



# The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

## University APPG weekly update

5 - 9 February 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:

Jasmin Glynne | [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk)

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# Parliamentary business

## **Impact of industrial action on university students – Education Select Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 6 February, the Education Select Committee heard oral evidence as part of their inquiry on the impact of industrial action on university students.

The first half of the session focused on the student perspective. The Committee heard from Joe Hill (Education Officer, University of Birmingham Guild of Students), Chloe Field (Vice-President for Higher Education, National Union of Students), Jenni Lynam (Vice-President for Undergraduate Education and Access, Oxford University Student Union).

The second half of the session heard from Raj Jethwa (Chief Executive, Universities and Colleges Employers Association), Jo Grady (General Secretary, University and College Union) and David Smy (Deputy Director of Enabling Regulation, Office for Students).

Witnesses were asked questions on the scale and impact of industrial action, particularly impacted groups, support for students, mental health impact, complaints procedures, compensation, impact on marking and graduation and their opinion on proposed minimum service levels.

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

## **Treasury – oral questions**

On Tuesday 6 February, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt. Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, and his ministerial colleagues answered oral questions in the House of Commons. During topical questions, the issue of university funding and international student fees was raised:

**Paul Blomfield MP (Labour):** The Government have deliberately created a funding model for universities in which they are dependent on income from international students. Does the Chancellor share my concern about ensuring that nothing is done to undermine that income? [UIN 901389]

**Laura Trott MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury,:** The university sector is one of the jewels of this country and I am proud that we have four of the world's top 20 universities. I am happy to look at any individual proposals from the hon. Gentleman.

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

## **Women and Equalities – oral questions**

On Wednesday 7 February, the Minister for Women and Equalities, Rt. Hon Kemi Badenoch MP, and her ministerial colleagues, answered questions in the House of Commons.

Mrs Flick Drummond MP (Conservative) asked what steps are being taken to support women into STEM jobs. The Minister for Women, Rt. Hon Maria Caulfield MP, set out three ways the government are helping young girls and women into STEM sectors: increasing young girls taking up university courses, apprenticeships and helping women who have left return to the workplace. She cited a 50% increase in the number of undergraduate STEM courses taken by young women.

Flick Drummond highlighted the role of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) in getting girls into STEM, highlighting 6,000 girls attend UTCs and 82% go on to apprenticeships, university or employment mostly in STEM careers. She asked whether the Minister agrees the proposed UTC sleeves in secondary schools will help more girls into STEM careers. Maria Caulfield said she 'absolutely agrees' and echoed the praise of UTCs for providing both academic and technical skills.

During topical questions, Stuart C. McDonald MP (SNP) asked the Minister to make a statement on her departmental responsibilities. Kemi Badenoch MP spoke about the outcome of the employment tribunal judgement between Professor David Miller and the University of Bristol. She reaffirmed the need to challenge antisemitism and said it is 'important to stress that this ruling does not change the fact that while academics have the right to express views, they cannot behave in a way that amounts to harassment of Jewish students. Disguising that as discourse about Israel would be no more lawful than any other form of antisemitism.'

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

## **Prime Minister's Questions**

On Wednesday 7 February, the Prime Minister, Rt. Hon Rishi Sunak MP, answered questions in the House of Commons.

**Steward Malcolm McDonald MP (SNP):** Last year, the Prime Minister and other senior Ministers were given the conclusions of a Government audit of research programmes at UK universities with links to the Chinese state. The audit flagged up hundreds of programmes as being at high risk of potentially being used by the Chinese Communist party for military use, and other applications in strategic and sensitive areas as being of high interest to an authoritarian regime such as China. A smaller proportion was judged to be extremely high risk. Despite that, the Government have elected to do nothing about it. Will the Prime Minister confirm his personal knowledge of that report and explain to the House why no action is to be taken and why these programmes must be continued unimpeded? [UIN 901394]

**The Prime Minister:** We will continue to take a robust and proactive approach towards our relationship with China, rooted in the UK's national interest and values. The National Security Act 2023 brings together vital new measures to protect our national security. That includes creating a foreign influence registration scheme through the Act specifically to tackle covert influence in the UK. We will continue to take all possible powers to keep the country safe.

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

# Forthcoming business

## **Recess**

On Thursday 8 February, the House of Commons rose for February recess. It will return on Monday 19 February.

On Wednesday 14 February, the House of Lords will rise for February recess. It will return on Monday 19 February.

# Written Questions

## STEM Subjects: Higher Education

**Jim Shannon MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of trends in the uptake of STEM subjects studied at universities. [UIN 11995]

**Robert Halfon MP:** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes data on student enrolments across all UK higher education (HE) providers. This includes data on full person equivalents (FPE) enrolled in different subject areas, categorised using the HE coding of subjects (HECoS) system. Counts of enrolments across all science subjects from 2019/20 to 2021/22 are published in Table 52 of HESA's Student Data at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-52>.

HESA developed the HECoS system to replace the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) from the 2019/20 academic year onwards. Counts of enrolments across all science subjects from 2014/15 to 2018/19 are still available and published in Table 22 of HESA's Student Data at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-22>.

Due to the change in subject classification system, figures for 2018/19 and earlier are not directly comparable with more recent years. Caution is therefore advised when interpreting data over a longer time series. For more information on JACS and HECoS see: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>.

More recent data on acceptances by subject to full-time undergraduate courses for the 2023 admissions cycle is available from UCAS here: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2023>.

## Foreign Students: Fees and Charges

**Lord Tyrie:** To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the total undergraduate fees paid by foreign students coming to the UK in (1) 2018, (2) 2019, (3) 2020, (4) 2021, and (5) 2022. [UIN HL1883]



**Baroness Barran:** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), now part of JISC, is responsible for collecting and publishing data about UK higher education (HE)

Table six of HESA's 'HE finance data' reports on the income from tuition fees and education contracts at UK HE providers between the 2017/18 and 2021/22 academic years. This data is available by level of study and students' domicile (UK, EU, non-EU) and is accessible at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/finances/table-6>.

Complete data for 2022/23 will be published in Spring 2024.

## Overseas Students

**Lord Tyrie:** To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of undergraduate foreign students who graduated in (1) 2018, (2) 2019, (3) 2020, (4) 2021, and (5) 2022; and what estimate they have made of the number of graduate foreign students who completed their courses in each of these years. [UIN HL1828]

**Baroness Barran:** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, now part of JISC), is responsible for collecting and publishing data about UK higher education. The latest statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year.

Figure 15 of HESA's 'Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2021/22' reports the number of qualifications obtained at undergraduate and postgraduate level at UK Higher Education Providers between the 2017/18 and 2021/22 academic years, and is available by students' domicile (UK, EU, non-EU) prior to study. See figure 15.

Updates on the timing of HESA Student Statistics for the 2022/23 academic year are available via the following link: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/upcoming>.

## Overseas Students: Dependants

**Lord Tyrie:** To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of dependents brought to the UK by foreign students in (1) 2018, (2) 2019, (3) 2020, (4) 2021, and (5) 2022; and what estimate they have made of the number of these (a) foreign students, and (b) their dependents, who have since returned home. [UIN HL1829]

**Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** The Home Office publishes data on Entry clearance visas in the 'Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release'. Data on the number of student

dependant visas granted are published in [table Vis\\_D02](#) of the Entry clearance detailed dataset. Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate to 2023 Q3.

The Home Office publishes data on how people move through the immigration system in the Migrant Journey report. The report contains information on the number of people starting a journey each year broken down by immigration route (e.g. study) and applicant type (e.g. dependant), and how long they continued to hold leave to remain in the UK. The latest report covers up to the end of 2022. The report looks at periods when people held valid leave which does not necessarily mean they were in the UK.

View [table Vis\\_D02](#)

## **Doctors: Training**

**Jonathan Gullis MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of paying junior doctors' student loans if they (a) remain in the UK and (b) take up a registrar post. [UIN 11888]

**Andrew Stephenson MP:** Whilst the Government currently has no plans to introduce such arrangements, it is committed to financially supporting healthcare students in England throughout their studies and keeps funding arrangements under review. In doing this, we must strike a balance between ensuring students are financially supported during their studies and making best use of money for the taxpayer.

Data from the General Medical Council shows that approximately 7% of doctors do not hold a licence to practice five years after Foundation year 2 in England, which is equivalent to around 450 doctors.

## **Innovation and Research: Higher Education**

**Chi Onwurah MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether her Department has made a recent assessment of the potential impact of the current threshold for higher education innovation funding on smaller universities and colleges; and whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential impact of reducing that threshold. [UIN 12611]

**Andrew Griffith MP:** Research England are reviewing the level of allocation threshold used as part of the formula for making Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)

allocations which is currently £250,000. An update will be provided prior to the start of the next academic year.

## **Innovation and Research: Finance**

**Chi Onwurah MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, with reference to the UK Innovation Strategy published on 14 November 2021, what funding the Government has provided for a University Commercialisation and Innovation Policy Evidence Unit in Cambridge to build the UK's evidence base on commercialisation. [UIN 12337]

**Andrew Griffith MP:** Research England has awarded the University Commercialisation and Innovation Policy Evidence Unit £2,449,883 in two grants running from July 2020 to March 2025.

## **Visas: Overseas Students**

**Lord Tyrie:** To ask His Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the proportion of those issued student visas in (1) 2018, (2) 2019, (3) 2020, (4) 2021, (5) 2022, and (6) 2023, who (a) remain in the UK today, and (b) are expected to remain in the UK five years after their visa was first issued. [UIN HL1905]

**Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** The Home Office publishes data on how people move through the immigration system in the Migrant Journey report. The report contains information on the number of people starting a journey each year broken down by immigration route (e.g. study) and applicant type (e.g. dependant), and how long they continued to hold leave to remain in the UK. The latest report covers up to the end of 2022 and shows that for those who started their journey on a Study visa in 2017, 20% of main applicants and 26% of dependants held valid leave five years later. The report looks at periods when people held valid leave which does not necessarily mean they were in the UK.

## **Universities: Admissions**

**Fabian Hamilton MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will take steps to require universities to admit foreign students on the same terms as UK students. [UIN 13198]

**Robert Halfon MP:** Higher education opportunities should be available to all who have the ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so. The government takes a close interest in ensuring that the higher education admissions system is fair, which includes working closely with higher education providers (HEP) and sector bodies to make sure the system works well for students.

HEPs are autonomous institutions, as per the Higher Education and Research Act of 2017. This means they control their own admissions criteria and the government does not intervene in the requirements providers set for students to access a course.

While HEPs are used to assessing a wide range of qualifications from domestic and international applicants to make admissions decisions, it is essential that that recruitment and admissions practices command public confidence and deliver the best outcomes for students.

The department has launched an investigation into university admissions practices, and will take action to ensure fairness between domestic and international students.

## **Higher Education: Special Educational Needs**

**Rachael Maskell MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is taking steps to assist students with SEND to access higher education as (a) school leavers and (b) mature students. [UIN 13122]

**Robert Halfon MP:** The department works to ensure that students of all ages with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can access higher education. Under Section 20 of the Equality Act 2010, education and training providers and other related service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including people with a learning difficulty, so they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students.

Support is provided for disabled students by higher education providers (HEPs) through reasonable adjustment and disability services, some of which is funded through the Disabled Student Premium as well as by the government through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

DSA is available to help students with the additional costs they may face in higher education because of their disability. This includes long-term health conditions, mental health conditions, or specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. DSA can be used for the purchase of specialist equipment, for travel, or to pay for non-medical help, including the human support provided to students to enable them to access

their studies. It is not means-tested and does not have to be repaid. It is available to eligible full-time and part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The department's grant with Disability Rights UK provides a Disabled Students Helpline that responds to over 1,500 enquiries per year.

## **Overseas Students: Finance**

**Elliot Colburn MP:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of (a) reducing and (b) eliminating the residency requirement for British National Overseas visa holders to qualify for (i) home fee status and (ii) student finance. [UIN 12725]

**Robert Halfon MP:** To qualify for student finance in the UK, a person must have settled status or a recognised connection to the UK.

Subject to meeting the normal eligibility requirements, British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders will be able to qualify for student finance once they have acquired settled status, which is usually after five years, and have three years of ordinary residence in the UK.

The government believes that it is right that the support provided by the taxpayer should be targeted at those who have a history of a lawful and substantial residence in the UK.

There are no plans to review BN(O) status holders' access to student finance.

# Sector News

## **Five trends on international student mobility for 2024 – British Council report**

On Monday 5 February, the British Council published a report which gives a high level view of the five international education trends to track in East Asia of the coming year. It predicts 2024 will mark the end of the post-Covid boom in international student mobility.

The five key trends identified are:

- a. The *post post*-Covid era
- b. Tightening of migration policy
- c. US awakens
- d. Fewer jobs in China, more demanding students
- e. Exchange rate discouraging student exchange

You can [read the report](#).

## **Living and Learning in London 2023 – London Higher report**

On Monday 5 February, London Higher published a report on students studying at higher education institutions in London. The report uses 2023 HEPI/AdvanceHE Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES) data and focuses specifically on three key areas: paid work, value for money and international student experience.

The report found that although the demographics in London are very diverse, a common theme emerged that students are drawn to the capital due to its great career prospects post-graduation. It recommends:

- Employers work with institutions to provide a wide range of opportunities for internships, placements and micro-placements;
- Institutions work with relevant sector bodies to gather more data and feedback on student experiences, particularly groups such as international students or students with dependents; and

- Institutions work with sector bodies and in collaboration with one and other to review the type of paid work students are undertaking, associated time commitments and student work schedules to better inform timetabling, module choice, student support and wellbeing.

You can [read the report](#).

## **Written Statement: Tuition fee limits and financial support for higher education students in the 2024/25 academic year – Welsh Government**

On Tuesday 6 February, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, released a written statement that lays out changes to tuition fees and financial support for Welsh students and universities in the 2024/25 academic year.

The announced changes include:

- Maintenance support for eligible undergraduate students from Wales will increase by 3.7%.
- The tuition fee cap will increase from £9,000 to £9,250, in line with England, Northern Ireland and Scotland.
- Grants available to postgraduate Master’s students will be replaced fully by repayable student loans. The maximum value of support will increase by 0.9%.

You can [read the statement](#).

## **General Election Briefings: Examination of higher education fees and funding across the UK – London Economics report**

On Tuesday 6 February, London Economics published a range of in-depth analyses in relation to higher education fees and funding arrangements across the four parts of the United Kingdom, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The research found:

- In England, the average Exchequer cost of the system per student in 2023/24 stands at only approximately **£1,630**. This compares to **£9,130** in Scotland, **£3,780** in Wales, and **£4,810** in Northern Ireland.

- English HEIs receive approximately **£10,220** in net income per student, while Scottish universities accrue **23% less (£7,870)**. The corresponding levels of net HEI income per student stand at **£9,290** in Wales (**9%** less than in England), and **£7,620** in Northern Ireland (this is the lowest level across the four home nations, and approximately **25%** less than in England).
- In aggregate, the Exchequer contributes approximately **16%** of the total cost of higher education provision per cohort in England, while students/graduates contribute the remaining **84%**. This compares to an Exchequer contribution of **113%** in Scotland (ie students are effectively paid to attend higher education), **44%** in Wales and **51%** in Northern Ireland.

You can [read the report](#).

## **Universities not for everyone: levelling up and who is missing out on higher education in England – NEON report**

On Wednesday 7 February, the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) released a report that looks at progression to higher education for young people from free school meal (FSM) backgrounds from 2005-06 to 2021-22.

Key findings in the report include:

- Of all the state-funded pupils' progressing to higher education (HE) by age 19 in 2021-22 only a very small minority – less than 10%, come from an FSM background.
- Progress in expanding participation for FSM learners has slowed from 1.22% per year from 2005-06 to 2011-12 to 0.89% per year from 2011-12 to 2021-22 after the coalition government was elected.
- In 63% of local authorities, the gap between FSM state-funded pupils' progressing to higher education (HE) by age 19 over the period 2011-12 to 2021-22 and non- FSM pupils progressing to HE has increased.
- The gap in in the % of FSM state-funded pupils' progressing to higher education (HE) by age 19 between London and every London regions from 2011-12 and 2021-22 has increased. Between London and the south west the gap in participation in 2021-22 is 30%.



- Across England there has been an increase in 44% in FSM learners participating in HE from 2011-12 to 2011-22 but some areas are making very slow progress. In 15 areas there has been an increase in less than 25% over the period and in 2 areas – Leicester and Blackpool, the progression rate has declined over the period.
- In 69% of local authority areas the % of FSM state-funded pupils’ progressing to higher education (HE) by age 19 in 2021-22 is below the national average of 29.2%.

You can [read the report](#).

## **Scotland’s International Education Strategy – Scottish Government publication**

On Wednesday 7 February, the Scottish Government published its first International Education Strategy for Scotland. This strategy ‘sets out a framework to cement Scotland’s reputation as a world leader in education, research and knowledge exchange, working with universities and colleges to attract students and staff from outside the UK’.

The ambitions of the strategy are:

- to work with our universities and colleges to attract students, staff, and researchers from outside the UK; to help diversify our international student population; and support them to maximise their contribution to Scotland.
- as an outward looking, inclusive nation that values our international education capabilities and export potential, we will work with universities and colleges, to maximise our social, educational, and economic contribution globally.
- as a world leader in international education, research and knowledge exchange, we will deepen our global collaborations and engagements.

Universities Scotland’s International Committee Convener, Professor Andrea Nolan commented on the strategy:

*“This is Scotland’s first international education strategy, and it gives us a platform, working together with Government and other partners, to further develop these positive links to strengthen the sector’s contribution to the economy, society, and culture. It also looks to deepen support for the full breadth of universities’*

*international role. We're already known internationally for the quality of our higher and further education, but what may be less well understood is the role our universities and colleges play as major contributors to inwards investment, and the attraction of talented people who want to live and work in here. Working in partnership we will build on all elements of our international work to grow our reach and impact."*

You can [read the strategy](#) and [Universities Scotland's response](#).

## **National Student Accommodation Survey 2024 Results – Save the Student report**

On Wednesday 7 February, Save the Student published the results of the eighth annual National Student Accommodation Survey. The survey asked over 1,000 students about their experiences with managing the costs of housing at university. Save the Student's Communications Director, Tom Allingham, said the results of the survey 'are deeply concerning, and highlight how life in a cost of living crisis is at risk of becoming the new normal for students'.

Key findings include:

- £550 is the average monthly rent among surveyed students. London has the highest monthly average of £778.
- Among those who pay rent, 64% said they struggle with the cost at least some of the time. This includes 20% who described it as a constant struggle.
- Two in five have thought about dropping out due to the cost of rent.
- Over a third have had issues with damp.
- 7% said they have experienced homelessness.
- 14% don't think they will ever be able to buy a house.

You can [read the report](#).

## **What works in international R&I collaboration – DSIT evidence review**

On Thursday 8 February, the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) published a review of evidence from evaluations and other studies on what constitutes successful investment in research and innovation (R&I) through international partnerships, and on the key conditions and mechanisms that can lead to success. The aim of the study is to generate insights to inform the design and delivery of future interventions.

You can [read the evidence review](#).

## **The UK Science and Technology Framework: update on progress – DSIT policy paper**

On Friday 9 February, the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) published an update on the progress of the UK Science and Technology Framework. The framework, originally published in March 2023, aims to ‘provide the plan for the UK to bring together activity across government focused on a single mission: to cement the UK as a science and technology superpower’.

In the foreword, the Secretary of State for DSIT, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, notes that ‘substantial gains’ have already been achieved. She states ‘we continue to focus on cultivating the right environment for these technologies and our science and technology sectors more generally to flourish.’ Public spending on R&D, Mansion House reforms, and the global AI Summit are all highlighted for their success.

The Secretary of State notes they must ‘stick to the plan and continue to deliver on the vision we have set, working across government, and with our excellent academics, innovative businesses, and international partners to develop our science and technology system.’

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

## **Government response to the Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy – DSIT response**

On Friday 9 February, the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) published its response to the [Independent Review of Research Bureaucracy](#). The

response provides a roadmap on how the sector will work together to reshape the research system to maximise efficiency and productivity and prevent the build-up of any new unnecessary bureaucracy going forward.

The actions covered by the response are:

- Systems are being streamlined and simplified.
- Funders are developing better ways of collecting, processing and analysing data.
- Funders will work together to harmonise and co-ordinate processes.
- Funders are exploring innovative new approaches to reducing bureaucracy.
- More trust is being built into the system to reduce the need for onerous verification.
- Funders are improving the way they communicate about bureaucracy.
- The research sector is getting its own house in order.
- A new strategic approach to monitor, challenge and remove bureaucratic burdens.

You can [read the response](#) .