



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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[Click on the items in the Table of Contents to go straight to the debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.](#)

Parliamentary Business	3
Education Oral Questions:	3
National Security Bill at Public Bill Committee:	3
Forthcoming business.....	4
Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions	4
Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Commons Committee Stage	4
National Security Bill at Commons Committee Stage	4
Education Select Committee oral evidence session: the future of post-16 qualifications:	4
Women and Equalities Oral Questions:.....	5
Written Questions	5
16-19 Bursary Fund: Apprentices.....	5
Scientists: UK Relations with EU.....	5
Horizon Europe	6
Research Finance.....	6
Business and Management: Higher Education.....	6
Nurses: Training.....	7
Further Education: Coronavirus and Ventilation	7
English Language: Education.....	8
Students: Mental Health Services	8
Overseas Students: Fees and Charges	9
Technology: Education.....	9
Arts: Higher Education	10
Overseas Students: Employment.....	11
Overseas Students: Ukraine	11
Universities: Greater London.....	11
Students: Loans.....	12
University of Gibraltar: British Students Abroad.....	12
Medicine: Higher Education	12
Universities: Admissions	13
Higher Education: Admissions	13
Higher Education: Student Numbers.....	14
Higher Education: Disadvantaged.....	14
Electronic Publishing: Competition.....	15
Sector News.....	15
Turing Scheme press release	15
Government response to spiking report	15
English universities pledge to reverse pandemic grade inflation.....	15

National Student Survey 2022 results: 16

Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP announced as new Secretary of State for Education..... 16

Parliamentary Business

Education Oral Questions:

On Monday 4 July at 11:30am, the then Secretary of State for Education, Rt. Hon. Nadhim Zahawi MP and his ministerial team answered questions in the House of Commons.

Barry Sheerman MP (Lab) argued that to deliver on the levelling up agenda there must be partnerships with universities and local communities. He asked the minister whether it disturbed him that some universities were fixated on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects (STEM), at the expense of humanities. Nadhim Zahawi agreed that universities were central to the success of levelling up. He noted the work that the Open University had achieved and the collaboration between Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE).

Matt Western MP, Shadow Minister for Universities, referenced recent reports on the alarming number of students accessing mental health services. He asked what steps the minister was taking to tackle the mental health crisis on campuses. The then Minister for Higher and Further Education, Rt. Hon. Michelle Donelan MP, reaffirmed that mental health was placed at the top of the government agenda and referenced partnerships between government and universities to deliver services.

Carol Monaghan MP, SNP Education spokesperson, cited that the number of graduates that owed more than £100,000 in student loans increased by 3000% in a single year and called for this to be urgently addressed. Michelle Donelan outlined her intention for a fair system that meant no student paid back more in real terms than they borrowed.

Abena Oppong-Asare MP (Lab) expressed concern that many students were denied access to student finance because of “unnecessary and unfair” residency rules and urged the minister to reconsider such rules. Michelle Donelan reaffirmed the principles of fairness currently in the system and agreed to meet with Abena Oppong-Asare to discuss the issue further.

Dr Julian Lewis MP (Con) asked whether the minister shared his concern about donations from communist countries (China and Vietnam) to universities and their constituent colleges. He asked the minister whether a taskforce should be established to examine the problem and make recommendations. Michelle Donelan cited the additional clause to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill that increased the transparency of donations to institutions.

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

National Security Bill at Public Bill Committee:

On Thursday 7 July, a Public Bill Committee in the House of Commons heard oral evidence on the National Security Bill from 11 witnesses over two sessions.

Answering a question on the current nature of hostile threats to the UK, Director of Communications at the Henry Jackson Society, Sam Armstrong, said that Confucius Institutes at UK universities were a branch of the Chinese state, and employees were ‘double hatting’ as academics and as spies. Sam Armstrong commended the government for its efforts thus far but suggested that the UK could follow Australia’s lead in allowing central government to terminate relationships with public authorities that had connections with hostile foreign states.

Holly Lynch MP (Lab) asked about the particular threat from China. In response, Sam Armstrong said there were “huge problems in academia” and cited leaks that suggested China was targeting UK academics, universities, and open research. He added that he believed that there were researchers in the UK “working with branches of the Chinese navy” to develop devices to track nuclear submarines around the world and that there were grievous concerns about these types of cases.

Professor of Practice in the Management of Public Organisations at the University of Oxford, Professor Ciaran Martin, was also asked about his view of Confucius Institutes. He reflected on his experience in academia and agreed that higher education was clearly a “target sector” for hostile foreign powers, including China. He added that he did not know whether the Bill would provide sufficient legislative framework to deter some of these actions, however, there were clauses in the Bill that covered foreign intelligence activity, which would include the academic sector.

Anthony Higginbottom MP (Con) asked whether the higher education sector would welcome the Bill providing more clarity on the legal position for such activities. In response, Professor Martin said that his ideal view would be that government provided clear frameworks, laws, and guidance to universities without infringing on academic freedom and noted that it was not fair to rely on universities to police this activity. He explained that it was extremely difficult in open and collaborative research environments like universities to be able to identify what is malevolent activity and subsequently know where to go and know what the relevant laws were. Professor Martin concluded by saying that a combination of a clear legal framework and guidance to universities, for those involved in particularly sensitive areas like technological research, would be “absolutely welcome”.

On digital security, Holly Lynch asked whether the Bill went far enough to protect institutions from hostile state activity. Former Director of GCHQ, Professor Sir David Omand, replied “probably not” but added that it was important to balance the legislation against the risk. He also said that where a foreign power was taking “covert acts” and “dirty tricks” to access institutions, including universities, that would be criminalised by the Bill.

You can watch the first session [here](#) and read the transcript [here](#). You can watch the second session [here](#) and read the transcript [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Oral Questions

On Tuesday 12 July at 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Rt. Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng MP, and his ministerial team will answer questions in the House of Commons.

This will include a question from Henry Smith MP (Con) about levels of spending on research and development (R&D).

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

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Commons Committee Stage

On Tuesday 12 July from 9:25am and Thursday 14 July from 11:30am, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will continue its line-by-line scrutiny by Public Bill Committee.

You can watch the Tuesday 12 July session [here](#) and the Thursday 14 July session [here](#). The latest list of amendments can be found [here](#).

National Security Bill at Commons Committee Stage

On Tuesday 12 July from 9:25am and Thursday 14 July from 11:30am, the National Security Bill will continue its line-by-line scrutiny by Public Bill Committee.

You can watch the Tuesday 12 July session [here](#) and the Thursday 14 July session [here](#). The latest list of amendments can be found [here](#).

Education Select Committee oral evidence session: the future of post-16 qualifications:

On Tuesday 12 July from 10:00am, the Education Select Committee will hold an oral evidence session inviting witnesses to discuss the future of post-16 qualifications.

Witnesses:

- Kirsti Lord (Deputy Chief Executive at Association of Colleges)
- David Gallagher (Chief Executive at NCFE)
- Mrs Ruth Perry (Representative at Special Educational Consortium and Senior Policy Manager at Natspec)
- Tom Bewick (CEO at Federation of Awarding Bodies)
- Suzanne Straw (Research Director at National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER))

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

Women and Equalities Oral Questions:

On Wednesday 13 July at 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and Minister for Equalities, Rt. Hon. Liz Truss MP and her ministerial team will answer questions in the House of Commons.

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

Written Questions

16-19 Bursary Fund: Apprentices

Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to extend the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund to apprentices [UIN HL 1217].

Baroness Barran: The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund targets support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who need help with the costs of staying in post-16 education and training. The department has no plans to extend the qualifying criteria to include apprentices, because they are employed and in receipt of a wage. Apprenticeships are paid jobs allowing people to earn while they learn, gaining the necessary knowledge and skills needed to progress, or start an exciting career in a variety of industries. The department continues to provide £1,000 to both employers and providers when they take on 16- to 18-year-old apprentices and 19- to 24-year-old apprentices with an education, health, and care plan. To support apprentices with living costs, employers may offer work benefits such as travel loans, or company equipment such as a phone or a car and in some cases offer relocation allowance. The department recognises that young care-experienced apprentices, usually living independently, are more likely to struggle with living costs while on an apprenticeship. For this reason, in 2018 the department introduced a £1,000 bursary for care leavers on apprenticeships.

Scientists: UK Relations with EU

Baroness Randerson: To ask Her Majesty's Government, (1) what assessment they have made of the number of UK-based scientists who may have grant offers from the European Research Council withdrawn if there are no UK– EU agreements on Horizon Europe, Copernicus and Euratom, and (2) how many UK-based scientists have already relocated to the EU [UIN HL 1359].

Lord Callanan: The UK remains committed and is taking unprecedented steps to support association to Horizon Europe. This includes setting out a guarantee to fund eligible, successful UK applicants to Horizon Europe whose grants are expected to be signed by December 2022. This will ensure that important individual and collaborative projects can go ahead as planned regardless of the status of our association to Horizon Europe.

The guarantee means that eligible successful applicants will receive the full value of their funding at a UK host institution or in their consortia, and do not need to leave the UK. UKRI onboarding remains

open, and so we encourage all eligible successful UK applicants to take up their guaranteed grant with UKRI.

Horizon Europe

Matt Vickers: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, what recent progress he has made on formalising the UK's association with Horizon Europe. [UIN 26912]

George Freeman: The UK stands ready to formalise our association to EU programmes at the earliest opportunity. However, the EU 's delays to the UK's association are putting long term science collaboration at risk.

We are urging the Commission to finalise the UK's participation in Horizon as soon as possible. My rt. hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have raised the ongoing delays with our counterparts in Europe, including Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden. The UK also discussed association and the delays at the EU -UK Specialised Committee in December 2021.

Supporting the UK's research and development sector through this period of uncertainty remains our top priority. In order to provide reassurance, the UK Government has guaranteed funding for the first and second waves of eligible successful applicants to Horizon Europe. And if the UK is unable to associate to Horizon Europe, we will be ready to introduce a comprehensive alternative programme of international science, research, and innovation collaborations.

Research Finance

Matt Vickers: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps his Department is taking to increase R&D spending in the UK. [UIN 26911]

George Freeman: The Government is providing the fastest ever sustained uplift in R&D funding, reaching £20 billion per annum by the end of the SR period – £5 billion more than 2021/22 with HM Treasury committed to £22bn in 2026/7 as part of our commitment to the target of UK economy-wide R&D investment reaching 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

In order to achieve 2.4% by 2027, we are mapping out the current private and public R&D investment by sector and modelling options for securing the necessary private sector investment, using a combination of policy tools across the R&D ecosystem – from innovation accelerators to the catapults, catalyst funds, and a range of fiscal incentives including R&D tax credits, the patient capital review, scale up capital taskforce, pension fund reforms and post-Brexit regulatory reform.

Business and Management: Higher Education

Lord Triesman: To ask Her Majesty's Government which eight universities are under investigation by the Office for Students because of reported shortcomings in their Business and Management Studies provision; and what assessment they have made of the timing of the investigations, given that applicants for such courses for the next academic year will need to make their decisions soon. [UIN HL1176]

Baroness Barran: The department is clear that driving up quality in higher education (HE) in England remains one of our highest priorities. This includes tackling the unacceptable pockets of poor-quality provision and taking regulatory action where appropriate.

The department has encouraged the Office for Students (OfS) to implement a visible and effective inspections regime where the OfS has concerns about the quality of provision. This will involve on-site inspections. The OfS announced its first wave of onsite inspections on 26 May, which will look specifically at business and management courses provided by eight higher education providers (HEPs). These will also examine whether poor-quality online learning has replaced face-to-face teaching to the detriment of students' academic experience.

Through section 33 of the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, the government has amended the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to make express provision for the OfS to publish notices, decisions or reports given or made in the performance of its functions, including whether a HEP is

under investigation. This new legislation sets out the factors that the OfS must consider when deciding whether to publish. The OfS recently consulted the sector on this and is now considering responses before it makes use of these provisions.

As the independent regulator of HE in England, responsibility for initiating investigations and deciding whether, and when, it announces them, or the names of the providers being investigated, is a matter for the OfS. The OfS is required to consider the implications for students planning their higher education this autumn.

Nurses: Training

Lord Lilley: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether universities in England face any financial or other restrictions on the number of nurses they may accept for training; and if so, what are the restrictions. [UIN HL1160]

Baroness Barran: The government does not impose a cap on nurse training places. Higher Education Providers (HEPs) make decisions on their intakes, and these are based on demand from suitable candidates and the ability of education and healthcare systems to provide the necessary capacity (both academic and practise). HEPs receive funding to support the delivery of these courses from student fees, as well as additional support from the Strategic Priorities Grant.

We have committed to deliver 50,000 more nurses into the NHS by the end of this Parliament. We will achieve this through a combination of investing in and diversifying our training pipeline and recruiting and retaining more nurses in the NHS.

Since September 2020, all eligible nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students have received a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year. Additional funding is also available for studying certain courses, for example mental health and learning disabilities nursing, with further financial support available to students for childcare, accommodation costs and travel costs.

This support package comes in addition to maintenance and tuition fee loans provided by the Student Loans Company. It enables healthcare students to focus on their studies and placements and helps alleviate financial pressures which students might be facing.

Health Education England (HEE) has invested £55 million in expanding clinical placements, including simulated learning capacity. This funding is being provided in addition to £180 million, spent each year by HEE on placements for around 120,000 nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students.

Further Education: Coronavirus and Ventilation

Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to issue guidance to further education colleges on making adjustments and improvements to premises used for teaching and other purposes to (a) improve ventilation and (b) reduce the risk of covid-19 transmission. [UIN 26767]

Alex Burghart: We have provided CO2 monitors to state-funded education settings, including early years, schools, and further education providers, backed by £25 million in government funding.

The monitors enable staff to identify areas where ventilation needs to be improved and provide reassurance that existing ventilation measures are working, helping balance the need for good ventilation with keeping rooms warm.

The law says employers, including education and childcare settings, must make sure there is an adequate supply of fresh air (ventilation) in enclosed areas of the workplace. This has not changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Health and Safety Executive provides more information on this at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/ventilation/>.

From 1 April 2022 the government has withdrawn most pieces of specific COVID-19 guidance for education and childcare settings, although public health and emergency planning guidance for education and childcare settings is still available.

If settings suspect an outbreak of respiratory infection, which could include COVID-19, they should review and reinforce the baseline infection prevention and control measures they already have in place.

English Language: Education

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help UK (a) universities and (b) colleges provide free English language tuition to Ukrainian refugees. [UIN 22475]

Michelle Donelan: Ukrainians aged 19 and over and their family members settled under the Home Office Ukraine schemes in the UK can access training to gain the skills they need to move on with their lives. This includes immediate eligibility for provision funded through the Adult Education Budget, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and level 3 free courses for jobs offer.

Ukrainians aged 19 and above will be able to access adult education, including ESOL, by contacting their local authority or further education college directly. The college will be able to confirm what courses are available and when.

Additionally, the Open University has published a range of helpful resources for Ukrainian nationals arriving in the UK to learn English. More information can be found at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/supporting-ukrainians> (opens in a new tab).

The Office for Students has been delivering up to £4 million of additional support, as instructed by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, to higher education (HE) providers in England to assist students from Ukraine whose financial means have been impacted by events in Ukraine.

The department is also working in close partnership with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education to facilitate entrance exams for Ukrainian nationals arriving in the UK who wish to continue their HE education in Ukrainian at their Ukrainian universities, remotely.

Ukrainians aged 16 to 19 living in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme, and under Homes for Ukraine scheme are eligible to enrol as a student in a 16-19 provider, including colleges. Providers may ask to see evidence of their eligibility. 16-19 study programmes can include ESOL courses or other English tuition, depending on the needs of the individual student.

Students: Mental Health Services

Cherilyn Mackrory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing additional mental health support for university students on placement years. [UIN 22535]

Michelle Donelan: Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous bodies, independent from government, and have a responsibility to ensure students are well supported during their studies, so they can fully participate in their university experience and achieve outcomes to progress to quality employment. HE providers are not only experts in their student population, but are also best placed to identify the needs of their students, including students undertaking placements as part of their studies.

The mental health and wellbeing of young people is a priority for the government. We continue to work closely with the higher education (HE) sector to promote and fund effective practice. Through strategic guidance to the Office for Students (OfS), we asked that it distributes £15 million of funding in FY the 2022/23 financial year to give additional support for transitions from school/college to university, and through targeting funding to support partnership working with NHS services to provide pathways of care for students. The OfS funded Student Space, which provides a dedicated online platform for students providing vital mental health and wellbeing, and resources and is leading work to establish and share 'what works' across the sector.

The University Mental Health Charter, led by Student Minds and backed by the government, brings together universities to drive up standards of practice in mental health provision across the HE sector. The Charter identifies support for students on placements as a principle of good practice, encouraging HE providers to ensure targeted support for students on placement and on professional programmes,

who may require more in-depth preparation and specific interventions. I have made clear my ambition for all HE providers to sign up to the Charter programme within 5 years.

Preventing suicide and self-harm in our student population continues to be a key concern, including through supporting the suicide safer universities framework led by Universities UK (UUK) and Papyrus. UUK have worked with stakeholders to develop a checklist which ensures better coordination of support between HE providers and placement providers, including mental health quality assurance of placements. This is due to be published in late July.

The OfS will allocate up to £3 million of funding towards developing stronger partnership working with NHS services. Alongside my hon Friend, the member for Chichester, I chaired a summit in June to launch this work and ensure that the department and the Department of Health and Social Care work together to achieve this common goal.

Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Ms Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made of the number of overseas university students resident in the UK who have not paid full fees in each of the last three years; what recent assessment he has made of the impact of non-payment of full fees due to the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on (a) university finances, (b) overseas students being unable to complete their courses and (c) overseas students losing their migration status; and what recent steps he has taken to support overseas university students whose difficulty paying fees is related to the covid-19 pandemic. [UIN 24567]

Alex Burghart: The setting and payment of fees is a matter for universities as autonomous institutions and therefore, the department does not hold data on the exact number of international students in the UK who have not paid full fees in each of the last three years.

The Office for Students (OfS) collects and analyses financial data from higher education (HE) providers in England to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector. We work closely with the OfS and recognise that although there is variation in the performance and strengths of individual institutions the overall financial position of the HE sector remains sound.

Where the OfS identifies concerns about the financial viability of an HE provider, they will implement enhanced monitoring of that provider.

Payment of tuition fees and course progression is a matter between a student and their sponsor (HE institution). If a sponsor decides to withdraw a student from a course for non-payment of fees, they are required to notify the UK Visas and Immigration which may subsequently result in the student's visa being cancelled

During the COVID-19 pandemic the department, alongside the government, worked hard to ensure that international students were supported throughout this difficult time, including visa concessions so that students who could not travel to the UK during the pandemic were not adversely impacted.

In addition, the department provided grant funding to the OfS for the 2021/22 financial year included an allocation of £5 million to HE providers in England in order to provide additional support for student hardship. This hardship funding could be accessed by international students and would be allocated by providers to where the need was greatest.

Technology: Education

Baroness Uddin: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to work with (1) universities, and (2) businesses, in the fields of (a) the metaverse, (b) blockchain technologies, (c) cryptocurrencies, and (d) artificial intelligence. [HL1071]

Baroness Barran: The Digital Strategy announced by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Tech and the Digital Economy on the 13 June, is the roadmap we will follow to further strengthen our global position as a science and technology superpower.

The Digital Strategy will lead to new jobs, skills and services that benefit and level up the whole of the UK. It will bring tech leaders together in a new Digital Skills Council to tackle the skills gap and to carry out a review of the UK's large-scale computer processing capabilities. The group will look at the issue of digital skills from schools through to lifelong learning and at ways the industry can inspire the next generation of talent from a wide range of backgrounds to consider a digital career.

As an illustration of our commitment to this, we announced that the Office for Students (OfS) will be providing 2,000 scholarships to ensure we have more of the advanced digital skills needed to maintain the country's leading position in cutting-edge AI and data science. The OfS allocate up to £23 million to universities to fund scholarships starting in 2023. Funding will be available for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as well as black, women and disabled students to ensure the AI built and used in the UK reflects the make-up of our society.

In this new landscape, businesses will be critical to supporting our ambitions. The Innovation Strategy, published by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy in July 2021, focuses on how the government supports businesses to innovate by making the most of the UK's research, development and innovation system.

As part of this UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will ramp up its investment in the technologies of the future including Artificial Intelligence, digital, and advanced computing, working with businesses to crowd-in investment and create world leading sectors and job-rich industries. Over the spending review period UKRI allocation for the 2022/25 financial year is £25.1 billion and will reach its highest ever level in the 2024/25 financial year (over £8.8 billion).

Arts: Higher Education

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of budget cuts on access to Higher Education arts courses on (1) the UK's economy, and (2) those from (a) lower socio-economic, and (b) minority, backgrounds. [UIN HL1073]

Baroness Barran: The government recognises the importance of the creative arts to the economy and the UK. High-quality provision in a range of subjects is critical for our workforce and our public services. It is also culturally enriching for our society, which is why the government awarded nearly £8million directly to creative universities as part of the Culture Recovery Fund.

The Office for Students (OfS) has increased the high-cost subject funding rate per student for performing and creative arts and media studies to £125.76, a rise of 3.51% from the previous year, for the 2022/23 academic year. The department has also increased funding for world-leading specialist providers, including 11 providers specialising in the arts, by an additional £5 million in the 2022/23 financial year, on top of the increase of £10 million provided in the 2021/22 financial year. The department wants to ensure that such providers receive additional support, and that grant funding is used effectively to support students, including those with an interest in the cultural and creative sectors.

In January 2021, the former Secretary of State for Education reprioritised the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG). This was to ensure value for money, support strategic priorities across the sector, including provision of courses vital for the economy and labour markets, and continued support for disadvantaged students and underrepresented groups. This resulted in the high-cost subject funding rate for some arts and music courses to be set at £121.50, down from £243 in 2020/21. This reallocation of grant funding amounted to about 0.05% of affected providers' estimated total income.

The OfS consulted on the proposals and published its conclusions on their website. The consultation responses were carefully analysed. The issues raised were considered by both the OfS and the former Secretary of State in reaching their respective decisions about the allocation of the SPG in 2021/22.

The department considers that access to higher education should be based on a student's attainment and their ability to succeed, rather than their background. In 2021, 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds were 82% more likely to go to university than in 2010. There are also more disadvantaged students at university today than at any other point in our history.

Overseas Students: Employment

Baroness Masham of Ilton: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to allow overseas students to have the right to access paid work placements in the UK, of up to six months, under the Short-term Student (English language) route. [HL1087]

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Those who wish to study the English Language for up to 6 months can do so under the visitor route, they do not need to apply for a Short-Term Study Visa.

The Short-term Student (English language) route is for those whose aim is to study the English language, not for those wishing to work in the UK. Changing this position would open this route to potential abuse by those whose intention would primarily be to work, not study, as we saw in the past when the then student routes were widely abused for this purpose.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help support Ukrainian refugees who started a university course in Ukraine to complete their studies in the UK. [UIN 22473]

Michelle Donelan: The department is continuing to work closely with the education sector and across government to ensure that students are supported and have a range of options available to them during this difficult time.

We know that universities in Ukraine are striving to maintain the education of their students under extremely challenging conditions. We are therefore encouraging them to contact their education provider in Ukraine, to understand what support is available to them to study remotely. This may be particularly beneficial to students nearing the end of their course.

Students may also wish to explore their options with higher education (HE) providers in England. The department encourages them to engage in conversations with their preferred provider to understand the full range of options available specifically to them. I have urged institutions in England to consider students' circumstances sensitively and to show as much flexibility as possible when considering students' applications.

To support those who are granted leave under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Ukraine Family Scheme or the Ukraine Extension Scheme, introduced by the Home Office, we have extended access to HE student support, home fee status, tuition fee caps, advanced learner loans and 19+ funding allocations. This ensures Ukrainians who have been affected by the war in Ukraine can access support on the same basis as those within other protection-based categories, such as refugees.

The Student Loans Company will also treat students who were living in England before leaving to study in Ukraine, and who join a course on return to the UK, as being temporary absent when assessing the requirement for three years' ordinary residence in the UK or Crown Dependencies prior to study. Students should contact Student Finance England, or other relevant funding bodies if individuals lived in one of the devolved administrations prior to study in Ukraine, for further details.

Additionally, the department is working closely with the Ukrainian Government and UK HE Sector to help facilitate Ukrainian HE entrance exams this summer for students from Ukraine.

The Office for Students has been delivering up to £4million of additional support to students from Ukraine whose financial means have been impacted by events in Ukraine.

Universities: Greater London

Munira Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of removing the London weighting element of the Strategic Priorities Grant on London universities in the context of rising inflation. [UIN 24660]

Michelle Donelan: The Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) is funding supplied by the government on an annual basis to support teaching and students in higher education (HE), including expensive to deliver subjects, such as science and engineering, students at risk of discontinuing their studies, and world-leading specialist providers.

We asked the Office for Students (OfS) to reform the SPG in the 2021/22 financial year. The removal of London weighting was required to enable the reprioritisation of this funding towards the provision of high-cost subjects that support the NHS and wider healthcare policy, STEM, and specific labour market needs. The London weighting previously accounted for a small proportion of London providers' income. For example, £64 million was allocated through the London weighting in the 2020/21 academic year SPG, which was less than 1% of London providers estimated total income.

As set out in the guidance letter from my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education to the OfS in March we are investing an additional £750 million over the next three years to support high quality teaching and facilities including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships. Further information on this guidance letter can be found here: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/bb422aae-54fb-42c8-b5db-26e7ed48df80/strategic-priorities-grant-20220331_amend.pdf (opens in a new tab). This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade. The recurrent SPG budget is £1,397 million for the 2022/23 financial year, which is 5% higher than last year.

Students: Loans

Fleur Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether it is his policy to increase the size of student loans in line with the rate of inflation. [UIN 26873]

Michelle Donelan: The department is currently reviewing options for uprating maximum grants and loans for the 2023/24 academic year.

Maximum grants and loans for living costs were increased by 3.1% this academic year, and the department has announced that they will increase by a further 2.3% in the 2022/23 academic year.

In addition, we are freezing maximum tuition fees for the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By the 2024/25 academic year, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years.

The 2022/23 financial year guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) confirms universities will continue to be able to support students in hardship through the student premium. Ministers' Strategic Priorities Grant guidance letter to the OfS asks that the OfS looks to protect the student premium in cash terms for the 2022/23 financial year.

University of Gibraltar: British Students Abroad

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to ensure English students wishing to attend the University of Gibraltar are able to apply for funding under Student Finance England. [UIN 23380]

Michelle Donelan: The department is exploring options to finance English students to study in Gibraltar, whilst ensuring that these students receive an education and benefit from safeguards broadly comparable with those in England

Medicine: Higher Education

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to lift the cap on (a) medicine and (b) dentistry course places for the academic year 2022-2023. [UIN 23376]

Michelle Donelan: It is important to carefully manage dental and medical places to ensure a sustainable pipeline of practitioners to the NHS across all regions of the UK. The department will continue to monitor current arrangements to ensure student intakes are in line with workforce requirements. However, we have no immediate plans to increase the number of medical and dental school places.

The number of places available to study medicine and dentistry is regulated by the government and controlled through intake targets operated by the Office for Students. These places are quality assured by the General Medical Council to ensure the availability of sufficient provision of high-quality

education, training and clinical placements and therefore have all been allocated for this coming academic year.

The department funded an additional 1,500 undergraduate medical school places each year for domestic students in England, a 25% increase over three years. This expansion was completed in September 2020 and has delivered five new medical schools in England. In addition, we temporarily lifted the cap on medical and dental school places for students who completed A levels in 2020 and 2021, and who had an offer from a university in England to study medicine or dentistry, subject to their grades.

The department is working with the British Dental Association to reform the NHS dental contract to make it more attractive to the profession. Health Education England set out a range of recommendations in their Advancing Dental Care Review, which will improve recruitment and retention of dentists and other professionals. Action is being taken to implement these through their Dental Education Reform Programme. We are also working to allow greater flexibility to expand on the registration options open to international dentistry applicants.

My hon. Friend, the Minister for Health and I have made clear to all medicine and dental schools, through joint letters sent in October and March, that there is no room for flexibility this year, and it is the department's firm expectation that all schools will only recruit up to the maximum number of students as set in the Office for Students' intake targets. Students recruited above these numbers would need to be fully funded by the institutions and relevant clinical placements secured without department support.

Universities: Admissions

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department is taking steps to provide additional support to universities in preparation for A-Level results day in 2022. [UIN 23375]

Michelle Donelan: I will continue to work closely with the higher education (HE) sector to support the 2022 intake of students to ensure they can go on to their next step in life following A level and T Level Results day on 18 August, whether that's university, on-the-job training, moving into employment or continuing to study elsewhere.

In November 2021 I wrote to Vice Chancellors to recognise the hard work and dedication that the sector has shown to students throughout the last 2 admissions cycles, and to ask that they build additional resilience into their offer making strategies for the 2022 HE admissions cycle. I have also engaged HE sector bodies through the HE Taskforce to commend them on their efforts to date and to ask that they continue to put students first through the 2022 admissions cycle.

Furthermore, the department, in collaboration with Ofqual, has actively engaged with and sought the views of the HE sector in shaping the decisions for the 2022 exam series for AS and A levels and vocational and technical qualifications. We have put a package of measures in place to ensure that students can take their exams fairly to recognise the disruption that this year's students have faced.

Higher Education: Admissions

Damien Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will take steps to ensure that UCAS applicants who have undertaken qualifications that are equivalent to GCSEs are not penalised in their applications. [UIN 22520]

Michelle Donelan: The government works closely with schools, colleges, awarding organisations and the higher education (HE) sector to ensure that students' interests are at the centre of decision-making, and to ensure that students have the time to carefully consider their options and make the best choices for their future.

As set out in the International Education Strategy, the government is committed to enhancing the international student experience, from application to employment. We work closely across government and the HE sector to achieve this.

Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous and independent institutions and are therefore responsible for their own admissions decisions. As such, HE providers are used to assessing a wide range of qualifications from domestic and international applicants to make fair admissions decisions.

UCAS is a charity, operating independently of the government. Prospective international and domestic applicants can find a range of information, advice and guidance on their website, and on the websites of their preferred providers.

The department is continuing to work with UCAS and sector bodies to improve transparency, reduce the use of unconditional offers, and reform the personal statement to improve fairness for domestic and international applicants of all backgrounds.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students started an undergraduate degree course at each higher education institution in England in each year since 2017; and what proportion of those students had left that course by (a) Christmas and (b) Easter of the first year. [UIN 22397]

Michelle Donelan: Official Statistics on student retention are published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) as part of their UK Performance Indicators.

For the academic years 2014/15 to 2019/20, the following link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation/table-t3> (opens in a new tab) shows the number of undergraduate entrants [1] at each English higher education provider and their associated non-continuation rates.

These non-continuation rates are defined as the percentage of first year students who do not continue their studies after 12 months (full-time students) or 24 months (part-time students). Rates specific to leaving courses by (a) Christmas and (b) Easter are not published by HESA.

Whilst the department holds HESA Student data from which it could derive the information requested on how many students started an undergraduate degree course at each higher education institution since 2017, the information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

[1] Who did not leave within 50 days of commencing study.

Higher Education: Disadvantaged

Paula Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has plans to guarantee places in higher education settings for disadvantaged students. [UIN 22585]

Michelle Donelan: Access to higher education (HE) should be based on a student's attainment and their ability to succeed, rather than their background.

In November 2021, the department issued guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) to refocus the Access and Participation Regime. We asked them to create a system that supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring students can make the right choices, accessing and succeeding on high-quality courses which are valued by employers and lead to good graduate employment. We have appointed John Blake as Director for Fair Access and Participation at the OfS, and he will play a pivotal role in driving this work forward.

It is very important that providers focus on supporting students to see good outcomes, not just getting more disadvantaged students through the door, this will ensure that HE remains an engine of true social mobility. We know that prior attainment is a key determinant of successful participation in HE, and that is why we are asking universities to take on a more direct role in driving up the standards in schools.

The department also recently consulted on the design of a new National State Scholarship, worth up to £75 million, which will help the highest achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds overcome barriers to attending and succeeding on the course that is right for them.

Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access a world-class education remains a top priority, and we expect universities to do all they can to help disadvantaged students. This year, more students from disadvantaged backgrounds went to university than ever before.

Electronic Publishing: Competition

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will instruct the Competition and Markets Authority to conduct a market review of the academic e-book market. [UIN 23378]

Michelle Donelan: The department is aware of the concerns about pricing and licensing of e-books, which are at the heart of the campaign led by a group of UK-based academic librarians seeking an investigation into the academic publishing industry by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

There are different views across the publishing and higher education (HE) sectors, as these concerns engage wide-ranging issues, including consumer protection.

I will be hosting a discussion shortly with representatives of the publishing sector, government and HE bodies, including the body for university libraries. Any moves to request a market study or challenge practice on confidentiality agreements will be decided after this discussion.

While it is possible for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education to ask the CMA to look into issues in markets, the CMA is independent of government and makes its own decisions about its work according to published prioritisation principles. Under statute, it is the CMA Board who decides whether to publish a market study notice, and thereby launch a market study.

Sector News

Turing Scheme press release

On 2 July, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that 20,000 disadvantaged students from schools, colleges and universities were set to travel abroad through the Turing Scheme.

Students taking part in the scheme, which replaced the UK's participation in the Erasmus+ scheme, would be given the chance to undertake study, school exchanges, and industry work placements in over 150 international destinations, including the USA, Japan, Canada, Thailand, and South Africa.

More than 130 universities, 116 further education providers and 70 schools would be receiving a share of grants worth £105m.

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

Government response to spiking report

On 4 July, the Home Affairs Committee published the government's response to its report.

The government welcomed most of the committee's recommendations and committed to working with police, local government, and night-time industries to produce a 'victim-first' approach to combatting spiking.

The government response to each conclusion and recommendation is set out in the full report. You can read the full report [here](#).

English universities pledge to reverse pandemic grade inflation

On 5 July, Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE members committed to return to pre-pandemic levels of 'upper' degree classification by 2023.

By the end of 2022, members of UUK and GuildHE in England will publish degree outcome statements, setting out actions to return to pre-pandemic levels of classification. Universities will take the pre-pandemic year of 2019 as a benchmark for the commitment.

Professor Steve West CBE, President of Universities UK and Vice Chancellor of UWE Bristol, said, "As we emerge and look to the future, we have an opportunity to take meaningful action and strengthen our commitment to fair, transparent and reliable degree classification. This is vital to ensure that grades remain meaningful to the public, employers, and students themselves, for the long term."

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

National Student Survey 2022 results:

Results from the National Student Survey (NSS) were published on 6 July. The survey asked students questions relating to their academic experience, which included the teaching on their course, assessment, and feedback, and how well courses were organised. 325,000 students responded to the survey, a 68.8% response rate.

The results show an increase in students rating their access to resources positively, while views of teaching quality remained below pre-pandemic levels. There was variation in the views of students studying different subjects.

You can read the full report [here](#). You can read the response from Chris Hale, Interim Chief Executive of Universities UK [here](#).

Rt. Hon. James Cleverly MP announced as new Secretary of State for Education

Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP was announced as new Secretary of State for Education on 7 July. He replaces Rt. Hon. Michelle Donelan MP who was elevated to Secretary of State for 35 hours before tendering her resignation.

James Cleverly has been the MP for Braintree since 2015. He is a former co-chair of the Conservative Party, and has held ministerial positions in the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO).

The Minister of State for Higher and Further Education remains vacant.