

Political Affairs Digest

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29 April – 3 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:

Jasmin Glynne | jasmin.glynne@universitiesuk.ac.uk

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Parliamentary business

DfE – oral questions

On Monday 29 April, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial team, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Chris Clarkson MP (Conservative) highlighted a recent meeting he held with representatives from the education and industry sector to discuss how they could leverage private sector resources to support the further education sector. The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships, and Higher Education, Luke Hall MP, noted the ‘exciting’ discussions, including the lecturer reserve pilot which he hoped to visit when it was operating.

Yasmin Qureshi MP (Labour) raised the fall in nursing applications in 2024 and shared warnings from the Royal College of Nursing. She said the government’s new tuition fee system meant public sector workers were being ‘penalised.’ In his reply, the Minister said the system was ‘progressive’ with earnings correlated to repayments. The new system was described as fairer for students and taxpayers.

The Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Matt Western MP, said the government were in real danger of ‘disenfranchising’ young people from fulfilling their job ambitions due to changes in the tuition fee system. He probed whether the new system was ‘fair.’ In his reply, the Minister said the 2023 cycle showed a ‘rebalancing’ of normal growth following the pandemic. He also highlighted that nursing degree apprenticeships were positively impacting the system. The Minister added that the new tuition fee system would result in ‘more people being able to access a high-quality education.’

During topical questions, Dave Doogan MP (SNP) asked if the government would match the intervention in Scotland to support students with their maintenance at university in England. The Minister said the government were delivering a system that was fair to students and taxpayers. He referenced the freezing of tuition fees and the support available to students from low-income households.

Richard Foord MP (Liberal Democrat) raised the Times report that some Tory MPs wanted to scrap the Graduate Route. He asked the Minister to ask the Home Secretary to stop the ‘damaging rumour’ and cited Universities UK figures that the UK is boosted by £42 billion through international students.

In his reply, the Minister said the UK is home to top universities that benefit from strong international ties. He noted the significant cultural and economic contributions and said it was right that the integrity of higher education system was protected. He added that the right balance could be achieved between a fair and robust migration policy while protecting the UK's position as a top destination for higher education.

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

Protecting sensitive research at universities from national security threats – HoL oral question

On Tuesday 30 April, Lord Young of Cookham (Conservative) asked the government what measures they were taking 'to protect sensitive research at universities from national security threats.'

In his opening remarks, Lord Young suggested that universities were becoming over reliant on China and warned of the risks of 'infiltration of academic research'. He asked what steps the government were taking to replace lost Chinese funding in universities. The Minister for AI and Intellectual Property, Viscount Camrose, noted the 'great many concerns' identified in the integrated review refresh but reassured the member that reassociation to Horizon Europe would 'go some way towards providing a new pool of collaboration partners in academic research.'

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Labour) raised the risk of dual-research research. He asked how the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) distinguished between research used for 'benevolent' or 'malign' reasons. The Minister described the Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) as 'the most powerful tool at our disposal' in determining the use of research and advising accordingly.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (Liberal Democrat) highlighted other state actors, such as Iran, who may be pose a risk due to researchers and students coming to the UK. She asked how universities could be expected to vet individuals. The Minister clarified that 'the non-legislative and legislative elements of the entire approach to this are about being actor agnostic, and simply looking at the cases as they arise.'

Viscount Stansgate (Labour) warned that for certain areas, such as biosecurity, voluntary schemes 'may not be enough'. He probed whether there was a case for mandatory surveillance over certain activity such as accessing material. The Minister said he recognised the limits of voluntary schemes and reassured the member that research contracted for purposes of defence would be subject to vetting.

Baroness Goldie (Conservative) probed whether there were plans for a UK security portal to ensure all universities had access to immediate advice and information on security. She noted that the Russell Group and Universities UK did not represent all universities. The Minister agreed that the government must consider the needs of all universities and confirmed there would be a consultation over the summer.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) raised overreliance on ‘money flowing in from China’. He also asked the Minister to comment on the media reports that Professor Michelle Shipworth from University College London (UCL) had been banned from teaching a ‘provocative course’ as it might compromise commercial interests. The Minister said he recognised the value in diversification efforts. He said he would write to the member on the example he raised.

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

Supporting the study of the arts and humanities in higher education – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 1 May, the Earl of Clancarty (Crossbench) asked a question on ‘supporting the study of the arts and humanities in higher education.’

The Earl of Clancarty criticised the government’s approach by not recognising the threat to the arts at universities and not appreciating the strategic importance of the talent pipeline from universities. He asked whether the government would reconsider the recent funding decision and take steps to protect the jobs and departments that were currently at risk. Baroness Barran, the Minister for the School System and Student Finance, said high quality education across a range of disciplines was critical for cultural enrichment and for the UK’s workforce. She added that the Office for Students (OfS) was required to maintain funding for high-cost subjects at the current level of £16.7 million.

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Labour) said the funding for undergraduate teaching was at its lowest in 25 years with a £1 billion ‘funding hole’. She warned universities were having to make ‘very difficult decisions’. She highlighted the problem-solving skills that humanities and arts graduates were equipped with which were essential for harnessing the potential of AI. The Minister said the government were striving to create a ‘sustainable student finance system’ that was responsive to the requirements of the labour market and was fair to taxpayers and students. She added that SHAPE and STEM disciplines were both important for harnessing the potential of AI.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) asked what impact ‘slashing’ the Graduate Route would have on arts and humanities provision as well as the levelling-up agenda. He referenced Middlesbrough and Darlington and said every intake of international students at Teesside University contributed £240 million to the local economy. The Minister said the government remained ‘absolutely committed’ to the International Education Strategy and said she recognised the contribution that international students brought.

Lord Storey (Liberal Democrat) raised the importance of the arts and humanities to the UK’s cultural and creative industries as well as soft power. He noted that 15 universities were already making job cuts across these departments and 35 were considering it. He highlighted that there was a problem with university funding and in the pipeline of students from schools.

Lord Blunkett (Labour) suggested that it would be ‘crazy’ to restrict international student recruitment to particular universities or to certain courses as it would create a paradox whereby it would be accepted these courses were satisfactory for domestic students but not international students. The Minister said she was ‘not aware that this was a plan that had currently been proposed’. She explained that the government’s concerns over quality was targeted at courses rather than broad subject areas.

Baroness Wilcox of Newport, Shadow Spokesperson for Education, asked when the government’s Cultural Education Plan would be published. The Minister said she was unable to confirm a precise timeline of the plan.

Lord Aberdare (Crossbench) highlighted the many doors that were opened through the study of Classics. He asked what steps the government were taking to promote the teaching of classical subjects at universities. The Minister clarified that it was not the role of government to instruct universities what subjects it should teach.

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

Forthcoming business

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – Committee Stage Day 3

On the afternoon of Tuesday 7 May, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill will be discussed at Committee Stage.

Amendment 21, removing higher education institutions from the scope of the Bill, is due to be discussed.

You can [watch the session](#).

Importance of skills – House of Lords debate

On Thursday 9 May, the House of Lords will debate the ‘importance of skills for the success of the UK economy and for the quality of life for individuals.’ This was tabled by Lord Aberdare (Crossbench).

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

Written Questions

Terrorism: Higher Education

Derek Thomas MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking with the Secretary of State for the Home Department to help prevent people (a) promoting, (b) encouraging and (c) glorifying terrorism at universities. [UIN 23258]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): Higher education (HE) providers must comply with the statutory Prevent duty to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. The statutory Prevent duty can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales-accessible>.

HE providers should have effective policies and procedures in place to safeguard individuals susceptible to radicalisation. This includes assessing the risk of learners becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The Office for Students has delegated responsibility from the Secretary of State for Education for monitoring compliance of the Prevent duty in Registered HE Bodies.

The department has a team of Prevent Regional Education Co-ordinators who work directly with HE institutions in England to provide advice, support and training to ensure providers are well equipped to prevent people from being drawn into or supporting terrorism. Further guidance, including bespoke training material for HE providers, can be found on GOV.UK.

In the 'Independent Review of Prevent: One year on' progress report, the department announced that it is committed to publishing research on the implementation of the Prevent duty in HE, and guidance for universities on managing external speakers on campus. The Independent Review of Prevent can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-prevents-report-and-government-response/independent-review-of-prevent-one-year-on-progress-report-accessible>.

Apprentices

Helen Grant MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to encourage take up of degree-level apprenticeships. [UIN 22543]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): Degree-level apprenticeships (Levels 6 and 7) provide people with high-quality training and are important in supporting productivity, social mobility and widening participation in higher education and employment. There are now over 170 degree-level apprenticeships available in exciting occupations such as Doctor and Nuclear Scientist. More broadly, the department has now developed nearly 700 high-quality apprenticeship standards with employers, so today nearly 70% of occupations are available via an apprenticeship.

The department has seen year-on-year growth of degree-level apprenticeships, with 229,970 starts since their introduction in the 2014/15 academic year. The department want to further accelerate the growth of degree level apprenticeships and are providing an additional £40 million over two financial years to support providers expand their offers, improving access to young people and disadvantaged groups. The department has also teamed up with UCAS so that students can now see apprenticeship vacancies on their service, putting apprenticeships on an equal footing with traditional academic routes, and continuing outreach work in schools and colleges through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme.

Overseas Students: English Language

Peter Gibson MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps he is taking to ensure that universities are following English proficiency requirements for foreign students. [UIN 22818]

Tom Pursglove MP (Conservative): UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), as part of their compliance activities, conduct on-site audits of sponsors and check what assessment methods sponsors have used and their relevant evidence. Where there are any compliance breaches, UKVI take compliance action which can include formal action plans or revocation of the sponsor licence. English language assessments are also considered as part of the Basic Compliance Assessment which sponsors are required to pass on an annual basis.

UK Research and Innovation: Finance

Andrew Rosindell MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding her Department plans to provide to UK Research and Innovation in the next three financial years. [UIN 22712]

Andrew Griffith MP (Conservative): DSIT is responsible for the majority of the Government's spending on R&D, including UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) budget of £25.1 billion across the current Spending Review (FY2022/23 – 2024/25). This includes an allocation of over £8.8 billion in financial year 2024/25.

As outlined by the Chancellor at Spring Budget 2024, the next Spending Review to set future financial year budgets will be held after the General Election.

DSIT has budgets and plans in place until at least April 2025. Government will agree departmental budgets for financial years following this as part of the usual budget setting process.

Immigration: Universities

Steve McCabe MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of his immigration policies on universities. [UIN 22835]

Tom Pursglove MP (Conservative): We keep all our immigration policies under constant review to ensure they best serve the UK and reflect the public's priorities. Impact assessments are produced and considered when developing Government policies.

We have been successful in delivering our International Education Strategy goal of hosting 600,000 students per year by 2030, earlier than planned, and expect universities to be able to adapt to policy change.

Medicine: Higher Education

Greg Knight MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what progress she has made on increasing the number of medical student places; and whether she expects to meet the commitment to double the number of medical school places by 2031. [UIN 23143]

Andrew Stephenson MP (Conservative): We are on track to meeting the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan's aim to double the number of medical school places in England, from 7,500 to 15,000 places a year by 2031/32. We have accelerated this expansion by allocating 205 additional medical school places for the 2024/25 academic year, and have provisionally allocated a further 350 additional places for the 2025/26 academic year. Final allocations will be published shortly. This will build on the expansion of medical school places in England to 7,500 per year, a 25% increase, that the Government completed in 2020, and which delivered five new medical schools.

Overseas Students

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the potential impact of the estimated 33 per cent fall in overseas students on the financial viability of UK universities. [UIN HL3891]

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 its 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 ten, 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.

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 abuse and exploitation of the country's immigration system.

Our universities are autonomous institutions responsible for managing their own budgets. The department works closely with the Office for Students, the independent regulator of the HE sector in England, to understand the evolving landscape including on risks relating to international students.

It also 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.

Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Marquess of Lothian (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of current students at English universities pay international tuition fees; how this compares with the same figure from 2010; and what steps they are taking to ensure that English universities have a long-term, stable and sustainable funding model. [UIN HL3954]

Baroness Barran (Conservative): The total number of non-EU students at higher education (HE) providers in England in academic years 2021/22 and 2010/11 is published and can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis>.

Please note, the data for these years is not comparable as home fee status for EU domiciled students has changed over this period. In 2010/11, all EU students had 'home status' meaning they paid the same tuition fees as UK domiciled students. In 2021/22, only existing EU domiciled students had home fee status while those starting their course in 2021/22 did not; they were charged international tuition fees as other non-EU students. In 2021/22, there were 24,365 new EU first year enrolments at HE providers in England.

As autonomous organisations, HE providers have a high degree of financial independence and it is for them to make appropriate and necessary decisions around income, funding, spending and borrowing which ensure their continued financial viability and sustainability.

Higher Education: Students

Lord Allen of Kensington (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to increase investment in skills training to meet the needs of more 150,000 additional students seeking higher education by 2030 in England. [UIN HL3831]

Baroness Barran (Conservative): It is important that the department has a sustainable higher education (HE) funding system that responds to the needs of the economy and that is fair to students and to taxpayers. The government keeps the HE funding system under continuous review to ensure that this remains the case, and to provide many different opportunities for learners to acquire vital skills.

The government is committed to creating a world-leading skills system, backed with an additional investment of £3.8 billion over the course of this Parliament to strengthen HE and further education (FE). This includes increasing opportunities for people to develop higher technical skills through T Levels, Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, or Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). From 2025, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement will transform access to FE and HE, offering all adults the equivalent of four years' worth of student loans to use flexibly on quality education training over their lifetime.

Through the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG), the department is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in additional funding over the three-year period to the 2024/25 financial year to support high-quality teaching and facilities, the majority of which goes to supporting the provision of courses in high-cost subjects including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and degree apprenticeships. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade. The recurrent SPG budget is £1,456 million for the 2024/25 financial year. This includes an £18 million increase in support for strategically important high-cost subjects.

The department is also providing £40 million over two years through the SPG to support degree apprenticeship providers to expand and help more people access this provision. The department has seen year-on-year growth in degree level apprenticeships (Level 6 and 7) with almost 230,000 starts since their introduction in the 2014/15 academic year. The government has increased investment in the apprenticeships system in England to over £2.7 billion this financial year, to support employers of all sizes access high-quality apprenticeships at all levels.

The department's Higher Technical Education reforms are growing skills at Level 4 and 5. The department has introduced new HTQs, which will increase the prestige and uptake of level 4 and 5 qualifications. To date, 172 qualifications have been approved as HTQs across seven occupational routes and are being taught at FE Colleges, Institutes of Technology, Universities, and Independent Training Providers. The department has provided up to £115 million in funding to providers to help grow provision across the country, on top of up to £300 million to create a network of 21 Institutes of Technology.

Students: Loans

Lord Mendelsohn (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of interest rate charges on Government student loan

financing, following research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies which showed that higher interest rates will add more than £10 billion per year to the cost of England's student loan system. [UIN HL4035; Grouped Question HL4036]

Baroness Barran (Conservative): Student loans are valued in the department's annual accounts in line with the International Financial Reporting Standard 9 and set out in The Government Financial Reporting Manual which is attached.

Under which where future cash flows are discounted to measure the fair value of a financial asset, this should be done using the higher of the rate intrinsic to the financial instrument or the HMT discount rate. HMT set the discount rate annually based on a 10 year rolling average of gilt yields. For student loans the intrinsic rate would be the discount rate that gave a Resource Accounting Budget (RAB) or stock charge of 0%, so the HMT discount rate is used provided the RAB charge is greater than 0%. Should the HMT discount rate result in a RAB charge calculation giving a negative value then the intrinsic rate is used instead, meaning that that RAB charge will take a value of 0%.

The most recent forecasts for the student finance system can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-loan-forecasts-for-england/2022-23>.

The net present value of future repayments was calculated by discounting all future repayments at a rate of RPI -1.3% per year until the end of financial year 2029/30, and -0.2% per year from financial year 2030/31, to the same point in time as the loan outlay or loan balance. This is the discount rate for financial instruments set by HMT in 2022 and is intended to reflect of the cost of government borrowing. The most recent student loan forecasts using the 2023 discount rate set by HMT will be published at the end of June 2024.

The department has carefully assessed the impact of changes and published a full and comprehensive analysis in the Higher Education Reform and Consultation Document Equality Impact Assessment, which is attached.

The student loan repayment system under Plan 5 is progressive, with repayments being positively correlated with lifetime earnings. The highest earners make the largest individual contributions to the system overall, and the lowest earners are required to contribute the least.

Lower earners, whether male or female, are protected. If a borrower's income is below the repayment threshold, they will not be required to make any repayments at all. At the end of the loan term, any outstanding loan debt, including interest accrued,

will be written off at no detriment to the borrower. No commercial loans offer this level of protection.

The department will continue to keep the student finance system, including repayment terms, under review to ensure that it remains sustainable and delivers value for money for students and the taxpayer.

Immigration: Overseas Students

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to review their statistical methods regarding the inclusion of international students on postgraduate taught courses in net migration figures. [UIN HL3762]

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Conservative): The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority.

Please see the letter attached from the National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority.

The Right Hon. the Lord Johnson of Marylebone

House of Lords

London

SW1A 0PW

19 April 2024

Dear Lord Johnson,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am responding to your Parliamentary Question asking what plans there are to review the statistical methods regarding the inclusion of international students on postgraduate taught courses in net migration figures (HL3762).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for publishing long-term international migration statistics. The most recent edition is for year-ending (YE) June 2023[1].

Net international migration accounts for a significant part of population change. Therefore, it is important that long-term international migration estimates account for those joining or leaving the UK population for all reasons, including international students (on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses). This ensures that the size of the population can be measured and the impact of migration on the economy and service requirements can be understood.

However, I recognise that there is also a user need for estimates of specific groups such as international students, as well as the need to understand the contribution of students to net international migration. Therefore, the latest long-term international migration estimates for YE June 2023 include breakdowns by reason for migration.

Alongside the latest estimates, the ONS also published an article named Reason for international migration: international students update: November 2023[2]. This presents further analysis of net migration of non-EU international students up to the YE June 2023 along with cohort analysis that provides insight on the changing behaviours of international students. This includes how long they spend studying in the UK before emigrating or, for example, transitioning onto work visas.

The ONS are continuing to develop their research in this area to provide more granular estimates, further insights on migration patterns of international students and identify priority areas for further research based on user priorities. A further update on this work will be published in May 2024, including estimates of international student migration for the YE December 2023.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sir Ian Diamond

[1]<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/longterminternationalmigrationprovisional/yearendingjune2023>

[2]<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/reasonforinternationalmigrationinternationalstudentsupdate/november2023>

Overseas Students: Postgraduate Education

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what proportion of international students on student visas are undertaking postgraduate

taught courses that can be completed in less than 12 months, and whether that proportion has increased following the COVID-19 pandemic. [UIN HL3759; Grouped Question: HL3760]

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Conservative): The Home Office does not publish data on the proportion of student visas for postgraduate taught courses or how long people were resident in the UK on student visas.

The Home Office publishes data on sponsored study visas in the 'Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release'. Data on the outcomes of student visas are published in table 'Vis_D02' of the detailed entry clearance visas dataset. Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relates up to the end of December 2023.

The Home Office also publishes data on how people move through the immigration system in the Migrant Journey report. The report contains information on the number of people starting a journey each year broken down by immigration route (e.g. study) and for how long they continue to hold leave. It does not contain information on how long people were resident in the UK or the level of qualification for which they were studying. The latest report covers up to the end of 2022.

Students: Equality

Baroness Hunt of Bethnal Green (Crossbench): To ask His Majesty's Government why the Department for Education maintains named individuals' religious affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability information from Higher Education equality monitoring data, rather than retaining the information as anonymised statistics. [UIN HL4026]

Baroness Barran (Conservative): The department does not directly collect information from higher education institutions concerning the religious affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability of students. However, the department does receive these variables from Jisc (and previously the Higher Education Statistics Authority) as part of the student records that they share with the department.

The information is held at a named level to enable this data to effectively function as a longitudinal research source, which can be used to compare educational pathways with other (non-educational) outcomes later in life. This will provide an evidence base against which society can evaluate and monitor the impact of education and training

on outcomes and support government decision-making to improve services and ensure equality of opportunity for all irrespective of background or circumstances.

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.

Higher Education: Greater Manchester

Navendu Mishra MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of increases in the cost of living on the accessibility of higher education for students in Greater Manchester. [UIN 23060]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): The government publishes an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is each year to analyse the impact of changes to higher education (HE) student support in England on students with protected characteristics and those from low-income families. The EIA for the 2024/25 academic year was published on GOV.UK on 26 January 2024 and is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-student-finance-2024-to-2025-equality-analysis>.

The department has continued to increase maximum loans and grants for living and other costs for undergraduate and postgraduate students each year with a 2.8% increase for the current academic year, 2023/24, and a further 2.5% increase announced for 2024/25.

In addition, the department has frozen maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven successive years. The department believes that the current fee freeze achieves the best balance between ensuring that the system remains financially sustainable, offering good value for the taxpayer, and reducing debt levels for students in real terms.

The government understands the pressures people have been facing with the cost of living and has taken action to help. The department has already made £276 million of

student premium and mental health funding available for the 2023/24 academic year to support successful outcomes for students including disadvantaged students.

The department has also made a further £10 million of one-off support available to support student mental health and hardship funding for 2023/24. This funding will complement the help universities are providing through their own bursary, scholarship and hardship support schemes. For this financial year, 2024/25, the department has increased the Student Premium (full-time, part-time, and disabled premium) by £5 million to reflect high demand for hardship support. Further details of this allocation for the academic year 2024/25 will be announced by the Office for Students (OfS) in the summer.

Overall, support to households to help with the high cost of living is worth £108 billion over 2022/23 to 2024/25, an average of £3,800 per UK household. The government believes this will have eased the pressure on family budgets and so will in turn enable many families to provide additional support to their children in HE to help them meet increased living costs.

English domiciled 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas are now 74% more likely to enter HE than they were in 2010, and the department is working to close the disadvantage gap with our access and participation reforms.

The department has tasked the OfS to include support for disadvantaged students before entry to HE in new access and participation plans. Providers should be working meaningfully with schools to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are encouraged and supported to achieve the highest possible grades and follow the path that is best for them, whether that be an apprenticeship or higher technical qualification, or a course at another university.

Business: Training

David Evennett MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department are taking to encourage businesses to invest in skills training.
[UIN 23142]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): This government is committed to delivering a world-leading skills system which is employer-focused, high-quality, and fit for the future. The department's reforms are backed with an investment of £3.8 billion over the course of this Parliament to strengthen higher and further education to help more

people get good jobs, upskill and retrain throughout their lives and to improve national productivity.

Over 5,000 employers have been involved in the development of nearly 700 high-quality apprenticeships to meet their industry skills needs. To support employers of all sizes offer apprenticeships, the government has increased investment in apprenticeships to over £2.7 billion in the 2024/25 financial year. This includes investing a further £60 million to meet overall increased employer demand for apprenticeships and encourage small-medium enterprises (SMEs) to take on young apprentices.

From April, the department pays 100% of training costs when SMEs take on new apprentices aged 16-21. Additionally, larger employers can now transfer more of their levy funds (50% increased from 25%) to support businesses of all sizes, which will help more employers to invest in apprenticeship training.

Skills Bootcamps offer free, flexible courses of up to 16 weeks, giving people the chance to build sector-specific skills with an offer of a job interview on completion. Training providers work with employers to ensure training is designed to teach the skills employers need. To date, over 1000 employers have been involved in Skills Bootcamps. Employers play a range of roles from supporting the design and delivery of the training, to recruiting learners that complete training into a job, or an apprenticeship. Employers can also use Skills Bootcamps to upskill their existing employees, subject to a 10% contribution for SMEs and 30% contribution for large employers.

Institutes of Technology bring education and business closer together, creating unique collaborations between colleges, universities and industry which deliver higher-level technical education with a clear route to high skilled employment. The department has provided £300 million of capital funding for infrastructure and industry standard equipment to increase capacity to deliver level 4/5 technical skills. In addition, employer partners were encouraged to provide additional support (monetary and in kind) which for the wave 2 competition was set at 35% of value of capital expenditure.

In October 2023, the department launched a new website called Skills for Careers that provides a single digital front door to information about skills training options and careers. A link to Skills for Careers can be found here: <https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/pages/skills-for-life>. From Skills for Careers, users are guided through government's skills offer from apprenticeships

to Skills Bootcamps, A levels to Multiply. The website provides an overview of each option along with information about writing job applications and CVs.

Across all areas of England, employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) have helped engage thousands of local businesses and have brought them together with local providers and stakeholders to collaboratively agree and deliver actions to address local skills needs. By giving employers a more strategic role in the skills system, LSIPs are helping to drive greater employer investment in skills and ensure businesses are more actively involved in the planning, design and delivery of skills provision.

Departmental officials are also working with the Office for Investment and Department for Business and Trade to provide support for investors to navigate the skills system at a national and local level and encourage take-up of government funded skills programmes and employer investment in skills, as well as build strategic partnerships with local education and training providers. Whilst it is not a core part of their role, some of the designated employer representative bodies leading the LSIPs have engaged with inward investors as part of developing and implementing their LSIPs.

Visas: Graduates

Philippa Whitford MP (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of (a) the increase in (i) visa and (ii) Immigration Health Surcharge fees and (b) the removal of the ability of taught masters students to bring dependants on trends in the level of demand for graduate visas. [UIN 22960]

Tom Pursglove MP (Conservative): The Home Office produced Impact Assessments (IA) alongside the visa and Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) fee changes and the package of Student route reforms, including the change to dependant eligibility.

The Migration Advisory Committee are undertaking a review of the Graduate route. We will consider any evidence put forward by the MAC very closely.

Overseas Students: Finance

Matt Western MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an estimate of the number of British National Overseas visa holders that are unable to access student finance. [UIN 23263]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): Under the existing student support regulations, Hong Kong British National Overseas (BNO) visa holders would not have access to student finance until they have acquired a settled status in the UK and meet the three-year ordinary residence requirement. As the BNO route only opened in January 2021, the earliest a person is likely to become settled (and have access student finance) is in January 2026. As such, all persons who have been granted leave under the BNO route, are not currently able to access student finance.

Home Office statistics show that 140,300 people have arrived in the UK on the scheme since it began. However, not all of these people will go on to study in higher education.

Music: Universities

Barbara Keeley MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data her Department has on the number of music departments at UK universities in each of the last 10 years. [UIN 23717]

Luke Hall MP (Conservative): The department does not hold data on the number of music departments, or on the establishment or closure of individual distinct music courses offered by higher education providers (HEPs). However, the department does hold data on the numbers of student enrolments in music courses more generally, and the number of HEPs offering these courses. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which is 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.

The data on HE student enrolments by HEP and subjects of study for the 2014/15 to 2018/19 academic years is available here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-13>.

The data on HE student enrolments by HEP and subject of study for the 2019/20 to 2021/22 academic years is available here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/table-49>.

In the 2014/15 academic year, there were 102 HEPs that enrolled 24,620 students in music courses. In the 2021/22 academic year, this increased to 120 HEPs enrolling 37,090 students in music courses.

Counts are on the basis of full-person-equivalents. Where a student is studying more than one subject, they are apportioned between the subjects that make up their

course. Figures provided are for UK HEPs enrolments for all modes and levels of study, and for all domiciles. Figures have been rounded to the nearest five, in line with HESA rounding conventions. More information on the figures is available here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students#rounding-and-suppression-strategy>.

The figures from 2019/20 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years due to the introduction of a new subject classification system, called the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS), which replaced the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS3).

Further information on HECoS and JACS can be found via the following:
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>, and
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs>

Universities: Overseas Students

Philippa Whitford MP (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential financial impact of trends in the level of enrolments of international students on universities. [UIN 22962]

Luke Hall MP (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 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 ten, and 17 in the top 100, worldwide. 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.

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 abuse and exploitation of the country's immigration system.

The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of the HE sector in England, continues to work closely with the Home Office, Department for Business and Trade,

and other governmental departments to assess the impact of these changes on HE providers.

Universities are autonomous institutions responsible for managing their own budgets. The department also works closely with the OfS to understand the evolving landscape, including on risks relating to international students.

Students: Finance

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government when they expect to publish an update to the calculation of the resource accounting and budgeting charge for student finance; and whether they propose to make any changes to the basis for calculation used at the time it was last updated. [UIN HL3915]

Baroness Barran (Conservative): In the 2022/23 financial year, the Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge was £5.5 billion, or 27% of the £20.0 billion of loans issued that financial year. The RAB charge for 2023/24 will be published in the department's 2023/24 Annual Report and Accounts this summer.

Of student loans issued in the 2023/24 financial year, the government is expected to subsidise:

- 28% of full-time Plan 2 Loans.
- 23% of part-time Plan 2 Loans.
- 48% of Plan 2 Advanced Learner Loans.
- 27% of full-time Plan 5 Loans.
- 19% of part-time Plan 5 Loans.
- 37% of Plan 5 Advanced Learner Loans.
- 0% of Master's Loans.

These forecasts are subject to change. The final RAB forecasts for 2023/24 will be available as part of the annual student finance statistical publication, released in June 2024.

The RAB charge, the government subsidy anticipated on student loans issued in any particular financial year, is calculated as the present value of student loan outlay less expected future repayments, in accordance with relevant International Financial Reporting Standards and guidance from HMT's Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM).

The FReM requires future repayments of student loans to be discounted at the higher of the intrinsic rate and HMT's discount rate, based on analysis of real yields on UK index linked Gilts and are specifically appropriate to central government.

The FReM is kept under constant review. It is updated to reflect developments in relevant standards and best practice.

Universities: Innovation and Research

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the potential impact on university research and innovation of the reduction in applications from overseas postgraduate students.
[UIN HL3892]

Viscount Camrose (Conservative): We are committed to ensuring the UK and our world-leading universities remain competitive and attractive to the brightest and the best and that UK students have chances to excel at postgraduate study.

Postgraduate courses in the UK attract healthy levels of interest from domestic and overseas graduates.

We will monitor this closely to ensure the UK continues to attract and retain the best research talent.

Sector News

Government to launch new consultation to protect UK universities from security threats – Cabinet Office and DSIT press release

On Friday 26 April, the Cabinet Office and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) published a press release on the Deputy Prime Minister's, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, intention to launch a consultation on measures to protect UK universities from national security threats posed by foreign states.

Deputy Prime Minister, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, said:

For a millennium, our universities have thrived on being open. Open to ideas, open to innovation, open to being independent of Government. This is not about erecting fences, this is about balancing evolving threats and protecting the integrity and security of our great institutions.

Vivienne Stern, Chief Executive, Universities UK, said:

For several years, Universities UK has worked with Government to ensure that universities are supported and equipped to recognise and mitigate risks to national security. This is important and necessary, and we welcome the Government's approach to working hand in hand with us to get the mechanisms right. This consultation is an important next step, and we will gather views from all 142 universities in our membership to help Government develop the right approach, which allows us to balance the need to remain open to collaboration with the need to protect national and university interests.

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

A Conservative economy: Building a fairer and more productive nation – Onward report

On Monday 29 April, Onward published a report, co-authored by Gavin Rice and Nick Timothy, making the case for an active industrial strategy to rebuild Britain's manufacturing base, boost exports and make it less reliant on overseas ownership of its core strategic assets.

It recommends:

- Offering tax breaks for parents raising children with a new tax allowance for families.
- Replacing residential planning rules in inner London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford and Cambridge with new development zones to unlock housebuilding.
- Abolishing the shortage occupation list, introducing visa caps, and imposing higher salary thresholds to reduce net immigration.
- Ending taxpayer subsidies for ‘failing university degrees’ and changing ‘low-quality’ universities into institutes focused on STEM, technical and vocational education.

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

Digitally enhanced blended learning: leveraging the benefits of technology in Higher Education – Policy Connect report

On Tuesday 30 April, Policy Connect published a new report, led by Lord Norton of Louth and Professor Kathryn Mitchell CBE, setting out how blended learning can widen participation, enhance student outcomes, and modernise educational delivery.

It sets out twelve recommendations to refine and elevate current approaches, covering the following important themes:

- The importance of leadership and strategic oversight.
- Digital capabilities of staff and provision of support.
- Equitable access to technology for learning and student experience.
- Employability for the modern workforce.
- Use and procurement of educational technology.
- Regulation and quality assurance of emerging practice.

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

The Student Mental Health Manifesto: Our vision for a future where every student can thrive – Student Minds manifesto

On Tuesday 30 April, Student Minds published a manifesto laying out their vision for how the next government can improve student mental health.

It covers five main themes:

- **Healthcare** - all students need access to quality and timely mental health support.
- **Financial hardship** - all students need enough money to support them through their studies.
- **Higher education** - our higher education institutions need improved support and investment.
- **Inclusive education and healthcare** - all students need access to inclusive education and healthcare without facing barriers.
- **A mentally healthier nation** - we must reach a holistic approach to the mental health and wellbeing of the nation, improving support, prevention and equality.

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

Higher education around the world: Comparing international approaches and performance with the UK – HoC Library briefing

On Tuesday 30 April, the House of Commons Library published a briefing examining higher education systems across the world in order to compare policy approaches and performance in other countries with the UK. It builds on the Commons Library briefing [Higher education in the UK: Systems, policy approaches, and challenges](#).

Key findings include:

- England, Scotland, and Wales are among the small number of countries in the OECD which have an arms-length co-ordinating body between the state and higher education providers.

- The UK also has one of the least diverse higher education systems in terms of institutional type of any of the richer countries in the world.
- The level of public investment in the higher education system in England (excluded publicly funded student loans) is also the lowest in the OECD.
- England, Wales, and Northern Ireland continue to base admissions to higher education for most undergraduate students on qualifications obtained after application to universities and offers of places are made.

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

UK maintains position behind Australia and Canada for first-choice study destination, while the US improves – IDP Connect report

On Tuesday 30 April, IDP Connect published research revealing a sharp increase in the popularity of the US as international students respond to policy changes in Canada, Australia and the UK.

The research, which collated the views of more than 11,500 prospective, applied, and current international students from 117 countries, has revealed significant shifts in how international students perceive and engage with study destinations amid a period of ongoing political and social change in the sector.

The US, which ranked last of the four leading study destinations in the previous iteration of Emerging Futures in October 2023, has claimed the top spot of first-choice destination for the first time since IDP began surveying students on this question. Canada has felt the biggest impact, falling from equal first to fourth. Australia, previously tied first with Canada, has dropped to second, and the UK retains third place. Student perceptions of New Zealand and Ireland as first-choice study destinations improved.

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

TEF 2023 analysis – QAA report

On Wednesday 1 May, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published a report on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023. It presents a comprehensive qualitative analysis of provider submissions and panel statements, broken down by features of excellence.

The report is designed to demonstrate the extent of work happening within the sector, extracting key themes and areas of learning from what has been recognised as outstanding practice, to support the sector in preparing for the next iteration of the TEF and also the broader enhancement of their provision.

Helena Vine, Lead Policy Officer (England) at QAA, said: ‘The TEF submissions provide endless examples of innovative and imaginative practice to dig into and, coupled with the TEF panel statements, enabled us to analyse trends in sector practice and the factors that secured ratings of outstanding quality in the exercise.’

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

Statement on support for mid-career researchers – N8 Research Partnership

On Wednesday 1 May, the N8 Research Partnership, the collective body for the North’s eight research intensive universities, published a statement setting out its collective commitment to advancing the culture and environment for established (mid-career) researchers.

The statement, the first of its type from a UK academic consortium, was developed as a response to findings from a workshop held in March 2023. The N8 had previously identified established researchers as the ‘forgotten middle’ and part of the research and innovation ecosystem where working together we could create more positive change than we could working independently. The statement acts as a collective commitment from the N8 to improve the ecosystem for established researchers.

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

England student maintenance and cost of living polling – HEPI

On Thursday 2 May, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published polling revealing student attitudes to maintenance support and the cost-of-living crisis.

The polling shows that the cost-of-living crisis continues to hit students hard:

- Nearly three-fifths of students (58%) say their financial situation has got worse over the last year, with a third (33%) saying they are at risk of dropping out as a result.
- Three-fifths (60%) say money concerns affected which university they chose to go to.
- If students received an extra £500, nearly half (47%) would put it into savings and a quarter (24%) would spend it on groceries.
- By contrast, if they had £500 less to spend, students would cut back on social activities (42%), nights out (40%) and do more paid work (42%).
- Just over a third (36%) of English students think the system of maintenance support in their country is fair, compared with 58% of Welsh students, 59% of Scottish students and 37% of Northern Irish students.

This polling was released ahead of the launch of a new report on student maintenance, due to be published on Thursday 9 May.

Josh Freeman, Policy Manager at HEPI and author of the research, said: ‘The financial situation of many, already challenging, has worsened in the last year. The high number of students indicating they are at risk of dropping out should set off alarm bells, as these students are hard-working and capable enough to be in higher education, but they may no longer be able to stay there.’

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

Skills Policy Manifesto – GuildHE

On Friday 3 May, GuildHE launched its Skills Policy Manifesto which includes a series of five recommendations to the next government:

1. Reduce regulatory overlap and bureaucracy in Level 4+ qualifications.
2. Finalise the Lifelong Learning Entitlement policy to ensure a range of qualification options are available.
3. Ensure that the Apprenticeship Levy is fit for purpose and encourages greater employer support for learners, plus additional financial investment in training.

4. Support the full diversity of higher education providers to develop new educational pathways.
5. Recognise the successful work universities are already delivering in their professional and technical qualifications offers.

Anthony McClaran, GuildHE Chair, and Vice-Chancellor of St Mary's University Twickenham said: 'Tackling the UK skills shortage and productivity problem is key to unlocking economic growth and universities and colleges play a central role, but the system needs change if the shared objectives are to be met... The GuildHE Skills Manifesto makes positive recommendations to address these challenges.'

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