Political affairs digest

A regular digest of House of Commons, House of Lords and higher education sector business. If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Forthcoming Business

Home Office oral questions

On Monday 20 November, the House of Commons will hear oral questions to the Home Secretary Amber Rudd. A number of questions have been tabled relevant to the university sector, namely on international students being included in the net migration target, and the Tier 4 visa pilot scheme.

Immigration Minister gives oral evidence to the Home Affairs Committee

At 9.30am on Tuesday 21 November, the Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis will give oral evidence to the Home Affairs Committee as part of its inquiry into the Home Office’s delivery of Brexit. He will also be accompanied by Patsy Wilkinson, Second Permanent Secretary at the Home Office.

The focus of the inquiry is more on management of immigration services, rather than the immigration system overall. However, the committee has said that some questions will likely focus on ‘prospects for post-Brexit immigration arrangements’, which may include points relevant to universities.

Commons Science and Technology Committee hearing on research integrity

The Commons Science and Technology Committee will take further oral evidence on Tuesday 21 November at 10.50am as part of its inquiry into research integrity.

The following witnesses will be taking part:

- **Professor David Hand**, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics, Imperial College London
- **Dr Damian Pattinson**, Vice President of Publishing Innovation, Research Square
- **Wendy Appleby**, Registrar and Head of Student & Registry Services, University College London
- **Dr Trish Groves**, Director of Academic Outreach, BMJ
- **Dr Elizabeth C Moylan**, Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)
- **Catriona Fennell**, Director of Publishing Services, Elsevier (representing The Publishers Association)
- **Alyson Fox**, Director of Grants Management, Wellcome Trust

Lords Science and Technology Committee hearing on life sciences

The Lords Science and Technology Committee will take oral evidence at 10am on Tuesday 21 November in connection with its inquiry into life sciences and the industrial strategy.
Across three sessions, the select committee will hear from:

- **Rt Hon Lord Heseltine**
- **Sir John Chisholm**, Executive Chair, Genomics England
- **Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser**, Fellow, Royal Society
- **Professor Chris Whitty**, Interim Government Chief Scientific Adviser, Department of Health
- **Professor Dame Sally Davies**, Chief Medical Officer for England, Department of Health

**Autumn Budget 2017**

At 12.30pm on Wednesday 22 November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond will make his statement for the Autumn Budget 2017. In addition to responding to financial forecasts by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the Chancellor will set out tax and spending plans for the next year.

Following the statement by the Chancellor, the House of Commons will debate the policies announced. This debate will be continued on three more sitting days until Tuesday 28 November, throughout which there will be votes on the Budget as a whole and amendments to it.

The university sector has been vocal in urging the Chancellor to include policies which further unlock the ability of universities to support economic growth across the country. You can read Universities UK’s priorities for the Budget [here](#).

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**House of Lords oral question: disabled students**

On Monday 13 November, Lord Addington asked an oral question on ‘payment of assessment by dyslexic students for Disabled Students’ Allowance’. The initial response from the minister is copied below, with a full transcript available on [Hansard](https://hansard.parliament.uk/). At the end of the session, the Education Minister Lord Agnew agreed that the government would look at the issue raised by Lord Addington.

**Lord Addington:** To ask Her Majesty’s Government why dyslexic students have to pay for an assessment for disabled students’ allowance when other disabled students do not.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Lord Agnew of Oulton):** My Lords, all students are required to prove their eligibility for disabled students’ allowances. This applies to all students, including those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. DSA funding is not available to any student to pay for evidence to establish eligibility. DSAs continue to provide funding for eligible dyslexic higher education students to access IT equipment as well as software and other support.
Lord Addington: I thank the Minister for that reply. However, if you have already had a diagnosis—for instance, in primary school—have received assistance for dyslexia or a SpLD condition throughout your education, including assistance in the exams that get you to university, what possible justification is there for a further assessment that you have to pay for to get the assessed help at university?

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The noble Lord, Lord Addington, has great expertise in this area, both as president of the dyslexia association and in other commercial interests, so I defer to his superior knowledge. I reassure him that many universities now offer hardship funds for these tests. Perhaps I may quote from the University of East Anglia, which states:

“The cost to students for the 2017/18 academic year will be £30.00 for the screening and £70.00 for the Educational Psychologist or Psychiatrist assessment”.

Lords Science and Technology Committee hearing on life sciences

The Lords Science and Technology Committee took oral evidence on Tuesday 14 November as part of its inquiry into life sciences and the industrial strategy.

The following witnesses gave evidence across three sessions:

- Professor Jonathan Elliott, Vice-Principal, Research and Innovation, Royal Veterinary College
- Dr David Hughes, Head of Global R&D Technology Scouting, Syngenta
- Professor Angela Karp, Director for Science Innovation, Engagement and Partnerships, Rothamsted Research
- Dr Mark Hammond, Co-founder, Deep Science Ventures
- Mr John Bowler, Fund Manager and Global Sector Specialist with responsibility for the health care sector, Schroder Global Healthcare Fund, Schroders
- Dr Peter Hughes, Healthcare Equity Analyst, AXA Framlington Biotech Fund
- Dr Andrew Elder, Partner, Albion Capital
- Dr Glenn Crocker MBE, Chief Executive Officer, UK Science Park Association, BioCity Nottingham
- Dr Iain Thomas, Head of Life Sciences, Cambridge Enterprise
- Dr Sally Ann Forsyth, Chief Executive Officer, Norwich Research Park

A recording of the oral evidence session can be watched here.
Lords Economic Affairs Committee hearing on the economics of higher, further and technical education

On Tuesday 14 November the Lords Economic Affairs Committee held its fifth session as part of its inquiry into the economics of higher, further and technical education.

The following witnesses took part:

- **Sir Anthony Seldon**, Vice Chancellor, Buckingham University
- **Professor David Phoenix OBE**, Vice Chancellor, London South Bank University
- **Pam Tatlow**, Chief Executive, MillionPlus
- **Professor Mike Thomas**, Vice-Chancellor, University of Central Lancashire
- **Mr Peter Horrocks CBE**, Vice Chancellor, Open University
- **Professor David Latchman CBE**, Master, Birkbeck University

The evidence sessions covered issues of particular interest to post-1992 universities, such as sector diversity, part-time study, technical and vocational education, and degree apprenticeships. Also discussed were international students, alternative systems of higher education funding, and perceived trends of grade inflation.

A video recording of the session can be watched online. One more evidence session has so far been announced, and will take place on Tuesday 28 November.

Joint Committee on Human Rights launches inquiry into freedom of speech at universities

This week, the Joint Committee on Human Rights launched a new inquiry into freedom of speech on university campuses. This joint select committee, which is made up of both peers and MPs, will look at how universities are upholding their freedom of speech obligations, and connected issues like the Prevent duty.

The first oral evidence session on Wednesday 15 November heard from:

- **Dr Joanna Williams**, Senior Lecturer, Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, University of Kent
- **Professor Dennis Hayes**, Professor of Education, University of Derby
- **Tom Slater**, Deputy Editor, Spiked
- **Professor Colin Riordan**, President and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University

You can watch a recording of this oral evidence session here. The committee is not currently taking written evidence and has not yet announced any further oral evidence sessions.
Education Committee launches apprenticeships and skills training inquiry

On Thursday 16 November, the Education Committee announced an inquiry into apprenticeships and skills training. The terms of reference, which will be of particular interest to universities which are especially involved in degree apprenticeship programmes, can be found [here](#).

The deadline for written submissions is Friday 5 January 2018. No oral evidence sessions have yet been announced.

Written answers

Research: Europe

*Matthew Offord:* What assessment he has made of the capacity within UK universities and research institutes to continue to investigate the European geo-political area after the UK leaves the EU.

*George Eustice:* The Department has made no such assessment but the Prime Minister explained in her Florence Speech that the UK will continue to take part in those specific policies and programmes which are greatly to the UK and the EU’s joint advantage, such as those that promote science, education and culture.

Universities: Treasury meetings

*Kerry McCarthy:* How many meetings he has had with (a) the University Alliance, (b) the Russell Group, (c) Universities UK and (d) MillionPlus in the last 12 months. [111461]

*Liz Truss:* Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery. Details of ministerial and permanent secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available [here](#).

Overseas Students

*Bill Esterson:* How many students from (a) India, (b) Nigeria, (c) Germany, (d) France, (e) Ireland, (f) Greece, (g) Saudi Arabia and (h) Poland have studied in the UK in each of the last three years.

*Jo Johnson:* The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes statistics on students enrolled at UK Higher Education Institutions. The number of student enrolments from the requested countries in the latest three academic years for which data are available has been provided in the table below. Statistics for the academic year 2016/17 will come available from HESA in January 2018.

Higher Education Enrolments by Country of Domicile
UK Higher Education Institutions
Academic Years 2013/14 to 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>19,750</td>
<td>18,320</td>
<td>16,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>18,020</td>
<td>17,920</td>
<td>16,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>14,060</td>
<td>13,675</td>
<td>13,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>11,955</td>
<td>12,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>11,490</td>
<td>10,905</td>
<td>10,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>10,670</td>
<td>10,130</td>
<td>9,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>9,060</td>
<td>8,595</td>
<td>8,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>5,245</td>
<td>5,655</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HESA student record

Notes: Numbers rounded to the nearest multiple of five. Numbers include all modes, levels and across all years of study.

Higher education: student admissions

_Daniel Zeichner:_ How many England-domiciled (a) full-time and (b) part-time undergraduate students entered higher education institutions in England from disadvantaged areas to study in (i) 2011-12 and (ii) 2015-16.

_Daniel Zeichner:_ How many (a) mature and (b) part-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds have entered higher education in England in each year since 2008-09.

_Joseph Johnson:_ The Higher Education Statistics Agency collects and publishes data on the number of individuals enrolled in and entering higher education courses. This includes information on the area each student lived in before they entered university, which is used as a proxy for disadvantage.

This growth in participation is seen in the latest disadvantaged entry rates published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, which show that in 2016 young people from the most disadvantaged areas were 43% more likely to enter full-time higher education than they were in 2009 (19.5%, up from 13.6%).

In 2011/12, 41,405 full-time English-domiciled undergraduate students from low participation areas (defined as being in the lowest quintile of the POLAR3 classification) entered English higher education institutions. The equivalent figure for 2015/16 was 44,285, representing a 7% increase in full-time undergraduate entrants from low participation areas between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

In 2011/12, 30,845 part-time English-domiciled undergraduate students from low participation areas entered English higher education institutions. The equivalent figure for 2015/16 was 16,330, representing a 47% decrease in part-time undergraduate entrants from low participation areas between 2011/12 and 2015/16.
Information for all years since 2008/09 could only be provided at disproportionate cost to the department. Information for the years 2011/12 and 2015/16 has been provided, in line with PQ 109021.

More detailed counts of students (including numbers of mature students) can be found in the table provided.

The following document(s) are referenced by this answer (see [here](#)).

### Midwives: Graduates

**Ellie Reeves:** How many midwifery graduates there were in each year since 2010-11.

**Philip Dunne:** The following table shows the number of midwives who graduated in England in each academic year, for the period 2010-11 to 2015-16. Data on the number of graduates in 2016-17 will be available from January 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midwifery graduates</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>1,486</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>1,810</td>
<td>1,933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency Student Record

There were 6,802 midwives in training as at 31 March 2017.

### Students: advanced learner loans

**Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 31 October 2017 to Question 109926, how much her Department spent marketing advanced learner loans in (a) 2014-15, (b) 2015-16 and (c) 2016-17.

**Anne Milton:** Since the introduction of loans, training providers have been offered a toolkit to help them develop their communications with potential loan-funded learners. The latest toolkit is available via [here](#).

In total, the Government invested circa. £24,000 in 2014-15 and circa. £71,000 in 2015-16 in materials for training providers to use, including leaflets and media. There has been no additional outlay for 2016-17 but the Student Loans Company and Education and Skills Funding Agency are continuing to provide a support service to all training providers.

### Student loans: RAB charge

**Angela Rayner:** To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, what target has been set for the Resource and Accounting Budgetary Charge on student loans.

**Liz Truss:** HM Treasury sets a target Resource and Accounting Budgetary (RAB) Charge to the Department for Education as budgetary measure to help manage the costs of student loan book. The current target RAB charge is 36%, published online [here](#).
**Angela Rayner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effect of changes to Government policy on the repayment thresholds for graduate debt on the total resource departmental expenditure limit of her Department in each of the next three fiscal years.

**Jo Johnson:** The long-term cost of the student loan system is reflected in the Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge, which measures the proportion of loan outlay that we expect not to be repaid when future repayments are valued in present terms. In each of the financial years (a) 2017-18, (b) 2018-19 and (c) 2019-20, the RAB charge for higher education loans is expected to change from around 30% under the previous policy to between 40% and 45% under the new policy. For Advanced Learner Loans, the RAB charge is expected to change from around 40% to between 50% and 55%.

The allocated budget for RAB expenditure forms part of the total resource departmental expenditure limit. It is disclosed within the depreciation figure set out within the annual report and accounts. In 2016-17 annual report and accounts, this was £3.5bn for 2017-18, £3.9bn for 2018-19 and £4.3bn in 2019-20. As in prior years, the 2017-18 budget will be reviewed as part of the Supplementary Estimates process.

The cost of the system is a conscious investment in young people. It is the policy subsidy required to make higher and further education widely available, achieving the Government’s objectives of increasing the skills in the economy and ensuring access to university for all with the potential to benefit.

**Angela Rayner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what is the ring-fenced allocation from her resource departmental expenditure limit for the resource accounting and budgeting charge for higher education student loans for each financial year of the current spending review period.

**Jo Johnson:** The allocated budget for the Resourcing, Accounting and Budgeting charge expenditure, forms part of the total resource departmental expenditure limit. It is disclosed within the depreciation figure set out within the annual report and accounts. In the 2016-17 annual report and accounts, this was £3.5bn for 2017-18, £3.9bn for 2018-19 and £4.3bn for 2019-20. As in prior years, the 2017-18 budget will be reviewed as part of the Supplementary Estimates process.

The cost of the system is a conscious investment in young people. It is the policy subsidy required to make higher and further education widely available, achieving the Government’s objectives of increasing the skills in the economy and ensuring access to university for all with the potential to benefit.

**Student Loans Company: management**

**Gordon Marsden:** When the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation was first made aware of allegations on the management and leadership of Steve Lamey, Chief Executive at the Student Loans Company.
**Jo Johnson:** The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation was informed in June that allegations had been made against the Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company, Steve Lamey.

**Gordon Marsden:** Who commissioned the investigation into Steve Lamey's performance as Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company; who took the decision to terminate Steve Lamey's contract as Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company; and when that decision was made.

**Jo Johnson:** Investigations into allegations received about aspects of Steve Lamey’s management and leadership were commissioned jointly by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and the department.

The SLC took the decision to terminate Steve Lamey’s contract as SLC Chief Executive Officer as a result of the findings of those independent investigations, and following a formal internal SLC process. His contract was terminated on 7 November 2017.

**Student Loans Company: HMRC meetings**

**Gordon Marsden:** What meetings HM Revenue and Customs have had with the Student Loans Company in the last 12 months.

**Jo Johnson:** Officials and staff from HM Revenue and Customs and the Student Loans Company have frequent meetings to discuss the operation and performance of the Student Loan system. These include regular formal Board and Governance meetings, attended by senior officials from both organisations.

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**Sector news**

**Government announces increase to Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) visas**

On Wednesday 15 November, the Home Office announced a doubling of the number of visas available through the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) route from 1,000 to 2,000 per year. These visas are issued to highly-skilled people who show 'promise in technology, science, art and creative industries.'

These visas will be issued to individuals who are recognised as promising future leaders by one of five organisations:

- Tech City UK
- Arts Council England
- The British Academy
- The Royal Society
- The Royal Academy of Engineering

The full government press release announcing the change can be found [here](#).