



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

4 – 8 March 2024

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

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

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Parliamentary business

Spring Budget – HM Treasury statement

On Wednesday 6 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, delivered the Spring Budget to the House of Commons. The Chancellor promised to deliver a ‘high wage, high skill economy’ in a ‘budget for long-term growth’. There were no announcements directly related to higher education, but the Chancellor did refer to Britain’s universities as being the ‘most respected’ in the World outside of the US.

On R&D, new funding was announced to transform Canary Wharf into a new hub for life sciences companies, and £10.2 million funding to support the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, helping it become the ‘world’s leading scientific powerhouse.’ £45 million investment was also announced to support the next generation of early career medical researchers. The UK’s strategic advantage in science and innovation was to be supported through £14 million investment in the UK’s public sector research and innovation infrastructure, up to £100 million support for future satellite communications, and £1.6 million to progress the quantum computing mission.

The government confirmed it was investing up to £100 million in the Alan Turing Institute over the next five years. The Institute is the national centre for AI and data science and aims to drive economic and scientific advancements.

Following the [Independent Review of University Spin-Outs](#) published last November, the [Budget document](#) confirmed that universities had been asked to report on their spin-out policies by the end of May and that the government had begun consulting on the design of the new £20 million proof-of-concept fund to support universities and future founders to de-risk technology.

The Chancellor focused on boosting investment in UK technology-related industries, announcing that both local authority and defined contribution (DC) pension schemes would have to declare how much they have invested in UK shares, and ensure there are vehicles to make it easier for pension schemes to invest in UK growth opportunities. Attracting investment into tech industries was a priority he said, alongside encouraging entrepreneurs to stay in the UK when it came to stock market listings. He added ‘[the UK] is on track to become the world’s next Silicon Valley.’

The full [Spring Budget 2024 document](#) can be read.

You can [watch the Spring Budget speech](#) and [read a transcript](#).

The crucial nature of Higher Education to growth, productivity and levelling up – House of Lords debate

On Thursday 7 March, the House of Lords debated the ‘crucial nature of Higher Education to growth, productivity and levelling up’. This debate was tabled by Lord Blunkett (Labour).

Lord Blunkett (Labour) opened the debate by expressing his concerns about the narrative that there are too many students at universities studying courses that are of no value. He pointed to challenges the university sector faces, including adapting to changes in artificial intelligence, the challenging financial climate, and the impact of Brexit. He cited the 750,000 jobs created in the UK through higher education, emphasising their role in levelling-up.

Addressing the notion that growth in international student numbers is squeezing out domestic students, Lord Blunkett cited there was no evidence this was happening and outlined the financial incentives for universities to recruit more international students. He condemned government ministers’ attacks on the higher education sector and emphasised the contribution of universities to local economies. He stressed the importance of ensuring ‘quality research, world-class teaching and the importance of valuing our universities are put front and centre’.

Lord Blunkett concluded his opening remarks by calling for: linking further and higher education; removing overseas students from migration statistics; reshaping longitudinal studies ‘to get a real understanding of what students from higher education are actually doing in local communities’; and a commission on the funding of higher education for the future.

Throughout the debate, Peers emphasised the benefits of higher education, citing their strengths in research, producing Nobel laureates, promoting social mobility and supporting industries including Britain’s creative industries. Many emphasised that, in addition to the notable economic benefits of higher education, universities also contribute a great deal of public and civic good which is often left out of the debate. Lord Willetts stressed the diversity of Britain’s higher education sector, noting that excellence can come from vocational offering or strength of teaching in addition to world university rankings.

On financial sustainability, Baroness Blackstone, Baroness Wolf of Dulwich, Lord Storey, Lord Bilimoria and Baroness Prashar all noted that tuition fees had been

frozen while university costs have risen due to inflation. Baroness Blackstone called for government grants to universities to be restored and said the movement to a fee-based system has been a mistake. Viscount Chandos expressed concern at the disparity of wealth amongst UK universities, pointing out that both public and private universities in the US enjoy large endowments, whereas wealth through endowments in UK universities is concentrated in Oxford and Cambridge.

On international students, many Peers agreed on their economic benefit both to universities and local communities. Lord Bilimoria, Lord Norton of Louth and Lord Vaizey of Didcot also raised the benefit of soft power that international students bring. Lord Bilimoria, Baroness Prashar and Lord Shipley echoed Lord Blunketts call to take overseas students out of migration figures. Lord Howarth of Newport and Lord Watson of Invergowrie criticised the government's recent visa rule changes preventing international students bringing dependants to the UK.

On productivity, many Peers expressed their hopes that universities offering more degree apprenticeships could help address skills mismatch issues. Lord Willetts expressed concern about where funding for expanding degree apprenticeships would come from and warned against funding for other levels of apprenticeships suffering by comparison. He also raised evidence that degree apprenticeships are more socially selective and said more needed to be done to extend access. Lord Londesborough gave a speech from an employer perspective and suggested the economy is failing to keep pace with the rapid expansion of graduates. He called for employers from both public and private sectors to scale up graduate traineeships and internships.

On levelling up, Peers applauded the success of the higher education sector in stimulating regional economic growth. Lord Shipley expressed concern that higher education had not been adequately recognised in the government's recent levelling up White Paper. Baroness Garden of Frognal and Lord Watson of Invergowrie warned of the sharp decline in part-time higher education in recent years, which particularly exacerbates regional disparities.

Minister for the School System and Student Finance, Baroness Barran, responded to the debate. She described the diverse higher education sector as 'world-leading' and playing a 'pivotal role in driving economic prosperity, creating employment opportunities and supporting the local communities that are the foundation of our levelling-up agenda.'

Turning to the narrative around quality, she defended the government's recent measures to ensure higher education delivered positive outcomes for all students

and taxpayers. She stressed that poor quality courses risk 'besmirching the reputation of all our universities' and indicated that many universities shared this view.

The Minister proceeded to outline the government's focus on technical and further education as part of their skills reforms worth £3.8 billion of investment over the course of this Parliament.

On R&D, the Minister highlighted that universities delivered 77.5% of the UK's non-business R&D and innovation activities. She also stresses the importance of university R&D stimulating private investment in the longer-term.

The Minister emphasised that levelling-up remained at the heart of the government's agenda to deliver better productivity for every part of the UK. This meant addressing the disparities in quantity and quality of human capital between different parts of the UK. On skills, the Minister highlighted the government's ambition of 200,000 more people completing high quality training in England each year by 2030. On R&D, she noted the role of universities as major partners as well as the role of spin-outs.

On international students, the Minister said that 'international undergraduate student numbers have grown in recent years, but not at the expense of domestic undergraduate numbers.' She said the decision of removing international students from net migration figures was ultimately a decision for the Office for National Statistics.

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

You can [read the UUK briefing](#) and the [House of Lords library briefing](#).

Forthcoming business

Education oral questions

On Monday 11 March at 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt. Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial colleagues will be answering oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps her Department is taking to help increase the number of occupations for which apprenticeships are available [Andrew Jones MP, Conservative; Chris Clarkson MP, Conservative; Stephen Hammond MP, Conservative; Peter Aldous MP, Conservative]
- What recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in the devolved Administrations on the potential merits of providing additional financial support to students in the context of increases in the cost of living. [Chris Stephens MP, SNP]
- What steps her Department is taking to encourage take-up of degree-level apprenticeships. [Greg Smith MP, Conservative]
- What steps she is taking to promote post-college opportunities to pupils with SEND. [Jane Hunt MP, Conservative]

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

The housing needs of young people – House of Lords debate

On Thursday 14 March, there will be a debate about the housing needs of young people in the House of Lords. This debate has been tabled by Lord Young of Cookham (Conservative).

You can [view the full list of speakers](#) and [watch the session](#).

Written Questions

European Innovation Council and Innovate UK

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment she has made of the (a) similarities and (b) differences between the European Innovation Council and Innovate UK. [UIN 15399]

Andrew Griffith MP: Both organisations bridge the funding gap for small and medium-sized enterprises to succeed through a range of support mechanisms. These include funding products for thematic R&D projects to help individual businesses take their ideas towards commercialisation; and providing support services including advisors to support business access to global markets.

The European Innovation Council provides the opportunity for businesses to seek direct equity investment. The British Business Bank, a close partner of Innovate UK, offer some similar products and Innovate UK enables connectivity with trusted investors to bring about private investment aligned with its funding and support.

Horizon Europe

Paul Blomfield MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if she will take steps to (a) expand the Government's support for the Horizon Europe pump priming collaboration and (b) end the rule that research applications to Horizon Europe must identify a call and topic in Pillar 2. [UIN 15875]

Andrew Griffith MP: The British Academy has received considerable interest in the Pump Priming grants scheme, and the Government is pleased with the level of engagement, including from those new to the programme. There are no plans to expand the recently launched pump priming grants.

Applications for Horizon Europe grants are made directly to the European Commission. All calls within Horizon Europe work programme 2024 and beyond are funded by the UK's association to Horizon Europe.

Vocational Education: Qualifications

Seema Malhotra MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much has been spent on marketing for (a) Institutes of Technology, (b) T Levels and (c) Higher Technical Qualifications in each year since 2017. [UIN 14592]

Robert Halfon MP: From January 2022, the department has moved away from delivering individual campaigns for each policy product and started delivery of joined up, audience-led campaigns under the banner of Skills for Life, which covers T Levels, Institutes of Technology, Higher Technical Qualifications and others.

Up to and including the 2020/21 financial year, there was a T Level specific marketing campaign with incurred costs of £400,000 in the 2018/19 financial year, £2,667,975 in the 2019/20 financial year and £4,109,207 in the 2020/21 financial year.

The Skills for Life campaign is ongoing. The overall spend for 2023/24 was £12,085,527, as detailed in my response to 7043 on 8 January 2024, which is available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-12-14/7043>. For the 2021/22 financial year the overall spend was £4,092,000. In the 2022/23 financial year overall spend was £12,400,000.

Nurses: Training

Wes Streeting MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many training places for nursing students there were in England in the 2023-24 financial year; and how many places there will be in the (a) 2024-25 and (b) 2025-26 financial year. [UIN 15713]

Andrew Stephenson MP: Since 2017, universities have set the number of available nursing training places based on market demand. The Department does not set figures for the number of places. Data published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service shows that the number of accepted applicants to undergraduate nursing courses in England for 2023 was 20,790.

The NHS Long term Workforce Plan published in June 2023 outlines the nursing training intakes which underpin the plans ambitions across academic rather than financial years, and NHS England will work with the university sector to help achieve this. Across all nursing training intakes, including undergraduate, postgraduate and apprenticeships, these are 32,124 in 2025 academic year, and 33,981 in 2026 academic year.

Visas: Robert Gordon University

Kirsty Blackman MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential economic impact on Robert Gordon University of the restrictions to student visa routes implemented on 1 January 2024. [UIN 15924]

Tom Pursglove MP: The Government will continue to strike the balance between reducing overall net migration, protecting the economic benefits that overseas students bring to the UK and ensuring that businesses have the skills they need. Those affected by changes made to the Student visa will predominantly be dependants of students who make a more limited contribution to the economy than students or those on work visas, minimising the impact on UK growth.

We have been successful in delivering our International Education Strategy goal of hosting 600,000 students per year by 2030, earlier than planned, and expect universities to be able to adapt to reduced dependant numbers.

Medicine: Students

Karin Smyth MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate she has made of the number of available medical school places in each of the last 10 years. [UIN 16149]

Andrew Stephenson MP: The Government controls the number of medical school places that it funds. The Office for Students (OfS) sets the maximum number of funded places for medical degrees, on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education.

For 2023/24, the maximum number of funded places was set at 7,571, and it has been near this number since 2019. Each provider is allocated a number of these places but may take slightly fewer or more people than their allocated number, for example if exam results are unexpectedly good. For this reason, the target for funded places does not necessarily match actual intakes, though the difference is often not large.

The OfS publishes the number of entrants to medical degrees in England each year. Numbers for 2020 and 2021 are high as a result of the Government's temporary lifting of the cap on medical school places in England. The following table shows the number of entrants to medicine courses in England, each year from 2014 to 2023:

Year:	Entrants:
2014	6,000
2015	5,880
2016	5,930
2017	6,095
2018	6,800
2019	7,565
2020	8,405
2021	8,485
2022	7,625
2023	7,655

Source: The Office for Students' Medical and Dental Students Survey, from 2014 to 2023.

Note: 2023 entrants are based on initial figures and may change.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan published in June 2023 commits to doubling the number of medical school places, taking the total number of places up to 15,000 a year by 2031/32.

We have accelerated this expansion by allocating 205 additional medical school places for the 2024/25 academic year. The process for allocating 350 additional places for the 2025/26 academic year is underway.

This builds on the expansion of medical school places in England to 7,500 per year - a 25% increase - that the Government completed in 2020 and which delivered five new medical schools.

Health Professions and Teachers: Training

Stephen Morgan MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to work with universities to help train (a) doctors, (b) nurses and (c) teachers. [UIN 16009]

Robert Halfon MP: The department is working closely with Higher Education Providers (HEP's) to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access a world class education. This remains a top priority and is fundamental to the government's ambition to level-up skills, growth, and economic opportunity across the country.

Record numbers of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare staff will be trained in England as part of the first ever NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP), which was published in June 2023. By significantly expanding domestic education, training and recruitment, we will have more healthcare professionals working in the NHS. The LTWP will:

- Double the number of medical school places to 15,000 a year by 2031/32. To support this ambition, the government will increase the number of medical school places by a third, to 10,000 by 2028/29. This will build on the expansion of medical school places in England to 7,500 per year, a 25% increase, which the government completed in 2020 and that delivered five new medical schools. The government has accelerated the LTWP expansion by allocating 205 additional medical school places for 2024/25, a year ahead of target. The process for allocating 350 additional places for the 2025/26 academic year is underway and further details will be confirmed in due course.
- Record numbers of nurses are now working in the NHS, and the Plan will increase adult nursing training places by 92%, taking the number of total places up to nearly 38,000 by 2031/32. To support this ambition, the government will increase training places to nearly 28,000 in 2028/29. This forms part of the ambition to increase the number of nursing and midwifery training places to around 58,000 by 2031/32. The government will work towards achieving this by increasing places to over 44,000 by 2028/29, with 20% of registered nurses qualifying through apprenticeship routes compared to just 9% now. The number of nursing applicants still continues to outstrip the places on offer. Nursing and midwifery training places are competitive, and lead to an attractive and important career in the NHS.
- Introduce medical degree apprenticeships, with pilots running from 2024/25 so that by 2031/32, 2,000 medical students will train via this route. The department will work towards this ambition by growing medical degree apprenticeships to more than 850 by 2028/29

The government is backing the LTWP with over £2.4 billion over the next five years to fund additional education and training places. This is on top of increases to education

and training investment, reaching a record £6.1 billion over the next two years. The department is working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England, the Office for Students, as well as the General Medical Council to actualise the delivery of the plan.

The department will continue to work with the sector so everyone who wants to pursue a rewarding healthcare career has the support and opportunities to do so.

There are record numbers of teachers in England's schools, with more than 468,000 working in state-funded schools across the country, which is 27,000 (6%) more than in 2010. The department works closely with schools and universities to recruit the best teachers, in the subjects and areas they are needed most. The department has already put in place a range of measures for trainees in the 2023/24 academic, including bursaries worth up to £27,000 and scholarships worth up to £29,000, to encourage talented trainees to apply to train in key subjects such as chemistry, computing, mathematics, and physics.

The department is also offering a levelling up premium worth up to £3,000 after tax for mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their careers who choose to work in disadvantaged schools. For 2024/25 and 2025/26, the department is doubling the rates of the levelling up premium to up to £6,000 after tax. This will support recruitment and retention of specialist teachers in these subjects and in the schools and areas that need them most.

The department is also working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) and an employer-led trailblazer group to develop the Teacher Degree Apprenticeship (TDA). The TDA will be a new route into the teaching profession, for both primary and secondary teachers, through which successful candidates will 'earn while they learn' and attain an undergraduate degree and qualified teacher status while working in a school. Subject to IfATE approvals, the TDA standard will be published in spring 2024, with the candidate recruitment commencing from autumn 2024 and training commencing in autumn 2025.

Higher Education: Social Mobility

Stephen Morgan MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she is taking steps to encourage collaboration between colleges and universities to (a) widen participation in tertiary education and (b) promote social mobility. [UIN 16008]

Robert Halfon MP: The department is investing in Institutes of Technology (IoT). IOTs are prestigious, high-quality education providers that are created through innovative

collaborations that bring together the best of existing further education (FE) colleges and higher education (HE) providers with local employers. To date the IoT Network comprises 77 colleges, 35 HE providers and 99 employers. By offering a range of specialised courses, from Higher Technical Qualifications to apprenticeships, IoTs empower students to develop the practical skills and knowledge required to excel in key sectors such as engineering, healthcare digital technology and manufacturing.

FE and HE Providers across the country already collaborate at local levels to deliver education and training, ensuring learner and employer needs are met. Some of these partnerships are formal, longstanding arrangements for colleges to deliver degrees but less formal arrangements with specific courses in FE occurring to ensure progression for those who wish to go into HE.

In Plymouth, City College is working with Plymouth Marjon University and the University of Plymouth to offer foundation degrees, higher national certificates and higher national diplomas, as well as traditional degrees.

Collaborative working forms a significant part of the department's HE access and participation reforms, which were launched in 2021. As part of these the department has tasked the Office for Students to strongly encourage universities to work with schools and colleges to drive up standards and encourage aspiration and attainment. The department wants to see universities stepping up to support students through the paths that benefit them the most, including through apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications, and vocational education as well as degrees.

The department is aware that diversifying modes of study can be an important method of broadening access and participation. HE providers have been strongly encouraged to set themselves ambitious, measurable targets to significantly increase the proportion of students on higher and degree apprenticeships, Level 4 and Level 5 courses and part time study. The department is also providing £40 million over the next two years to support degree apprenticeship providers to expand and help more people access this provision.

Uni Connect, which the department is funding at £30 million for the 2023/24 academic year, brings together partnerships of universities, colleges and other local organisations to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college.

Students: Cost of Living

Stephen Morgan MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to support students with the cost of living. [UIN 16006]

Robert Halfon MP: The department has frozen maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years to deliver better value for students. By the 2024/25 academic year, maximum fees will have been frozen for 7 years.

The government has continued to increase maximum loans and grants for living and other costs each year. Maximum support has been increased by 2.8% for the current 2023/24 academic year, with a further 2.5% increase announced for 2024/25.

Students awarded a loan for living costs for the 2023/24 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the tax year 2023/24 has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

Decisions on student finance have had to be taken to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of HE are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have benefited from going to university.

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and that are impacting students. The department has already made £276 million of student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year to support successful outcomes for students including disadvantaged students.

The department is making a further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding. This funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes.

Further the department is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in additional funding over the three-year period from 2022/23 to 2024/25 to support high-quality teaching and facilities including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade.

That is why the department has asked the Office for Students (OfS) to maintain student premium and mental health funding for the 2023/24 financial year at the same levels as the previous year and to ensure providers are aware they can draw on

the Student Premium to support students in financial hardship. The department will continue to liaise with the OfS on the impacts of cost-of-living pressures.

Between 2022/23 to 2024/25, government will have provided support worth £104 billion, an average of £3,700 per household, to help families throughout the UK with the cost-of-living including to meet increased household energy costs. This will have eased some of the pressure on family budgets and so will in turn enabled many families to provide additional support to their children in HE to help them meet increased living costs.

Research: Finance

Stephen Morgan MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of setting a target for GDP invested in research and development. [UIN 16007]

Andrew Griffith MP: In 2017, the Government committed to a target of increasing UK economy-wide investment in R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027, and 3% in the longer-term.

Last year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) updated its methodology for capturing R&D performed in small businesses and higher education institutions throughout the UK. This has not yet been incorporated into calculations of GDP, and so an official estimate of UK R&D expenditure as a proportion of GDP under the new methodology is not yet available. However, on this revised basis, DSIT estimates R&D investment would have been between 2.8% and 2.9% of GDP for 2021. Government remains committed to public R&D expenditure reaching £20bn for 24/25, a record level.

Research: International Cooperation

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to encourage research collaborations across (a) the Horizon Europe programme and (b) globally. [UIN 16499]

Andrew Griffith MP: The Government is committed to restoring the UK's position as a partner of choice in Horizon Europe. The Government is undertaking a series of actions to ensure that UK businesses and researchers feel supported to engage with Horizon Europe and lead consortia. This includes a series of roadshow events around the country, pump-priming schemes and a largescale marketing campaign.

The Government launched the International Science Partnership Fund in December 2022. ISPF will have up to £337 million this spending review period, allowing UK researchers and innovators to collaborate with international partners on multidisciplinary projects. The Government also continues to fund the global Science and Innovation Network of over 130 officers in 65 locations around the world to actively build and facilitate science, technology and innovation collaborations of value to the UK.

Research

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to integrate research opportunities to maximise research capacity. [UIN 16498]

Andrew Griffith MP: Since publication of the R&D People and Culture Strategy, the Government has been working with the R&D sector to integrate research opportunities and to maximise research capacity. To deliver the New Deal for Postgraduate Research, and as part of its Collective Talent Funding, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is currently reviewing its provision for collaborative doctoral training, working with stakeholders inside and outside of academia to integrate postgraduate research opportunities.

Alongside this, UKRI has increased the minimum stipend to ensure the UK's offer remains internationally competitive and attractive to the full range of potential students seeking to pursue a R&D career in the UK.

Skilled Workers: Research

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what criteria she uses to assess the impact that research funding has on future skills required across the economy. [UIN 16497]

Andrew Griffith MP: As set out in the Science and Technology Framework, the Government is committed to, and delivering on, its ambition to create an agile and responsive skills system, which delivers the skills needed to support a world-class workforce in STEM sectors and drive economic growth.

We will continue to track our progress through a range of metrics and identify new ways to evaluate and evidence the impact of our science and technology system, including the impact of research funding for skills.

Sector News

Jo Grady returned as UCU general secretary – UCU announcement

On Friday 1 March, the University and College Union (UCU) announced that Dr Jo Grady had been re-elected to continue as general secretary.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said:

I want to thank every member who has voted to endorse my strategy for our union's future.

We have achieved so much in the past five years, including further education's biggest pay award in a decade and the greatest pension win in UK trade union history.

But there is still much to do. Under my leadership UCU will continue to be a fighting union that will stand up for education. We need a fair funding settlement for higher education and binding national bargaining in further education. I look forward to working with our incredible members to push employers and government to invest in our sector's staff and students.

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

Backing R&D in the Budget can deliver jobs and sustainable growth to help tackle cost-of-living challenges – Russell Group budget submission

On Monday 4 March, the Russell Group published a Budget submission calling on ministers to maximise the impact of existing £20bn spending plans, by removing blocks to capital investment and targeted spending to strengthen the UK's research base.

The Russell Group's submission to the Treasury called for action to:

- Advance net zero ambitions through capital investments that improve the efficiency of university estates, enhance the UK's R&D landscape, and enable

the testing of net zero infrastructure solutions that can be scaled up by local councils.

- Remove the planning blockers to capital investment by announcing an intention to introduce a Research and Innovation Guarantee in the National Planning Framework that would fast-track key infrastructure.
- Scale up proof-of-concept funding for new, cutting-edge university spin-outs and explore new ways to back businesses in areas like AI and deep tech.
- Strengthen the UK's research base by protecting UKRI's share of R&D funding and, within this, UKRI's core research budgets.

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

Evaluation of the Future Leaders Fellowships scheme: process evaluation report – UKRI report

On Monday 4 March, UKRI released an independent report, prepared for UKRI by RAND Europe, evaluating the Future Leaders Fellowships programme (round one to six) in June 2022.

This process evaluation sought to:

- Understand the extent to which FLF's organisational targets have been achieved.
- Assess whether scheme management, support and structures have been fit for purpose.
- Develop an understanding of barriers and facilitators faced by the scheme in relation to its set-up and implementation.

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

Higher education providers with T Levels in entry requirements – DfE data

On Monday 4 March, the Department for Education (DfE) released a list of higher education providers that will consider T Levels for entry onto at least one course at their university or college.

You can [view the list of providers](#).

Outcome of investigation: Research England EDI Expert Advisory Group – UKRI update

On Tuesday 5 March, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) published the outcome of its independent investigation into the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Michelle Donelan’s, letter raising concerns about the views expressed on social media by members of the Research England Expert Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

UKRI outlined:

Following the independent investigation, the UKRI Board has found no evidence of a breach of the Research England Expert Advisory Group on EDI’s terms of reference and no failure to uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles).

Moreover, the UKRI Board found no evidence in the public domain of support for a proscribed terrorist organisation or the sharing of extremist material and no grounds to remove any individual members of the Research England Expert Advisory Group on EDI.

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

MillionPlus comment on public backing for loan forgiveness for nurses

On Tuesday 5 March, MillionPlus, the Association for Modern Universities, commented on polling by YouGov which shows overwhelming public backing for a fee loan forgiveness scheme for nurses.

Rachel Hewitt, Chief Executive of MillionPlus, said:

That a fee loan forgiveness scheme for nurses who choose to work and remain in the NHS has such overwhelming backing from the country is unsurprising and vindicates a long-held MillionPlus position. The cost to the Treasury pales in comparison to the long-term economic and social benefits brought about through improved staff retention and should be viewed in Westminster in the same way that this polling suggests the people of Britain

do: as a vital investment in Britain’s future. Nurse educators, nurse leaders and now the public are speaking as one – the Chancellor must heed them.

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

Evidence versus Emotion: The facts about international student recruitment and what they mean – IHEC report

On Tuesday 5 March, the International Higher Education Commission (IHEC) published a report on international student recruitment.

The report focuses on providing a detailed evidential basis, where relevant recording past policy changes and “system effects”, in order to review a number of oft repeated assertions. It focuses on what the evidence shows is actually happening, hoping to encourage a debate about how best to build on the success of the UK HE sector.

IHEC recommends the report be read in conjunction with the recent short paper by UUKI entitled [“International Students and Graduates: Myths and Reality”](#).

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

Consultation on the OfS’s new free speech complaints scheme – GuildHE response

On Tuesday 5 March, GuildHE published its consultation response on behalf of members to the OfS’ consultation on the new free speech complaints scheme.

Key points covered in the response include:

- Complainants should only be able to take complaints to the OfS once they have completed institutions’ own process or after an unreasonable delay. GuildHE believes the proposed 30 days is unreasonable and arbitrary and should be closer to 90 days.
- There should be a statute of limitations of five years after the initial incident rather than 12 months after the last “adverse incident” which could be many years later.
- Visiting speakers should not be considered as such until they have gone through the institution's visiting speakers process to prevent confusion about who can make invitations.

- There should be more detail on how the OfS will keep down the costs of the scheme to ensure that it doesn't take away from core teaching and learning activities.
- The OfS should conduct a review of the effectiveness of the scheme after one year.

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

Our responses to Office for Students consultations on free speech – UUK publication

On Wednesday 6 March, Universities UK (UUK) published its response to the Office for Students (OfS) consultations on their free speech complaints scheme and the regulation of students' unions in relation to freedom of speech.

Key points covered in the response include:

- The definition of 'visiting speaker' set out in the proposals is concerningly broad, as it does not limit a 'visiting speaker' to a person invited through the provider or students' union's formal processes for inviting speakers.
- Significant concerns about the OfS' proposal to review free speech complaints after 30 days have elapsed since a provider's internal review process has begun as after 30 days internal reviews may well be ongoing.
- OfS should commit to a review of the complaints scheme after 12 months, including engaging with students and providers on their views about how it is working.
- The OfS must ensure guidance is clear and accessible to students' unions, acknowledging that this is new territory for students' unions and they do not have the familiarity with regulatory language that providers do.
- In its approach to monetary penalties, the OfS should recognise the limited resource of students' unions, their capacity to seek legal advice and the need for students' unions to balance this duty alongside others.

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

Cracks in our foundations: evaluating foundation years as a tool for access and success – HEPI report

On Thursday 7 March, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report into whether foundation years are effective tools for widening access.

Key findings:

- **There has been an explosive eightfold increase in foundation year enrolment.** While only 8,500 took foundation years in 2011/12, over 69,000 students did so in 2021/22.
- **Business and Management dominate foundation year studies, accounting for over half (51%) of enrolments.** By contrast, only 13% of undergraduates study Business courses.
- **Foundation years excel in providing access to higher education.** Nearly 30% of students possess no prior qualifications and 64% are mature students.
- **However, a large majority (73%) of foundation year students study at low-tariff institutions, and just 4% study at high-tariff institutions.**
- **Only 74% of foundation year students proceed directly to degree-level study or qualify.** By comparison, 91% of full-time undergraduates do so.
- **Some institutions may be using foundation years to inflate their tariff scores artificially.** However, the report finds no evidence of institutions pressuring students to take foundation years.

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

A manifesto for higher education in a global city: unleashing the potential of London’s higher education sector – London Higher manifesto

On Thursday 7 March, London Higher published its manifesto calling for a strong vision from Government, so that London’s diverse institutions can drive forward the UK’s global ambitions, deliver innovation-led growth that will benefit not only the capital city but the whole country, and provide the opportunities for talented people from all backgrounds to thrive.

The manifesto focusses around four key asks:

- To deliver a vision for long-term success: provide a better, more joined-up vision for where higher education is headed, so that higher education institutions know what to plan for the long-term.
- To maintain our global competitiveness: create a more positive dialogue around London's world-leading universities and higher education institutions, showcasing them proudly nationally and internationally, including in the press.
- To invest in knowledge and innovation to deliver sustainable growth: let London's higher education institutions be the solution by harnessing knowledge and skills, leading to economic development through science, technology and research, and ultimately the growth of the UK economy.
- To nurture talent through opportunity: universities are engines of opportunity and social mobility and can support the pipeline of talent this country needs to grow and thrive with increased awareness of opportunities and adequate places.

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