



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**



Dear Colleague,

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy on 6 April has catapulted Degree Apprenticeships into the spotlight. Employers with a pay bill of £3 million or more are in the process of formulating plans to operationalise their Levy spend. While these plans will inevitably focus on apprenticeships at all levels, for Degree Apprenticeships, in particular, the levy looks to be a game changer. It will act as a catalyst for growth in breadth of subject areas available, the scale of opportunities

on offer to existing employees looking to up skill, and alternative degree pathways for people starting out on a new career.

A recent report by Universities UK published the results of a survey of more than sixty universities and higher education institutions, which indicated 91 per cent of these HEIs were actively engaging with Degree Apprenticeships, either through programme level pilots or through organisation-wide developments. Many universities, including Manchester Metropolitan, are poised to meet the exponential growth in employer demand that looks likely to hit us in the next few months. At the same time we face the possibility that employers may instead focus levy expenditure on apprenticeships at sub-degree level and, moreover, there is, as always, fierce competition within the sector. The fact that HEIs, including my own, Manchester Metropolitan University, have been prepared to enter this new territory, to take calculated risks and to forge ahead with new ways of engaging with employers and student-apprentices is evidence of the strength of our sector. We have also demonstrated that, contrary to popular opinion, universities can be fleet of foot, speedily responding to almost real-time policy announcements and regulatory changes.

Degree Apprenticeships offer an educational path that combines the academic knowledge, the professional behaviours and the technical skills, needed by employers here and now and by students to progress rapidly in their present and future careers. Our first cohort of sixty Degree Apprentices in Digital started in September 2015; they are already achieving well beyond expectation, academically and professionally. First and foremost, this is testament

All-Party Parliamentary University Group
c/o Kate Jackson, Universities UK, Woburn House, 20 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HQ
Tel: 020 7419 5621 appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk

to the commitment and hard work of the apprentices, but also to the enthusiasm of the academic teams and the active support of our partner employers.

We are hugely proud of the progress that we have made in partnership with employers and our pioneering degree apprentices. There have been and continue to be, however, internal and external challenges to the development and delivery of new programmes. All universities new to apprenticeships will experience complications navigating the systems and processes required for effective development, complex funding, reporting requirements, employer engagement and different models of delivery and student support, to name but a few. However, with internal support from senior management and through the commitment of resources these can be overcome.

What can be a more significant challenge is the very short time that providers have between an appropriate apprenticeship standard being approved and programmes needing to be ready for delivery. While the fundamental building blocks of the Trailblazer process, with employers always taking centre stage, is the right approach, without strong academic leadership the journey can be slow and sometimes frustrating. On rare occasions this can lead to employers and institutions being ready to move forward with a new apprenticeship, but having to pause and wait for a standard to clear due process.

I was pleased to hear of the recent HEFCE announcement of the second round of funding for Degree Apprenticeship development. While we are allocating significant internal resources to developing degree apprenticeships, the opportunity to bid for additional funds to support programme development in areas of acute business need is positive news.

Manchester Metropolitan University welcomes the linked commitments to closing the skills gap and to enhancing educational and career opportunities for all. The Education Secretary has spoken of placing technical education at the heart of social mobility through the creation of 3 million apprenticeships. However, these traditional categorisations of education into the technical and the academic, risk us continuing to divide our young people into those who will learn to labour and those who will learn to lead. Degree apprenticeships offer something different through their combination of the professional and the academic, the theoretical and the practical.

As we approach the general election, I hope we see a firm commitment from all parties to support the continued growth of Degree Apprenticeships and that there is recognition of the vital role they can play in driving up productivity and giving new opportunities to people of all ages.

Professor Malcolm Press

Vice-Chancellor, Manchester Metropolitan University

*Please note that the upcoming meetings on Tuesday 9 May (visit to London South Bank University) and Wednesday 10 May (meeting on Degree Apprenticeships and Future Skills) **are both postponed** as they now fall in the election period. We hope to revisit this topic and rearrange this visit in the Autumn.*

Upcoming Meetings

Tuesday 20 June 2017

Higher education policy – updates from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

6-7.30pm, Committee Room 4, followed by dinner

Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education (tbc), Professor Paddy Nixon, Vice-Chancellor, Ulster University and Professor Gerry McCormac, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Stirling

This update is produced by Universities UK. It provides links to all relevant parliamentary business and sector announcements for the previous week and notes upcoming business. The APPG council have also suggested that university members may like to suggest inclusions from their institutions, such as major reports, speeches or events. If you did wish to do so, please do get in touch.

The University APPG twitter account ([@universityappg](https://twitter.com/universityappg)) will also be tweeting updates of parliamentary business and sector announcements. We would encourage all members to follow the account.

The University APPG blog is now up and running and I would like to encourage members who may be interested in writing a piece to please get in touch.

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Forthcoming Business

Prorogation and State Opening

Parliament prorogued on Thursday 27 April. Parliament will dissolve on 3 May, and there are formally no MPs. Following the General Election on 8 June, Parliament is expected to meet on 13 June to elect the Speaker, with the Queen's Speech and State Opening scheduled for Monday 19 June.

Higher Education and Research Act (2017)

On Thursday 27 April, the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) received Royal Assent. A number of Government amendments were tabled on Monday of this week and these were debated and agreed in the Commons on Wednesday and the Lords on Thursday. UUK responded to the passing of the legislation with a statement on Thursday afternoon.

Lords Oral Question – Brexit

On Monday 24 April Lord Dykes (Crossbench) asked Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the principal Brexit negotiation issues following the invoking of Article 50. Read the full transcript at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-04-24/debates/BB35BAE6-F869-4A05-A07C-1F133440294D/BrexitNegotiations>.

Exiting the European Union Oral Questions

On Thursday 27 April the Brexit Secretary and Ministers responded to oral and topical questions. Below is an exchange on universities and you can read the full transcript of the questions at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-04-27/debates/C9953A67-B48D-4CAE-8D2B-7EE2DE795FAC/OralAnswersToQuestions>.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): What discussions his Department has had with UK universities on the negotiations for the UK leaving the EU.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):

The Government have provided assurances to EU students in the UK. I particularly welcome the announcement on 21 April, which confirmed that EU students applying to study at English universities in 2018-19 will remain eligible for undergraduate, masters, postgraduate and advanced learner financial support, even if the course concludes after the UK's exit from the EU. The

Government want to create an environment in which the UK remains a world leader in research and academia, and continues to be home to the best universities in the world.

Jason McCartney: I echo those sentiments about international students and commend my hon. Friend for all his work on that campaign. I am very proud to have the award-winning Huddersfield University in our town. I visited its institute of railway research a couple of weeks ago. Thanks to the local enterprise partnership business growth fund, it is working on innovative rail and tram projects around the world, including in Australia. Will the Minister and his team make sure that our world-class universities are at the heart of the opportunities that Brexit brings?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion our world-class universities. Along with my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, I have been meeting regularly with his higher education and innovation council, which represents the views of the university sector to us. It is very clear that UK collaborative research, both with European partners and more widely in the world, is a huge opportunity through this process.

Lords Motion to Regret

Also on Thursday 27 April Lord Clark of Windermere (Labour) moved a motion to regret on the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 with regards to loans replacing bursaries for nursing, midwifery, and allied health professionals.

The motion was disagreed and you can read the debate at:

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-04-27/debates/2E807FC8-5FE9-4349-B08A-D12E241AA55B/Education\(StudentFeesAwardsAndSupport\)\(Amendment\)Regulations2017](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2017-04-27/debates/2E807FC8-5FE9-4349-B08A-D12E241AA55B/Education(StudentFeesAwardsAndSupport)(Amendment)Regulations2017).

Education Select Committee Report

On Tuesday 25 April the Committee published their report into Brexit and Higher Education. You may also be interested in reading the full statement by the Committee and UUK's response.

The recommendations included:

- The uncertainty around the rights of EU citizens currently living in the UK needs to be clarified immediately
- The Government should resolve the issue of staff residency rights by unilaterally guaranteeing rights before the end of 2017
- The Government should remove overseas students from the net migration target
- An easier route than the Tier 2 (skilled worker) visa for academics from around the world should be introduced, with less bureaucracy

- The Government should retain a reciprocal open approach with light touch controls such as visa-free access for students from both inside and outside the EU

The three areas the Committee identified as priority areas for Brexit negotiations were-

- The Regional Growth Fund
- Horizon 2020 and research frameworks
- Erasmus+ programme

Written questions

The answers to written questions can be found by clicking the name of the MP or Lord beneath the title. Members may appear more than once if they have asked several questions on the same topic.

Overseas students

[Ian C Lucas MP](#)

[Sir Nicholas Soames MP](#)

[Julian Sturdy MP](#)

[Martyn Day MP](#)

[Lord Green of Deddington](#)

[Earl of Sandwich](#)

[Eilidh Whiteford MP](#)

Nurses: Training

[Vicky Foxcroft MP](#)

[Catherine McKinnell MP](#)

Research: Regions

[Sir Nicholas Soames MP](#)

[Craig Whittaker MP](#)

[Jim Cunningham MP](#)

[Jim Cunningham MP](#)

Further education: Subsidiaries

[Gordon Marsden MP](#)

[Gordon Marsden MP](#)

Universities: Wales

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

[Jo Stevens MP](#)

Universities: Ethnic groups

Lord Boateng

Student loans

Gordon Marsden MP

Gordon Marsden MP

Gordon Marsden MP

Liz McInnes MP

Angela Rayner MP

Higher education admissions

Paul Blomfield MP

Mental health services

Stephen Timms MP

Research: Finance

Roberta Blackman-Woods MP

Universities: Refugees

Lord Fink

Sector News**2018/19 funding**

On Friday 21 April, the Government confirmed that EU students applying for university places in the academic year 2018/19 will remain eligible for financial support. Funding in Wales and Scotland has also been confirmed.

Press release - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-funding-for-eu-students-for-2018-to-2019>

NUS elections

On Wednesday 26 April, Shakira Martin was elected NUS President for 2017/18. Amatey Doku was elected Vice-President (Higher Education).

Press release - <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/shakira-martin-elected-nus-president-2017-18/>