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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Parliamentary Business

Both houses were in recess this week.

Forthcoming business

Westminster Hall Debate on post-16 funding
On Tuesday 25 February at 2:30pm, Lloyd Russell-Moyle will lead a debate on equality in funding for post-16 education.

You can watch the debate here.

Written Questions

There were no written questions this week due to both houses being in recess.

Sector News

Home Secretary Priti Patel announced new points-based immigration system

On Wednesday 19 February, the Home Secretary announced a new points-based immigration system. It will be introduced for 1 January 2021 with the aim of reducing low-skill immigration.

A total of 70 points are required to be eligible to apply for a visa. There are three essential requirements:

- Offer of a job by an approved sponsor (20 points)
- Job at appropriate skill level (20 points)
- Speaks English at a required level (10 points)

There are a further five characteristics that will give an applicant points, these points are tradable:

- Salary of £23,040 – £25,599 (10 points)
- Minimum salary of £25,600 or the ‘going rate’ (the average salary) for that occupation – whichever is higher (20 points)
- Job in a shortage occupation (as designated by the MAC) (20 points)
- Education qualification: PhD in subject relevant to the job (10 points)
- Education qualification: PhD in a STEM subject relevant to the job (20 points)

There is one additional characteristic which does not give any points:

- Salary of £20,480 (minimum requirement) – £23,039 (0 points)

The salary threshold will therefore be reduced to £25,600 or the average salary for that profession. New entrants will be able to receive a lower rate, 30% below the standard threshold for their profession.

Because the points-system is tradable, those earning between £23,039 and £25,600 can still receive points, although fewer. Those receiving below £23,039 points will not earn any points which count towards their application, although this does not necessarily exclude them from becoming eligible.

You can find out more about the new system here.
Global talent scheme opened
On Thursday 20 February, the global talent scheme opened to non-EU citizens, which will allow 'highly-skilled' scientists and researchers to come to the UK without a job offer. It will extend to EU citizens on 1 January 2021.

The Global Talent route replaces the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) route and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will endorse applicants from the scientific and research community. The fast-tracked scheme will:
- double the number of eligible fellowships
- continue to ensure dependents have full access to the labour market
- not require an individual to hold an offer of employment before arriving
- allow lead-researchers to nominate research and support staff to also become eligible
- provide an accelerated path to settlement for all scientists and researchers who are endorsed on the route
- provide for an exemption from the absences rules for researchers and their dependants, where they are required overseas for work-related purposes, ensuring they are not penalised when they apply for settlement

You can find out more about the scheme here.

Reshuffle
Here is an overview of the key ministerial roles for higher education in the new cabinet.
Department for Education
- Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education
- Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities
- Gillian Keegan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for BEIS
- Amanda Solloway, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science and Space

The latest updates on appointments can be found here.