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

House of Commons day debate estimates relating to the DfE

On Tuesday 7 July, members of the House of Commons held a debate on ‘Estimates relating to the Department for Education, HM Revenue and Customs and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy’.

The DfE debate centred on ‘Left Behind Children’. The debate focused on schools, 16-18 provision and FE but there were contributions relating to universities. Ben Bradley MP stated the endless drive for all children to go to university is not always helpful.

David Johnston MP called for an increased focus on the students, who have had low contact time due to strikes and Covid-19 and been trapped in accommodation contacts. He went on to note that “students on some courses at some universities will have fewer employment outcomes than if they had simply got a job”. He agreed the Government is right to cover costs of the international fees gap but suggested that “universities with high numbers of international students have the worst records in widening access and this should be looked at in the business model”.

Jonathan Gullis MP praised Staffordshire University and said student number controls must ‘not go on too long’ as this would limit social mobility and harm colleges that have links with universities.

You can read the full debate here.

Chancellor announces ‘Plan for jobs’ in summer statement

On Wednesday 8 July, Chancellor Rishi Sunak gave a financial statement to the House of Commons in which he announced the government would give a £1,000 bonus to companies for each employee brought back from furlough. The government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, having originally been intended to end in July is now set to end in October.

The Chancellor announced a new programme to support young people into work entitled ‘Kickstarters’. The programme will cover the wage costs of 16-24 year olds in newly created jobs (paid at least the National Minimum Wage) for six months; we are seeking confirmation as to whether graduates will be supported by this policy.

The Chancellor also announced an expansion of traineeships, giving employers £1,000 per trainee, and that employers creating new apprenticeships would be paid a £2,000 bonus for each apprentice under 25, and £1,500 for each apprentice over 25 they take on.

You can read a transcript of the statement here and the ‘Plan for Jobs’ here.

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee

On Thursday 9 June, the BEIS Committee held a session on the ‘Work of the Department and Government Response to coronavirus’

The witnesses for this session will be the Secretary of State for BEIS, Alok Sharma MP and Sam Beckett, Acting Permanent Secretary, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

A transcript has not been published yet. We will include a summary in a future digest.
You can watch the session here.
Forthcoming business

Home Office oral questions

On Monday 13 July, Home Office ministers will answer questions from the floor of the house.

Lee Anderson MP and Marco Longhi MP will ask a question on progress made on the points based immigration system.

You can watch the debate here.

Education Committee session with Universities Minister

On Wednesday 15 July at 10:15am, the Education Committee will hold an ‘Accountability hearing’ with Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State for Universities, Department for Education.

The Education Committee holds regular hearings with the Secretary of State for Education and other key figures directly accountable to Parliament. This forms part of the Committee's ongoing scrutiny of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

You can watch this session here.

Home Affairs Committee session with Home Secretary

On Wednesday 15 July at 10:30am, the Home Affairs Committee will hold a session on ‘the work of the Home Secretary’. The witnesses for this session are Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary, Home Office, Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office and Shona Dunn, Second Permanent Secretary, Home Office.

You can watch this session here.

Treasury Committee session with Chancellor of the Exchequer

On Wednesday 15 July at 2:30pm, the Treasury Committee will hold a session on ‘the economic impact of coronavirus’. The witness for this session is the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, HM Treasury.

You can watch this session here.
Written Questions

Financial and education support for PG students

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what (a) financial and (b) educational support is provided to postgraduate students whose education has moved online. [60865]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): This is a difficult and uncertain time for students, but we are working with the sector to make sure all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies.

Eligible students studying designated postgraduate courses online are entitled to apply for a postgraduate loan. The rate of loan is the same for all students.

Higher education providers are working to ensure that learning and teaching continues and is completed through the use of online teaching and other digital delivery. Providers will contact students to tell them how this will affect their studies.

The Office for Students, the higher education regulator in England, has produced guidance on practical ways in which students can complete their studies whilst ensuring quality and standards are upheld. This covers teaching, learning and assessment during this difficult time - further details are available here.

The government is also working closely with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the professional bodies and the Office for Students to ensure students continue to leave university with qualifications that have real value, reflect their hard work and allow people to progress.

Student complaints to OIA

Esther McVey (Tatton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the level of evidence a student is required to provide to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education in the event that that student is dissatisfied with the level of education that their university has provided during the covid-19 outbreak. [59751]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The statutory independent student complaints scheme for higher education is run by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The scheme, guidance for students and the level of evidence has not changed during the COVID-19 outbreak. Students are still expected to raise formal complaints with their own university in the first instance, and if those cannot be resolved, students can approach the OIA. The OIA website outlines the process and the information required to submit a complaint here.

On 22 June, the OIA published specific guidance outlining its approach to handling complaints that arose from the COVID-19 outbreak, including complaints on course delivery. The OIA will take a number of issues into account when considering a complaint and will consider what was promised against what was delivered. The OIA will also take into account the relevant legislation and related guidance (such as that published by the Competition and Markets Authority), and whether the higher education provider has been fair and reasonable in developing its policies.

The guidance is available here.
There are some issues that the OIA is unable to consider. These issues include matters relating to admissions and academic judgement. Guidance on the issues that the OIA can consider is available at [here](#).

**Delivery and format of higher education courses in 2020-21 academic year**

**Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions has he had with representatives of universities on the planned (a) delivery and (b) format of higher education courses in the 2020-21 academic year. [61578]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** Departmental officials and I have been engaging with the sector to help to ensure that higher education providers can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and which help students achieve their academic goals. The vast majority of providers are planning for a mixture of face-to-face and online teaching in the autumn term, and we have already seen some fantastic, innovative preparations for blended education for the next academic year. Delivering through a mixture of face-to-face and online provision will enable them to prioritise safety and to comply with guidance from Public Health England.

Departmental officials are also working closely with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which has recently published guidance, attached [1], setting out 4 key principles to inform providers as they plan for the next academic year. The principles are that any move to on-site activity is safe and secure for staff and students, that degree-awarding bodies maintain quality and standards in the move to flexible provision, that providers engage with students and staff in planning changes to delivery and assessment of teaching and learning and that providers’ planning scenarios are flexible and responsive to students’ needs.

As providers have moved a significant proportion of their provision online for both the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year and for the next academic year, maintaining the quality and value of online teaching and learning has been at the forefront of our actions. While the methods of delivery may have changed, we are engaging with the sector and the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure that the depth and breadth of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching and the value of the degree achieved are maintained. This will help to ensure that any online learning provides the same academic value to students as campus-based learning. The OfS and the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education have both also recently issued guidance on student and consumer protection issues during the COVID-19 outbreak. The OfS and I have been clear that providers should give students clear and transparent information on what they can expect from their course in the next academic year and the extent to which initial teaching will be online, how this will happen and what support there will be for online learning.


**Value of online learning for university students**

**Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department made of the value of online learning for university students. [61582]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** Departmental officials and I have been engaging with the sector to help to ensure that higher education providers can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and which help students achieve their academic goals. The vast majority of providers are planning for a mixture of face-to-face and online teaching in the autumn term, and we have already seen some fantastic, innovative preparations for blended education for the next academic year. Delivering through a mixture of face-to-face and online provision will enable them to prioritise safety and to comply with guidance from Public Health England.
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Guidance for students moving during coronavirus

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what guidance his Department has issued to students with housing contracts who plan to move between properties during the covid-19 outbreak. [66977]

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth): On 13 May we announced that anyone in England could move home as long as they followed the advice here.

This includes students moving into university-run and privately rented accommodation. Everyone involved in the moving process must follow social distancing to minimise the spread of the virus.

Letting agents and landlords should also consider how best to conduct tenancy check-ins for new tenancies agreed while broader measures remain in place, taking care to follow government advice on social distancing.

UKRI budget

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) : To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, when UK Research and Innovation’s (UKRI) budget will be published; and what proportion of the £22 billion spend on research and development in 2024-25 will be allocated to UKRI. [68693]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy’s research and development allocations for 2020/2021 were published on 29 th May 2020 and are available at here.

Information on future years’ allocations will be published following the Spending Review.
Decline in international student numbers: Impact on research capacity

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the financial effect on university research capacity of the potential reduction in international students studying in the UK in 2020-21. [67637]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): The Government fully recognise the implications for financial sustainability of university research from potential decline in income from international students, and other sources. BEIS officials are working with colleagues in Department for Education, Office for Students and UK Research and Innovation, and with the university sector, to understand and assess the potential scale of the impacts, taking account of range of actions to encourage continued recruitment of international students, and to open up higher education institutions from September.

On June 27 th we announced a support package to sustain research capacity and capability which might otherwise be impacted. From this autumn, UK universities will be able to access a government funded package of long-term, low interest loans, supplemented by a small amount of grant, covering up to 80% of the university’s income losses from international students for the academic year 20/21, up to the value of their non-publicly funded research activity. This will help to protect research jobs, capability and ground-breaking research.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to his Department’s press release entitled Government to protect UK research jobs with major support package, published on 27 June 2020, whether universities seeking access to replacement funding for research as a result of the decrease in international students can access both the announced (a) grants and (b) loans. [69540]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement made by my Rt. Hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 29 June 2020 that informed the House of Commons of a support package to sustain research capacity and capability which might otherwise be impacted by Covid-19.

From the Autumn, the Government will demonstrate its commitment to research by providing a package of support to research-active universities, consisting of low-interest loans with long pay-back periods, supplemented by a small amount of government grants. In sharing responsibility for the future of science and research with our world-leading university system the government will cover up to 80% of a university’s income losses from international students for the academic year 20/21, up to the value of non-publicly funded research activity in that university.

Further details of the package, including the loan and grant arrangements, will be announced in due course.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect on the finances of universities of a reduction in the income derived from international students; and what steps he is taking to help ensure that universities are able to replace that income. [68699]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education (HE) sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We understand that a possible reduction in international student numbers poses significant challenges but stand ready to help the sector with various mitigations.

The UK’s world-leading universities remain open to international students and we are working as a priority to make processes as flexible as possible to allow them to study at UK institutions in 2020-21. The UK’s new International Education Champion, Sir Steve Smith, will assist with opening up export
growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, which will include attracting international students to UK universities.

The government is committed to continuing to improve our offer to international students, which is why we have announced the new graduate route, to be introduced in summer 2021. The graduate route will be simple and light-touch and will permit graduates at undergraduate and masters level to remain in the UK for 2 years and PhD graduates to remain in the UK for 3 years after they have finished their studies and to work or look for work at any skill level - a significant improvement in our offer.

On 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced the package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. We are pulling forward an estimated £2.6 billion worth of forecast tuition fee payments to ease cashflow pressure this autumn and are bringing forward quality-related research funding for HE providers in England in the current academic year by £100 million. Full details of the package have been published on GOV.UK here.

On 27 June, the government announced a further package of support to research-active universities. This includes £280 million of government funding and a package of low-interest loans with long payback periods supplemented by a small amount of government grants, which will be available from autumn. In sharing responsibility for the future of science and research with our world-leading university system, the government will cover up to 80% of a university’s income losses from international students for the academic year 2020/21, up to the value of their non-publicly funded research activity.

The government has confirmed that HE providers in England are eligible to apply for its support packages, including business loan support schemes. The Office for Students estimates that these schemes could be worth at least £700 million to the sector.

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

Welcoming message to international students

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking abroad to demonstrate that Britain is open and welcoming to international students. [65132]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government has been clear that our world-leading universities, which thrive on being global institutions, will always be open to international students. Engaging closely with other government departments and the higher education sector, the department is working to reassure prospective international students that the UK higher education is ‘open for business’, remains world-class and is a safe and tolerant place to study. This includes continued work with Study UK (the government’s international student recruitment campaign led by the British Council), support for the sector-led #WeAreTogether campaign and a package of bespoke communications that will directly target prospective international students, making clear our world-leading UK offer.

Furthermore, on 22 June, with my counterparts in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, I wrote to prospective international students to outline the support and guidance that is available to international students who are considering studying in the UK from the autumn here. This letter reiterates a number of flexibilities that the government has already announced for international students including, amongst other mitigations, confirmation that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 2020/21 academic year, provided that international students’ sponsors intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow, and steps to further promote the new graduate route.
The government is committed to continuing to improve our offer to international students, which is why we have announced the new graduate route, which will be introduced in summer 2021. The graduate route will be simple and light-touch and it will permit graduates at undergraduate and masters level to remain in the UK for 2 years and PhD graduates to remain in the UK for 3 years after they have finished their studies in order to work or to look for work at any skill level. This represents a significant improvement in our offer to international students and will help ensure the UK higher education sector remains competitive internationally.

The government is also in discussions with Universities UK and other sector representatives on a regular basis to ensure that we are united in welcoming international students to the UK. In particular, we expect international students - especially those who will be subject to the 14-day self-isolation period - to be appropriately supported upon arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times.

In addition, on Friday 5 June, the government announced Sir Steve Smith as the UK’s new International Education Champion. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, which will include attracting international students to UK Universities. Alongside Sir Steve’s appointment, our review of the International Education Strategy this autumn will respond to the new context and the challenges that are posed by COVID-19 across all education settings to ensure we can continue to welcome international students in the future.

Hong Kong immigration route

Lisa Nandy (Wigan): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to ensure that dependents accepted under the proposed bespoke immigration route for British Nationals (Overseas) passport holders from Hong Kong will be treated as home students for the purpose of tuition fees. [68342]

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 those 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 their dependants.

Tier 4 applications without biometrics

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the merits of allowing Tier 4 applications from international students to be processed without biometrics for students in countries where visa centres remain closed. [65131]

Kevin Foster (Torbay): Students, like other visa applicants, are required to attend a visa application centre (VAC) to provide documents and enrol their biometrics, this is a minimum mandated security requirement for all visa national travellers to the UK.

Biometrics play a significant role in delivering security and facilitation in the border and immigration system. They enable quick and robust identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals subject to immigration control.

As restrictions continue to be lifted by governments, overseas VACs are reopening, enabling students to apply for the required visa to study in the UK. As centres reopen, details of these will be published on our commercial partner websites. As of 29th June, 113 visa application centres have reopened.
UKVI operations and the Education sector are working closely to ensure student applications are not impacted by earlier closures as a result of Covid-19.

**Student visa applications to NI universities from China and India**

Baroness Garden Of Frognal: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the backlog of student visa applications for Northern Ireland universities from applicants from China and India. [HL6125]

Baroness Williams Of Trafford: Our Visa Application Centres in China began to open on 2nd June 2020 and to date have provided sufficient capacity to accommodate Tier 4 demand for students wishing to study at all locations within the United Kingdom.

Our Visa Application Centres in India reopened from 6th July. We are opening further locations globally to allow the further submission of student applications.

We are continuing to work with the Education Sector and our Commercial Partners to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the system, to allow for all applications to be made for the Autumn enrolment.

**Deferred EU students exempt from Tier 4 visa rules**

Lord Bassam Of Brighton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether postgraduate research students who (1) are EU citizens, and (2) were due to start courses at UK universities in the autumn and have deferred by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will be exempt from Tier 4 student visa rules. [T] [HL6344]

Baroness Williams Of Trafford: Free movement will cease at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

EEA nationals intending to study within the UK from January 2021 will need to apply for and meet the requirements of the Student route under the UK’s Points Based Immigration system.

**Investors in People accreditation**

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many UK (a) businesses and (b) universities are accredited as Investors in People. [66874]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): Investors in People is responsible for awarding the Investors in People standard. Since 1 February 2017 this has been a Community Interest Company, which is not part of the Government.

**Student finance applications**

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students have applied to Student Finance England for (a) tuition fee loans and (b) maintenance grants for the 2020/21 academic year. [61583]
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Student Finance England processes applications for student financial support for English domiciled students studying in the UK and EU-domiciled students studying in England. Eligible full-time and part-time undergraduate students can apply for up-front tuition fee loans to meet the full costs of their tuition. Eligible students attending full-time courses and part-time degree and equivalent level courses can also apply for partially means-tested loans towards their living costs. Maintenance grants are only available in 2020/21 for small numbers of continuing full-time students who started their courses before 2016/17.

Applications for student support for full-time students opened in mid-February, and for part-time students in mid-June. As of 18 June 2020, Student Loan Company had processed 742,000 applications to Student Finance England for undergraduate tuition fee loans, 716,000 for maintenance loans, and 800 for maintenance grants for the 2020/21 academic year.

Students can apply for student finance up to nine months after the commencement of their course each academic year. This means that application numbers are likely to continue to rise as we approach the start of the 2020/21 academic year and for a period beyond that.

Nursing bursary

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the announcement of 18 December 2019 that all nursing students on courses from September 2020 will receive a payment of at least £5,000 a year which they will not need to pay back, when (a) further details on that funding will be published and (b) the application process will open. [66897]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): The Department of Health and Social Care has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

Healthcare student tuition fee refund

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of reimbursing tuition fees for the spring 2020 term for nursing, midwifery and allied healthcare students. [68333]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 July 2020 to Question 63492.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to ensure that (a) nursing, (b) midwifery and (c) healthcare students are reimbursed their tuition fees for the 2019-20 academic year. [68334]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 July 2020 to Question 63492.

Student nurse placements

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has for student nurses whose final year unpaid placements are due to end in relation to (a) early qualification and (b) extended placements as a result of covid-19. [60722]
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): All student nurses are required to complete practice placements as part of their education programme. The Government is extremely grateful to all student nurses who have supported the COVID-19 response, by opting into a paid placement for their time in practice at the frontline during the pandemic.

There are also a number of students who have not been in paid placements during the pandemic and after 31 July, provision has been made for the return of supernumerary placements.

Health Education England is working locally with each higher education provider to ensure placements are available and is supporting students so that as many as possible graduate on time. For those final year students who may need to extend beyond three years, arrangements are being developed to ensure that they get the support that they need in order to graduate. Details of these arrangements will be communicated to students as soon as possible.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has been clear that where a student has completed all their hours, academic assessment and university sign off they can go on to the NMC register and start their working life as a qualified nurse.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he has taken to ensure student nurses who were contracted to work during the covid-19 outbreak are compensated for the hours they have been contracted to work. [59664]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): The Government is extremely grateful to all student nurses who have supported the COVID-19 response, by opting into a paid placement for their time in practice at the frontline during the pandemic.

We have ensured that all students who do so are rewarded fairly for their hard work. NHS England has been funding the support to trusts where the contracts are held and Health Education England (HEE) has been brokering appropriate placements between the university and trust.

It was always made clear to these students that the arrangements would need to come to an end at an appropriate point and Health Education England, NHS England and NHS Improvement have agreed appropriate transition arrangements for all students in paid placements.

Any student in the last six months of their programme on a paid placement will be paid until the end of their contract, unless otherwise agreed. By the end of July most final year students can qualify as registered nurses and start full time work, increasing their pay.

For students in year two or the first part of their final year, employers and universities will work with them to aim to bring paid placements to a close no later than 31 August. This will be part of a voluntary learning agreement between student, placement provider and university.

Minimum qualifying thresholds for additional 5000 non-healthcare places

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department made of the social intake of higher education institutions and the communities they serve when setting the specific values of the continuation rate and the skilled employment/further study rate as minimum qualifying thresholds for institutions to bid for funding for 5,000 non-healthcare places. [62570]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, gave consideration to a wide range of factors when setting out the eligibility criteria for the extra non-healthcare places. This included the need to ensure that these places lead to completed qualifications and entry into the professions in which we need more people so we can support our vital public services and add value to the economy. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, had due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and the other equality aims under the Equality Act (2010) when formulating the policy on student number controls (SNCs). Admitting students,
including disadvantaged students, to low quality courses which do not give them the support they need to complete their degree, or do not give them good access to graduate employment, is not in the interest of students.

Overall, SNCs allow for substantial growth across the sector – they allow for all provider forecasts of growth and another 5% growth above this. Every individual provider in the country can recruit at least 6.5% more students than in the last academic year. The extra places that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education can award, are in addition to this already generous allowance.

SNCs will, however, re-distribute students more equally across different higher education providers compared to what would likely occur in the absence of any quantitative limits on student numbers at individual providers. Providers in the medium and low tariff groups are expected to be the main beneficiaries from SNCs as they are most likely to feel the greatest pressure on recruitment.

Our overarching aim is to protect students and to allow all students who want to go to university, and who meet their entry requirements, to access higher education.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) : To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department has undertaken an equalities impact assessment when arriving at the values of a continuation rate of ≥90 per cent and a skilled employment/further study rate of ≥75 per cent as minimum qualifying thresholds for higher education establishments to bid for funding for 5,000 non-health care places. [62571]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, gave consideration to a wide range of factors when setting out the eligibility criteria for the extra non-healthcare places. This included the need to ensure that these places lead to completed qualifications and entry into the professions in which we need more people so we can support our vital public services and add value to the economy. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, had due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and the other equality aims under the Equality Act (2010) when formulating the policy on student number controls (SNCs). Admitting students, including disadvantaged students, to low quality courses which do not give them the support they need to complete their degree, or do not give them good access to graduate employment, is not in the interest of students.

Overall, SNCs allow for substantial growth across the sector – they allow for all provider forecasts of growth and another 5% growth above this. Every individual provider in the country can recruit at least 6.5% more students than in the last academic year. The extra places that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education can award, are in addition to this already generous allowance.

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Our overarching aim is to protect students and to allow all students who want to go to university, and who meet their entry requirements, to access higher education.

Apprenticeship guarantee

Karin Smyth (Bristol South): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which organisations his Department has met with to discuss the Government’s forthcoming apprenticeship guarantee. [64240]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): Apprenticeships will have an important role to play in creating employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and in supporting employers in all sectors to access the skilled workforce they need to recover and grow following the COVID-19 outbreak. We are
looking to support employers of all sizes, and particularly smaller businesses, to take on new apprentices this year. We will set out further details in due course. We will also ensure that there is sufficient funding to support small businesses who want to take on an apprentice this year.

Ministers and officials continue to work closely with business representative organisations including the Confederation of Business Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, Make UK, the Institute of Directors and British Chambers of Commerce. Ministers and officials are also working closely with other governmental departments including HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on economic recovery and the role of apprenticeships and other skills programmes.

In my role as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, I have held many conversations with employers and training providers, in addition to recently hosting two cross-sectoral employer roundtables. These roundtables were used to gain insight into their experiences of the impact of COVID-19 and the government’s response, and to share their ideas as to how apprenticeships can drive economic recovery and continue to be an accessible, high-quality route to employment and skills. Employers in attendance covered a diverse spectrum of the economy, including retail, manufacturing, construction, digital, creative arts and the public sector. I was also pleased to recently meet a broad range of members of the Federation of Industry Sector Skills & Standards to consider key skills shortages in different sectors and how COVID-19 has impacted these.

**Apprenticeship levy**

**Karin Smyth (Bristol South):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of enabling public sector employers to utilise unspent apprenticeship levy funding to help alleviate the decline in the number of apprentices as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [63387]

**Gillian Keegan (Chichester):** Public sector employers are embracing the opportunities that apprenticeships bring to develop their workforces. Apprenticeships accounted for more than one in ten new appointments in the public sector (12.7 per cent) between April 2018 and March 2019. We continue to engage regularly with employers from across the public sector, to support them to address any barriers to recruiting apprentices.

The apprenticeships budget funds the training and assessment costs in England for both levy payers and non-levy paying employers. Levy-paying employers, including those in the public sector, have full control over when and where they spend the funds available to them to meet their current and future skills needs, including by transferring up to 25% of an employer’s annual levy funds to support the sustainable development of skills in their supply chain or local area. We strongly encourage all public sector employers to make maximum use of their levy, particularly at the current time.

Apprenticeships will have an important role to play in creating employment opportunities, and in supporting employers in all sectors to access the skilled workforce that they need to recover and grow, following the COVID-19 outbreak. We want to support employers to take on new apprentices this year and will provide further detail in due course.

**Apprenticeship levy review**

**Karin Smyth (Bristol South):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to review the apprenticeships levy; and what progress he has made on that review. [64241]

**Gillian Keegan (Chichester):** The government is committed to improving the working of the apprenticeship levy. We are continuing to engage closely with businesses and to listen to their views...
about the operation of the levy and the apprenticeships programme more broadly, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We have already introduced the flexibility for levy-payers to transfer up to 25% of their funds, enabling them to support apprenticeship starts in their supply chains or to meet local skills needs. In response to the outbreak, we have introduced a range of flexibilities to enable apprentices and employers to continue with their apprenticeships and start new ones wherever possible. This includes encouraging the remote delivery of training and allowing changes to end point assessment.

We are also bringing non-levy paying employers onto the apprenticeship service during 2020-21 to give smaller employers more control over the apprenticeships they choose and the training providers they use.

Russel Group student admissions by region

Neil O’Brien (Harborough): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of pupils in each UK region and nation progressed to a Russell Group university in each of the last 10 years. [69678]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The attached tables show the number and percentage of students who progressed to a Russell Group university in the year after reaching the end of 16 to 18 study in state-funded schools and colleges in each region of England. The tables cover the last 8 years for which data is available. The tables only include students who took approved level 3 qualifications, including A levels. Only students who were enrolled for at least 2 terms in the destination year are counted.

The progression of home-schooled children into HE

Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what arrangements they have put in place to facilitate permanently home-schooled children being awarded the grades required to allow the take up of college and university places in the 2020/21 academic year. [HL6186]

Baroness Berridge: This is a matter for Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. I have asked its Chief Regulator, Sally Collier, to write to the noble Lord and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

A-level appeals timetable

Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the appeals system for grades awarded this year for GCSE, AS Level and A Level exams will operate to a timetable that will ensure that students do not have to defer the next stage of their education by a full year. [HL6188]

Baroness Berridge: This is a matter for Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. I have asked its Chief Regulator, Sally Collier, to write to the noble Lord and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.
Sector News

Universities minister written statement on fee arrangements for 20/21

On Monday 6 July, universities minister Michelle Donelan MP made a written statement on student finance arrangements for higher education students starting in Autumn 2021. The maximum level tuition fee will remain at £9,250 for 2020-21. The maximum maintenance loans and grants will go up by 3.1%, in line with forecast inflation.

The minister also announced changes to the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA). The undergraduate DSA which is currently structured into four sub-allowances will now be one allowance. A maximum allowance of £25,000 will apply to both full time and part time undergraduate and postgraduate DSA recipients from 2021/22.

Regulations to implement these changes are expected later this year and will be subject to the usual parliamentary scrutiny.

You can read the full statement here.

House of Commons library publishes briefing: “Coronavirus: Financial impact on higher education”

On Tuesday 7 July, the House of Commons library published a briefing paper exploring the possible financial impacts of coronavirus on universities. The paper largely focuses on the possible impacts from loss of international students, but also highlights the effects of any decrease in lower domestic student numbers, as well as any drop in research work or revenue from accommodation, catering and conferencing.

The paper brings together data analyses from UCAS, HESA and the OfS and cites the above IFS research on the financial impact of Covid-19. The briefing goes on to highlight UUK’s call for a package of measures and the subsequent government response of a support package as well as the R&D roadmap announced last week. Additionally, it includes the subsequent responses from UUK, the UCU and Labour’s Shadow Minister for Universities, Emma Hardy MP.

You can download the full report here.

Education Secretary’s speech on Further Education

On Thursday 9 July, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson gave a virtual speech on further education hosted by the Social Market Foundation. The speech predominantly focused on the government’s vision for further education as Gavin Williamson outlined the measures in the Chancellor’s summer statement, stated that he wanted to see a greater focus on education for the 50% of young people that do not go into higher education, and argued for an approach to further education centred around flexible-learning and levelling-up in which colleges are responsive to their local communities and employers.

During the speech the Education Secretary made a number of statements on higher education including criticising the previously set target for 50% of young people to enter into higher education, stating that 34% of graduates end up in non-graduate jobs and “a significant proportion of graduates [have] failed to gain much advantage from going to university at all.” He also criticised a decline in part-time and adult-learning in higher education and set out a desire for a more modular, flexible form of provision.
Scottish Government publishes COVID-19 further and higher education sustainability plan

On Thursday 9 July, the Scottish Government published a new Coronavirus Further and Higher Education Sustainability Plan. The most significant part of the plan is the announcement of the Scottish Government’s decision on the EU undergraduate fee status for 2021, meaning EU undergraduate entrants will pay international fees from 2021. The plan and the Minister’s comments commit to keeping that resource in the college and university sector.

The plan brings together the series of funding and policy announcements already made by the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council since the pandemic, recapping on May’s £75m research funding announcement, the SFC’s review of FE and HE among others. The plan does not include the announcement of significant new funding support for universities, but it does indicate greater flexibility on under/over recruitment than had previously been provided by the SFC. However, the plan is clear on the continued financial threat facing the sector and is clear that further support will be considered if/when needed.

Finally, there was no announcement on whether universities can plan for the 1 metre plus rule for next term. The Scottish Government said it is keeping this under review and Universities Scotland welcomed the announcement on that basis.

You can read the full sustainability plan here.

HESA publishes Graduate Outcomes data with a focus on wellbeing

Today, HESA published Graduate Outcome data on ‘graduates subjective wellbeing’. The Graduate Outcomes survey asks four questions that were developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to measure people’s own assessment of their general wellbeing. The data breaks down well-being by degree, graduate activity, degree classification, sex and domicile.

You can find the data here.