



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

## University APPG weekly update

7 – 10 May 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

## **Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill - committee stage (Day 3)**

On Tuesday 7 May, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill received its third day at Committee Stage. This included a discussion of Amendment 21 which sought to remove higher education institutions from the scope of the Bill. After discussion, the amendment was withdrawn.

Lord Willetts (Conservative) began by questioning the justification for including universities under the scope of the Bill. He explained that while there were numerous examples of student unions campaigning on the BDS movement, this was not relevant to the actual procurement and investment decisions that universities were taking.

Turning to free speech, Lord Willetts said that it was ‘hard to imagine a lively debate in a university council that does not involve somebody sounding off about some foreign state or other and how much they disapprove of it and what it is doing for some reason or other.’

Lord Willetts said he was increasingly ‘concerned that the bit-by-bit process of adding more regulation and more legal compliance duties on universities pulls them into the public sector.’ He said caution needed to be exercised to ensure universities retained their autonomy, particularly in light of the ongoing ONS review into the classification of universities.

Lord Mann (Non-affiliated) reflected on his tenure as independent government advisor on anti-Semitism, concluding that the ‘critical thing’ was to listen on a regular basis to Jewish students and societies. He said the biggest problem was the ostracisation of Jewish students and staff which the Bill did nothing to address. He highlighted that the University of Jewish Students (UJS) should be the ‘arbiters’ and they were opposed to the Bill.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) raised his concern that the Bill could ‘inadvertently tip [universities] towards being reclassified as part of the public sector.’ He asked what assessment the government had made of that likelihood and of the impact this would have on universities’ ability to borrow and make investment decisions of their own.



Lord Johnson also raised potential conflicts with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. He asked how the Minister felt the Office for Students' (OfS) new director of freedom of speech would be able to promote a climate of freedom of speech when the OfS will also be responsible for 'fin[ing] universities simply for saying that they would have made certain investment decisions had this law not been in place.'

Turning to the justification to include universities in the scope of the Bill, Lord Johnson said that there was an important distinction between the BDS movement taking credit for something and a university actually succumbing to pressure in relation to investment and procurement decisions.

Lord Verdirame (Non-affiliated) probed whether academic collaborations would fall under the scope of the Bill and highlighted the importance of having clarity in this regard.

Baroness Blackstone (Labour) said her 'main problem' with the Bill was that it 'creates a problem that does not exist.' She shared concern over 'top-down foreign policy' and its infringements on free speech at universities, as well as the risks that the university sector may be reclassified as part of the public sector. Baroness Blackstone concluded her remarks by asking where the pressure had come from to introduce universities into the Bill and asked whether the government had any 'sensible consultation' with Universities UK and other representatives of the higher education sector.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Crossbench) highlighted the UK's world-leading universities and warned of the risks to academic freedom by the Bill. She also echoed previous contributions on the risks that universities would be reclassified as part of the public sector.

Lord Davies of Brixton (Labour) said that paragraph 20 of the Bill's Explanatory Notes which explained how academic freedom would not be affected referred only to 'ending existing contracts and to a break because of the provisions under a particular statutory provision.' He called on the Minister for reassurance that 'when decisions are made about an academic project, it will not impinge on the area that could be characterised as an investment or procurement decision, particularly when we come to the enforcement.'

Baroness Noakes (Conservative) reflected on the current student protests and highlighted that they included BDS demands on universities. Supporting the Bill, she said it 'would close the option of them ever implementing BDS policies and would



therefore be one small step to closing that route off and helping to create an environment for Jewish students.’ On the ONS reclassification, she said that ‘just being classified by the ONS does not of itself lead to other consequences.’

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative) described the rise of antisemitism on campus and stressed that the UJS’s previous objections to the Bill were made before 7 October 2023. He raised the example of Goldsmiths, University of London, who he said ‘looks like the college has agreed to all [the student protesters] demands without carefully considering the impact this might have.’ Supporting the Bill, he said it would ‘help those in leadership positions in the above examples and at other universities.’

Lord Shipley (Liberal Democrat) noted three ‘fundamental reason’ why the amendment should be accepted by government. Firstly, he highlighted the importance of universities maintaining their autonomy from state interference and government. Secondly, he raised concerns over the conflicts with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, noting that the Bill had ‘not been thought through properly.’ Finally, he questioned why universities had been included under the Bill’s scope in the first place.

In her opening remarks, Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Labour) warned that the Bill ‘simply will not work’ and raised the risk of reclassification of the higher education sector.

Baroness Chapman said she understood why the government had included universities under the scope of the Bill given the rise in antisemitic incidents but suggested the Bill was not the correct response. Examining the recent example at Goldsmiths, she clarified that only one section of the agreement was related to investment, divestment or boycotts with the rest falling outside of the scope of the Bill. She also stressed that the agreement states the senior management team would raise concerns with the college’s ethical investment fund manager rather than enacting divestment at this stage.

Baroness Chapman said that she was not convinced by the government’s line of argument that if you remove a university’s ability to adopt BDS, the protests somehow diminish. On reclassification, she supported the arguments made by Lord Willetts and Lord Johnson. Concluding her remarks, she suggested a better approach would be to work alongside universities to identify the most effective way of dealing with the problem.



Responding on behalf of the government, Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Minister at the Cabinet Office, said she did not think sufficient weight had been given to the pressure on universities to engage in BDS at this time. She said the Bill would discourage BDS campaigners demands in the first place by removing the chance of success. The Minister confirmed that her officials had consulted with Universities UK prior to the Bill's introduction.

On free speech, the Minister said no member wanted to inhibit the freedom of students and individual academics to express their views on the conflict in the Middle East. She repeated comments made at previous stages that the Bill would not affect the ability of individual academics to express their views in their private capacity. She also added that the Bill was not intended to prevent a higher education provider from deciding to terminate a collaboration with a foreign university on the grounds of academic freedom.

Regarding the scope of activity that falls under the Bill, the Minister said the Bill would not interfere with the private commercial activity of universities, including providing conference facilities, maintaining office spaces, and making decisions related to commercially funded research. The Minister further clarified that academic collaborations would only be caught by the ban if they involved investment and procurement decisions.

On the reclassification concerns, the Minister reassured members that her officials had liaised with HM Treasury and were content that the Bill restricts the investment and procurement decisions of universities only in a 'limited way.' HMT's assessment is that the fact that the Bill may be applicable to a body would not automatically affect its classification by the ONS.

Amendment 21 was withdrawn.

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



# Forthcoming business

## **Skills for the future: apprenticeships and training – Lords Industry and Regulators Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 14 May from 10:30am, the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will hear oral evidence on the issue of apprenticeships and training.

The committee will hear evidence from:

- Shazia Ejaz, Director of Campaigns at Recruitment and Employment Confederation
- Lloyd Thomas MBE, Future Workforce Skills and Capabilities Lead at Co-op Group
- Nicola Drury, UK Head of Skills and Apprenticeships at Amazon

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

## **Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill - committee stage (Day 4)**

On the afternoon of Tuesday 14 May, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will be discussed at Committee Stage.

You can [watch the session](#).

## **Legal migration – Home Affairs Committee oral evidence**

On Wednesday 15 May from 9:30am, the Home Affairs Committee will hear oral evidence on the issue of legal migration.

The committee will hear evidence from:

- Professor Brian Bell, Chair at Migration Advisory Committee
- Mr Marley Morris, Associate Director at Institute of Public Policy Research







- Dr Madeleine Sumption, Director at Migration Observatory
- Caroline Coombs, Executive Director at Reunite Families UK
- Kate Roberts, Head of Policy at Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)
- Jonathan Thomas, Senior Fellow, Migration Researcher at Social Market Foundation

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

## **Renters (Reform) Bill - second reading**

On the afternoon of Wednesday 15 May, the Renters (Reform) Bill will have its second reading in the House of Lords.

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



# Written Questions

## Overseas Students: Gaza

**Baroness Gohir (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of students in the UK who are on a student visa from Gaza and what support is being provided to them. [UIN HL4066]

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

Table 28 of HESA's 'Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2021/22' reports the number of non-UK domiciled HE students by country of domicile. This data is accessible at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-28>.

In the 2021/22 academic year, there were 245 student enrolments at UK HE providers who were domiciled in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (formerly the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) prior to their studies.

Universities offer a range of dedicated support to their international students before they arrive in the UK, on arrival and during their studies. This includes both pastoral care and financial support. If a student is experiencing difficulties, they should contact the university to discuss their circumstances.

## Overseas Students

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of findings from a recent IDP Connect survey which found that nearly half of prospective students surveyed were reconsidering or unsure of their plans to study in the UK following changes in policy and rules regarding international students. [UIN HL4029]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** The government seeks to ensure that there is a fair and robust migration policy while maintaining the UK's place as a top destination for the best and brightest students from around the world. The department remains committed to the ambitions set out in the government's International Education Strategy to host 600,000 international students per year and to increase the value of our education exports to £35 billion per year, both by 2030.



The department expects the UK to remain a highly attractive study destination. The UK has four universities in the top 10, and 17 in the top 100. The UK has a highly sought after higher education (HE) experience, which is respected by students across the globe. The department is hugely proud to have met its international student recruitment ambition two years running, with 679,970 international students studying at a UK university in 2021/22.

However, the level of legal migration remains too high. As a result, on 4 December 2023, the government announced a new package of measures to reduce net migration and curb the abuse and exploitation of the country's immigration system. The department continues to work closely with the Home Office, the Department for Business and Trade, and other governmental departments to assess the impact of these changes on HE providers.

HE providers are autonomous bodies, independent of government. As such, they are responsible for their own admission decisions. The government takes a close interest in ensuring that the HE admissions system is fair and works closely with HE providers and sector bodies to make sure the system works well for students.

## **Overseas Students: Visas**

**Lord Sharkey (Liberal Democrat):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of recent data by Enroly published on 27 March which showed that issuance of certificates of Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies has significantly reduced, with overall deposits down by more than a third on the same point in 2023. [UIN HL3962]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** The government seeks to ensure that there is a fair and robust migration policy, whilst maintaining the UK's place as a top destination for the best and brightest students from around the world. The department remains committed to the ambitions set out in the government's International Education Strategy to host 600,000 international students per year and to increase the value of our education exports to £35 billion per year, both by 2030.

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## **Overseas Students: Economic Situation**

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the contribution of international students to the UK economy. [UIN HL3980]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** The government recognises the significant economic and cultural contribution that international students make to the UK's higher education (HE) sector.

International tuition fee income at HE providers can be found on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/finances/income>.

## **Higher Education: Freedom of Expression (1)**

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to extend the deadline of 1 August for implementation of the provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, given that the Office for Students has yet to publish guidance on the new complaints scheme relating to freedom of speech. [UIN HL4046]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** The main provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 will come into force on 1 August 2024. Provisions surrounding the new regulatory framework and overseas funding will come into force on 1 September 2025. There is currently no intention to delay the commencement of these provisions, the department will lay the required secondary legislation to meet these implementation dates.



The department will work in collaboration with the Office for Students (OfS) to implement the Act, to allow time for the sector to update their policies and codes of practice. The department meets regularly with OfS to understand progress.

The OfS have already launched three consultations related to:

- The regulation of students' unions (closed).
- The new free-to-use complaints scheme (closed).
- Its proposed approach, regulatory advice and guidance on the duties related to freedom of speech and academic freedom. (open until 26 May 2024).

The proposed guidance is intended to help providers, constituent institutions and students' unions to navigate the new free speech duties that the OfS expects to regulate from 1 August 2024. The department understands that the OfS intends to publish the final version on or before 1 August 2024.

A provisional implementation timetable is available on the OfS website:  
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/quality-and-standards/freedom-of-speech/changes-to-regulation/>.

## **Higher Education: Freedom of Expression (2)**

**Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Labour):** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that the Office for Students will provide guidance on the complaints scheme under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 in a timely manner, in compliance with the provisions of the Act. [UIN HL4047]

**The Baroness Barran MBE (Conservative):** The main provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 will come into force on 1 August 2024.

The Office for Students (OfS) has already carried out consultations related to the regulation of students' unions and new complaints scheme rules in December 2023. The department meets regularly with OfS to understand its progress on the implementation of the Act.

The OfS also launched a consultation on 26 March 2024 on its proposed approach, regulatory advice and guidance on the duties related to freedom of speech and academic freedom.



The proposed guidance is intended to help providers, constituent institutions and students' unions to navigate the new free speech duties that the OfS expects to regulate from 1 August 2024. The department understands that the OfS intends to publish the final version on or before 1 August 2024.

## **Students: Equality**

**Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green (Crossbench):** To ask His Majesty's Government what is the total number of individual named (1) current, and (2) former, students' records held by the Department for Education collected in equality monitoring, broken down by (a) religious affiliation, (b) sexual orientation, (c) gender identity, and (d) disability. [UIN HL4027]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA – now part of Jisc), is responsible for collecting and publishing data on the UK's higher education (HE) sector. The latest published statistics refer to the 2021/22 academic year.

The department holds individual-level HESA data for all HE students in each academic year from 1995/96 to 2021/22. From 1998/99, the students are able to be identified by name.

The HESA data includes information on student's disability status, religion or belief, gender identity and sexual orientation, although, gender identity, sexual orientation and religion or belief (for English, Scottish and Welsh HE providers) were not collected prior to 2012/13. Note that gender identity differs to biological sex which has been collected across all academic years since 1995/96.

The estimated figures below are derived by counting every student that started a HE course in the UK since 1999/2000, as well as the total number of enrolments (entrants and continuing students) in the academic year 1998/99. The figures exclude students with a missing first and last name, but includes students who are not part of the standard registration population. Therefore, these figures will differ from HESA's publications. Additionally, students that disclose sensitive characteristics for the first time in any year after their first year of study are not counted under the estimated number of students with known sensitive characteristics, and students that have started more than one course since 1998/99 are counted once for each enrolment.

The department is estimated to hold the names of 28,927,337 students that started a HE course in the UK between 1998/99 and 2021/22. For 27,424,867 of these names,



the department holds information on at least one of the following sensitive characteristics - disability status, religion or belief, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Of the estimated 28,927,337 names held by the department, 27,373,886 (95%) of them have a known disability status, 7,403,109 (26%) have a known religion or belief, 6,164,770 (21%) have a known gender identity and 6,388,972 (22%) have a known sexual orientation.

Student numbers broken down by personal characteristics over time are available through HESA's open data pages, which can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sb265/figure-5>. HESA's publication archive for earlier years can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications>.

While individual identifiers are retained by the department for matching purposes, at all times the department will minimise the processing of, and access to, instant or meaningful identifiers. Access to named data within the department is restricted to a small number of data professionals with responsibility for matching this data with other sources and creating pseudonymised, or aggregated, versions of the data which are subsequently used for research and statistics.

## **Health Professions: Qualifications**

**Allan Dorans MP (SNP):** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of ensuring that degrees awarded by the Open University are recognised as professional qualifications by the (a) Health and Care Professions Council and (b) British Psychological Society. [UIN 24830]

**Andrew Stephenson MP (Conservative):** No such assessment has been made by the Department. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), which is independent of Government, is the statutory regulator of practitioner psychologists and 14 other professions in the United Kingdom. As part of this responsibility, the HCPC is required by law to set the standards of education, training, and practice for practitioner psychologists, and the other professions it regulates.

Approved education institutions and practice partners develop the specific content and design of programmes to meet the HCPC's education and training standards. The HCPC approves and monitors training programmes to ensure that they meet its



standards. The HCPC's legislation requires that UK trained applicants to its register must hold an approved qualification.

It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in the design of standards of education and training, or the design of the curricula to meet those standards. This is to respect the independence and expertise of the HCPC and education institutions in designing standards and curricula that ensure public safety.

There are a number of different postgraduate options to train as a psychologist. The British Psychological Society offers qualifications across a number of domains in psychology, to support individuals in their chosen specialism. Completion of one of its qualifications will provide an individual with eligibility to become a Chartered Psychologist.

## **Turing Scheme**

**Lord Bishop of St Albans (Bishops):** To ask His Majesty's Government how many students applied to take part in the Turing Scheme in (1) 2021–22, (2) 2022–23, (3) 2023–24 and (4) 2024–25. [UIN HL4110]

**Baroness Barran (Conservative):** Students cannot apply directly to the Turing Scheme. Education providers and other eligible organisations can apply to the scheme for funding towards the costs of their students' international study and work placements. These organisations are responsible for planning placements on behalf of their students. This includes recruiting students and disbursing Turing Scheme funding to them.

However, 21,353 pupils, learners, and students participated in international work and education placements in the 2021/22 academic year through the Turing Scheme. The scheme provided funding for 38,374 placements during the 2022/23 academic year, but the actual number of participants is not yet known. The department expects to publish data for the 2022/23 academic year this autumn.

For the current academic year (2023/24) the Turing Scheme is providing funding for 41,175 pupils, learners and students across the UK. Final data will not be available until after the academic year ends on 31 August 2024 following the submission of providers' final reports.

No data is available for the 2024/25 academic year as applications from providers are currently being assessed. The department will inform providers about the outcome of their applications in June 2024 and will announce results publicly shortly thereafter.





# Sector News

## **The Exchequer benefits and costs associated with the Graduate Route visa – London Economics, HEPI, Kaplan and NUS report**

On Tuesday 7 May, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), Kaplan International Pathways and the National Union of Students (NUS) published a report undertaken by London Economics on the net benefits to the UK Exchequer of the Graduate Route visa scheme.

Key findings include:

- There were an estimated 66,410 Graduate Route visa holders in the UK in the 2022/23 tax year, split between 56,460 international graduates educated in UK higher education and 9,950 dependants.
- For every 10 Graduate Route visa holders, there were under two dependants and this ratio will decline significantly in the future due to the recent tightening of the rules on dependants – this took effect in January 2024 and has already seen a decline of around 80 per cent in the number of dependants of new international students.
- The benefits to the UK in higher tax revenues from hosting these Graduate Route visa holders are estimated to have been £588 million in 2022/23 (or £10,410 per main Graduate Route visa holder). These figures entirely exclude the wider and longer term benefits – for example, Graduate Route visa holders may choose to remain in the UK beyond their current visa through the Skilled Worker route.
- A comprehensive assessment of the costs to the Exchequer of Graduate Route visa holders in terms of public service provision comes to an estimated £517 million for 2022/23 (or £9,160 per main Graduate Route visa holder).
- This means the total net benefit to the UK Exchequer of hosting Graduate Route visa holders in the first full year of the scheme (2022/23) is estimated to be £70 million (or £1,240 per international graduate), disproving claims that the UK loses out financially.



- As robust official data on Graduate Route visa holders is – to date – scant, the numbers are calculated where necessary using reasonable proxies and detailed information on our data sources is available in the report.
- The financial benefits of the Graduate Route visa are on course to increase materially, as the Home Office estimated 173,000 Graduate Route visas would be granted in 2023/24 and slightly more the following year, meaning over 350,000 Graduate Route visa holders could be in the UK by April 2025. This would increase the direct economic benefits by over five times the level in the first full year of the Graduate Route’s operation. Meanwhile, the costs are set to fall significantly as a result of the new rules on dependants.

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

## **Insights into digital poverty – Jisc report**

On Tuesday 7 May, Jisc published analysis of their Digital experience insights survey, which found that not everyone has the same level of access. The survey asked students about how they use technology in their learning. It is designed to help education providers to understand and improve their digital provision.

Key findings include:

- 36% of students said that they did not have a private space in which to work, and 19% said they did not have a safe area to work.
- Despite 94% of students having access to a laptop, 27% of respondents said that they did not have a suitable device for their educational work.
- Less than half of survey respondents said that they had been offered support or training for basic IT skills or learning online. Even fewer reported being supported in the use of specialist software, data analysis, or coding.

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

## **Taking Back Control – CPS report**

On Wednesday 8 May, the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) published a report written by former Immigration Minister Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, former minister Neil O’Brien MP, and CPS Research Director Karl Williams.



The report's recommendations include:

- Abolishing the Graduate route, instead giving international students who want to stay in the UK should need to find graduate-level jobs that meet the salary threshold within six months of the end of their studies.
- Substantially revising the International Education Strategy (IES), ending the 600,000 a year target for the number on international students.
- Accepting the Migration Advisory Committee's recommendation to retire the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) altogether, rather than creating a new Immigration Salary List (ISL).
- Indexing salary thresholds for visa routes in line with inflation, to prevent automatic liberalisation.
- Reaffirming a national commitment to return net migration to the tens of thousands.
- Instituting an annual cap on each individual visa route, voted on by Parliament as part of a 'Migration Budget'.

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

## **The British Academy urges government to safeguard 'vital' Graduate Visa scheme – British Academy letter**

On Wednesday 8 May, the British Academy published a letter to Professor Brian Bell, Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC).

The British Academy's Foreign Secretary, Professor Simon Goldhill FBA, said:

‘International students are a success story for the UK, bringing major social, cultural and economic benefits. It is demonstrably the case that international students boost businesses and local communities, underpin the provision of high-level education and skills for home students, and enable universities to invest in R&D activity. Indeed, modelling by London Economics shows that a single cohort of international students produces a net benefit of £37bn for the UK economy.

We call for the retention of the vital Graduate Visa Route as International students are fundamental to the health of the humanities and social sciences



in the UK, as well as to the UK's prosperity more generally, since these disciplines contribute significantly to an economy that is an 80% services economy with high performing creative, legal, heritage, economics and finance and tourism sectors.'

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

## **Assessing the costs of removing undergraduate tuition fees across the UK – London Economics and UCU report**

On Wednesday 8 May, the University and College Union (UCU) published research by London Economics assessing the impact on the Exchequer, students/graduates, and higher education institutions (HEIs) of introducing free tuition fees for undergraduate students across the UK.

The research finds that a levy of around 1% on employer National Insurance contributions for graduates could support the scrapping of tuition fees at no cost to the Exchequer.

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

## **Prime Minister to call on university leaders to protect Jewish students – No.10 and DfE press release**

On Thursday 9 May, 10 Downing Street and the Department for Education (DfE) published a press release ahead of a roundtable which took place that day with the Prime Minister, Education Secretary, Communities Secretary, Security Minister, Vice-Chancellors and the Union of Jewish Students (UJS).

The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, said:

'Universities should be places of rigorous debate but also bastions of tolerance and respect for every member of their community.

A vocal minority on our campuses are disrupting the lives and studies of their fellow students and, in some cases, propagating outright harassment and antisemitic abuse. That has to stop.'

The Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, said:



‘I have made it absolutely clear that universities must crack down on antisemitism and ensure that protests do not unduly disrupt university life.

I am looking welcoming vice chancellors to No10 today to make sure together we have clear steps in place to protect Jewish students on campus.’

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

## **A Minimum Income Standard for Students – HEPI and TechnologyOne report**

On Thursday 9 May, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and TechnologyOne, in partnership with the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University, published a report showing, for the first time, how much students need to have a minimum acceptable standard of living.

Key findings include:

- Excluding rent, students need £244 a week to have a minimum acceptable standard of living. Including rent, students need £366 a week.
- Adjusting in line with rent prices in different parts of the UK, it is estimated that students need £18,632 a year outside London and £21,774 a year in London to reach a Minimum Income Standard (MIS).
- For a student studying outside London, the maximum government maintenance support, provided to support students to meet their living costs, falls short by £8,405 for English students, £6,482 for Welsh students, £7,232 for Scottish students and £10,496 for Northern Irish students.
- For those studying outside of London, the maintenance support in England covers just 55% of the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) developed here. The Welsh maintenance support covers 65%, Scottish support covers 61% and Northern Irish support covers just 44% of MIS.
- For students studying in London, the gap is £8,426 if a student is from England, with the loan covering 61% of students’ costs. The gap is £6,604 if they are from Wales (support covers 70% of costs), £10,374 if they are from Scotland (support covers 52%) and £10,922 if they are from Northern Ireland, where support covers just 50% of students’ living costs.



- Even a student doing 10 hours a week of paid employment for the whole year and in receipt of the maximum maintenance support will not have enough money to reach MIS. English students must work nearly 19 hours a week at minimum wage, Welsh students more than 14 hours, Scottish students 16 hours and Northern Irish students 23 hours to reach MIS. By contrast, many universities recommend students should work no more than 15 hours during term-time.
- The parents of an English student who receives the minimum maintenance support and does no paid employment would have to contribute £13,865 a year for the student to reach MIS. For a Welsh student, the contribution is £6,482; for a Scottish student, it is £10,232; and for a Northern Irish student, it is £13,548.
- Additionally, under the current system, parents in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are expected to contribute to their children's living costs even if they do not themselves have enough money for a minimum acceptable standard of living.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

‘Our current students are the next generation of teachers, doctors, nurses and scientists, and it is clear many are struggling to keep up with the cost of living. Students have different sources of funding to support their time at university, from parental support, earnings from term-time and summer jobs, and maintenance loans for those who qualify.

While universities do all they can to support students, the maintenance package is falling short and has not kept pace with inflation. In England, students receiving the maximum maintenance package are £1,903 worse off than they would have been if correct inflation measures were used over the last four years. It is imperative we look again at how well the current system is supporting students and what changes need to be made to continue widening participation in higher education for all learners regardless of their background. In England, this includes a need for the uprating of the student maintenance package, a reintroduction of maintenance grants for those most in need and a re-evaluation of household income thresholds – frozen since 2008.’

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



## **Graduate Route – Russell Group briefing**

On Thursday 9 May, the Russell Group published a briefing on the Graduate Route.

It outlines that the Graduate Route has:

- Helped Russell Group universities grow the number of places for UK students over time despite shortfalls in government funding. English universities, on average, subsidised the cost of educating UK undergraduates by £2500 per student in 2022/23.
- Helped universities support economic growth by maintaining investment in cutting edge R&D, benefitting communities in every part of the UK. Universities subsidised research activity by £5bn in 2021/22.
- Supported work to boost the financial resilience of universities, with an internationally competitive offer to overseas students helping Russell Group institutions diversify recruitment.

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

## **New initiatives to encourage students from low-income families to apply for university – UCAS press release**

On Friday 10 May, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) announced a new package of support targeting students who might disregard university as an option for them, because of initial financial barriers or because they believe they will not achieve the entry requirements published by universities.

The initiatives being launched are:

- Students in receipt of free school meals (FSM) will no longer have to pay for their university application.
- Applicants will soon be able to view historic entry grades data and offer rates displayed for each course.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:

‘Going to university can be a transformative experience. Indeed, a recent poll showed that almost a third of students who were the first in their family to attend university described it as ‘the best decision they have made’. So it can’t





be right that you are much less likely to go to university if you received free school meals. The university sector has made great strides towards expanding opportunity, but there is much further to go, and it is clear that affordability is a real barrier. It would be nothing short of a tragedy if someone chose not to apply to university because they couldn't afford the UCAS application fee.

Today UCAS is making a welcome step by ending the university application fee for students who have received free school meals. I warmly welcome this decision. It may be a small part of the overall cost, but it sends an important signal – we want you, and we want to do all we can to make going to university possible, whatever your financial circumstances.

This announcement adds to sector progress to better support students eligible for free school meals to apply to university, the numbers of applicants with FSM status increased by 13% between January 2024 and the 2023 cycle.'

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

