



# The All-Party Parliamentary University Group



Dear Colleague,

Not surprisingly, the Green Paper has triggered widespread debate across the higher education sector and beyond. The renewed focus on learning and teaching has been broadly welcomed as too has the emphasis on social mobility and the achievement of minority groups. However, serious concerns have emerged about the challenges of introducing a robust teaching excellence framework (TEF) which has the confidence of students and other stakeholders within the proposed timeframe. Universities themselves struggle to define objective measures of teaching excellence and while some progress has been made in recent years, discussions on how best to recognise, evaluate and reward excellence in teaching and enhancing the broader educational experience of students through the promotion process are all too often fraught with difficulties. That of course is not a reason for not developing a TEF; to the contrary, the development of robust measures of educational excellence would be a very positive development. But it is a reason for proceeding with caution, for seeking out good practice across the sector in the UK and internationally, for drawing on the expertise of the PSRBs which accredit many of our courses and for thinking creatively how best we might develop a rigorous framework which has the confidence of the sector and its various stakeholders.

The UK has led the world in the evaluation of research performance with the REF and its predecessor, the RAE. The Green Paper opens the door for the development of a comparable 'gold standard' for the evaluation of teaching and the students' broader learning experience which would again put the UK at the forefront internationally and help to secure our future as a world leading provider of higher education in the face of growing competition from both established western markets and the growing cadre of quality institutions in the developing world. But a gold standard TEF will take time to establish. The basket of measures must embrace the diversity of sector and the complexity of a university education in which teaching is a key part, but by no means the only part, of a transformational learning experience which instils the knowledge, skills and attitudes our students need to succeed in their future careers and play their part in enabling economic growth and social prosperity. And those measures must be piloted and rigorously evaluated and before being accepted, refined or rejected on basis of firm evidence. It is no mean task, but anything less than a gold standard would be detrimental to our students, our institutions and our world renowned HE sector.

Julia Buckingham

**Vice-Chancellor, Brunel University**

## Upcoming meetings

### Tuesday 1 March

BME students and social mobility in the higher education sector

*8.30am-10am, Dining Room B, House of Commons*

Speakers to be confirmed

### Tuesday 12 April

Flexible Pathways: part-time, adult education and lifelong learning

*8.30am-10am, Dining Room B, House of Commons*

Peter Horrocks, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University

### Wednesday 25 May

Students as consumers in their education; where student fees go, how universities explain their financial decisions to students, the public and government (Joint meeting with the APPG on Students)

*6pm-7.30pm, Committee Room 2a, followed by dinner*

Speakers to be confirmed

### Tuesday 28 June

University APPG Summer Reception

*Churchill Room, times to be confirmed*

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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.

[Click on the items in the Table of Contents to go straight to the debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.](#)

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## **Forthcoming Business**

### **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Oral Questions**

Oral questions for BIS Ministers take place on Tuesday 2 February from 11.30am. Questions must be tabled by MPs by Wednesday 27 January.

### **Immigration Bill**

The Immigration Bill continues through the House of Lords on Wednesday 3 February

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## **Debates**

### **Adult education and life-long learning**

The debate tabled by Baroness Sharp of Guildford took place on Thursday 28 January. Read the transcript [here](#).

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## **Select Committees**

### **Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy**

On Tuesday 26 January Nick Boles MP, the Minister for Skills gave evidence to the newly formed Sub-Committee on his responsibilities. The full evidence session can be watched [here](#) and the transcript available [here](#).

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## **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.

### **Universities: China**

[Jim Cunningham MP](#)

### **Universities: Finance**

[Lord Laird](#)

### **Mature Students: Loans**

[Baroness Sharp of Guildford](#)

### **Nurses: Training**

[Helen Jones MP](#)

Helen Jones MP

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

**Students: Loans**

Patrick Grady MP

Barry Sheerman MP

**Medicine: Education**

Jim Cunningham MP

**Students: Plagiarism**

Lord Storey

Lord Storey

Lord Storey

**Overseas Students**

Richard Burden MP

**Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: Public expenditure**

Nia Griffith MP

**Teachers: Training**

Nic Dakin MP

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**Sector news**

**Research Excellence Framework (REF) consultation**

On Wednesday 27 January the Government opened a new consultation on the Research Excellence Framework (REF), seeking views on the future shape of the REF as part of Lord Stern's independent review. The main focus of the call for evidence is on ways "in which a simpler, lighter-touch, system for the REF might be developed"

More information can be found at [-https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/research-excellence-framework-review-call-for-evidence](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/research-excellence-framework-review-call-for-evidence)