

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

## Table of Contents

<b>Parliamentary Business</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Skills and Post-16 Education Bill Second Reading.....	3
Lords question on adopting a formal definition of Islamophobia .....	3
Lords question on the resignation of Professor Kathleen Stock.....	3
Advanced Research and Innovation Agency Bill Committee Stage.....	4
Adjournment Debate: British Council and opportunities for Global Britain .....	4
Lords debate on the role of universities in supply and education of new teachers.....	5
<b>Forthcoming business</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Health and Care Bill – remaining stages .....	6
Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill in Committee .....	6
<b>Written Questions</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Government spending on mathematical sciences .....	6
Numbers of young people studying mathematics at higher education .....	6
Additional energy costs for educational establishments over winter .....	7
Potential effect of tuition fees and student loans on regional education outcomes .....	7
UKRI research funding allocations .....	8
Childcare support available for full-time students .....	8
Tackling antisemitism on university campuses.....	8
<b>Sector News</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Department for Education international qualified teacher status scheme guidance .....	9
OfS open investigation into free speech at the University of Sussex .....	10
Rob Phillpotts named as incoming HESA Chief Executive .....	10
OIA statement on complaints involving sexual misconduct .....	10
Government response to Foreign Affairs Committee report .....	10

## Parliamentary Business

### Skills and Post-16 Education Bill Second Reading

On Monday 15 November, the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons. Education Secretary Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi championed the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) saying it would revolutionise the way education, retraining and upskilling was seen, and create parity of esteem between higher and further education. He confirmed individuals would be able to take courses or modules at both colleges and universities. Shadow Education Secretary Kate Green asked about the timetable for the consultation on the LLE and further primary legislation, but no further details were given.

Several MPs asked about rumours that BTEC qualifications would be abolished; Nadhim Zahawi said that although A Levels and T Levels would be front and centre of the level 3 landscape, plans to remove funding for BTECs and other general applied qualifications would be pushed back to 2024 to allow more time to get T Levels right. He also confirmed the requirement to have level 2 in England and Maths to undertake a T Level would be dropped. Labour pointed out that BTECs were a route into university for white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and black pupils, and asked what government plans were to make sure T Levels provided a route into higher education given not all universities had accepted them yet.

Former Universities Minister Chris Skidmore stressed that a place-based approach to reforms was needed to ensure the lifetime skills guarantee and LLE worked, and urged the government to amend the Bill to include universities' involvement in local skills improvement partnerships. He also urged the government not to weaken universities in a bid to strengthen further education colleges.

The House of Commons has [launched a call for evidence](#) on the Bill. Submissions should be emailed to [scrutiny@parliament.uk](mailto:scrutiny@parliament.uk).

The Bill will now move to Committee Stage where amendments can be tabled. Committee Stage will run until 7 December at the latest. A transcript of the Second Reading can be [read here](#).

### Lords question on adopting a formal definition of Islamophobia

On Monday 15 November, Conservative peer Lord Sheikh will ask a question on the government's position on adopting a formal definition of Islamophobia.

The Minister, Lord Greenhalgh, responded that the government were currently considering definitions of Islamophobia and tackling this issue as a matter of urgency. However, he said that part of the difficulty of adopting some of the proposed definitions, including the definition proposed by the APPG, is that they conflated anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia with race. He repeatedly said that this was not a straightforward matter, and it would take time to get right.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (non-afi) raised that there was a need to distinguish between "anti-Muslim bigotry and the highly contentious concept of Islamophobia which threatens free speech for fear of it being labelled Islamophobic". The Minister agreed that the government need a way forward that did not compromise free speech.

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

### Lords question on the resignation of Professor Kathleen Stock

On Tuesday 16 November, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab) asked the government what assessment it had made of the circumstances around the resignation of Professor Kathleen Stock from the University of Sussex, as well as its relation to the Higher Education (Free Speech) Bill, currently going through parliament.

Responding on behalf of the government, Baroness Baran outlined that the Office for Students (OfS) had informed the Department for Education (DfE) on 11 November that it has decided to open an

investigation into whether the University of Sussex had met its obligations in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom. She thought the case demonstrated why the government was pressing ahead with the Bill, but Lord Hunt stated that the issue could not be 'legislated away'.

On the appointment process of the OfS Freedom of Speech Director, Baroness Sherlock, Labour Higher Education spokesperson, stated that there was a need to gain trust from all sides of the sector and be carefully appointed through a fair and transparent process, to which the minister responded saying that it would follow the 'usual public appointments process'.

A transcript of the question can be [read here](#).

## **Advanced Research and Innovation Agency Bill Committee Stage**

On Wednesday 17 November, Lords considered the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) Bill in the Committee Stage (Day 1).

Lord Willetts (Con) welcomed any attempt to bring greater diversity and innovation to the funding landscape. He asked the Minister for assurance that it was possible for the agencies of UKRI and other sources of public funding for R&D to also engage in high-risk, high-return research. He also asked for bureaucracy to be removed from other research institutions.

Several members suggested that the Agency's funding should be harnessed for climate innovation, including Baroness Chapman (Lab) who raised the important role of university partnerships for innovating in this area. Baroness Randerson (Lib Dem) also raised the 'vital importance' of university and commercial partnerships for the blue-skies research that ARIA aims to accelerate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Callanan responded that it would not be in the interests of ARIA to duplicate activities being conducted by other bodies, however, it will be in ARIA's interests to maintain a consistent, ongoing dialogue with UKRI to understand the current work and opportunities in the UK R&D landscape.

Amendment overview:

- Amendment 1 looked to provide a broad sustainability purpose for ARIA.
- Amendment 2, 6, 8 and 10 in Baroness Noakes' (Con) name were all probing amendments that concerned the governance of ARIA and its board.
- Amendment 4, moved by Baroness Randerson (LD) would require representation from the devolved administrations on ARIA.
- Amendment 11 would ensure that the National Audit Office produces a value for money study of ARIA.
- Amendments 12-14 considered items for inclusion in ARIA's annual report. Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab) explained that amendments 13 and 14 would help ARIA to assure itself that no lobbying or purchasing of influence could possibly have taken place.
- Amendment 15 would ensure that a Statement was made to both Houses of Parliament on its annual report.
- Amendment 17 and 20 were probing amendments designed to explore the extent of the powers given to ARIA to create liabilities for the state through borrowing and financial mechanisms.
- Amendment 18 would add the phrase "and any other property" to the end of an existing clause giving ARIA the power to "acquire and dispose of land".

Clause 1 agreed, Amendment 1 withdrawn, Amendment 2 withdrawn, Amendment 3 not moved, Amendment 4 withdrawn, Amendments 5 to 10 not moved, Amendment 11 withdrawn, Amendments 12 to 16 not moved, Amendment 17 withdrawn, Amendment 18 withdrawn.

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

## **Adjournment Debate: British Council and opportunities for Global Britain**

On Thursday 18 November, John Baron MP (Con) led an adjournment debate on the 'British Council and opportunities for Global Britain'.

John Baron MP explained that the UK is often termed a soft power, down to the country's 'extensive and impressive assets of attraction and influence' including world-class universities and research.

The Conservative MP went on to note that since the 1930s British Council has been promoting British culture and English language, as well as facilitating cultural exchanges and building trust between the UK and other countries. He also argued that the British Council represents excellent value for money, receiving only 15% of its income from the state.

He then explained that the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the British Council published a report on opportunities for global Britain that highlighted the government's decision to curtail activity in 20 countries and the APPG's concern that a further 2 country operations face closure as a result of a discussed cut in the British Council's allocation from the FCDO over the coming three-year spending review period. Bob Stewart MP (Con) agreed with John Barron and posited that the soft power gained from the British Council is a huge influence on how a country looks at the UK.

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly MP, reassured the House that the British Council was a key part of Britain remaining an outward-looking nation and agreed that the British Council is one of the UK assets and a key aspect of global influence.

The Minister spoke of the impact the pandemic has had on the British Council's commercial activities and finances. He confirmed that the funding settlement had not been finalised, and any decisions will be made in consultation with the British Council. When pressed by members he declined to provide assurances in strict financial terms.

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

### **Lords debate on the role of universities in supply and education of new teachers**

On Thursday 18 November, Baroness Donaghy (Lab) moved a motion on Initial Teacher Training, including (1) the recruitment of new teachers, and (2) the role of universities and other bodies, in ensuring the supply and education of new teachers.

She stressed that the proposed reaccreditation process was a bureaucratic, costly and unnecessary exercise "which will lead to no improvement in teacher education and training. It is seen as a back-door method of weeding out the smaller SCITTs—school-centred initial teacher training—and pushing through a prescriptive curriculum on to ITE providers."

Baroness Morris of Yardley (Lab) said she was concerned that the government had given the impression that higher education did not have a significant contribution to make to the training of teachers. She also said that universities and the higher education sector were feeling undervalued, and that some of the greatest universities were about to drop out of teacher training.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab) told colleagues that in recent years the "distinctive and long-established role of university teacher education has been weakened to the point where I believe serious questions are raised about the very purpose of teaching." The new system, he said, would apply to maintained schools, academies and free schools, yet there were no representatives of local authorities or maintained schools on the expert working group.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education, Baroness Barran, argued that at the heart of the Government strategy was "a golden thread of training and professional development". He said that the starting point of this golden thread was initial teacher training, and a new core content framework had been established. She confirmed that the government were considering the responses to the consultation and expect to publish a full response shortly.

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

## Forthcoming business

### Health and Care Bill – remaining stages

On Monday 22 November at 3:30pm and Tuesday 23 November at 1:30pm the [Health and Care Bill](#) is due to have its report stage and third reading. Amendments can be made to the Bill at Report Stage. Amendments to be considered are selected by the Speaker.

You can find the latest version of the Bill [here](#).

You can watch the day one of the remaining stages [here](#) and day two [here](#).

### Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill in Committee

On Monday 22 November at 3:45pm and Wednesday 24 November at 4:15pm, members of the Lords will consider the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill in committee. The Committee stage involves detailed line by line examination of each of the separate parts of the Bill. Every clause of the Bill has to be agreed to and votes on any amendments can take place.

You can find the marshalled list of amendments for the Grand Committee [here](#).

You can watch the day two of the Committee Stage [here](#) and day three [here](#).

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## Written Questions

### Government spending on mathematical sciences

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the amount that the Government has spent on mathematical sciences at higher education institutions in the UK over the last five years; and what comparative assessment he has made between that figure and the G20 average.

**George Freeman:** The UK is a world leader in Mathematics. British mathematicians publish a large volume of highly regarded work. When compared to international colleagues, British mathematicians have the 5th largest share of publications in the world. When looking at the top 1% of most cited publications, UK mathematicians are responsible for the third largest share.

Between Financial Year 2015-2016 and September 2021, EPSRC committed £259.9m to research grants Mathematical Sciences. This includes commitment from the Additional Funding Programme. At this current time, EPSRC are unable to make a direct comparison to international averages.

### Numbers of young people studying mathematics at higher education

**Caroline Dinenage:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase the number of young people studying mathematics at higher education. [70256]

**Michelle Donelan:** Universities are autonomous bodies, independent from government, and they have control over decisions about who to admit to their courses.

Mathematics remains the most popular A level subject and we are committed to increase participation in post-16 mathematics. We introduced reformed A levels which provide a better foundation to study Mathematics courses, including pure Mathematics, at a higher level. We fund the Advanced Mathematics Support Programme which supports schools and colleges to improve the effectiveness of level 3 maths teaching and provides targeted support for students preparing for study at higher

education.

We are working with universities and academy trusts to establish a specialist Mathematics

Topics > Science, technology and research > Applied sciences > mathematics school in each region (and a total of 11 nationally). These aim to prepare more of our most mathematically able students to succeed in Mathematics disciplines at top universities.

We strongly believe effective careers guidance and advice is key to supporting young people in their education and career choices.

The government's Careers Strategy sets out a long-term plan to build a world class careers system to achieve this ambition. The delivery of the Careers Strategy will ensure that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) encounters, such as with employers and apprenticeships, are built into school career programmes.

The government also supports around 25% of the total PhD population in the UK through grants awarded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Since January 2020, UKRI has awarded £104 million of additional funding into Mathematical Sciences, over and above the Engineering and physical Sciences Research Council 's core Mathematical Sciences Theme budget.

### **Additional energy costs for educational establishments over winter**

**Munira Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the additional energy costs that educational establishments are facing this winter; and what additional funding his Department is planning to make available to educational establishments to cover any potential additional costs. [73981]

**Mr Robin Walker:** The department recognises that educational establishments may be facing pressures this winter, including where energy prices have increased. Educational establishments, including schools, higher and further education institutions, are autonomous institutions. They are therefore responsible for estimating and meeting their own energy costs.

Schools have the flexibility to make their own decisions on how to prioritise their spending to invest in a range of resources that will best support their staff and pupils. The 2021 Spending Review secured an additional £4.7 billion in the core school budget by the 2024-25 financial year compared to previous plans. This means the core schools budget will see a real terms per pupil increase in each of the next three years

The £4.7 billion investment includes a further £1.6 billion in the 2022-23 financial year, on top of the year on year increase already announced as part of the 2019 spending round. This additional funding will help the school sector respond to the pressures the department knows they are facing, for example on energy costs and Health and Social Care Levy from April 2022. We will make announcements on the breakdown of the 2023-24 and 2024-25 core school budget in due course, as well as the distribution of the additional £1.6 billion of funding confirmed for 2022-23.

At the 2021 Spending Review the department announced an investment of £3.8 billion more in further education and skills over the Parliament as a whole, to ensure people can access high-quality training and education that leads to good jobs, addresses skills gaps, boosts productivity and supports levelling up. This includes an extra £1.6 billion per year for 16-19 education in financial year 2024-25 compared with 2021-22. This will fully fund the additional students the department anticipates in the system, pay for the increasing take-up of T Levels, maintain funding per student in real terms, and enable increased time in education for all 16 to 19 year olds. We will set out details of how this additional funding will be allocated in due course.

### **Potential effect of tuition fees and student loans on regional education outcomes**

**Dan Jarvis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with Ministerial colleagues in the Department for Education on the potential effect of (a) tuition fees and (b) student loans on regional education outcomes. [73840]

**Michelle Donelan:** My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and I regularly engage with Cabinet colleagues on a range of issues.

### **UKRI research funding allocations**

**Helen Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with the UKRI Board on research funding allocations.

**Maria Caulfield:** The Department for Health and Social Care is working closely with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Office for Life Sciences on the outcome of the Spending Review for health and care research. The Department and UK Research and Innovation Research Councils will continue to collaborate on a range of ongoing research programmes in future.

### **Childcare support available for full-time students**

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of childcare support available to full-time students who undertake paid work. [70223]

**Michelle Donelan:** The government recognises the value of parents continuing in or returning to education and provides support to those enrolled in recognised higher education courses.

Eligible student parents may be able to claim a Childcare Grant, which offers parents support with up to 85% of their childcare costs depending on their household income.

The maximum Childcare Grant for the 2021/22 academic year is:

- up to £179.62 a week for one child
- up to £307.95 a week for two or more children.

In further education, the Care to Learn scheme contributes towards childcare and related travel costs while young parents are in education.

All parents aged under 20 who meet Care to Learn residency criteria and engage in directly publicly funded education or training (except higher education) can apply if they are the main carer and in receipt of child benefit for their child.

The maximum amount that can be claimed is £175 per child per week in London and £160 per child per week elsewhere

### **Tackling antisemitism on university campuses**

**Dr Lisa Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what policies the Government has in place to tackle antisemitism (a) on university campuses and (b) in the broader education system; and what steps the Government is taking with academic institutions to improve the safety of British Jewish students. [69123]

**Michelle Donelan:** There is no place in our society, including within our education system, for antisemitism. The government has acted over a number of years to send a clear message that antisemitism will not be tolerated in our schools, colleges, and higher education (HE) institutions.

The government's action on antisemitism in HE has included working closely with Universities UK (UUK), and the Office for Students (OfS) as sector regulator. UUK recently published a briefing on tackling antisemitism in HE, which includes recommending adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. Adopting the widely recognised definition sends a strong signal that HE providers take these issues seriously and is an important tool in tackling antisemitism.

The former Secretary of State for Education wrote to the sector in October 2020, calling upon leaders to adopt the IHRA definition. He repeated this message in May 2021, reinforcing the government's expectation that providers adopt the IHRA definition, stressing the even greater importance of doing so in light of an increased number of antisemitic incidents recorded as a result of the conflict in the Middle East.

In addition, in his February 2021 strategic guidance letter, the former Secretary of State for Education asked the OfS to undertake a scoping exercise, to identify providers which are reluctant to adopt the definition. In response to this, on 10 November 2021 the OfS published a list of providers who have adopted the definition. I am pleased to report good progress in the last year: an increase from around 30 to over 200 providers having adopted the IHRA definition. This includes the vast majority of universities. The list is available [here](#).

The decision on adoption of the definition rests with individual providers, but the government will continue to urge them to adopt the definition and ensure that HE is a genuinely fulfilling and welcoming experience for everyone.

The government is also committed to stamping out antisemitism in schools. On 28 May, the former Secretary of State for Education wrote to all schools to reiterate that pupils and staff must be kept safe, and there is absolutely no place for hate and prejudice. This intervention was a clear message that this government will not tolerate antisemitism in our schools and will act where necessary to tackle it.

The government has also continued to take action to support schools in this area, including providing over £3.5 million of funding to anti-bullying organisations like the Anne Frank Trust, between 2016 and 2021. We are currently running a procurement exercise to fund activity in 2021-22, to make sure that schools have the right support in place to prevent bullying.

Any form of antisemitism is abhorrent, and I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure it is eradicated from our world-leading education system.

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## Sector News

### Department for Education international qualified teacher status scheme guidance

On Monday 15 November, the Department for Education (DfE) published a policy paper, guidance, and information on a pilot scheme for the international qualified teacher status (iQTS).

iQTS is a new, UK government-backed international teaching qualification that will be recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) (via an amendment to regulations) as equivalent to English qualified teacher status (QTS). It will be delivered by accredited English ITT providers to trainees all over the world.

Pilot courses will begin in September 2022. Approved pilot providers will begin recruiting candidates in early 2022. Information about how to apply for candidates interested in iQTS will be provided following the appointment of pilot providers.

No DfE funding has been made available for participation in the pilot or longer term provision of the iQTS qualification. Trainee fees for iQTS will be decided by individual training providers.

You can find information about the pilot scheme [here](#).

### **OfS open investigation into free speech at the University of Sussex**

On Tuesday 16 November, the Office for Students opened an investigation whether or not the university had met its obligations for academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law for all students and staff, whatever their views.

The OfS's investigation is considering whether the university has complied with general ongoing conditions E1 and E2 which give regulatory force to the public interest governance principles for academic freedom and freedom of speech. It is also considering matters relating to general ongoing condition E3 which places responsibility on a provider's governing body for compliance with all conditions of registration.

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

### **Rob Phillpotts named as incoming HESA Chief Executive**

On Tuesday 16 November, HESA announced that Rob Phillpotts, currently Managing Director of HESA Statutory, has been appointed HESA's Chief Executive.

You can read the announcement [here](#).

### **OIA statement on complaints involving sexual misconduct**

On Wednesday 17 November, the OIA published a statement on complaints involving sexual misconduct in response to an open letter from The 1752 Group.

The statement notes that the OIA works with higher education providers and student bodies to share good practice on how to approach complaints about sexual misconduct. It links to a briefing note on complaints involving sexual misconduct and harassment, and the OIA's Annual Report that includes information and examples of complaints. The statement also notes the close working with the OfS, HEFCW and other relevant organisations to highlight any systemic issues that might be identified in the complaints.

The statement acknowledges the particular complexities in balancing the need for reporting students to know the outcome of their complaint, and the data protection rights of other individuals. It also confirms that the OIA have been working with the sector and the Information Commissioner's Office to look at how clarity in this area can be improved.

You can read the statement [here](#).

### **Government response to Foreign Affairs Committee report**

On Thursday 18 November, the government [published a response](#) to the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on the UK's responsibility to act on atrocities in Xinjiang and beyond.

Recommendation 28 is of relevance to the UK higher education sector, and its ties with China:

*"Where a Chinese institution possesses known or suspected links to repression in Xinjiang, or substantial connections to Chinese military research, UK universities should avoid any form of technological or research collaboration with them. They should also conduct urgent reviews of their current research partnerships, terminating them where involved parties are found or suspected to be complicit in the atrocities in Xinjiang."*

The government's response to recommendation 28:

The Government is committed to providing support to UK universities and research institutions to help them to make informed decisions and manage risks when undertaking technological or research collaborations with other countries, including China. We will not accept collaborations which compromise our national security or values. However international research collaboration is central to our position as a science superpower, and our research sector therefore needs to be both open as well as secure.

A range of measures are already in place to support UK universities and research institutions to manage these risks, including:

- Launching the Trusted Research campaign, which included the publication of new detailed guidance by Universities UK on the risks involved in international collaborations. The new guidance, 'Managing risks in internationalisation: security-related issues', advises UK institutions to assess reputational, ethical and security risks when conducting due diligence on prospective partners. The Government is also working with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the UK's largest public funder of research and innovation, to ensure that its employees and grant holders adhere to the latest Government guidance.
- Under the UK's export control regime, the Government rigorously assesses all export licences against strict criteria. We continuously strengthen protective measures and expect universities to do the same.
- The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is currently recruiting a new Research Collaboration Advice Team to help raise awareness and understanding of Government advice on security related matters, including export controls, cyber security and the protection of intellectual property. The new BEIS team will also provide support to researchers to help them to pursue safe international collaborations.
- The Academic Technology Approval Scheme, which the Government expanded in March 2021, also provides robust procedures to protect national security and counter foreign interference.

You can find the response [here](#).