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:

Issy Cooke
issy.cooke@universitiesuk.ac.uk
0207 419 5434

Click on the items in the Table of Contents to go straight to the debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.
Table of Contents

Parliamentary Business .................................................................................................................. 4
BEIS Oral Questions ...................................................................................................................... 4
Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill ......................................... 4
Lords oral question on recruitment of nurses onto degree courses ........................................... 4
Forthcoming business ................................................................................................................... 5
Education Oral Questions ............................................................................................................. 5
International Trade Committee .................................................................................................... 5
Lords question on UK’s continued participation in the Erasmus+ programme ......................... 6
Written Questions .......................................................................................................................... 6
Coronavirus: loss of international student fees .......................................................................... 6
Coronavirus: viability of subject-specialist universities ............................................................... 7
UKRI review of Open Access Policy ............................................................................................ 8
Trade negotiations: higher education ........................................................................................... 9
Coronavirus: graduate route visa ................................................................................................. 9
Coronavirus: tuition fee charges ................................................................................................. 10
Coronavirus: access online learning ........................................................................................... 10
Student visas .................................................................................................................................. 11
Coronavirus: student cap Wales ................................................................................................... 11
Coronavirus: support for universities with international students quarantined ........................ 12
Coronavirus: short-term liquidity and plans for additional funding to sector ............................ 12
Requirement of indefinite leave student finance applications ...................................................... 13
EU student fees for 2021/22 ......................................................................................................... 13
Support for students returning to study in September ................................................................. 13
Coronavirus: reimburse student accommodation deposits ........................................................... 14
Extension for application window for Tier 4 visas ....................................................................... 15
Updates on the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce ....................... 15
Priorities for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce ................... 15
Priorities for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce ................... 15
Coronavirus: student accommodation ....................................................................................... 16
Coronavirus: quality of education during 20/21 academic year ................................................ 16
British national (overseas) status holder international or home student fees ........................... 17
Sector News .................................................................................................................................. 18
Updated guidance on concessions for Tier 4 sponsors and students ........................................... 18
New student mental health platform to support students during Covid-19 pandemic ............ 18
Michelle Donelan HEPI webinar ................................................................................................. 18
HESA publish graduate outcomes survey .................................................................................. 18
Parliamentary Business

BEIS Oral Questions

On Tuesday 16 June at 11:30am, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Ministers answered questions on the floor of the House.

Darren Jones MP asked a supplementary question on associate membership to Horizon Europe, “UK-EU research collaboration contributes £2b to British R&D and accounts for at least 5000 researchers in British universities as well as its contributions to Covid research and vaccination research. Can the Secretary of State today commit that irrespective of the free trade agreement negotiations with the EU, that the UK will seek third country full associate membership to Horizon Europe to keep that money coming into British R&D?”

Secretary of State for BEIS, Alok Sharma MP, responded: “We are committed to being a science and R&D superpower and that is why we have committed to spending £22b a year by 24/25 and to reaching 2.4% of GDP by 2027. The discussions with the EU are ongoing and we will see what they lead to.”

You can read the full transcript of the oral questions here.

Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill

The final debates of the Immigration Bill's Committee Stage were conducted this week on Tuesday 16 June and Thursday 18 June. The aim of the bill is to end free movement with the EU and pave the way for a points-based immigration system.

On Tuesday 16 June, Stuart McDonald MP mentioned students twice: when referring to the cost of obtaining a visa and when discussing which government department presides over the granting of Tier 4 visas. MPs tweeted that the impact of the bill on universities was discussed more closely in Thursday’s sessions, at the time of writing the debate hadn't been published on Hansard. We will include a further summary next week if necessary.

You can watch the Tuesday committee session at 9:25am here and 2:00pm here and the Thursday committee session at 11:30am here and 2:00pm here.

Lords oral question on recruitment of nurses onto degree courses

On Thursday 18 June, Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) asked Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to facilitate the recruitment of nurses onto degree courses beginning in September 2020.

Lord Bethell, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care, responded “the health and education sectors are working jointly to increase applications and places. The Government announced 5,000 more healthcare places from September. In England, nursing students can access more funding worth at least £5,000 per academic year. During July in clearing, there will be marketing campaigns aimed at students considering nursing.”

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock noted the need not only to recruit new students but also retain those entering second and third years and ensure final year students complete their training. She called for the introduction of universal cost of living maintenance grants. Lord Bishop of Winchester, Lord Randall of Uxbridge and Lord Singh of Wimbledon asked what support packages and funding were being considered for both students and newly qualified nurses and allied health professionals.
The minister noted the government’s backing of a marketing campaign called, “We are the NHS that will seek to attract a broad range of backgrounds to the nursing profession.

You can read the transcript of the debate [here](#).

---

**Forthcoming business**

**Education Oral Questions**

On Monday 22 June at 2:30pm, Education Ministers will answer questions on the floor of the House. Several questions pertaining to higher education have been submitted.

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

**Home Affairs Committee session on the UK’s new immigration system**

On Wednesday 24 June at 9:15, the Home Affairs Committee are holding a session on the government’s proposals for the UK’s new immigration system. The Government’s Proposals for the UK’s New Immigration System.

The witness for this session is Professor Brian Bell, Interim Chair, Migration Advisory Committee

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

**Education Committee**

On Wednesday 24 June at 9:45, the Education Committee is holding a session on the impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services.

Witnesses: David Hughes, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges; Kirstie Donnelly MBE, Chief Executive Officer, City and Guilds Group; Jane Gratton, Head of People, British Chambers of Commerce (10.45am) Mark Dawe, Chief Executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers; Olly Newton, Executive Director, The Edge Foundation; David Marsh, Chair, The St Martin’s Group; Dr Fiona Aldridge, Director for Policy and Research, Learning and Work Institute.

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

**International Trade Committee**

On Wednesday 24 June at 2:30, the International Trade Committee is holding a private session on UK trade negotiations.

You can find out more about the session [here](#).
Lords question on UK’s continued participation in the Erasmus+ programme

On Thursday 25 June at 11:00, there is an oral question in the House of Lords on what progress the government have made in securing funding for the United Kingdom’s continued participation in the Erasmus+ programme, or its successor, after the end of 2020.

You can watch the debate here.

Written Questions

Coronavirus: loss of international student fees

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what financial support he plans to allocate to universities that lose income due to the loss of international student fees during the covid-19 outbreak. [55669]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak is bringing significant financial challenges to the higher education (HE) sector and we have been working closely with the sector, including specialist providers, to monitor its likely impacts.

On 4 May 2020, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

We will stabilise the admissions system and pull forward tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for HE providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of the 2020/21 academic year. This will have no impact on students but will allow providers to better manage financial risks over the autumn. This will be available to all providers across the UK.

In reprofiling these payments, we are clear in our expectation that providers should use the cashflow benefits appropriately, taking significant steps to improve efficiencies and manage their finances in order to avoid cashflow problems in the future. Reprofiling in this way is a one-off intervention for the autumn term only, to help providers take all necessary steps now to prepare for the future.

On Friday 5 June, the department announced Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a key deliverable of the 2019 International Education Strategy. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections.

In England, we will also bring forward £100 million of quality-related research funding for providers to the current academic year to help to address some of the immediate pressures faced by university research activities.

The department will consider purchasing land and buildings where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges in England. This will take place as part of existing programmes and using established procedures. This financial year (across purchases from all suitable vendors and including but not limited to HE providers), we have budgeted up to £100 million to acquire sites for planned projects in England. Details are available on GOV.UK here.

The government has also confirmed that providers are eligible to apply for its support packages, including business loan support schemes. The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, estimates that this could be worth at least £700 million to the sector. We will only intervene further where we believe there is a case to do so and where we believe that intervention is possible and appropriate and as a last resort.
In such instances, we will work with providers to review their circumstances and to assess the need for restructuring and any attached conditions. The department will be working with HM Treasury and other government departments and with the devolved administrations to develop this restructuring regime.

**Coronavirus: viability of subject-specialist universities**

**Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he plans to take to ensure the continued viability of subject-specialist universities after the covid-19 outbreak. [55670]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak is bringing significant financial challenges to the higher education (HE) sector and we have been working closely with the sector, including specialist providers, to monitor its likely impacts.

On 4 May 2020, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

We will stabilise the admissions system and pull forward tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for HE providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of the 2020/21 academic year. This will have no impact on students but will allow providers to better manage financial risks over the autumn. This will be available to all providers across the UK.

In reprofiling these payments, we are clear in our expectation that providers should use the cashflow benefits appropriately, taking significant steps to improve efficiencies and manage their finances in order to avoid cashflow problems in the future. Reprofiling in this way is a one-off intervention for the autumn term only, to help providers take all necessary steps now to prepare for the future.

On Friday 5 June, the department announced Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a key deliverable of the 2019 International Education Strategy. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections.

In England, we will also bring forward £100 million of quality-related research funding for providers to the current academic year to help to address some of the immediate pressures faced by university research activities.

The department will consider purchasing land and buildings where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges in England. This will take place as part of existing programmes and using established procedures. This financial year (across purchases from all suitable vendors and including but not limited to HE providers), we have budgeted up to £100 million to acquire sites for planned projects in England. Details are available on GOV.UK here.

The government has also confirmed that providers are eligible to apply for its support packages, including business loan support schemes. The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, estimates that this could be worth at least £700 million to the sector. We will only intervene further where we believe there is a case to do so and where we believe that intervention is possible and appropriate and as a last resort.

In such instances, we will work with providers to review their circumstances and to assess the need for restructuring and any attached conditions. The department will be working with HM Treasury and other government departments and with the devolved administrations to develop this restructuring regime.
UKRI review of Open Access Policy

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether his Department plans to make an assessment of the potential financial effect on the higher education institutions of UK Research and Innovation’s review of its Open Access policy.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): The Government’s university research sustainability taskforce is examining how best to respond to the challenges for the sector resulting from COVID-19, with the aim of sustaining the university research base and its capability to contribute effectively to UK society and economy in the recovery from COVID-19 and beyond. Given the broader focus and urgency of addressing the impacts of COVID-19, at this time, the outcome of the UKRI Open Access Review does not form part of the taskforce’s consideration.

The OA Review is independent from Plan S. Working internationally however, is important to help achieve open access. UKRI has joined cOAlition S, a consortium comprising research funders and foundations from across the world and supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council. The coalition aims to help make full and immediate Open Access to research publications a reality, and is built around the Plan S principles. UKRI will consider outcomes of the work of cOAlition S as part of its ongoing Open Access Review alongside other evidence and inputs. The outcomes of the review will determine decisions on UKRI’s OA policy.

As part of the UKRI open access review, UKRI is working with BEIS to consider implications for stakeholders. UKRI has commissioned an independent analysis to help assess the possible implications for various groups, including higher education institutions. This analysis will include direct costs and benefits and wider social and economic implications, and will be considered alongside other evidence gathered through the review, including via the consultation on a proposed UKRI policy which has recently closed. The consideration of the COVID-19 impacts on research sector, including economic implications, will be taken into account in the UKRI review.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if UK Research and Innovation’s review of Open Access policy is independent from the work of the cOAlition S consortium.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): The Government’s university research sustainability taskforce is examining how best to respond to the challenges for the sector resulting from COVID-19, with the aim of sustaining the university research base and its capability to contribute effectively to UK society and economy in the recovery from COVID-19 and beyond. Given the broader focus and urgency of addressing the impacts of COVID-19, at this time, the outcome of the UKRI Open Access Review does not form part of the taskforce’s consideration.

The OA Review is independent from Plan S. Working internationally however, is important to help achieve open access. UKRI has joined cOAlition S, a consortium comprising research funders and foundations from across the world and supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council. The coalition aims to help make full and immediate Open Access to research publications a reality, and is built around the Plan S principles. UKRI will consider outcomes of the work of cOAlition S as part of its ongoing Open Access Review alongside other evidence and inputs. The outcomes of the review will determine decisions on UKRI’s OA policy.

As part of the UKRI open access review, UKRI is working with BEIS to consider implications for stakeholders. UKRI has commissioned an independent analysis to help assess the possible implications for various groups, including higher education institutions. This analysis will include direct costs and benefits and wider social and economic implications, and will be considered alongside other evidence gathered through the review, including via the consultation on a proposed UKRI policy which has recently closed. The consideration of the COVID-19 impacts on research sector, including economic implications, will be taken into account in the UKRI review.
**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge):** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if the UK Research and Innovation’s review of Open Access policy will be considered as part of the work undertaken by the Department’s research sustainability taskforce. [55696]

**Amanda Solloway (Derby North):** The Government's university research sustainability taskforce is examining how best to respond to the challenges for the sector resulting from COVID-19, with the aim of sustaining the university research base and its capability to contribute effectively to UK society and economy in the recovery from COVID-19 and beyond. Given the broader focus and urgency of addressing the impacts of COVID-19, at this time, the outcome of the UKRI Open Access Review does not form part of the taskforce’s consideration.

The OA Review is independent from Plan S. Working internationally however, is important to help achieve open access. UKRI has joined cOAlition S, a consortium comprising research funders and foundations from across the world and supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council. The coalition aims to help make full and immediate Open Access to research publications a reality, and is built around the Plan S principles. UKRI will consider outcomes of the work of cOAlition S as part of its ongoing Open Access Review alongside other evidence and inputs. The outcomes of the review will determine decisions on UKRI’s OA policy.

As part of the UKRI open access review, UKRI is working with BEIS to consider implications for stakeholders. UKRI has commissioned an independent analysis to help assess the possible implications for various groups, including higher education institutions. This analysis will include direct costs and benefits and wider social and economic implications, and will be considered alongside other evidence gathered through the review, including via the consultation on a proposed UKRI policy which has recently closed. The consideration of the COVID-19 impacts on research sector, including economic implications, will be taken into account in the UKRI review.

**Trade negotiations: higher education**

**Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton):** To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, whether the export of UK higher education is a priority sector in future trade negotiations; and whether (a) research collaboration and (b) student exchanges will be included in those negotiations. [58105]

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire):** The Department for International Trade (DIT) recognises that higher education is a significant export for the United Kingdom, bringing value in the collaboration and partnerships they foster, and helping to forge deep global relationships. These underpin opportunities for the United Kingdom and our international partners to develop, trade and work together.

HM Government is exploring to what extent our trade negotiations could support trade in education services. This may include collaboration in science, research and innovation as appropriate. DIT will continue to work across government and with other interested parties to make sure our trade negotiations represent the sector’s interests.

**Coronavirus: graduate route visa**

**Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether international students who start their courses online due to the covid-19 outbreak and spend less than 11 months studying in the UK will be eligible for the graduate route visa. [55849]

**Kevin Foster (Torbay):** The Graduate route will be introduced in the summer of 2021.
We have been clear no migrant will be penalised due to circumstances outside their control related to Covid-19, including those who need to complete part of their courses online due to the covid-19 outbreak.

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge)**: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether international students who have to start their courses online as a result of the covid-19 outbreak will be eligible for the Graduate Route visa despite spending less time than is required physically in the UK under the terms of that visa. [57223]

**Kevin Foster (Torbay)**: The Graduate route will be introduced in the summer of 2021. We have been clear no migrant will be penalised due to circumstances outside their control related to Covid-19, including where they have had to start their courses online as a result.

**Coronavirus: tuition fee charges**

**Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham)**: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate the Government has made of the number of universities that have charged (a) full or (b) partial tuition fees during the covid-19 outbreak. [55889]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham)**: Higher education providers are autonomous institutions and responsible for setting their own fees. Higher education providers will of course want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses that are fit for purpose and that help students progress their qualifications.

As of 11 June, no university had made a submission of changes in the level of chargeable fees for courses during the COVID-19 outbreak for the academic year 2019/20. It is possible that a higher education provider has submitted adjustments for an individual or sub-set of students on a course. However, these adjustments would have been processed on a student-by-student basis, and no information is recorded on the reason for a fee reduction being recorded.

**Coronavirus: access online learning**

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central)**: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he will take to ensure that students have full access to online learning while college and university campuses are closed as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [58700]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham)**: When lockdown began, higher education providers reacted rapidly to move provision online (in many cases within 24 hours), to ensure that students were able to access teaching and assessment. The vast majority of providers are currently planning to move to blended or dual provision for the next academic year. They have redesigned courses and timetables to be suitable for these new styles of delivery, front-loaded the next academic year with more online friendly provision and moved areas which require practical, face-to-face teaching or assessment to the back of the academic year.

The Office for Students (OfS) has published information and guidance for providers and students, including frequently asked questions on a broad range of issues. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has also published a series of guides to support higher education providers to secure academic standards and to support student achievement during the outbreak.

The government is aware of the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 outbreak will have on some students. Officials are working with the sector to identify what further steps may be necessary. The government has already worked closely with the OfS to help clarify that providers can draw upon existing funding to provide hardship funds and to support disadvantaged students impacted by
COVID-19. Providers are able to use the funding, worth around £23 million per month for June and July, towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment and mental health support as well as to support providers’ access and participation plans.

Using this facility, providers have been supporting those with practical access issues through the provision of IT equipment including laptops and Wi-Fi dongles to ensure that they are able to continue their studies online.

**Student visas**

**Lord Bradley:** Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that all overseas student visa applications are processed in time to enable these students to register to study at UK universities in the 2020–21 academic year. [HL4917]

**Baroness Williams Of Trafford:** UKVI have ensured that sufficient casework capacity is in place and are engaging with the Education Sector, to plan to meet the demands of the student market for Autumn enrolments. UKVI are also working with their Commercial Partners to enable this within the confines of international restrictions in place because of COVID-19.

**Coronavirus: student cap Wales**

**Lord Bassam Of Brighton:** Her Majesty's Government what impact assessment they undertook of the decision to cap student numbers from England studying at universities in Wales; what consultation they had with the Welsh government; and what response was received to any such consultation. [HL4904]

**Baroness Berridge:** My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, have regular meetings with Welsh ministers, and ministers from all of the devolved administrations, about higher education issues. These discussions have included the development of student number controls policy. The department’s officials also have regular meetings and discussions with their counterparts.

Student number controls are a direct response to the COVID-19 outbreak. They are designed to minimise the impact of the financial threat to higher education institutions that is posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. They also form a key part of the package of measures to stabilise the higher education admissions system.

These controls are a temporary measure and will be in place for one academic year only. Student number controls for higher education institutions in the devolved administrations only apply to the number of English-domiciled entrants who will be supported with their tuition fees through the Student Loans Company, and these controls are set at a level which will allow every institution to take more first year English students than they took last year. The funding of English-domiciled students is not a devolved matter, and it is right and fair that this policy should apply as consistently as possible wherever they are studying in the UK.

Ministers will continue to work closely with the devolved administrations on strengthening and stabilising the higher education system following the COVID-19 outbreak.
Coronavirus: support for universities with international students quarantined

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to support universities with international students who may be subject to quarantine policy due to the covid-19 outbreak. [55671]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): We are in discussions with Universities UK and other sector representatives on a regular basis to ensure that international higher education students are welcomed to the UK and we expect international students to be supported on arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times.

On 3 June, the department published guidance to support providers in making decisions on re-opening campuses and buildings to students and staff ahead of the academic year 2020/21. Further information on this guidance can be found here.

We also welcome the actions of Universities UK, who have set out principles for the sector to consider as it prepares for the autumn term, including encouraging higher education providers to think about how to support students during the self-isolation period.

On Friday 5 June, the department announced Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a key deliverable of the 2019 International Education Strategy. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections.

Coronavirus: short-term liquidity and plans for additional funding to sector

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that universities have adequate short-term liquidity during the covid-19 pandemic; and whether he plans to allocate additional funding to that sector. [58104]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak is bringing significant financial challenges to the higher education (HE) sector, and we have been working closely with the sector to monitor the likely impacts including on short-term liquidity.

On 4 May 2020, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

We have stabilised the admissions system and will pull forward tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of the 2020/21 academic year. This will have no impact on students but will allow providers to better manage financial risks over the autumn. This will be available to all providers across the UK. In reprofiling these payments, we are clear in our expectation that providers should use the cashflow benefits appropriately, taking significant steps to improve efficiencies and manage their finances in order to avoid cashflow problems in the future. Reprofiling in this way is a one-off intervention for the autumn term only, to help providers take all necessary steps now to prepare for the future.

In England, we will also be bringing forward £100 million of quality-related research funding for providers to the current academic year to help to address some of the immediate pressures faced by university research activities.

The department will consider purchasing land and buildings where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges in England. This will take place as part of existing programmes and using established procedures. This financial year (across purchases from all suitable vendors, including but not limited to HE providers), we have budgeted up to £100 million to acquire sites for planned projects in England. Details are available on GOV.UK here.
The government has also confirmed that providers are eligible to apply for its support packages, including business loan support schemes. The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, estimates that this could be worth at least £700 million to the sector. We will only intervene further where we believe there is a case to do so and where we believe intervention is possible and appropriate and as a last resort.

In such instances, we will work with providers to review their circumstances and assess the need for restructuring and any attached conditions. The department will be working with HM Treasury and other government departments to develop this restructuring regime, as well as with the devolved administrations.

**Requirement of indefinite leave student finance applications**

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to make an assessment of the effect on BAME communities of the requirement that non-EU nationals must in general have indefinite leave to remain in order to apply for student finance. [57094]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** Student finance is generally available to those who have no restrictions on their ability to live and work in the United Kingdom, so that they are likely to be able to stay in the UK to complete their education and contribute to the UK economy afterwards.

In 2016, the regulations governing student support were amended to introduce a new eligibility category for those who do not have settled status but who have resided in the UK for an extended period. The amendment extended access to support to students who have spent half their life or at least 20 years in the UK preceding the first day of the first academic year of their course, or 7 years for those under 18 years old. Like most other students, they must be ordinarily resident in England and have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man) for the 3 years preceding the first day of the first academic year of their course to qualify for support.

An equality impact assessment was carried out on this change before it was introduced. This can be found here. This assessment concluded that the policy could particularly benefit people from the Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia Central, Europe Other or Middle East regions.

**EU student fees for 2021/22**

**Baroness Royall Of Blaisdon:** Her Majesty's Government when they expect to be able to inform EU students who wish to study in the UK from the 2021/22 academic year whether they will be liable for (1) UK, or (2) overseas, fees. [HL5241]

**Baroness Berridge:** We recognise how important it is that higher education students and institutions have information on eligibility for student support before applications open for university courses.

Applications for courses starting in the academic year 2021/22 do not open until September 2020. We will provide sufficient notice for prospective EU students on fee arrangements ahead of the 2021/22 academic year and subsequent years in the future.

**Support for students returning to study in September**

**Lord Taylor Of Warwick:** Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support university students who are returning to study in September. [HL5253]
Baroness Berridge: We expect universities to be open for the autumn term and for them to offer a blend of online teaching and in-person tuition as they consider appropriate, while taking account of the need to minimise the risk to staff and students.

We have now published guidance for higher education providers on reopening campuses and buildings. This will support them in deciding when and how they can make facilities accessible again to students and staff, as long as they follow the relevant public health advice, available here.

Coronavirus: reimburse student accommodation deposits

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has plans to reimburse students that have paid deposits on (a) private and (b) university housing for the 2020-21 academic year and whose education may be disrupted as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [57372]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

The government encourages universities and private hall providers to be fair in their decisions about accommodation charges for this period.


The guidance sets out the CMA’s view on how the law operates to help consumers understand their rights and to help businesses treat their customers fairly. Students may be entitled to refunds from certain accommodation providers depending on the terms of their contract and their particular circumstances. If students need help, organisations such as Citizens Advice offer a free service, providing information and support.

Students who have already signed an accommodation contract for next year and, because of COVID-19, think it may no longer fit their requirements, should talk directly to their housing provider.

If a student thinks that their accommodation provider is treating them unfairly, they can raise a complaint under the accommodation codes of practice as long as their provider is a code member. The codes can be found at: https://www.thesac.org.uk/; https://www.unipol.org.uk/the-code/how-to-complain and: https://www.rla.org.uk/about/nrla-code-of-practice.shtml.

We have worked closely with the Office for Students to enable higher education (HE) providers to draw on existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding worth around £23 million per month for June and July, towards student hardship funds.

We have also asked that HE providers pay particular attention to the additional financial hardships that are being faced by student staff who have been reliant on income from campus-based jobs at this time.
**Extension for application window for Tier 4 visas**

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she plans to extend the application window for Tier 4 visas from three to six months, in order for international students beginning their courses online to know that they will be eligible for a visa to enter the UK before they begin studying. [57224]

**Kevin Foster (Torbay):** Students are currently permitted to apply up to three months in advance of the course start date listed on the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS). Students commencing a course of study outside the UK, are not required to hold a visa to commence the course. All provisions are being kept under regular review in light of the situation with Covid-19 (Coronavirus).

Visa Application Centres (VAC) are starting to re-open which will enable students to submit their applications and enrol biometrics.

**Updates on the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce**

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central):** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how often his Department plans to (a) meet and (b) receive updates from the Ministerial University Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce; whether he plans to publish those updates. [57208]

**Amanda Solloway (Derby North):** The Taskforce has been meeting remotely via video conference on a fortnightly basis. The membership and full terms of reference of the group are available on gov.uk.

The taskforce has discussed a range of issues facing the sector due to the disruption surrounding COVID-19, and how to approach those challenges. Discussions at the taskforce are assisting ongoing policy development, alongside intelligence which has been submitted by members and their networks.

**Priorities for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce**

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central):** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what discussions he has had with the Ministerial University Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce on their immediate priority issues. [57209]

**Amanda Solloway (Derby North):** The Taskforce has been meeting remotely via video conference on a fortnightly basis. The membership and full terms of reference of the group are available on gov.uk.

The taskforce has discussed a range of issues facing the sector due to the disruption surrounding COVID-19, and how to approach those challenges. Discussions at the taskforce are assisting ongoing policy development, alongside intelligence which has been submitted by members and their networks.

**Priorities for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce**

**Sarah Champion (Rotherham):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether British national (overseas) status holders and their dependants will be subject to (a) international or (b) home student fees for higher education if they study in the UK. [59476]
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): To qualify for home fee status in England, a person must have settled status or a recognised connection to the UK. This includes persons who are covered by EU law, have long residence in this country or who have been granted international protection by the Home Office. There are also requirements associated with ordinary residence in the UK.

Subject to meeting the normal eligibility requirements, British Nationals (Overseas) status holders will be able to qualify for home fee status once they have acquired settled status in the UK. The same applies to the dependents of such persons.

Higher Education Providers have discretion to charge a student who is not eligible for home fee status whatever fee they deem appropriate, including the same fee as they charge students who have home fee status.

Coronavirus: student accommodation

Barry Gardiner (Brent North): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent discussions he has had with student accommodation providers to prevent students with tenancies having to pay for properties they cannot reside in safely during the covid-19 outbreak. [57882]

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth): If students have already signed an accommodation contract for next year and, because of the COVID-19 outbreak, think it may no longer fit their requirements, they should talk directly to their accommodation provider.

During these unprecedented times, the Government encourages student accommodation providers, landlords, letting agencies and tenants to take a pragmatic, flexible approach and have a frank and open conversation at the earliest opportunity, to allow both parties to agree a sensible way forward.

In cases where students do not wish to move into the accommodation, they are able to end or surrender their fixed term tenancy if they reach an agreement with their landlord. Where students have a joint tenancy agreement, all tenants will need to agree to the surrender as well as the landlord.

In very limited situations where a student has been legally prevented from living in their accommodation, they may be entitled to a refund from certain accommodation providers. This is dependent on the terms of their contract and their particular circumstances. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published guidance on consumer contracts, cancellation and refunds affected by the coronavirus. This sets out the CMA’s view on how the law operates to help consumers understand their rights and help businesses treat their customers fairly. If students need help, organisations such as Citizens Advice offer a free service, providing information and support.

Coronavirus: quality of education during 20/21 academic year

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the (a) quality of education at universities and (b) the attainment of students of universities that are planning to operate online during the 2020/21 academic year. [58786]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Higher education providers reacted rapidly to move provision online (in many cases within 24 hours), to enable higher education students to complete the 2019/20 academic year. Providers are currently planning to move to blended or dual provision for the next academic year. They have redesigned courses and timetables to be suitable for these new styles of delivery, as well as front-loading the year with more online friendly provision and moving areas which require practical, face-to-face teaching or assessment to the back of the academic year.
Providers have also demonstrated a high level of agility while addressing issues around infrastructure, changing course content and developing new methods of assessment. To help support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19, the government has worked closely with the Office for Students (OfS) to clarify that providers can draw upon existing funding worth around £23 million per month for June and July, towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment.

The OfS has published information and guidance for providers and students, including frequently asked questions on a broad range of issues. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has also published a series of guides to support providers to secure academic standards and to support student achievement during the outbreak. The OfS has made it clear that all higher education providers must continue to meet conditions related to the quality of their courses and the standard of qualifications that they award. This means ensuring that higher education courses are high quality, that students are supported and achieve good outcomes and that standards are protected.

**British national (overseas) status holder international or home student fees**

**Sarah Champion (Rotherham):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether British national (overseas) status holders and their dependants will be subject to (a) international or (b) home student fees for higher education if they study in the UK. [59476]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** To qualify for home fee status in England, a person must have settled status or a recognised connection to the UK. This includes persons who are covered by EU law, have long residence in this country or who have been granted international protection by the Home Office. There are also requirements associated with ordinary residence in the UK.

Subject to meeting the normal eligibility requirements, British Nationals (Overseas) status holders will be able to qualify for home fee status once they have acquired settled status in the UK. The same applies to the dependents of such persons.

Higher Education Providers have discretion to charge a student who is not eligible for home fee status whatever fee they deem appropriate, including the same fee as they charge students who have home fee status.
Sector News

Updated guidance on concessions for Tier 4 sponsors and students

On Tuesday 16 June, the Home Office published updated guidance for Tier 4 Sponsors and Migrants and Short-term students. There are two main additions to the guidance:

1. Confirmation that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 2020/21 academic year provided students intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow.
2. Confirmation that those studying by distance/blended learning will be eligible to apply for the new Graduate route provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021.

You can read the full guidance here.

New student mental health platform to support students during Covid-19 pandemic

On Thursday 17 June, the Office for Students announced a new online platform will be developed to deliver targeted mental health support, designed to respond to additional pressures caused by Covid-19. The new platform called Student Space will launch in July. Student Minds have been awarded £3m in funding by the Office for Students (OfS) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to lead development of the platform.

Student Space will act as a single point of access to support for university students. The first phase of the programme will be launched in late July for all 2.3 million students at registered Welsh institutions and OfS-registered Higher Education providers in England.

You can find more information about the platform here.

Michelle Donelan HEPI webinar

On Wednesday 17 June, HEPI hosted a webinar with Michelle Donelan, Minister for Universities.

The minister reiterated that the government will respond to the Augar review in the next few months in the Spending Review, and that commitments to part-time learning were forthcoming. ‘We want to make sure we’re fostering an environment of life-long learning and there will be updates in due course’.

She restated that student number controls are a temporary measure for 2020-21 in response to calls from the sector. She noted that Horizon and Erasmus are part of the negotiations with the EU but a domestic replacement for Erasmus is also being devised just in case.

She highlighted that the government is continuing to look at what support it can provide graduates entering a particularly difficult labour market this summer. She reaffirmed commitment to the Education Sector Advisory Group with Graham Stuart for attracting international students and her commitment to the Research Taskforce with Amanda Solloway.

Finally, she announced the new mental health platform, Student Space.

HESA publish graduate outcomes survey
On Thursday 18 June, HESA published statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s (HESA) Graduate Outcomes Survey.

The statistics show the activities after 15 months of graduates who obtained qualifications during the academic year 2017 to 2018. Previously HESA has measured graduates’ activities through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

You can find more about the release here.

**Student number controls**

On Thursday 18 June, the Department for Education provided updated guidance on temporary student number controls.

The updated page provides details on how to apply for the additional 10,000 places and a detailed list of courses that the additional places may be in. The deadline to apply is 26 June 2020.

You can find more information here.