



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

7 - 11 October 2024

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

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Parliamentary business

UK's membership of Horizon Europe – HoL oral question

On Tuesday 8 October, Viscount Stansgate (Labour) asked the following question in the House of Lords: 'UK's membership of Horizon Europe.'

Lord Vallance of Balham, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation said they had 'early indication' that UK applications had increased in 2024 since association. Making association a success was described as a 'priority', and he stressed that the government was working with business and industry to remove barriers. On the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10), the Minister said the government wanted to shape the programme so that it delivered excellence, was relevant, and represented value for money for both taxpayers and researchers.

In his supplementary question, Viscount Stansgate asked whether the government were hoping to associate on computing and space work as part of FP10. He also asked whether his Department was working with the Home Office to ensure the visa system could attract the 'best and brightest' scientists to Britain. The Minister highlighted that visas were under constant review by the Home Office, and it was encouraging that visa costs could be covered by Horizon Europe funding.

Lord Krebs (Crossbench) raised the withdrawal of underspend due to the Horizon Europe contingency plans. The Minister reassured that any underspend had been kept fully under the Department.

Lord Fox (Liberal Democrats) raised the concern of visas and asked how much of the slow progress on Horizon Europe projects could be attributed to visa issues. The Minister said it was important that visa costs and the health surcharge could be put on the grant.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) described Horizon Europe as a 'no brainer' and asked whether the government would reassess their position on Erasmus. The Minister welcomed the comments and raised the success of the Turning scheme which he said would be continued.

Lord Kakkar (Crossbench) asked what action the government was taking to increase Horizon pillar 2 funding for collaboration between businesses and academia after he suggested this had been 'less promising' than applications for European Research

Council funding. The Minister noted the increased communication campaign and roadshows that were helping to improve success rate.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Labour) asked whether the Minister could provide an estimate of the damage to R&D programmes as a result of the UK's absence in the Horizon Europe scheme. The Minister said that there was 'absolutely no doubt quite significant damage was done'. He added it was not fully possible to work out the scale of the damage, but he expected that it would change.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrat) probed whether the UK's association with FP10 had to be 'wrapped up' in a broader consideration of the UK's relationship with the European Union. The Minister said that he was looking forward to engaging and shaping FP10 now that the UK was in Horizon Europe. He added that he was due to meet Manuel Heitor (Chair of the expert group on Horizon and FP10) to discuss how the UK can fully engage.

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

Renters' Rights Bill – HoC second reading

On Wednesday 9 October, the second reading of the Renters' Rights Bill took place in the House of Commons.

Gideon Amos MP (Liberal Democrat) questioned the Bill's definition of a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) being three or more students renting together. He argued that this should be extended to one or more students renting together and that if the definition is not revised there could be significant withdrawal of student housing from the market.

Siân Berry MP (Green) said she had spoken with the National Union of Students (NUS) about problems caused by well-off guarantors being required to secure a rented home. She said this fuels discrimination against 'working-class, estranged and international students, and fuels homelessness among students'.

Helen Hayes MP (Labour), Chair of the Education Select Committee, also raised concerns about guarantor arrangements – partly because one of her constituents' sons had died by suicide. The letting agency insisted that the agreement applied even in the event of a tenant's death and began pursuing his parents for rent payments. They were forced to find another student to take on his tenancy in order to be relieved of their responsibility for the rent.

Abtisam Mohamed MP (Labour) said that nearly half of her constituents are private renters, many of them students – and having visited some of the properties, she was horrified by the extent of the damp, mould and disrepair that many are forced to live with. She was also keen to see a cap on in-tenancy rent increases at the lower end of either inflation or wage growth. The Bill currently allows landlords to raise rents annually to market prices and must provide two months' notice of any change.

As the MP for one of the largest private rented housing sectors in the UK, the majority of which are rented to students, Alex Sobel MP (Labour) spoke at length about the impact of the Bill on student renters. He raised concerns about the use of rent guarantors and demands for deposits of up to 100% of annual rent. He cited research by students from the Centre for Homelessness Impact which found that just 36% of universities provide help with rent guarantors, that even fewer provide a rent guarantor service for students, and that, as universities themselves are facing extreme financial difficulties, such a service will 'become ever more unlikely'. He noted research from the NUS which shows that two in five students have considered dropping out because of the cost of rent. He called on the government to ban landlords from demanding either a UK-based rent guarantor or 'huge' up-front rent payments, and perhaps limiting deposits to just three months' rent. He also called for an end to the practice of signing joint tenancies too early in the academic year, so that students do not have to commit to accommodation before they are ready, 'creating artificial panic in the market.' Barriers must be removed for care leavers, students and international students. He said the APPG for Students heard from students that access to a rent guarantor is often a determining factor in their ability to continue their degree, or even access a university education in the first place.

John Cooper MP (Conservative) noted the impact of similar measures in Scotland, which he said has driven up costs for renters, reduced choice, and made it impossible to get student accommodation in university cities across Scotland.

Speaking on behalf of the opposition, David Simmons MP, Shadow Minister for Housing, Communities, and Local Governmentsaid there needs to appropriate flexibility in respect of student properties, so that students can find the housing that they need and landlords are not discouraged from entering that market. He warned of the consequences of landlords who might be 'wary of a two-month notice period, decide to take the property off the student market and put it somewhere else.'

Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP, noted the specific issues raised by several MPs relating to the impact of the new tenancy system on the student rental market. He said that the Bill will enable students to benefit from the new system while protecting the supply of student accommodation. However, he said

this is an area where the ‘judgments are finely balanced’ and that he looks forward to future discussions as the Bill progresses.

Committee stage is expected to conclude by Thursday 28 November.

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

You can [read UUK’s briefing](#).

Skills England – Westminster Hall debate

On Wednesday 9 October, Antonia Bance MP (Labour) led a Westminster Hall debate on Skills England.

Antonia Bance MP opened the debate by outlining the ‘urgent need to reset our adult skills system in England’ after ‘a decade of decline in skills’. She urged that Skills England must not ‘be just another quango’ and must be a ‘confident and directive organisation’.

She then outlined her views on how Skills England must operate to be successful: use the best available data to spot and respond to ‘genuine’ skills needs; be co-ordinated across Government; support training that meets the industrial strategy; co-ordinate regional and national partnerships; and push employers to do more. She said the government Green Paper on industrial strategy is expected to be published before the Budget, perhaps within the next week.

Andrew Pakes MP (Labour) argued Skills England will only succeed if it is linked to industrial strategy, is tripartite and brings together employers and unions.

Noah Law MP (Labour) said Skills England can only achieve its aims if there is a ‘levelling of the playing field’ for further education, including addressing wage disparities and recruitment challenges.

Helen Grant MP (Conservative) identified constant change in skills qualifications as a challenge for further education colleges and asked for more certainty for better long-term planning.

Alison Griffiths MP (Conservative) raised the issue of cyber security threats and the need for cyber security skills to be included in Skills England’s priorities.

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP, emphasised the importance of skills to the government’s five missions and said Skills England would ‘ensure that we

have the highly trained workforce we need to meet the national, regional and local skills needs of the next decade, and it will be aligned with the upcoming industrial strategy’.

She confirmed Skills England will use the best available data to ‘provide an authoritative assessment of national and regional skills needs’ and ensure appropriate training is available. She pointed to the new growth and skills levy as aligning apprenticeships with skills gaps and what employers need.

She also said Skills England will work with combined authorities to ‘ensure that regional and national skills needs are met at all levels, from essential skills to those delivered via higher education, in line with the forthcoming industrial strategy’. Local skills improvement plans will ‘provide an agreed set of actionable priorities’ to make training more responsive to local labour market needs.

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

Higher education in Staffordshire – HoC adjournment debate

On Wednesday 9 October, an adjournment debate on higher education in Staffordshire took place in the House of Commons. This debate was tabled by Adam Jogee MP (Labour).

Adam Jogee opened the debate by outlining that his constituency was ‘home to many excellent places of learning’ including Keele University. He highlighted the university’s global network of alumni, its excellence in teaching and research, as well as its leading sustainability efforts. The university was noted as one of the largest employers in his constituency with a significant economic impact. On the university’s contribution to local growth and regeneration, he raised the ‘Keele in Town’ programme which will see the transformation of an empty 19th century building into a mixed-use facility for the community.

Dave Robertson MP (Labour) intervened to highlight that the University of Staffordshire had a small satellite campus in his constituency of Lichfield. He asked whether the wealth of universities should be shared across the country, so that everybody could benefit from the investments. Adam Jogee said that ensuring people from all backgrounds and communities could access and benefit from education was something the new government would advance.

David Williams MP (Labour) highlighted the role of organisations such as the YMCA to help young people access higher education. Adam Jogee welcomed this intervention and echoed the important role of such organisations.

Jim Shannon MP (DUP) raised concern of the pressures on young people in higher education. He called for greater mental health support and financial help for students. Adam Jogee agreed and also raised other pressures such as the availability and quality of housing and balancing work and study commitments.

Dr Allison Gardner MP (Labour) highlighted degree-level apprenticeships as an ‘excellent alternative route for young people and career changers to access higher education.’ She said they provided a real benefit to local employers and economies by developing workplace skills of the future.

Leigh Ingham MP (Labour) described the higher education sector as ‘incredibly important’ to the skills and education landscape of Staffordshire. She noted concerns from university employees of the insecure environment they operate in, highlighting that the University of Staffordshire had its third restructure in three years.

Adam Jogee proceeded to raise the progression rates in Staffordshire as well as the need to improve access for students with special educational needs. He also paid tribute to all the ‘wonderful people who educate, inspire and support the leaders, the vets and the doctors of tomorrow’ that work at the university.

On the wider higher education sector, he said there must be ‘serious consideration and thought to our universities’ due to the financial environment they are operating in. He said the ‘future of our country is in many ways dependent on the future of our universities.’

Responding on behalf of the government, Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children and Families, said ‘it is right that we celebrate the success of our higher education sector, the value it brings to our economy, the valuable skills it gives to people who choose to study at our universities and colleges as well as the people who choose to work in the sector and within the regions they serve.’ She said the government was committed to ensuring a ‘sustainable funding model that supports high-value provision, powering opportunity and growth and meeting the skill needs of the country.’ On access, she said the government would support the aspiration of everybody who wants to attend higher education. In her response she also highlighted the need to meet the skills requirements, work on mental health provision, and the partnerships universities have with local industries.

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

Studying computer science at English universities – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 9 October, Lord Mackenzie of Framwellgate (Non-affiliated) asked an oral question in the House of Lords on studying computer science.

Lord Mackenzie raised a particular computer science course in which the UCAS page states only EU and international students are eligible to apply and questioned the fairness to domestic students. The Minister for Skills and Higher Education, Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern said that admissions arrangements are up to individual universities and a higher proportion of domestic applicants receive offers for computer science than international applicants. She also pointed to the positive ‘financial, cultural and social contribution made by international students’.

Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat) said current fee structures are not allowing universities to function properly and asked when the government will change the funding system. Baroness Smith said the government is looking at a range of options to deliver a funding system that is fair for students and provides stability for institutions.

Lord Tarassenko (Crossbench) raised concerns that not enough domestic students are undertaking PhDs in computer science or AI. Baroness Smith agreed that digital skills are important for the country’s future and said that this is something Skills England will work to address.

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated) asked about the significant decrease in international student applications and asked whether the government is exploring the barrier that call centres pose to prospective international students. Baroness Smith agreed that the sharp decline in international student numbers was concerning and emphasised the government is ‘doing everything we can’ to position the UK as a welcoming study destination.

Lord West of Spithead (Labour) questioned the security implications of a large number of quantum computing students being from China and potential members of the People’s Liberation Army. Baroness Smith said that research security is important and listed the academic technology approval scheme, the National Protective Security Authority and the National Cyber Security Centre as supporting universities to protect their research.

Lord Fox (Liberal Democrat) said the FBI has a dedicated unit touring US universities to warn them about the threats posed by China and asked whether the UK could set

up something similar. Baroness Smith repeated the schemes currently in place to safeguard the country's interests.

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

Freedom of speech in universities – HoC urgent question

On Thursday 10 October, there was an Urgent Question 'To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on freedom of speech in universities' tabled by the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP.

Responding on behalf of government, the Minister for School Standards, Catherine McKinnell MP, outlined that the Labour government is committed to upholding freedom of speech through working with academics, students and campaigners to get the legislation right. She said implementation of the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act had been paused due to government hearing concerns about unintended consequences and the disproportionate burdens the legislation would place on universities and students' unions. She clarified the decision to pause was in order to get the legislation right and that officials and ministers are currently engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to take into account their views on how freedom of speech can be protected.

Damian Hinds MP raised the issue of a Member of Parliament due to speak at Cambridge University being unable to do so due to safety concerns. He stressed that the Act had gained cross-party support and gained royal assent and criticised the government's decision to pause implementation that had passed through the House without consulting MPs. He referenced a letter signed by 600 academics criticising the pausing of the legislation. Catherine McKinnell MP reiterated the government's commitment to freedom of speech and ensuring higher education remains a place of 'constructive dialogue'. She repeated that the legislation's implementation had been paused to ensure they got the legislation right, citing concerns around the Act's impact on the welfare of students and minority groups. She said that possible plans for the Act will be confirmed as soon as possible, as well as long-term plans to ensure freedom of speech on campuses.

Graham Stringer MP (Labour) mentioned the economic importance of universities and said he regretfully does not support the government's actions as it was not mentioned in the party's manifesto. He suggested the government had succumbed to pressure from the Chinese government, which The Minister denied.

Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Higher Education, Ian Sollom MP, welcomed the decision to delay the Act and asked what steps the government is taking to ensure Jewish students feel safe on campus. The Minister cited regular meetings with Universities UK to discuss what support universities are providing.

John Whittingdale MP (Conservative) asked whether the Minister would meet with a group of Jewish academics who have requested to discuss the legislation. The Minister said she would pass the request on to the Skills Minister.

Mary Kelly Foy MP (Labour) said the real threat to academic freedom is cuts to departments and degree courses.

Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson MP (Conservative) also criticised the government not consulting MPs when pausing the legislation and asked for the House to have a say on the legislation.

Douglas McAllister MP (Labour) pointed out that previous Conservative Education Secretaries are on record conceded that the Act could allow hate speech to happen on campus. The Minister agreed and said that universities potentially allowing hate speech due to concerns around legal fees was a reason for the pausing of the legislation.

Julian Lewis MP (Conservative) asked for a specific example of how the legislation could have had unintended consequences. The Minister could not give a specific example but said the Skills Minister would provide a written response to his question.

Peter Swallow MP (Labour) pointed to 'unsubstantiated claims' made by a Conservative MP that lecturers are marking down Conservative students due to their views and said this undermines the hard work lecturers like himself do to support students.

Rt Hon Richard Holden MP (Conservative) said the pausing of the legislation was already having an impact, with a speaker cancelled at Cambridge University and the Durham University Debating Society being banned from the students' union freshers fair. The Minister said she 'respectfully disagreed' that pausing the legislation had caused harm.

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

Freedom of speech in universities – HoL urgent question

On Thursday 10 October, there was a repeat of the Urgent Question on freedom of speech in universities in the House of Lords.

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, repeated the statement earlier made by Minister for School Standards, Catherine McKinnell MP, in the House of Commons.

Shadow Education Minister, Baroness Barran, criticised that the legislation was paused with no debate in Parliament or mention in the Labour Party manifesto. She said the failure to commence the legislation was resulting in academic freedom being eroded and called on the Minister to meet with a group of Jewish academics calling for full implementation of the Act.

Baroness Smith said the speed of pausing the legislation was due to the timing of the commencement and it was right for the government to take time and engage with those on both sides of the argument. She cited government concerns that the legislation would cause hate speech to be allowed on campuses and concerns from universities themselves as reasons the implementation was paused.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (Liberal Democrats) pointed out that a speaker had been cancelled at Cambridge University due to the advice of the police, not the university. He said it was 'absolutely right' for the government to 'reconsider a badly drafted act'. Baroness Smith said the government does believe there is currently an issue with freedom of speech on campuses, that this is of fundamental importance and that is why the issue needs so much care.

Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston (Crossbench) said uncertainty creates bad decisions and called on the government to speed up the decision on the legislation to provide certainty for universities. Baroness Smith said that universities currently have free speech obligations they should be adhering to and the government will take the time needed to get the legislation right.

Lord Cashman (Non-affiliated) called on the government to stop the culture war as this impacts on the vulnerable in society and said freedom of speech comes with responsibility. Baroness Smith echoed that these are serious issues and said 'this is a serious government interested in finding the right solutions rather than a political headline'.

Lord Sewell of Sanderstead (Conservative) alleged a 'real stitch-up' between Vice-Chancellors and government and accused VCs and government of wanting an easy time of it, not caring about freedom of speech and being ideologically driven.

Baroness Smith said this was ‘wholly wrong’ and said the government has not just engaged with Vice-Chancellors on the issue.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Labour) criticised Lord Sewell for ‘grandstanding’ calling it ‘abhorrent’ and reminiscent of ‘fake news’. Baroness Smith said that Vice-Chancellors have a ‘difficult job made tougher by the previous government’s failure to address the financial challenges that they were facing and propensity to use universities and higher education as a political battleground rather than supporting them in the way in which they need supporting. The previous government has only made this worse and we are determined not to go down that route’.

Baroness Stedman-Scott (Conservative) said that the events at Cambridge University shows the Freedom of Speech Act must be implemented immediately. Baroness Smith pointed to Lord Wallace’s suggestion that there was a different cause of the issue at Cambridge University, but declined to comment on the details of that case. She said that, as someone who had both protested as a student and been on the receiving end of student protests as a politician, she recognised the careful balance that needs to be made between the right to protest and the right to freedom of speech. She said this is better dealt with in a ‘calm and considered way’ rather than through front page headlines.

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

Forthcoming business

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoC second reading

On Monday 14 October, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will have its second reading in the House of Commons.

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

Engineering biology – HoL Science and Technology Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 15 October from 10am, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee will take evidence from Lord Patrick Vallance, Minister for Science in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). The session will focus on both the Minister's general responsibilities as Minister for Science and issues related to the ongoing inquiry into engineering biology.

Possible question areas include:

- How will DSIT coordinate action across government on areas such as skills, procurement, and regulation, in line with the Science and Technology Framework?
- How will DSIT, and science and technology, feed into the Industrial Strategy and the Government's Missions?
- How will the Government ensure that we have sufficient skills and training to make the most of engineering biology in the UK?
- What is the Government's plan to ensure the UK has sufficient research infrastructure and facilities to enable the engineering biology sector to thrive?
- What is the Government doing to encourage science and technology companies to scale-up in the UK, list here and get investment here?

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



DSIT oral questions

On Wednesday 16 October from 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, and his ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps he is taking to help improve domestic research and development capabilities. (Mark Ferguson MP, Labour)
- What steps he is taking to support research into artificial intelligence. (Dan Norris MP, Labour)

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

Written Questions and Statements

Towards an FP10 Fit to Tackle Global Challenges: The UK's position on the Successor to the World's Largest R&D Programme

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP: The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is focused on improving people's lives by maximising the potential of research and development, science and technology to drive economic growth and wider societal benefits. It is our ambition to accelerate innovation, investment and productivity through world-class science, research and development. In line with this goal, the UK's association to Horizon Europe, the world's largest internationally collaborative research programme, empowers UK innovators and scientists to collaborate with colleagues from across the EU, as well as with other associated countries.

From 2028, the 10th Research and Innovation Framework Programme (FP10), will replace Horizon Europe. It will be tasked with harnessing excellence-based research and development to support delivery of European security, sustainable prosperity and competitiveness.

On 26th September, DSIT published a Position Paper setting out the UK Government's views on the potential shape and direction of FP10. We have published this Position Paper to support the work of the EU and Member States in developing an impactful programme which delivers research and development across all disciplines of the highest quality to the benefit of all participants. A copy of the position paper was deposited in the libraries of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The Government wants to strengthen ties with our European neighbours and explore areas where we can boost our shared prosperity and security through mutually beneficial agreements. This includes ensuring that UK scientists, innovators, businesses, and institutions can collaborate with partners across Europe and beyond.

Given current geopolitical realities, we believe now is the time to address global challenges through collective action. We believe that through genuine openness, EU Member States, the UK, and other likeminded countries can pool resources to effectively tackle priorities which affect us all. This includes using the power of research to harness emerging technologies and in turn boost productivity and competitiveness.

Our clear position is for FP10 to be based on openness and excellence, and to ensure the continuation of proven instruments within Horizon Europe.

In the paper, we advocate for an FP10 which:

1. Maintains excellence at the very core of FP10 to harness the full potential of Europe's research and innovation capabilities across the entire research pipeline.
2. Enables the equal participation of likeminded associated countries in all areas of the programme from its very inception, with barriers removed to ensure collaboration on critical technologies between like-minded partners. Maintaining the principle of openness to those who share common goals and values will support the best research and collaboration to tackle these shared challenges.
3. Preserves the three-pillar architecture in Horizon Europe, maintaining stable and predictable support for proven elements within Horizon Europe to continue supporting discovery research, international collaboration opportunities and applied innovation respectively. Through a careful balance between curiosity-driven research and applied research and innovation, FP10 should remain flexible and responsive to future global challenges.

We very much welcome opportunities for future discussion with researchers, innovators, businesses, institutions, the European Commission and EU Member States as FP10 develops given our many shared priorities.

We will, of course, be interested in potentially associating to FP10, assuming it is open, relevant, and provides good value for researchers and taxpayers. [UIN HCWS101]

Higher Education: Admissions

Baroness Crawley (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of removing the cap on student recruitment in higher education on the sustainability of the sector, and whether they plan to review or restore the cap. [UIN HL877]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, publishes an annual report on the financial health of the HE sector.

The OfS' most recent report, published in May 2024, does not cite the removal of the cap on student recruitment as a key risk to the financial sustainability of the sector. There are no plans to reintroduce student number controls. The report is attached and can also be read here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/ly1buqli/financial-sustainability-report2024.pdf>.

The UK's universities are autonomous, vibrant and independent. The government values this, as does the HE sector. This means that, ultimately, it is for providers, as part of an autonomous and independent sector, to decide on effective business models.

Lifelong Education

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have regarding the rollout of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. [UIN HL918]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: At present, the department is working to ensure that its approach to lifelong learning will be as effective as possible, enabling people to gain the skills they need to support their careers.

The government recognises that lifelong learning is a core part of a sustainable higher education system which provides opportunities for all and offers learners greater flexibility in an ever-evolving economy.

We will make further announcements about this work shortly.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Gavin Williamson MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an estimate of the cost to educational institutions of stopping the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. [UIN 5580; Grouped Question: 5579]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: An estimate of costs associated with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech Act) 2023 was provided in the Impact Assessment published with the Act.

The Act was paused to consider options for its future, including repeal, and no final decision has been made on this. One of the reasons for pausing the Act was to

consider the burden on higher education providers before making a final decision, and the department is currently engaging with stakeholders on this. The department will undertake all required impact assessments before making a final decision.

Innovation

Saqib Bhatti MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Innovation Skills Framework. [UIN 5396]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The Department has not made a formal assessment of this Framework, which is being delivered by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). UKRI is working to further refine and develop the Framework. Through Innovate UK, it will continue to work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and in due course with Skills England, to monitor the impact of applying this Framework.

New Businesses: Investment

Andrew Griffith MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether he is taking steps to support investment in (a) start-ups and (b) university spin-outs. [UIN 5702]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The Government is taking steps to increase the availability of capital in the UK and help businesses access finance, including for start-ups and spinouts. For example, our creation of a National Wealth Fund will increase access to domestic capital for businesses, and our ten-year extension of the Enterprise Investment Scheme and the Venture Capital Trust initiatives maintains investment incentives.

To support startups, Innovate UK offers businesses loans, grants and investor partnerships at the start-up/R&D stage through to scale up and growth. To support spinouts, the Government is implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of University Spin-outs published last year.

Students: Fees and Charges

Ben Obese-Jecty MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to increase tuition fees for university students. [UIN 6843]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government is determined that the higher education (HE) funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students.

Funding plans for the HE sector will be set out at the relevant fiscal event, in line with the approach to public spending commitments across government.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she had discussions with relevant stakeholders on the potential impact of pausing the implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 on income from China for UK universities as part of discussions relating to that decision. [UIN 6574; Grouped Question: 6571]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Departmental officials and my noble Friend, the Minister for Skills have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders on the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. This includes representatives of higher education providers and academics, including from the Committee for Academic Freedom, Academics for Academic Freedom and the London Universities' Council for Academic Freedom, who jointly set up the open letter.

Students: Loans

Rupert Lowe MP (Reform UK): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the adequacy of the interest rate system for student loans; and if she will meet the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth to discuss that system. [UIN 5469]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The government is determined that the higher education (HE) funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students. The department is considering the system and will continue to engage with stakeholders on this.

The department believes that every young person, regardless of their background, should have the opportunity to attend university. That is why the department is dedicated to creating a sustainable HE funding system that supports students, expands opportunities, and upholds the excellence of our world-leading universities.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the evidential basis is for the statement by her Department's spokesman quoted in the Telegraph of 24 August 2024 that the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 could expose students to harm and appalling hate speech on campuses. [UIN 6573; Grouped Question: 6572]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The department has not collected data on individual cases of employment tribunals related to freedom of speech. Cases such as these are rare and are rightfully seen as a last resort.

The department has heard concerns from many in the sector, including minority groups, that the Act and its implementation may have unintended consequences. Many raised concerns that the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act could push providers to overlook the safety and wellbeing of minority groups over fears of sanction and costly legal action.

Sector News

£7 million to tackle antisemitism in education confirmed – DfE press release

On Monday 7 October, the Education Secretary announced that the government is resuming the procurement of £7 million worth of funding to tackle antisemitism in schools, colleges and universities.

Some of the funds will go towards funding a project to upskill teachers and university staff in tackling antisemitism. It will also pay for an innovation fund to tackle antisemitism in Education, with a slightly broader focus on settings building resilience to mis-information.

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

What can QAA reviews tell us about what works in collaborative provision in the UK? – QAA report

On Monday 7 October, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published an analysis of lessons that have been learnt on collaborative provision from its reviews across the UK.

The report examines areas of good practice and offers recommendations for improvement in relation to three key themes identified by its analysis: robust oversight, constructive relationships and a coherent student experience.

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

Harnessing scientific and technological innovation in the UK – POST publication

On Tuesday 8 October, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) published the insights of a horizon scanning consultation of experts.

The publication identifies potential priorities for the government's science and technology policies, including in research and development (R&D) and notes that the

right policies could boost innovation and encourage the growth and scale-up of companies.

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

Changing the Culture: 7 Years On – Universities Scotland report

On Wednesday 9 October, Universities Scotland published a report on the progress of the strategic framework for institutions' anti-harassment work in the student community across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Key findings include:

- 95% of institutions have ensured close involvement of their student and staff bodies in their anti-harassment strategies.
- 79% work with third-sector organisations as part of their strategic approaches and 63% collaborate with the police.
- 63% of institutions work with survivors and those with lived experience to inform their strategic approach to anti-harassment, up from only a third who indicated they did so in 2019.
- 79% of institutions have adopted trauma-informed processes for student misconduct, with 74% having done so since 2019.
- 79% of HEIs now have policies that allow for preventative suspension where this is necessary and appropriate.

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

IfATE (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill – DfE policy summary note

On Thursday 10 October, the Department for Education published a policy summary note providing information on the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill as it is introduced into Parliament. It also sets out the role that Skills England will play in the government's wider skills reform agenda.

It outlines that Skills England will:

- Provide an authoritative assessment of national and regional skills needs in the economy now and in the future, combining the best available statistical data with insights generated from employers and other key stakeholders.
- Ensure that there is a comprehensive suite of apprenticeships, training and technical qualifications for individuals and employers to access, and which are aligned with skills gaps and what employers need. As part of this, it will identify which training should be available via the new growth and skills levy.
- Work together with Combined Authorities and other places with devolution deals, as well as other regional organisations (such as Employer Representative Bodies) to ensure that regional and national skills needs are met (at all levels – from essential skills to those delivered via Higher Education), in line with the forthcoming Industrial Strategy.

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

Future Ready: The role of research-intensive universities in an innovation-led Industrial Strategy – Russell Group report

On Thursday 10 October, the Russell Group published a new report outlining some of the ways research-intensive universities are already using partnerships with business, the public and third sectors, the NHS and others to deliver in government priority areas such as health and social care, clean energy, and economic resilience.

Alongside publication of this report, they announced a new expert advisory panel, chaired by University of Warwick Vice-Chancellor Professor Stuart Croft, that will help develop detailed proposals on how to maximise the impact of the UK higher education sector to support delivery of the government's Industrial Strategy.

Panel members confirmed so far include former Secretary of State **Greg Clark**; **Jen Tiffin**, Group Chief Operating Officer for NatWest Group; **Lucy Yu**, CEO of the Centre for Net Zero (Octopus Energy); **Dr Robert Scott**, Vice President of Human Genetics and Genomics at GSK; and **Dr Arnab Basu**, Chief Executive of successful university spinout Kromek – as well as other senior business leaders, founders and university experts.

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

Soft Power Index 2024 – HEPI publication

On Thursday 10 October, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published the results of its eighth annual Soft Power Index.

This year's results show:

- 70 serving world leaders received higher education in the US; and
- 58 serving world leaders received higher education in the UK.

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

Global Wales – Universities Wales briefing

On Thursday 10 October, Universities Wales published a briefing paper on Global Wales.

Global Wales takes a collaborative approach to international higher and further education. It brings universities and, more recently, colleges together to amplify their profile internationally, supporting the sector to recruit internationally as well as to develop education and research collaboration with overseas partners.

Global Wales' objectives are:

- Increase international student numbers from identified priority markets
- Maintain and grow international partnerships
- Increase the awareness and reputation of Welsh universities and colleges internationally
- Generate additional export earnings for Wales

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