

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

Education Committee session on the Apprenticeship Levy

On Tuesday 10 March, the Education Committee held a session on the Apprenticeship Levy. The committee heard contributions from:

- Sally Gilson, Head of Skills and Welsh Policy at the Freight Transport Association
- Stephen Radley, Director of Strategy and Policy, Construction Industry Training Board
- Laura Burley, Apprenticeships Ambassador, The Open University
- Chinara Rustamova, Senior Policy Advisor for Education and Skills, Federation of Small Businesses
- Nick Linford, Apprenticeship Funding Expert and Editor, FE Week
- Paul Raby, Group HR Director, Balfour Beatty

The committee heard arguments as to whether employers should be liable for the 5% co-investment rate and heard about the complexities of the levy system faced by small businesses.

You can watch the session [here](#).

Budget

Wednesday 11 March, new Chancellor Rishi Sunak delivered the first budget to be held since October 2018. The focus of the Budget was providing the financial support the country needs to mitigate the effects of the Coronavirus global pandemic. This comprised of £12billion for “temporary, timely and targeted measures to provide security and stability for people and businesses”.

The Budget confirmed an unprecedented government investment in research and development (R&D), rising to £22billion a year by 2024/25, which will be very much welcomed by the sector. Specific R&D commitments set out in the Budget document include an at least £800million investment in a new blue-skies funding agency modelled on ‘ARPA’ in the US, and an immediate funding boost of up to £400million in 2020/21 for research, infrastructure and equipment, including at universities across the country.

There was little detail relating to the government’s plans for skills policy as part of the levelling up agenda. The expected £1.8billion capital investment in the further education colleges was announced, but further details on how the £3billion National Skills Fund will be spent will not be available until the Spring when the government plans to launch a consultation.

You can find out more [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Public Accounts Committee session on University Technical Colleges

On Monday 16 March 2020 at 3:30pm, the Public Accounts Committee will hold a session on University Technical Colleges. Witnessed to this debate will include:

- Jonathan Slater, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education
- Andrew McCully, Director General, Early Years and Schools Group, Department for Education
- Mike Pettifer, Director, Academies and Maintained Schools Division, Education and Skills Funding Agency.

You can watch the session [here](#).

House of Lords debate on the skills required for a successful innovation economy

On Monday 16 March at 2:30pm, Baroness Bull will ask what assessment the government have made of (1) the skills required for a successful innovation economy, and (2) whether the education system is structured to deliver a workforce equipped with such skills.

You can watch the debate [here](#).

House of Lords debate on higher education provision in rural and coastal areas

On Wednesday 18 March at 3:00pm, Lord Bassam of Brighton will ask what support they plan to put in place to assist universities and further education colleges to address issues with higher education provision in rural and coastal areas.

You can watch the debate [here](#).

Written Questions

Postgraduate fees and charges

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reason universities have autonomy over the procedure for charging application fees at postgraduate level. [23524]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Universities are, historically, autonomous institutions, and they may determine their own procedures, within the law. The Secretary of State has no current legal power to intervene in the charging of application fees. In general, the freedom of higher education providers to determine the criteria for the admission of students and how they are applied is recognised in Section 2, and elsewhere, in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

Tuition fees for health professionals

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to abolish tuition fees for (a) student nurses, (b) midwives and (c) allied health professionals. [24325]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): The Government has no plans to abolish tuition fees for student nurses, midwives or those studying one of the allied health profession subjects.

The Government announced in December 2019 that new and continuing students from September 2020 will receive a £5,000-£8,000 grant during their course to help with their cost of living – and they will not have to pay it back. Eligible students will receive at least £5,000 and an additional £1,000 for those with child dependents with further funding of up to £2,000 available to new students in regions or disciplines that are struggling to recruit.

NHS bursary

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the NHS bursary will be paid retrospectively to students who did not receive that funding between 2017 and 2020. [26188]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn MP) on 27 February 2020 to Question 19994.

Percentage of school leavers in higher education Postgraduate fees and charges

Lord Bradley: To ask Her Majesty's Government what percentage of school leavers entered higher education in each of the ten districts of Greater Manchester in each of the last five years. [HL1721]

Baroness Berridge: The department publishes annual information on the proportion of students from state-funded and special schools who entered higher education by age 19 by local authority in its 'Widening Participation in Higher Education' statistical release.

The table below shows figures for the latest five years for local authorities within Greater Manchester.

Table 1: Percentage of pupils from state-funded and special schools who entered Higher Education by age 19 by local authority.

Local Authority 2013/14 2014/15 2015/16 2016/17 2017/18

Bolton	40%	43%	43%	46%	43%
Bury	41%	44%	46%	43%	44%
Manchester	35%	37%	39%	39%	42%
Oldham	37%	40%	40%	40%	41%
Rochdale	37%	38%	40%	40%	39%
Salford	34%	32%	34%	33%	32%
Stockport	38%	39%	41%	40%	43%
Tameside	31%	35%	37%	36%	36%
Trafford	50%	52%	53%	54%	57%
Wigan	37%	38%	40%	41%	40%

Student housing

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the average housing costs were for full-time students in England in each of the last 10 years. [22359]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government measures student housing costs periodically but does not collect data annually. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2014/15 reported average housing costs of £4,151 for full-time undergraduates who incurred those costs. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2011/12 reported average housing costs of £3,628 for full-time undergraduates who incurred them.

The student finance system contributes towards undergraduate students' living costs at University, with the most support available for students from the lowest income families. The government increased maximum loans for living costs by 2.8% for the current academic year, 2019/20, to £8,944 for students living away from home and studying outside London with a further 2.9% increase to £9,203 for 2020/21. Higher rates of loan are available for students living away from home and studying in London.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the extent to which maintenance loans cover the cost of housing for students in England. [22360]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government measures student housing costs periodically but does not collect data annually. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2014/15 reported average housing costs of £4,151 for full-time undergraduates who incurred those costs. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2011/12 reported average housing costs of £3,628 for full-time undergraduates who incurred them.

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John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of maintenance loans for full-time students in England for the purpose of housing costs. [24240]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government measures student housing costs periodically but does not collect data annually. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2014/15 reported average housing costs of £4,151 for full-time undergraduates who incurred those costs. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey in 2011/12 reported average housing costs of £3,628 for full-time undergraduates who incurred them.

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T-levels

Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the (1) number, and (2) distribution, of relevant businesses required to meet the demand for T-levels. [HL1826]

Baroness Berridge: Given the scale of the challenge, it is important that employers from all industries and regions are supported to deliver industry placements. We have carried out extensive stakeholder engagement across different industries, considered a range of evidence and put a substantial support package in place.

The published evidence is on pages 10 to 12 in the [following link](#). This document also provides links to other evidence.

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is promoting T levels and industry placements, including through operating a matching service which puts employers in touch with providers in their area. The NAS is also able to target specific geographical areas, as well as specific sectors and employers of specific sizes and types.

In May 2019, we published a new framework for industry placements to accommodate different industries, students and locations. We are piloting an employer support fund that is designed to help employers offering industry placements. We are also developing an employer support package alongside this. We will continue to monitor the regional and industry challenges to best target our activity to ensure that businesses can successfully meet the demands for T levels.

Erasmus+ programme and Horizon Europe

Lord Bassam Of Brighton : To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to their wish to avoid a role for the Court of Justice of the EU in resolving future disputes between the UK and the EU, what form of dispute resolution they would accept if the UK is to continue participating in the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ programmes. [HL1842]

Lord Agnew Of Oulton: The Public Mandate states that the UK is ready to consider participation in certain EU programmes where it is in the UK's and the EU's interest that the UK does so. The UK will consider a relationship in line with non-EU Member State participation for the following programmes: Horizon Europe, Euratom Research and Training, and Copernicus. The UK will consider service access agreements for the following programmes: EU Space Surveillance and Tracking, and the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service.

Existing agreements on programmes between the EU and third countries establish dispute resolution mechanisms that do not include recourse to the ECJ.

The UK's priority in negotiations is to ensure that the UK restores its economic and political independence on 1 January 2021. That is the Government's primary objective. Any agreement must be consistent with this. The UK must have full control over its own laws and the Government will not accept demands for the UK to follow EU law or accept the judgements of the ECJ.

Bursary scheme for trainee GPs

Jim Shannon (Strangford): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will work with Cabinet colleagues to introduce a bursary scheme for people who train as GPs and commit to a five-year tenure in local surgeries. [23405]

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) :We are considering a number of measures to increase the recruitment and retention of general practitioners (GPs) to deliver our manifesto commitment of 6000 more doctors in general practice, but there are no current plans to introduce a bursary scheme for all people who train as GPs to commit to a five-year tenure in general practice.

The Targeted Enhanced Recruitment Scheme (TERS) is an initiative that offers a one-off, payment of £20,000 to GP trainees committed to working in a select number of training places in England that have been hard to recruit to for the past three years. 276 places are currently being offered as part of 2019 recruitment round. TERS has proved highly successful in attracting GP trainees to the most under-doctored areas.

Trainees receive the TERS payment once they have signed an agreement to complete the three-year placement, with no relocation option. Should a trainee leave training before completing the three-year placement, they are required to make a pro-rata repayment of the payment.

Degree apprenticeships

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many apprentices have (a) undergraduate and (b) master's degrees, by apprenticeship level. [23664]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): The department does not collect robust data on the prior attainment of learners on apprenticeship programmes and whether they hold undergraduate or masters degrees.

We are committed to ensuring all apprenticeship standards deliver value for money, meet the skills needs of employers and help individuals acquire the skills they need to get ahead.

The apprenticeship funding rules require training providers to undertake an assessment of prior learning. This is to determine whether an individual needs to do an apprenticeship that lasts a minimum of 12 months and requires at least 20 per cent off-the-job training, and to ensure that every apprenticeship leads to the acquisition of new skills, knowledge and behaviours.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) is responsible for working with employer trailblazer groups to design and approve apprenticeships standards; this includes deciding which qualifications may be included in standards, and whether those qualifications should be funded by government as part of the apprenticeship.

To ensure that high-quality apprenticeships are available to learners, the Institute reviews standards on an ongoing basis. It is currently reviewing the Level 7 Senior Leader standard, which may include an MBA qualification, to ensure that it meets the current policy intent and provides value for money.

Lord Touhig: To ask Her Majesty's Government how they intend to increase the number of (1) intermediate apprenticeships, and (2) apprenticeships, for those under the age of 19. [HL2010]

Baroness Berridge: Increasing the number of apprenticeships further is a priority, and we are actively considering how to do so. We have introduced a wide range of reforms to improve the quality of apprenticeships and to encourage employers across England to create more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. In 2019-20, the funding available for investment in apprenticeships in England is over £2.5 billion, which is double what was spent in 2010.

For the smallest employers (fewer than 50 staff) who take on apprentices under 19, we pay 100% of apprenticeship training costs.

Apprenticeship starts in 2018-19 were 393,400, of which 37% (143,600 starts) were at intermediate level (level 2). 25% of starts (97,700 starts) were by apprentices aged under 19.

To ensure that young people hear about the education and employment options available to them, in January 2018 we introduced a legal requirement for schools to give training providers the chance to talk to pupils about technical qualifications and apprenticeships. We offer a free service to schools through the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) project to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and support to enable them to promote apprenticeships to their students. In the last academic year, ASK reached over 300,000 students.

Traineeships are also helping thousands of young people to get the skills and experience that they need to obtain apprenticeships and other jobs. We are strengthening our communications with employers, providers, parents and young people to raise awareness of traineeships and the benefits that they offer. 62% of those who completed a traineeship in 2016-17 progressed to positive destinations, including apprenticeships.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the take-up of (a) apprenticeships and (b) the apprenticeship levy among employers in the shipping industry. [25091]

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood):

There have been no discussions between the Secretary of State for Transport the Secretary of State for Education on the take up of apprenticeships and the levy amongst employers in the shipping industry.

Apprenticeship levy

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the operation of the apprenticeship levy. [22413]

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood): The Secretary of State has discussed with the Secretary of State for Education issues raised by the transport sector regarding the training that attracts levy funding, the creation of apprenticeship standards, the funding levels attached to them and the availability of training providers and end point assessors.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on extending the apprenticeship levy to the road haulage industry. [22412]

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood): All employers with an annual pay bill over £3 million pay the apprenticeship levy. This includes road haulage operators.

Lord Touhig: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are planning any reviews of the apprenticeship levy. [HL2011]

Baroness Berridge: We continue to engage closely with businesses and listen to their views about the apprenticeships programme and the operation of the apprenticeship levy.

We are committed to making sure the apprenticeship programme continues to provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds, while meeting the needs of employers of all sizes and delivering benefits for the economy.

Lord Touhig: To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of people beginning apprenticeships were existing employees of the organisation they undertook the apprenticeship with, in the last year for which figures are available. [HL2014]

Baroness Berridge: The department does not collect this information directly.

According to the 2017 apprenticeship evaluation learner survey, 56% of all level 2 and 3 apprentices were recruited specifically with the intention of completing an apprenticeship. Just over two-fifths of level 2 and 3 apprenticeships (42%) were undertaken by those in existing roles already working for their employer.

Lord Touhig: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve the completion rate of apprenticeships. [HL2012]

Baroness Berridge: We have introduced a wide range of reforms to improve the quality of apprenticeships and to encourage employers across England to create more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. Our reforms have made apprenticeships longer and more rigorous, with more off-the-job training and with an independent assessment at the end.

We recognise that some apprentices may not complete their apprenticeship. This can be for a variety of reasons; including personal circumstances, leaving for other employment or training opportunities, being promoted, or sometimes changing apprenticeships.

Programmes such as traineeships provide a pipeline to apprenticeships for young people who are not yet ready to do an apprenticeship, giving them the skills and work experience, they need to access these opportunities, and helping them to make informed career choices.

Last year, we worked with the Quality Alliance, made up of the bodies responsible for the quality of apprenticeships and provider representative bodies, to publish a quality strategy. This set out the expectations for a high-quality apprenticeship experience to help ensure that apprenticeships meet apprentice and employers' needs and delivers successful outcomes.

We are continuing to take steps to improve our understanding of the apprentice experience and how the department, employers and providers can better support apprentices throughout their journey.

Increasing apprenticeships in engineering

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking with representatives of private sector companies to increase the number of apprenticeships in the engineering sector. [25206]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): We have introduced a wide range of reforms to apprenticeships to improve their quality and encourage employers across England, include those in the engineering sector, to increase the number of apprenticeships they offer.

In 2018-19, there were almost 60,000 starts in the engineering and manufacturing technologies sector. There are currently 122 high-quality industry-designed apprenticeship standards available in the engineering sector, including engineering and manufacturing technician and rail and rail systems engineer, with a further 24 standards in development.

We continue to work closely with employers and industry sector bodies, including the Institute for Engineering and Technology, MAKE UK and the Royal Aeronautical Society, to help them make the most of the long-term benefits of apprenticeships.

This support ranges from direct engagement with key employers to support growth in apprenticeships, helping to promote apprenticeships on employers' websites and social media, and running sector-specific apprenticeship events. We also provide guidance for small employers who do not pay the levy to transition onto the apprenticeship service, through webinars, workshops and face to face meetings.

Our Intermediary Ambassador Network, which currently has 60 members, includes representation from the engineering and manufacturing sector. We are supporting these ambassadors to effectively promote apprenticeships in their sectors.

Police graduates

Lord Wasserman: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many police officers in England and Wales of the rank of Assistant Chief Constable, or equivalent, are university graduates. [HL1970]

Baroness Williams Of Trafford: The Home Office collects and publishes information on the police workforce on a biannual basis. The latest statistical releases [are available here](#).

The annual "as at March" release contains information on the ethnicity of officers by rank. The rank of 'Chief Officer' includes all ranks above Chief Superintendent, and the latest information shows that as at 31 March 2019, 2.6% of Chief Officers were BAME.

Data on promotions can also be found in the "as at March" edition of this release. However, as the rank of 'Chief Officer' includes all ranks above Chief Superintendent, promotions within Chief Officer ranks are not collected and we are therefore unable to say how many Chief Constables were promoted from the rank of Deputy Chief Constable or equivalent.

The releases also contain information on how many officers are on secondment, however, data are not collected on the location of those secondments.

Information on whether officers are university graduates, or whether they served at the same rank in another force are not collected.

Skills

Lord Touhig: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure employees of all ages are gaining new skills. [HL2013]

Baroness Berridge: We are working with employers to jointly design and deliver policies and programmes which will develop the skills that individuals of all ages need to be successful and that employers want.

These include apprenticeships, with our reforms benefiting people of all ages and backgrounds, including adults developing their skills.

This also includes Adult Education Budget (AEB) funded provision. The AEB fully funds or co-funds skills provision for eligible adults aged 19 and above from pre-entry to level 3 (including traineeships) to help them gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning.

Advanced Learner Loans support clear routes into work, progression within work and progression to higher education (HE), by providing fees support for level 3 to level 6 qualifications. Access to multiple Advanced Learner Loans enables adults to progress or re-skill.

We are developing the National Retraining Scheme to support working adults to prepare for future changes to the economy, including those brought about by automation, and help them retrain into better jobs.

The government is also developing a new £3 billion National Skills Fund to upskill workers and prepare for the economy of the future.

Flexible and part-time HE also has a key role in terms of widening choice and participation. To reduce barriers for entering HE, our part-time undergraduate tuition fee loans are available to eligible prospective students of all ages. We have asked the Office for Students to continue to focus on part-time and flexible learning to deliver choice and flexibility.

Sector News

Coronavirus

On Thursday 12 March, the Prime Minister held a press conference following a Cabinet COBRA meeting where he updated the country on the latest Coronavirus news and advice.

The government announced that they are moving out of the contain phase and into delay and that the UK Chief Medical Officers have now raised the risk to the UK from moderate to high.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed the current advice, that the most important thing individuals can do to protect themselves remains washing their hands more often, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water. Make sure you cough or sneeze into a tissue, put it in a bin and wash your hands.

Additionally, they are asking anyone who shows certain symptoms to self-isolate for 7 days, regardless of whether they have travelled to affected areas.

There was no further update for universities specifically.

Find out more about the press release [here](#).