



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG weekly update

4 – 8 September 2023

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

Contents

Parliamentary business	4
Turing Scheme – Westminster Hall debate	4
LLE Bill – report stage	5
Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – Committee Stage	6
Horizon Europe – Oral Statement to the House of Commons	9
Forthcoming business	12
Pay and financial support for healthcare students – Petitions debate	12
Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – further consideration	12
UK support for at-risk academics – Westminster Hall debate	12
Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill – third reading	12
Plans for the UK to join Horizon Europe – Lords oral question	13
Written Questions	14
Birkbeck: Mathematics and Statistics	14
Migrants and Overseas Students: Health Services and Visas	14
Science: Innovation and Research	15
Higher Education: Entry Clearances	15
Higher Education: Admissions	16
Immigration: Fees and Charges	17
Universities: Mental Health Services	17
Overseas Students: Postgraduate Education	19
Students: Housing	19
Sector News	21
The impact of the higher education sector on the UK economy – UUK report	21
Understanding the burden of regulation– UUK report	21
Labour reshuffle	22
Expressing the international student voice – London Higher and Middlesex University policy note	24



National Student Money Survey – Save the Student	25
Experiences of the rising cost of living– ONS	25
UCU industrial action update	26
Horizon Europe association announcement	26
Universities UK Annual Conference	27
Universities UK Strategic Plan 2024 – 2030	27

Parliamentary business

Turing Scheme – Westminster Hall debate

On Tuesday 5 September, the ‘Turing scheme’ was considered in a Westminster Hall debate. The debate was tabled by Wendy Chamberlain MP (Liberal Democrat).

She opened the debate by describing ‘education’ and ‘knowledge exchange’ as vital for the citizens of tomorrow. Wendy proceeded to outline the shortfalls of the Turing Scheme.

On the funding cycle, she shared the experience of a constituent studying at St Andrews University who did not receive the funding in sufficient time. She also highlighted that many countries do not operate on an academic year beginning in September and costs (e.g., flights) were often incurred before term begun.

Jim Shannon MP (DUP) intervened to highlight the increased costs due to the cost-of-living crisis which would have implications for access from lower income students.

Wendy Chamberlain further criticised the yearly cycle for funding which had only been guaranteed until 2025. She said this made it harder for longer term planning and certainty. On the categorising of living costs for students, she said that the group 2 of countries ‘felt like a one-size-fits-all category.’

She said that the project reporting tool had been criticised by universities and was causing an ‘administrative headache.’ She urged the Minister to engage with Universities UK and the Russell Group to streamline the process.

She proceeded to describe how the reciprocity element and global connections between students had been lost under the Turing scheme. This was echoed by Layla Moran MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and International Development.

She outlined how it cost over £1,000 to sponsor an intern from Europe which was now only available to degree students. She echoed Universities UK concern that the UK was now ‘essentially closed to inbound interns resulting in a loss of skills to businesses and was damaging partnerships.’

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP said he shared Wendy Chamberlain’s passion for international placements. He

praised St Andrews University in her constituency which had been successful for the third year running in applying for Turing funding. He highlighted the 4,000 participants in Scotland who had been allocated funding in the most recent cycle.

Carol Monaghan MP, Shadow SNP Spokesperson for Education, intervened by stating a recent Financial Times report that found that universities were only receiving 35 – 45% of the total cost required to support students through the Turing scheme.

The Minister proceeded to outline the objectives of the Turing scheme of (1) social justice, (2) enhancing skills, and (3) securing value for money. He outlined the transformative impact of Turing, echoing the positive findings from Universities UK on degree outcomes and employability.

Layla Maran intervened to ask the Minister what assessment the Department for Education (DfE) had made on the economic loss caused by fewer people engaging in international exchange. The Minister clarified that the number of people engaging with Turing was comparable to Erasmus and said that Erasmus did not provide good value for money.

Responding to the effective exclusion of international students from courses with clinical placements, the Minister said this was primarily an issue for the Home Office and highlighted that medical places were being expanded.

Regarding the project reporting tool, the Minister said Capita had offered webinars and 1-to-1 sessions to support providers. He would listen to sector feedback to ensure effective administration.

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

LLE Bill – report stage

On Tuesday 5 September, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill passed its report stage without being amended, as all four amendments were withdrawn after debate.

Baroness Barran, Minister for the School System and Student Finance, noted that the government would be keen for the relevant select committee to undertake full post-legislative scrutiny of the Bill at the appropriate time. She also committed to update the house on progress towards an alternative student finance system later this year.

The Minister also offered to provide an updated impact assessment of the LLE when the first regulations were laid under the Bill.

The Bill will proceed to third reading in the House of Lords on Tuesday 12 September.

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – Committee Stage

On Tuesday 5 and Thursday 7 September evidence was heard on the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill for its Committee Stage.

The first session focused on aspects of the Bill relating to pension schemes, and the Committee heard evidence from Jo Donnelly, Head of Pensions at the Local Government Association and Jon Richards, Vice Chair of the Local Government Pension Scheme Advisory Board.

Steve McCabe MP (Labour) spoke about a discrepancy in the Bill which had led to confusion about whether all pension schemes were included within scope. Jo Donnelly said that in her view, the Bill had been drafted in this way to exclude all pensions schemes except local government pension schemes. She added that it was necessary to be clear that other pension schemes such as those of universities, although in scope of the Bill more generally, would be excluded in relation to pension schemes.

The second session heard evidence from Russell Langer, Head of Policy and Research at the Jewish Leadership Council and Daniel Sugarman, Director of Public Affairs at the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Wayne David MP (Labour) asked whether the witnesses thought the Bill was the right approach to tackling the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Russell Langer said he judged that the legislation adequately prohibited BDS in public bodies and that it covered the correct public bodies within its scope, therefore he was comfortable to support it.

Felicity Buchan MP, Minister for Housing and Homelessness in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) asked about Clause 4 of the Bill, which prohibits a statement of intent to boycott. Russell Langer said that part of the problem with BDS was the “febrile nature of the debate” that was brought into public bodies and so he understood the purpose of the Clause, and that it would require

adequate enforcement powers to be effective. Daniel Sugarman added that in his view, the Bill would not interfere with individuals' freedom of expression to criticise Israel or carry out a BDS campaign, rather that it would prevent public bodies that receive public funding from promoting a foreign policy agenda that is different from the UK Government.

The third session heard evidence from Councillor Bob Deering, Executive Member of Hertfordshire County Council and Councillor James Jamieson, Former Chairman of the Local Government Association (LGA).

The former Shadow Minister for Housing, Alex Norris MP (now Shadow Minister for Policing) asked about Clause 4 and how the Councillors felt about being told by central government what they could or could not say. James Jamieson said he had concerns over free speech and that if the minutes of a meeting that reflected a view expressed in the meeting could be referred to the Pensions Regulator or for judicial review, then this was very concerning. He added that judicial reviews made it more likely for vexatious claims to be made. He also suggested that if the reference to a decision having been "influenced" was changed to "substantially influenced", it would make it much easier.

The fourth session heard evidence from Hannah Weisfeld, Director of Yachad and James Gurd, Executive Director at Conservative Friends of Israel.

The Minister asked the witnesses whether they thought it was appropriate for public bodies to support the BDS movement, and whether it had consequences for community cohesion. Hannah Weisfield said that she believed the Bill could actually have the reverse effect on community cohesion, as cracking down on the ability to express themselves would cause "real disharmony" among communities.

On the intent of the Bill, Hannah Weisfield said that in her view, the Bill would create a nasty debate around Israel-Palestine, rather than alleviate any issues. She added that the Committee had just heard from representatives of local government who had said that there was little evidence to support the need for a Bill. She noted the opposition of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) in particular, as Jewish students' experience on campus was often cited as a reason for the legislation. She concluded by saying that Yachad were against the Bill, saying that the way to protect Jewish life in the UK was not to "legislate against opinions we don't agree with".

Probed by Chris Stephens MP (SNP) on the potential for the Bill to restrict freedom of speech, Hannah Wesifield said that there was a sense that the Bill would severely

restrict freedom of speech, with Clause 4 effectively “gagging” the ability of local democracies to express their opinions.

The sixth session heard evidence from Yasmine Ahmed, UK Director of Human Rights Watch, Dave Timms, Head of Political Affairs at Friends of the Earth and Peter Frankental, Economic Affairs Programme Director at Amnesty International UK.

Chris Stephens MP (SNP) cited concerns from Amnesty International that the Bill would make it impossible for public bodies to use their procurement and investment policies to incentivise ethical business conduct that is human rights compliant. He then asked the panel whether they agreed with Amnesty International’s interpretation. Yasmine Ahmed said she agreed with it, and said they saw the Bill as restricting the ability of public bodies to carry out their human rights due diligence responsibilities under the United Nation’s Guiding Principles (UNGPs), the UK Government’s own business risk guidance and ESG. She also noted that the specific exemptions had significant loopholes, and this would lead to international crimes and human rights violations not caught in due diligence.

Yasmine Ahmed also warned that the threat of enforcement bodies imposing notices which require the organisation to hand over all the information about a decision, and the potential threat of penalties would have a chilling effect on public bodies carrying out and adhering to their due diligence responsibilities. She also noted ambiguity around the wording that decisions only had to include “a consideration” of moral or ethical concerns.

The seventh session heard evidence from Richard Hermer KC, Barrister at Matrix Chambers and Melanie Phillips, columnist at the Times newspaper.

Anum Qaisar MP (SNP) asked Richard Hermer KC about Clause 4 and why it was problematic. Richard Hermer said that in his view, the Clause was incompatible with Article 10 of the ECHR. He was also concerned that it would prevent the free speech of individuals, contrary to what the government had said, saying that it would “undoubtedly bind” the Leader of a Council or a Vice-Chancellor of a university. Melanie Phillips said that the Clause was required to tackle statements that say that Israel is “uniquely evil”.

The Bill will continue its Committee Stage on Tuesday 12 and Thursday 14 September.

You can watch the session here (Tuesday 5 September [9:25am](#) + [2:00pm](#), and Thursday 7 September [11:30am](#)).

Horizon Europe – Oral Statement to the House of Commons

On Thursday 7 September, the Secretary of State for the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP delivered a statement to the House of Commons, following the announcement that the UK had reached an agreement with the European Commission on association to Horizon Europe.

Welcoming the announcement, she said it had been a “hard-fought” negotiation but a landmark day for UK science. She said that scientists and researchers could benefit from Horizon today, being able to immediately bid into the programme with certainty over funding. She added that all calls in the 2024 work programme, including those that opened for bids this year, will be funded through the UK’s association to Horizon, while the remaining 2023 calls will be funded by the Horizon guarantee.

On value for money, she said that the deal meant that the UK would not pay for “a second time” that it had not been a member of the programme, and that it also protected taxpayers through a new “clawback” mechanism. On the delay, the Secretary of State explained that this was down to the EU linking association directly to the Northern Ireland (NI) protocol, which she said the Prime Minister had successfully managed to unlock through the Windsor Framework. Finally, she reiterated the government’s commitment to investing £20 billion a year on R&D by the next financial year and praised those who had supported the deal, including Universities UK and the Russell Group.

Responding on behalf of the opposition, newly appointed Shadow Cabinet Office Minister, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, criticised the government for the two-year delay, saying it had meant that the UK has been “locked out of world’s leading scientific collaboration project”. He highlighted examples of the impact he had seen, citing cancer research specialists leaving UK to pick up Horizon Europe projects elsewhere. The Shadow Minister then asked the Secretary of State if she could set out the precise contribution to Horizon Europe for the years ahead, and whether there was any financial disadvantage that would be accrued from missing out on the first two years of the scheme. The Secretary of State responded saying it would cost £2 billion per year.

On Euratom, several MPs criticised the government’s choice not to associate, with Nick Thomas-Symonds MP saying it could have risks for international collaboration on energy security. In response, the Secretary of State highlighted that the Fusion industry had made their case not to associate and instead pushed for UK plans for investment. She said the Fusion Industry Association and other key stakeholders had

welcomed today's announcement and the "ambitious" package of £650 million which would replace membership of Eurotam.

The Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology select Committee, Greg Clark MP (Conservative) said that his Committee would examine the deal in detail, but he already welcomed that the deal allowed researchers to win grants beyond the value of the UK's own financial contribution. He then asked the Secretary of State to confirm that Horizon funding would not only go to academic institutions, but also support innovations for British industry. He also asked whether her Department had consulted with the sector over Euratom. The Secretary of State said that the business community would benefit from today's announcement and that they had consulted with the sector and the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), who had both welcomed the announcement regarding Euratom.

SNP spokesperson, Marian Fellows MP, welcomed the announcement which she said would provide much needed certainty, but said that only by re-joining the EU as a full member state, would the UK be fully able to enjoy the benefits. She also asked about the status of Erasmus+. The Secretary of State said it would be "undemocratic" to rejoin the EU and cited the establishment of the Turing Scheme as an alternative to Erasmus, which she said was a better scheme, as it was "truly global" and supported people from a wider range of backgrounds.

Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, Sir Stephen Timms MP (Labour) said he was relieved to hear the announcement and that it was "just in time to avoid serious damage". Probing the Secretary of State on 'associate membership' he asked to what extent it would give the UK a seat at the table to shape the future of the programme. The Secretary of State said the UK would be able to lead projects going forward from 2024 and would again be at the forefront of future programmes.

Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Energy and Climate Change, Wera Hobhouse MP, welcomed the announcement, but said that there was still much to be done around European academic collaboration, specifically around cooperation on student exchange and the Turing Scheme. She highlighted evidence from the University of Bath that the Scheme required universities to forecast where students were going a year in advance, which restricted the freedom of students and created a major operational challenge for universities. Wera Hobhouse asked whether the Secretary of State would work with the University of Bath's Student Union to ensure Turing works "as smoothly as Erasmus did". The Secretary of State said she was happy to work with DfE and coordinate a conversation with the University of Bath, but again reiterated her view that the Turing Scheme was better than Erasmus, as it was "more

inclusive and global”. She added that Erasmus exchanges had particularly helped young people from middle class backgrounds.

Richard Fuller MP (Conservative) probed the Secretary of State on her comments around the UK researchers’ ability to lead projects, asking whether they would also have the right to determine the focus of future projects going forward. The Secretary of State said she was confident the UK could use the programme to collaborate on areas of shared interest, including strategically on areas such as chips and semiconductors. She also said that with this deal, the UK would be able to play a “leading role” in Horizon and help guide and even potentially extend its membership.

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

Forthcoming business

Pay and financial support for healthcare students – Petitions debate

On Monday 11 September from 4:30pm, e-petitions 610557, 616557, and 619609 will be debated in Westminster Hall. These petitions are related to pay and financial support for health care students.

You can [read a House of Commons library briefing](#) here. A livestream is currently unavailable.

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – further consideration

On Tuesday 12 September (9:25am and 2:00pm) and Thursday 14 September (11:30am and 2:00pm), there will be further consideration of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill.

You can read [additional information on the Bill](#) here and watch the sessions here (Tuesday 12 September [9:25am + 2:00pm](#), and Thursday 14 September [11:30am + 2:00pm](#)).

UK support for at-risk academics – Westminster Hall debate

On Tuesday 12 September from 4:00pm, UK support for at-risk academics will be debated in Westminster Hall. This debate has been tabled by Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP (Conservative).

You can [watch the session](#) here and [read a House of Commons library briefing](#) here.

Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill – third reading

In the afternoon of Tuesday 12 September, the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill will receive its third reading in the House of Lords.

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

Plans for the UK to join Horizon Europe – Lords oral question

On Wednesday 13 September from 3:00pm, an oral question on ‘plans for the UK to join Horizon Europe’ will take place. This oral question has been tabled by Viscount Stansgate (Labour).

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

Written Questions

Birkbeck: Mathematics and Statistics

Chi Onwurah MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent discussions she has had with Birkbeck University on proposed cuts to its mathematics and statistics department. [UIN 195510]

George Freeman MP: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer my Rt. Hon. Friend the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education gave to her question 193653 on 20 July 2023.

Higher Education providers are independent, autonomous institutions responsible for their own decisions on staffing issues, including how they structure themselves to deliver research and teaching priorities. Research in mathematical sciences is key for the advancement of all areas of science and technology, and a vital area of science in itself. UK Research and Innovation's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council funds Mathematical Sciences from its core budget, typically spending £25-£30 million per annum. They have also committed a further £124 million out to 2028-29 as part of the Additional Funding Programme for Mathematic Sciences programme.

Migrants and Overseas Students: Health Services and Visas

Paul Blomfield MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with (a) the Russell Group, (b) Universities UK and (c) other sector stakeholders on the potential impact of increasing the cost of (i) the immigration health surcharge and (ii) student visas on the higher education sector. [UIN 194749]

Robert Jenrick MP: The Home Office is increasing application fees across a range of immigration and nationality routes, including for people coming to live, work and study in the UK. Increasing application fees, together with the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), helps to fund vital services and allowing wider funding to be prioritised for public sector pay awards.

We will lay regulations and legislation in the Autumn to amend the immigration and nationality fees and the IHS levels, which will set out which immigration routes are impacted and will be accompanied by full economic impact assessments.

We keep fees and IHS levels under review.

Science: Innovation and Research

Alyn Smith MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what recent assessment she has made of the potential impact of increasing the cost of (a) the immigration health surcharge and (b) student visas on the (i) global influence of UK-based science and (ii) ability to attract international (A) researchers and (B) innovators. [UIN 195287]

George Freeman MP: The Science & Technology Framework sets out the government's plan to cement the UK as a Science and Technology superpower by 2030 and the government is committed to ensuring the UK's immigration system supports economic growth and remains competitive in attracting and retaining the best international researchers and innovators.

As announced on 13 July, increases to student visa fees and the immigration health surcharge will help to cover the cost of the migration and border system and help to improve it, as well as cover the genuine cost to the NHS of providing healthcare to those who use it.

Higher Education: Entry Clearances

Alyn Smith MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the impact of increases in visa costs for international students and researchers on the higher education sector. [UIN 195288]

Robert Halfon MP: The department has been successful in delivering the International Education Strategy ambition of hosting at least 600,000 students per year by 2030 for the last two years, and the government fully expects the UK to continue to be an attractive destination for international students.

We are increasing fees across a range of immigration routes, including for people coming here to live, work and study, at a time of record high migration numbers. It is the government's policy that those who use and benefit most from the immigration

system should contribute towards the cost of operating the system, reducing the burden on the UK taxpayer.

Our visa fees are competitive globally and there is little evidence that fee increases to date have significantly affected demand on work, study and tourism routes.

Higher Education: Admissions

Lisa Nandy MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to page 2 of the Department for Education's consultation response entitled Higher Education Policy Statement and Reform: Government consultation response, published in July 2023, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of proposals to cap the numbers of students on low quality courses on (a) students and (b) providers in each English region; and whether she discussed the potential impact of those proposals on the levelling up agenda with the Secretary of State for Education before the publication of the Government consultation response. [UIN 195021]

Robert Halfon MP: As the independent regulator, it will be for the Office for Students (OfS) to determine whether Higher Education (HE) provision is in breach of condition of registration B3, which requires providers to deliver positive student outcomes, and whether a recruitment limit is an appropriate and proportionate response to any individual breach. Therefore, the department cannot predict which providers and provision might be subject to a recruitment limit in the future. OfS are currently investigating 18 of the total 421 registered HE providers, in relation to condition B3.

Further detail about condition of registration B3 can found here:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/>(opens in a new tab).

The department considered the potential impact of recruitment limits on students and providers in each English region, based on provision currently not meeting the minimum thresholds for one or more of the three B3 metrics, in its HE Reform consultation response impact assessment. This impact assessment can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1170666/Higher_education_policy_statement_and_reform_-_government_consultation_response_-_impact_assessments_and_analysis.pdf(opens in a new tab).

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities considered and agreed all of the measures in the HE Reform Consultation Response.

The department wants to make sure that every student who goes into HE will be able to reap true benefits, regardless of where they are located. Supporting students across the UK onto HE which delivers good outcomes will support levelling up.

Immigration: Fees and Charges

Paul Blomfield MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to the oral contribution by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 July 2023, Official report, column 526, what the changes to immigration fees will be. [UIN 194745]

Robert Jenrick MP: The cost of most work and visit visas will increase by 15%. The cost of study visas, certificates of sponsorship, settlement, citizenship, wider entry clearance and leave to remain visas, and priority visas will increase by at least 20%.

We will also equalise costs for students and for those using a priority service so people pay the same whether they apply from within the UK or from outside the UK.

We will lay Regulations in the Autumn that will set out the specific changes to immigration and nationality fees in more detail.

Universities: Mental Health Services

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment has she made of the adequacy of the availability of mental health support within universities. [UIN 195168]

Robert Halfon MP: It is a priority for the government that students are provided with the mental health support they need.

We are taking an approach based on three pillars:

- Funding vital services and innovative projects via the Office for Students, with £15 million allocated for the 2022/23 academic year to support students starting university for the first time and enable effective partnerships between higher education (HE) providers and local NHS services. £3.6 million

was invested to launch Student Space in 2020 and it has since provided nearly 300,000 students with free online mental health resources and confidential support.

- Spreading and implementing best practice consistently across providers.
- Clear responsibilities for providers and protection for students, with solutions developed by the Student Support Champion, Professor Edward Peck.

The government does not collect data on the number of students seeking support for their mental health, but we know from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student data that 119,480 students with a registered mental health condition were enrolled in UK HE providers in academic year 2021/22, which is the most recent year data is available. This table is available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-15>(opens in a new tab).

The department recently conducted research on the design and delivery of mental health and wellbeing services to meet the needs of their students. This found that almost all HE institutions (99%) provided in-house self-help resources and the vast majority (97%) offered in-house psychological support for those experiencing poor mental health, either through face-to-face or virtual contact with a counsellor. Research also found a substantial increase in the proportion of HE institutions that now have a specific mental health and wellbeing strategy in place (two thirds in 2022 compared with just over a half in 2019). The report can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-wellbeing-practices-in-higher-education>(opens in a new tab).

While good progress has been made by the sector, the department is going further to protect students' wellbeing. 61 universities are already part of the University Mental Health Charter Programme and are following the principles the charter sets out for a whole university approach to mental health. Students should have confidence in the support they will receive, whatever university they have chosen to study at, and so the department has set a target for all remaining universities to sign up to the Mental Health Charter Programme by September 2024.

To set out a clear plan and targets for further improvements in mental health support, Professor Edward Peck is chairing the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce. The taskforce includes representatives from students, parents, mental health experts and the HE sector, and will deliver a final report by May 2024.

The department is confident the HE sector will rise to meet the challenge set. If the response is not satisfactory, the department will go further, and ask the Office for Students to look carefully at the merits of a new registration condition on mental health.

Overseas Students: Postgraduate Education

Sir John Hayes MP: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with (a) the Russell Group, (b) Universities UK and (c) other sector stakeholders on proposed restrictions to the ability of international students to bring family members on all but post-graduate research routes. [UIN 195313]

Robert Jenrick MP: The Home Office regularly engages with a range of organisations, including Russell Group and Universities UK and will continue to do so.

Students: Housing

Rachael Maskell MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the cost of student accommodation in (a) purpose-built student accommodation and (b) the private rental sector on students' ability to remain at university. [UIN 197562]

Robert Halfon MP: The government recognises the cost-of-living pressures that continue to impact students, including those wishing to live in student accommodation.

Student accommodation is a busy part of the housing market, and as universities and landlords are private, autonomous bodies, the government has no role in providing student residential accommodation, nor a remit to intervene. The department expects universities and private landlords to review their accommodation policies to ensure they are fair, clear, and have the interests of students at heart. This includes making accommodation available at a range of affordable price points where possible.

In England, the department has put in place a significant amount of support to help students tackle the ongoing cost of living pressures. We have continued to increase support for living costs each year for English-domiciled students, with a 2.8% increase to maximum loans and grants for the current 2023/24 academic year.

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

The department has frozen maximum tuition fees for the current academic year and for the 2024/25 academic year. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years. We believe that this continued fee freeze achieves the best possible balance between ensuring the system stays sustainable, offering good value for the taxpayer, and reducing student debt.

Sector News

The impact of the higher education sector on the UK economy – UUK report

On Tuesday 5 September, Universities UK published a report examining the contribution of the higher education sector to the UK economy.

Key findings include:

- Higher education makes a £116 billion contribution to the UK economy.
- Universities support more than three quarters of a million jobs (768,000), of which nearly half (382,500), are indirect, employed by local businesses such as restaurants and retailers who benefit from the economic stimulus universities create.
- There is a huge economic benefit to a variety of sectors across the UK including government, health and education which has an economic output of £52.8 billion and supports 444,244 jobs.

Commenting on the report, Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of St Andrews and President of Universities UK, said ‘Universities are the beating heart of so many local communities. As economic hubs in their own right they support and create a huge number of jobs across multiple sectors, meaning people up and down the UK benefit financially, whether or not they have a degree.’

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

Understanding the burden of regulation– UUK report

On Tuesday 5 September, Universities UK published a new report assessing the regulatory burden of registration with the Office for Students (OfS) for universities in England.

The research explored what the burden is, where it is most pronounced, and how this compares to regulatory burden in other sectors. A series of recommendations outline

where regulation can be made more efficient and effective and where unnecessary burden can be reduced:

- Initiate a relationship reset between the regulator and the sector.
- Establish a consistent approach to burden impact assessments.
- Produce and communicate a clearer operational plan for regulatory delivery.
- Address the perceived lack of a risk-based approach to regulation.
- Ensure the regulator has the capacity and expertise to regulate effectively.

You can [read the full report](#) here and [the response from the OfS](#) here.

Labour reshuffle

Throughout the past week, the leader of the Labour Party, Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP, has reshuffled his front bench.

You can see a list of relevant posts below:

Title	Pre-reshuffle	Post-reshuffle
Department for Education:		
Shadow Secretary of State for Education	Bridget Phillipson MP	Bridget Phillipson MP
Shadow Minister for Higher Education	Matt Western MP	Matt Western MP
Shadow Minister for Skills	Toby Perkins MP	Seema Malhotra MP
Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology:		
Shadow Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology	N/A	Peter Kyle MP

Shadow Minister for Science, Research & Innovation	Chi Onwurah MP	Chi Onwurah MP
Shadow Minister for Creative Industries and Digital (joint with DCMS)	N/A	Chris Bryant MP
Treasury:		
Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer	Rachel Reeves MP	Rachel Reeves MP
Shadow Chief Secretary to HM Treasury	Pat McFadden MP	Darren Jones MP
Health and Social Care:		
Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care	Wes Streeting MP	Wes Streeting MP
Shadow Mental Health Minister	Rosena Allin-Khan MP	Abena Opong-Asare MP (now including Women's Health brief too).
Levelling up, Housing and Communities:		
Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	Lisa Nandy MP	Angela Rayner MP
Shadow Minister for Housing and Planning	Matthew Pennycook MP	Matthew Pennycook MP
Home Office:		
Shadow Home Secretary	Yvette Cooper MP	Yvette Cooper MP
Shadow Minister for Security	Holly Lynch MP	Dan Jarvis MP

Shadow Minister for Immigration	Stephen Kinnock MP	Stephen Kinnock MP
Others:		
Shadow Leader of the House of Commons	Thangam Debbonaire MP	Lucy Powell MP
National Campaign Coordinator	Shabana Mahmood MP	Pat McFadden MP
Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Angela Rayner MP	Pat McFadden MP
Deputy National Campaign Coordinator	N/A	Ellie Reeves MP
Shadow Deputy Prime Minister	Angela Rayner MP	Angela Rayner MP

Expressing the international student voice – London Higher and Middlesex University policy note

On Tuesday 5 September, London Higher and Middlesex University published a policy note outlining how current international students feel about their higher education experiences in London. It follows discussions at a roundtable and was prepared for the International Higher Education Commission (IHEC).

The discussions at the roundtable have led to the following five recommendations to improve their experience:

1. Improve employability and ease cost pressures.
2. Avoid unnecessary hardship and exclusion.
3. Help foster a sense of belonging.
4. Reduce transportation costs.
5. Ensure international students have a say in key governance issues.

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

National Student Money Survey – Save the Student

On Tuesday 5 September, Save the Student published their annual Student Money Survey results.

Key findings include:

- The average student's monthly living costs have increased by 17% since 2022. London continues to be the most expensive region in the UK, with average student living costs of £1,211 per month.
- 18% of students in this survey have used a food bank in the last academic year, up from 10% who said the same in 2022.
- The proportion of surveyed students who have received hardship funding from their university has nearly doubled, up from 12% last year to 21% this year. However, the average amount received per student has gone down from £1,026 to £905.

Save the Student's Communications Director, Tom Allingham, said, 'Clearly, the problem is getting worse, not better, and the government urgently needs to do more. The £276 million of 'hardship funding' supplied through the Office for Students is actually less than pre-pandemic levels, and it's barely scratching the surface. Save the Student is calling on the Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, to increase the Maintenance Loan to catch up with inflation, and avoid driving thousands more students into financial turmoil.'

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

Experiences of the rising cost of living– ONS

On Wednesday 6 September, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the findings from interviews with 25 students across universities in England regarding the challenges of rising cost of living.

Some students struggled to afford their bills or food shopping. Careful budgeting was not enough to keep costs down for many students, who had to find other ways to

make ends meet. While there was some support available to help manage the cost of living through bursaries or hardship funds, these were not open to all students.

Students said they had a poorer university experience as a result, with the rising cost of living affecting their academic performance, skills development, health and well-being.

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

UCU industrial action update

On Wednesday 6 September, the University and College Union (UCU) announced that staff at 140 universities would strike for five days later in September.

At 136 of the 140 universities, UCU members will strike for five consecutive days from Monday 25 to Friday 29 September. Strikes will hit four Scottish universities on slightly different dates to coincide with local action by other unions.

UCU has also withdrawn its marking and assessment boycott.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: ‘We are left with no option but to strike during the start of term because our members refuse to stand by while pay is eroded and staff are shunted onto gig-economy contracts.’

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

Horizon Europe association announcement

On Thursday 7 September, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, and Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP announced a new agreement for the UK to associate to Horizon Europe and Copernicus programmes.

Researchers can now apply for grants and bid to take part in projects under the Horizon programme, with certainty that the UK will be participating as a fully associated member for the remaining life of the programme to 2027.

The UK will also associate to Copernicus, the European Earth Observation programme but has decided to pursue a domestic fusion energy strategy instead of associating to the EU’s Euratom programme.

Rishi Sunak said, ‘With a wealth of expertise and experience to bring to the global stage, we have delivered a deal that enables UK scientists to confidently take part in the world’s largest research collaboration programme – Horizon Europe. We have worked with our EU partners to make sure that this is right deal for the UK, unlocking unparalleled research opportunities, and also the right deal for British taxpayers.’

Michelle Donelan commented, ‘Today is a fantastic day for UK science and our whole economy. We have listened to the sector, and through hard work and negotiation we have secured an excellent deal for researchers, taxpayers and businesses.’

Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, President of Universities UK said, ‘The entire research community, within our universities and beyond, will be delighted at the news that an agreement has been reached. Overcoming the obstacles to association was no small feat and we are grateful to the government and the commission for their perseverance to secure this successful outcome.’

You can [read the full announcement and further responses](#) here.

Universities UK Annual Conference

On Wednesday 6 and Thursday 7 September, Universities UK held their Annual Conference at the University of Manchester.

The second day heard from political speakers including Rt Hon Justine Greening (former Secretary of State for Education), George Freeman MP (Minister for Science, Research and Innovation), Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP (Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education), Bridget Phillipson MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Education), and Rt Hon Lord Blunkett (former Secretary of State for Education).

The second day also included the inaugural speech of Professor Dame Sally Mapstone, President of Universities UK.

You can [read a transcript of the President’s speech](#) here.

Universities UK Strategic Plan 2024 – 2030

On Thursday 7 September, Universities UK unveiled its Strategic Plan for 2024 – 2030.

By 2030 it pledges that the organisation will have enabled its members to:

1. Create opportunity through high-quality education.
2. Provide knowledge and skills that drive growth and prosperity.
3. Make groundbreaking discoveries with the power to change the world.

To help its members achieve these aims, the organisation will:

1. Secure sustainable funding.
2. Build pride in universities.

The organisation itself will develop to be:

1. An exceptional membership organisation.
2. A great place to work.
3. A socially responsible organisation.

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