



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

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University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Statement on the Return to Education Settings in January

On Wednesday 5 January, the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP, made a statement to the House on the return to all educational settings for children, students and staff. He said that all settings that had been invited in November to order supplies of lateral flow tests should now have received their allocation. All college and university students had been asked to test at home prior to return. Staff and students should then continue to test twice a week throughout the term.

The Education Secretary said the government continued to welcome international students to the UK and that universities were ready to support students required to quarantine on arrival. Visa concessions remain in place to allow students to study remotely until 6 April.

He confirmed that face coverings should be worn in classrooms and teaching space for school pupils in years 7 or above and university students, explaining that the evidence showed this led to a reduction in transmission. He would review this measure on 26 January.

Bridget Phillipson, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, argued the "steps the government have taken so far, with further details announced at the very last minute and in the House today, simply do not rise to the challenge we face." On testing, she noted the online unavailability of LFTs for home delivery, which would make testing twice a week difficult. She asked if the Education Secretary could provide assurance students with exams this month and later this year that they would go ahead. Finally, she pressed him on when he would be setting out the rest of the government's education recovery plan.

On testing, The Education Secretary said the Prime Minister had just announced they would be trebling the number of LFTs going out each day. On catch-up, he said some £5 billion had been pledged, and there would be six million more tutoring sessions. Finally, on exams, the Education Secretary said vocational exams scheduled to take place in January would go ahead, and that exams in summer would also go ahead.

Lilian Greenwood MP (Lab) asked the Secretary of State how university students would be able to test before return to campus with the national shortage of LFTs.

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

Adjournment Debate: Anti-Semitism and Bristol University

On Thursday 6 January, Conservative MP Christian Wakeford MP led an adjournment debate on Antisemitism at Bristol University.

He began stating that it was "profoundly troubling" to have to speak about hatred directed towards Jewish students on campus. He focused the debate on Bristol University for what he said was the "consistent disregard for the welfare of its Jewish students and, indeed, for Members of this House."

Christian Wakeford spoke in particular about Professor David Miller, who "abused his position to extol dangerous antisemitic conspiracy theories to his impressionable students". He raised how Professor Miller had spoken out on the internationally agreed definition of antisemitism. He also noted how Lord Mann - the Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism - had written to the university asking for a review of how it processed complaints; and how the university had not engaged fully with select committees.

He asked if the Minister would write to the university to find out if training was being conducted, and what quality assurance had been applied. He also asked if the Minister would meet with him, the Antisemitism Policy Trust, the CST and Union of Jewish Students, to discuss how to prevent the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill being misused.

The Minister for School Standards, Robin Walker said that the Education Secretary had previously warned that if universities failed to consider the views of Jewish students, the risk was "obvious", adding that antisemitism was "not simply a historic debate; it is a present danger and a scourge that exists, sadly, on our campuses."

The Minister said higher education providers had been urged to adopt the IHRA definition and praised the work of the CST in highlighting the problem on some campuses. He urged providers to engage with the guidance, Universities UK had produced on tackling antisemitism. .

On the case of Professor Miller at the University of Bristol, the Minister said universities were independent and autonomous organisations. The government had therefore not intervened directly, but he said that the views of Professor Miller were "ill-founded and wholly reprehensible." The Minister said they welcomed the university completing a full investigation into the conduct of Professor Miller, but they "expect that future instances there or elsewhere should be dealt with in a much swifter and more decisive manner."

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

Forthcoming business

Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill - Third Reading

On Monday 10 January, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill will receive its third reading in the House of Lords.

You can find the latest version of the Bill [here](#).

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

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions

On Tuesday 11 January at 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Kwasi Kwarteng MP and his ministerial team will answer questions from the floor of the House.

Questions have been tabled on topics including harnessing science and innovation for levelling up and support for the government's ambition to become a science superpower.

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

Home Affairs Committee Oral Evidence Session on Spiking

On Wednesday 12 Jan at 10am, the Home Affairs Committee will be holding an oral evidence session on spiking.

Witnesses listed include:

- Victims of spiking Zara Owen and Hannah Stratton
- Julie Spencer, Head of Student Wellbeing at The University of Lincoln is a witness
- Helena Conibear, Chief Executive Officer at The Alcohol Education Trust
- Dawn Dines, Chief Executive Officer at Stamp Out Spiking

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

Effectiveness of the government's education catch up and mental health recovery programmes

On Thursday 13 January, a backbench business debate will be held on the 'effectiveness of the government's education catch up and mental health recovery programmes'.

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

Written Questions

Regional distribution of private R&D investment

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to page 72 of the UK Innovation Strategy, published in July 2021, what steps his Department has taken to improve the regional distribution of private R&D investment. [94374]

George Freeman: The 2021 Spending Review set out the Government's plan to increase public R&D spending to £22 billion a year by 2026/27 and restates our target for UK economy-wide R&D investment to reach 2.4% of GDP by 2027. Private investment forms around 2/3rd of current activity, so it is only by working with innovative businesses and funders from the private sector that we will reach 2.4%. The Innovation Strategy commits to using levers such as procurement, better regulation and the identification of key technologies as a means to create the conditions for private sector investment in innovation across the country.

We want to encourage businesses to invest in local economies and communities. The Innovation Strategy also outlined our thinking on how to grow innovation clusters, and to ensure that research and innovation benefits the economy and society across the UK through both systemic and targeted measures that respond to the varying needs of places. It announced £127 million in new investment through the Strength In Places Fund. This fund has pioneered bringing together consortia of diverse local actors, including business, to develop the R&D capabilities of places across the UK to improve local economic growth. The Government is investing over £300 million in 12 major projects in nations and regions across the UK, attracting an additional £340 million of investment including from private firms.

The forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper will take a comprehensive place-based approach to economic growth and will set out more detail on how the Government will support levelling up through R&D.

Alternative plans to full association with the EU Horizon programme

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has published alternative plans to full association with the EU Horizon programme. [94370]

George Freeman: The Government has always been clear that our priority is to support the UK's research and development sector and maintain strong international collaborations and we will continue to do this in all future scenarios.

As announced in the 2021 Spending Review, in the event that the UK's association to Horizon Europe is not formalised by the EU, the funding allocated to Horizon association will go to UK government R&D programmes, including those to support international partnerships.

Access to the lifelong loan scheme for those with a degree qualification

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of access to the lifelong loan scheme for people who have a degree qualification. [93740]

Michelle Donelan: The government is introducing the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) from 2025 to support flexible learning, upskilling and retraining. The government is considering conditions of access and eligibility for study funded by the LLE and will be consulting on the detail and scope in due course. We are also working closely with representatives from across the education sector, as well as key delivery bodies to scope and design the necessary system changes.

In November, the Government announced a guarantee to provide a financial safety net for successful UK applicants to Horizon Europe, while the government continues to push to formalise our association as soon as possible. At the same time, I published an open letter to the R&D sector setting out the UK's commitment to association, but also our priorities for supporting the sector in a scenario where association proves not possible. These build on the UK Research and Development Roadmap, which sets out a solid foundation for our plans in different scenarios.

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential (a) financial and (b) administrative effect of the lifelong loan entitlement on higher education providers. [93739]

Michelle Donelan: The Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) will be introduced from 2025, providing individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime. It will be available for both modules and full years of study at higher technical and degree levels (levels 4 to 6), regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or universities. The government intends that the LLE will create new opportunities for providers to offer more flexible learning pathways for students and develop new business models.

The impact assessment published alongside the Skills and Post-18 Education Bill included a significant section on the LLE. This was produced as part of an ongoing process, assessing and carefully considering the possible effects of the LLE and how best to deliver it.

We are also actively speaking with higher education and further education providers, including considering the operational implications on their administrative and financial structures. We will continue to engage to understand provider needs as we build towards introduction from 2025.

There is also potential for income gain through new learners entering the system. Although the tuition fee income gains from new learners may be more modest given the shorter duration of courses, large enough numbers could result in a net benefit to higher education and further education providers on average.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will consult (a) Universities UK, (b) the University and College and Union, (c) National Union of Students and (d) other relevant stakeholders when preparing the guidance to support the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill. [93016]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) will publish guidance to support the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, following completion of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that they will consult widely, including with sector representatives and student bodies, as appropriate in due course.

Guidance for higher education providers in England and students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers in England on the strengthened and additional duties imposed by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be published by the OfS.

The OfS is accountable to the Department for Education and to Parliament. They can also be asked to appear in front of the Education Select Committee.

The Department for Education published an Impact Assessment on 12 May 2021. This sets out the expected costs and benefits of the Bill, including the office of the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom. This is publicly available here: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862/publications>

Data on the number of events cancelled on higher education campuses since the introduction of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill to Parliament is not available. According to Prevent monitoring data, 0.24% of events were cancelled during academic year 2018/19, not necessarily due to freedom of speech concerns. This Bill is not only about event cancellations – it will underpin a culture change across campuses where students, staff and visiting speakers feel able to express lawful views without fear of negative repercussions.

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate his Department has made of the total cost of the delivery of the functions of the office of the Director of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom proposed in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill 2021. [93017]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) will publish guidance to support the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, following completion of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that they will consult widely, including with sector representatives and student bodies, as appropriate in due course.

Guidance for higher education providers in England and students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers in England on the strengthened and additional duties imposed by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be published by the OfS.

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Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has collected data on the number of events cancelled on higher education campuses since the introduction of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill to Parliament. [93018]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) will publish guidance to support the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, following completion of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that they will consult widely, including with sector representatives and student bodies, as appropriate in due course.

Guidance for higher education providers in England and students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers in England on the strengthened and additional duties imposed by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be published by the OfS.

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Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when his Department plans to publish the guidance accompanying the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill. [93019]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) will publish guidance to support the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, following completion of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that they will consult widely, including with sector representatives and student bodies, as appropriate in due course.

Guidance for higher education providers in England and students' unions of Approved (fee cap) providers in England on the strengthened and additional duties imposed by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be published by the OfS.

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Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to ensure that the guidance accompanying the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. [93020]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) will publish guidance to support the new regulatory framework and complaints scheme, following completion of the Bill's passage. I anticipate that they will consult widely, including with sector representatives and student bodies, as appropriate in due course.

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Innovation UK grants

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if he will provide details of Innovate UK's grants, broken down by (a) amount, (b) recipient type, including company size bands, academia, research organisation, (c) model, including collaborative or single company, and (d) support level. [94359]

George Freeman: Details of Innovate UK grants are published on their website and can be viewed [here](#).

Funding to protect the higher education system against increasing inflation

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the funding of the higher education system is protected against increasing inflation. [93855]

Michelle Donelan: The government is committed to a sustainable funding model for higher education (HE) that supports high-quality provision, meets the skills needs of the country and maintains the world-class reputation of our HE sector, while sharing its costs fairly between graduates and the general taxpayer.

Tuition fee levels must ensure that universities continue to be properly funded, while representing value for money for students and taxpayers, not all of whom will have wanted to go to university.

Maximum tuition fees for standard full-time courses will remain at £9,250 for the 2022/23 academic year. This will be the fifth year in succession that maximum fees have been frozen, providing better value for students and keeping the cost of HE under control.

Since 2012, total income for universities in England has increased by around £7.4 billion in real terms. Income from tuition fees is augmented by the Strategic Priorities Grant, which is paid directly to providers, and totals £1.4 billion in academic year 2021/22. On 19 January 2021, the former Secretary of State for Education wrote to the Office for Students (OfS), setting out his priorities for reform of the Strategic Priorities Grant for the 21/22 academic year. These reforms include the reallocation of high-cost subject funding, towards the provision of high-cost subjects that support the NHS and wider healthcare policy, high-cost STEM subjects, and subjects meeting specific labour market needs. As a result, the total funding for high-cost subjects, such as medicine, engineering and other high-cost subjects, is 12% (£81 million) higher in the 2021/22 academic year compared to 2020/21.

Students from the lowest income families have access to the largest ever amounts of living costs support in cash terms. Maximum grants and loans for living costs, which are a contribution towards a student's living costs while attending a university, have been increased by 3.1% for the current 2021/22 academic year, with a further 2.3% increase announced for 2022/23. Annual increases in maintenance support from government are based on inflation forecasts for the first quarter of the calendar year after the start of the academic year (using the All Items Retail Prices Index less mortgage interest payments (RPI-X) measure) provided by the Office for Budget Responsibility .

Effect of rising inflation on the funding of higher education since fee cap

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the potential effect of rising inflation on the funding of the higher education system since student fees were capped at £9250. [93856]

Michelle Donelan: The government is committed to a sustainable funding model for higher education (HE) that supports high-quality provision, meets the skills needs of the country and maintains the world-class reputation of our HE sector, while sharing its costs fairly between graduates and the general taxpayer.

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Purchasing power of the maximum amount of undergraduate maintenance loan

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the purchasing power of the maximum amount of undergraduate maintenance loan. [93859]

Michelle Donelan: The government is committed to a sustainable funding model for higher education (HE) that supports high-quality provision, meets the skills needs of the country and maintains the world-class reputation of our HE sector, while sharing its costs fairly between graduates and the general taxpayer.

Tuition fee levels must ensure that universities continue to be properly funded, while representing value for money for students and taxpayers, not all of whom will have wanted to go to university .

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Innovation strategy

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Innovation Strategy, what steps has his Department taken to facilitate interactions between businesses and (a) UK Research and Innovation and (b) other public bodies.[94372]

George Freeman: In the development of the Innovation Strategy, the Department worked across Government, engaging at both Ministerial and official level and with over 400 businesses and organisations across the whole of the UK.

The Innovation Expert Group, which was announced as part of the R&D Roadmap in 2020, featured representatives from innovative UK businesses and business-focused trade bodies. It played a key role in supporting the development of the UK Innovation Strategy by facilitating conversations between officials from across Whitehall and a broad spectrum of UK businesses. The discussions generated continue to help us to refine government's innovation policy thinking.

Since the Innovation Strategy was published, the Department has continued a high level of engagement with businesses.

In addition, in early 2022 and as announced in the Innovation Strategy, we will establish the Business Innovation Forum with representatives from the UK's largest R&D intensive businesses, UK startups and scaleups, and experts in the funding and commercialisation of innovation. The forum will galvanise action from the business community and provide an opportunity for officials from UKRI and other public bodies to interact with key innovation stakeholders in addition to the interaction they already undertake with industry.

The Department will also continue to facilitate bilateral conversations with UK businesses on innovation policy this year.

Proportion of students who transfer between higher education institutions

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the proportion of higher education students who transfer between higher education institutions in any

given year; and what assessment he has made of the socio-economic backgrounds of those students. [93871]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students published experimental statistics on student transfers on 30 November 2021, available here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-transfers/>.

The statistics show that 2.9% of students who entered the first year of a full-time first degree in England in the 2018/19 academic year had transferred to a different provider one year after entry.

The statistics are disaggregated by student characteristics, including two measures of disadvantage. These show that:

3.4% of students from Participation of Local Areas (POLAR4) [1] quintile 1 (lowest higher education participation) backgrounds had transferred to a different provider one year after entry, compared to 3.0% for those from quintile 5 (highest higher education participation).

3.8% of students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[2] quintile 1 (most deprived) backgrounds had transferred to a different provider one year after entry, compared to 2.5% for those from quintile 5 (least deprived).

[1] POLAR4 is a measure of how likely young people are to participate in higher education .

[2] IMD measures relative deprivation in small areas through factors such as income, employment, education and health.

Student visas for distance learning

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans her Department has in place to extend the concession that enables universities to sponsor students' visas for distance learning due to expire in April 2022.

Kevin Foster: Throughout the pandemic, the Government have introduced a number of concessions to support international students and their sponsors. International students are permitted to start a course from overseas through distance learning without a visa. These concessions are kept under regular review.

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans the Government has to extend the concession that allows universities to sponsor a student 's visa for distance learning, which is due to expire in April 2022.

Kevin Foster: Throughout the pandemic, the Government have introduced several concessions to support international students and their sponsors. International students are permitted to start a course from overseas through distance learning without a visa.

These concessions are kept under regular review.

Lifelong loan entitlement subsuming Student Loan Company processes

Mr Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential effect of the lifelong loan entitlement subsuming the Student Loans Company processes on current account holders with that company.

Michelle Donelan: Officials in the Department for Education are working closely and collaboratively with colleagues in the Student Loans Company (SLC) on the introduction of Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025.

The SLC is undertaking significant reform through its Evolve transformational programme which will provide a more efficient and user-friendly service. We are working closely with representatives from across the education sector, as well as key delivery bodies such as the SLC, to scope and design the necessary system changes to ensure it is ready to deliver the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). As flagged in the Skills Bill Impact Assessment, this includes using SLC data, such as monitoring metrics about the kind and rate of uptake for new student finance products, to centre users in our LLE design plans.

SLC has a successful history of delivering policy changes for Ministers and stakeholders. Changes of any scale are only implemented after considerable planning and testing to ensure that SLC 's systems possess the required robustness and resilience to ensure successful introduction.

We are committed to delivering at pace in order to introduce the LLE from 2025 and aware that delivering our vision will require extensive changes to the student finance system and the types of courses available. The legislation and regulation process may be complex, and must be informed by consultation, including detailed implementation work with the SLC.

The Evolve programme, and SLC 's ongoing transformation programme, will stabilise SLC 's existing technology base and IT infrastructure, which will enable the digitisation of the customer journey and remove existing manual processes. This will support the introduction of future system changes such as those which are required to deliver LLE.

Mr Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the (a) likelihood and (b) potential effect of lifelong loan entitlement subsuming the Student Loans company.

Michelle Donelan: Officials in the Department for Education are working closely and collaboratively with colleagues in the Student Loans Company (SLC) on the introduction of Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025.

The SLC is undertaking significant reform through its Evolve transformational programme which will provide a more efficient and user-friendly service. We are working closely with representatives from across the education sector, as well as key delivery bodies such as the SLC, to scope and design the necessary system changes to ensure it is ready to deliver the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). As flagged in the Skills Bill Impact Assessment, this includes using SLC data, such as monitoring metrics about the kind and rate of uptake for new student finance products, to centre users in our LLE design plans.

SLC has a successful history of delivering policy changes for Ministers and stakeholders. Changes of any scale are only implemented after considerable planning and testing to ensure that SLC 's systems possess the required robustness and resilience to ensure successful introduction.

We are committed to delivering at pace in order to introduce the LLE from 2025 and aware that delivering our vision will require extensive changes to the student finance system and the types of courses available. The legislation and regulation process may be complex, and must be informed by consultation, including detailed implementation work with the SLC .

The Evolve programme, and SLC 's ongoing transformation programme, will stabilise SLC 's existing technology base and IT infrastructure, which will enable the digitisation of the customer journey and remove existing manual processes. This will support the introduction of future system changes such as those which are required to deliver LLE.

Test and trace support payment for students

Catherine West: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment to students. [92999]

Maggie Throup: Students are eligible for the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment provided they meet the eligibility criteria for the main scheme or the discretionary scheme (which is set by local authorities).

Level of financial reserves for UK universities

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the level of financial reserves for UK universities and other Higher Education institutions between 1 March 2020 and 31 December 2021. [94340]

Michelle Donelan: The Office for Students (OfS) are responsible for monitoring provider financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England.

I and my officials work closely with the OfS and various parties including a variety of universities across the sector, mission groups and other government departments to understand the ongoing impacts and changing landscape of financial sustainability in the sector.

In December 2021 the OfS published the 'English higher education 2021: The Office for Students annual review report' which shows that despite the many operational and financial challenges arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, the overall financial position of universities, colleges and other providers registered with the OfS across the higher education sector has remained sound over the course of the last year, with generally reasonable financial resilience.

Providers were able to manage COVID-19 impacts better than originally expected, with student numbers holding up, and through careful management of cash and costs. Government support measures have served to help universities navigate those challenges.

The OfS continuously monitors provider financial sustainability, engaging more closely with those where it considers there to be increased financial risk.

Universities are autonomous businesses and continue to remain responsible for the decisions they make in regard to their business model and sustainability.

Replacement funding from the European Regional Development Fund

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent discussions his Department has had with relevant stakeholders on the replacement funding for the R&D funding from the European Regional Development Fund. [94375]

George Freeman: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a domestic successor to the EU Structural Fund programme, worth over £2.6 billion. The UKSPF will help people access opportunity in places in need, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities, and for people in disadvantaged groups across the UK.

The Government values the insights of stakeholders from different sectors and areas across the UK, which supports the development and delivery of the fund. Since the publication of the UKSPF Heads of Terms at Spending Review 2020, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

(DLUHC) officials have engaged widely on the UKSPF and DLUHC will continue to engage stakeholders as the fund is developed.

Furthermore, the Government's Innovation Strategy, published in July, outlines our emerging thinking on how to ensure that research and innovation benefits the economy and society across the UK as part of Government's objectives to level up the UK economy. The 2021 Spending Review sees record levels of investment in the UK's world-leading research base. Government investment in research and development (R&D) will increase by £5 billion to £20 billion p.a. by 2024-25. This will not only allow the UK to build on our core strengths, but will also provide opportunities to grow research and innovation across the entire country.

The forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper will also play a critical role in setting out how R&D together with skills, infrastructure, business support and regeneration can improve living standards, grow the private sector, and increase and spread opportunity across the UK.

Student loan eligibility

Duncan Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the evidential basis is to set the eligibility for student loans below 60 years old for students undertaking a master's degree; and what assessment he has made of the effect of setting the eligibility of student loans for master's degrees above 60 on (a) older people seeking to pursue their further education and (b) those retraining later in their careers. [92098]

Michelle Donelan: In settling on the current postgraduate master's loan eligibility criteria, the department consulted widely on the proposed terms of the new loan and considered its duty under the Equality Act 2010.

The upper age limit of 60 years old was put in place to ensure that the overall scheme remains affordable to the taxpayer and offers value for money. The age limit is also designed to restrict eligibility to those statistically most likely to continue in long-term employment and be able to repay the loan.

The department is closely monitoring take up of the loan and the response by students, the sector and employers. However, at present there are no plans to amend the loan eligibility criteria.

Items of guidance for vice chancellors and principals

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many items of guidance have been issued by his Department to vice chancellors and principals of higher education institutions, excluding such guidance as relates only to particular individual institutions, in each of the last 36 months. [92900]

Michelle Donelan: A database of publications by category can be found [here](#). This database can be interrogated to identify specific guidance aimed at specific audiences, including higher education providers.

The database contains guidance which may have been updated on multiple for instance, the guidance document 'Higher education COVID-19 operational guidance' has been updated 38 times since it was first published in June 2020. It is available [here](#).

Each document will include a published date, last updated date and option to show all updates [here](#).

Annual investment in mathematical sciences

Lord Birt: To ask Her Majesty's Government (1) what percentage of the annual investment in the mathematical sciences has been in pure mathematics and not invested in mathematics defined as maths of the "physical and material universe" in the past five years; and (2) what percentage of such annual investment is planned for future expenditure. [HL4930]

Lord Callanan: The UK is a world leader in Mathematics. British mathematicians publish a large volume of highly regarded work. When compared to international colleagues, British mathematicians have the 5th largest share of publications in the world. When looking at the top 1% of most cited publications, UK mathematicians are responsible for the third largest share.

Between Financial Year 2015-2016 and September 2021, UK Research and Innovation 's (UKRI) council the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) committed £259.9m to research grants Mathematical Sciences. This includes commitment from the Additional Funding Programme. At this time, EPSRC are unable to make a direct comparison between specific types of Mathematics.

Following the Government's announcement in January 2020 to invest additional funding into Mathematical Sciences, UKRI has awarded around £104 million of additional funding to the discipline, over and above EPSRC 's core Mathematical Sciences Theme budget. The additional funding has covered institutes, small and large research grants, fellowships, doctoral studentships and postdoctoral awards.

On the 27 October 2021, the Government announced the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. BEIS and UKRI will now set out how we meet the commitment to invest additional funding into Mathematical sciences in forthcoming years, as part of the allocations process.

Sector News

Updated Covid-19 Operational Guidance for Higher Education Providers

On Sunday 2 January, the Department of Education updated the Covid-19 operational guidance for higher education providers to include the use of face coverings in teaching settings.

The guidance recommends that from 4th January face coverings should also be worn in teaching settings, for example in workshops, laboratories, offices, libraries, teaching rooms and lecture halls.

You can find the guidance [here](#).

Science Minister Shares Priorities for 2022

On Tuesday 4 January, Science Minister George Freeman published 15 "core missions" and priorities for the year ahead.

- Horizon Europe
- Research Ecosystem
- ARIA
- National Science & Technology Council
- Research and development funding
- Regulation
- Science and innovation supporting levelling up
- UK Quantum Computing Technology and Industrial Strategy
- 2021 Life Sciences Vision
- UK innovation strategy

- UK space strategy
- Global Britain Science Fellowships & Partnerships
- Research security
- Patient Capital & Scale-Up capital reviews
- R&D People and Culture Strategy

You can find further details of the priorities [here](#).

Written Ministerial Statement on Skills Update

On Wednesday 5 January, the Department for Education published a written ministerial statement providing a skills update on details announced in December.

The statement provided information on the T Level capital fund, new short courses available from September 2022, OfS awards to further and higher education providers for projects to modernise facilities, and the conclusion of Wave 2 competition for new Institutes of Technology (IoTs), which create nine new Institutes.

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

Government Publishes Review of Masks in Classrooms

On Thursday 6 January, the Department for Education published the summary of the review into the use of face coverings in education settings.

The summary sets out the evidence informing the government's decision to revisit the guidance on the use of face coverings within secondary schools and colleges in England – temporarily extending their recommended use in communal areas to also include classrooms and teaching spaces for those in year 7 and above.

The review also looks at the social impact and perceptions, finding that pupils and staff are mostly in favour of mask-wearing as a key safety measure. However, it acknowledges that masks can make communication difficult for all, especially those who lip-read and that the communication restrictions for younger children (as well as the difficulties with ensuring they're wearing the covering correctly) make the situation more stressful for some.

It also acknowledges the use of face coverings could harm learning, and that the majority of staff and students feel they make communication more difficult.

You can view the full review [here](#).