic impact. While the report spans the entire innovation ecosystem, it places universities and higher education at the centre of knowledge creation, commercialisation interlinkages, and policy alignment.

At the heart of the analysis is a systems-based framework that maps three interconnected stages: research, commercialisation, and adoption—demonstrated

across ten diverse case-study technologies, including semiconductors, AI, mRNA vaccines, quantum, and more. The report finds that the UK excels at generating knowledge but faces significant challenges in capturing value—especially during later stages of innovation. Importantly, it shows how universities act as critical nodes in these innovation pathways, connecting research outputs to market and adoption stages.

The report builds on policy frameworks like the 2023 Science & Technology Framework and the Industrial Strategy, applying its findings to both tradeable and domestic sectors. While recognising national strengths, it emphasises that interventions must be tailored to specific technologies—and that universities, alongside infrastructure, skills, and regional support, must form part of holistic innovation policy.

**Key details include:**

- A systems lens across ten technologies (e.g., agricultural gene-editing, industrial robotics, offsite construction) providing comparative insight into where UK innovation stalls
- Identification of distinct barriers to value capture—ranging from IP management to diffusion processes—varying by market structure and technology type
- Emphasis that universities support all innovation phases—from initial research to commercial spin-outs and adoption networks—requiring integrated policy support
- Evidence that successful commercialisation depends on coordinated interventions spanning R&D investment, infrastructure, transport, housing, and higher education systems
- Advocacy for government to apply tailored, not one-size-fits-all, innovation interventions, with universities acting as anchors in regional and national innovation ecosystems

Universities are expected to be core to future innovation strategies—hosting key infrastructure, facilitating spin-outs, building skills and regional capacity, and collaborating with business and government to remove bottlenecks. Their role extends well beyond research, positioning them as essential drivers of adoption and economic diffusion.

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

## Student loan forecasts, England: 2024 to 2025

On Thursday 3 July, the Department for Education released *Student Loan Forecasts for England, Financial Year 2024–25*, a statistical projection of loans issued and repayments across both higher education and further education sectors. While

covering the full student loan landscape, the report places particular emphasis on higher education borrowing trends, subsidy levels, and fiscal implications.

At the heart of the report is the projection that **£20.7 billion** in loans will be issued in 2024–25, nearly evenly divided between Plan 2 and Plan 5 full-time higher education borrowers—alongside smaller amounts for postgraduate, part-time, and further education loans. This highlights the scale of public funding routed through universities and colleges, and underpins the government’s modelling of future subsidy burdens.

The forecasts build on models from the Research Bureaucracy Review and Government financial planning tools, detailing average loan uptake, borrowing per student, repayment trajectories, and government subsidy rates (RAB charge). The section on higher education is distinct but integrated: it covers full-time and part-time undergraduates, master’s and doctoral students, alongside further education forecasts.

**Key details include:**

- Full-time undergraduates in 2024/25 are forecast to borrow on average **£15,450** annually—£8,770 in tuition and £7,770 in maintenance.
- By 2029/30, average annual borrowing is expected to rise to **£17,830**, driven by inflation-linked tuition and maintenance increases.
- Full-time undergraduates are projected to accumulate **£44,690** over their study period, rising to **£50,780** for cohorts entering in 2029/30.
- Part-time undergraduates will average **£4,590** per year, increasing to **£5,460** by 2029/30.
- The government expects to subsidise around **30–32%** of Plan 2 and Plan 5 full-time HE loans in the year, with variation across loan types and levels; subsidies for part-time HE and FE loans show similar or higher rates.

You can [read the official statistics](#).