

PD-2021-19
24 - 28 January 2022

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
10 Minute Rule Bill on Spiking.....	4
Lords question on the Turing scheme contract.....	4
Lords question on plan to increase number of nurses in the NHS	4
Forthcoming business.....	5
Education oral questions	5
ARIA Bill – Consideration of Lords Amendments	5
European Affairs Committee - The UK's participation in Horizon Europe	5
Science and Technology Committee - Reproducibility and research integrity.....	6
Backbench Business debate on the Effectiveness of the Government's Education Catch-Up and Mental Health Recovery Programmes.....	6
Written Questions	6
Influence from the Communist Party of China	6
Number of students from Africa studying in British universities	6
Tuition fees and student debt for nursing, midwifery and allied healthcare students.....	7
Length of time that short-term exchange students are permitted to stay in the UK	7
International exchange student placements	7
Impact of proposed immigration changes on international exchange students	8
Merits of changing the length of visit period for international exchange students.....	8
Research and Development spending target	8
Research and Development funding across nations and regions	9
In person teaching	9
Student accommodation contribution to local authority finances	10
Value of UK research and development grants to the UK	10
Compulsory in person teaching.....	11
Support available in universities for those who have experienced sexual violence.....	11
Counselling services in universities for those who have experienced sexual violence..	12
Student accommodation settings that contain flammable cladding.....	13
Plans to charge HE providers for access to the reserved stream of covid-19 tests.....	14
Student Finance England loan fraud	14
Sharia compliant loans.....	14
Plans to increase the value of the Strategic Priorities Grant.....	15
Sector News.....	15
ONS: Education, social mobility and outcomes for free school meals students	15
Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi MP hosts antisemitism summit.....	15
OIA publishes Operating Report and Operating Plan 2021	16

Education Committee inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance	16
--	----

Parliamentary Business

10 Minute Rule Bill on Spiking

On Wednesday 26 January, Conservative MP Richard Graham moved a 10 Minute Rule Bill to create an offence of administering or attempting to administer drugs or alcohol to a person without their consent.

Richard Graham MP noted that spiking itself is not a specific crime, nor is there enough data on spiking for adequate analysis and response, and at the moment it is not mandatory for hospitals automatically to report suspected spiking incidents to the police. He gave this context, the experiences of victims and the gap in the law as the reason for making spiking a crime and proposing the Bill.

He drew attention to an increase in spiking cases in Gloucestershire that coincided with universities reopening, which he did not believe was a coincidence, and spoke of a student in his constituency who was a victim of needle spiking.

The motion was agreed to. It is due to be read a second time on Friday 18 March.

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

Lords question on the Turing scheme contract

On Thursday 27 January, Baroness Coussins (CB) asked a question on the criteria used to determine the award to Capita the contract to administer the Turing Scheme.

The Minister, Baroness Barran, responded that procurement was run in line with Cabinet Office rules and bids were evaluated on the answers to four questions relating to quality and social value, compliance with a range of financial and corporate information tests and the cost of the service.

Baroness Coussins, Baroness Blower and Lord Anderson of Swansea questioned the minister on whether cost had been a key factor in awarding process. The Minister responded that the criteria for appointing the new provider were based 70% on quality and 30% on cost. Within that 70%, 10% was in relation to social value and she confirmed that Capita came out as the stronger provider on both counts.

In response to a question by the Earl of Clancarty (CB) on concern that Turing does not pay incoming students' tuition fees, the Minister said he was right to raise the issue but judging by the success of the 605,000 international students coming to UK universities she did not think it was a top concern.

Other issues raised included the lack of reciprocity in the Turing scheme, the extent to which disadvantaged pupils were benefiting from the scheme, the British Council's international contacts and networks, and funding of the scheme from 2022-2023.

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

Lords question on plan to increase number of nurses in the NHS

On Thursday 27 January, Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) asked what plans the government had to increase the number of nurses working in the NHS.

The Minister, Lord Kamall, answered that the government were committed to increasing the number of nurses and were on target to deliver. He added that they were committed to domestic recruitment, expanding nursing apprenticeships, increasing ethical international recruitment and had taken action to improve retention across the NHS.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock asked whether the government would consider repaying student nurses' and other healthcare workers' course fees to retain new, young graduates in the NHS. The Minister responded that the bursary was available to encourage people into nursing but they were looking at completely different training pathways. He agreed to write to the Baroness with a list of the pathways.

Lord Walney (CB) raised that the Treasury had not set the budget for Health Education England, who were responsible for the number of new nurses. Lord Karmall disagreed as he said the government were on track to reach the 50,000 target. He repeated that the government were looking at completely different, innovative pathways into nursing.

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

Forthcoming business

Education oral questions

On Monday 31 January at 2:30pm, Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP, and his ministerial team will answer questions on the floor of the house.

Questions have been tabled on low quality university courses, cost of living for students and graduates, free speech and future funding for education.

You can find the list of tabled questions [here](#) and watch [here](#).

ARIA Bill – Consideration of Lords Amendments

On Monday 31 January, the ARIA Bill will return to the House of Commons for members to consider amendments made in the Lords.

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

European Affairs Committee - The UK's participation in Horizon Europe

On Tuesday 1 February at 4pm, the European Affairs Committee will be holding an oral evidence session on the UK's participation in Horizon Europe.

Witnesses for this session include:

- Professor Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary-General at League of European Research Universities
- Professor Robin Grimes, Foreign Secretary at Royal Society
- Peter Mason, Head of International Engagement at Universities UK

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

Science and Technology Committee - Reproducibility and research integrity

On Wednesday 2 February at 9:30am, the Science and Technology Committee will be holding an oral evidence session as part of its inquiry on 'reproducibility and research integrity'.

Witnesses for this session will include:

- George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation
- Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
- James Parry, Chief Executive at UK Research Integrity Office
-
- Alexandra Jones, Director of Science, Research & Innovation, at Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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

Backbench Business debate on the Effectiveness of the Government's Education Catch-Up and Mental Health Recovery Programmes

On Thursday 3 February, there will be a backbench business debate on the effectiveness of the Government's Education Catch-Up and Mental Health Recovery Programmes.

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

Written Questions

Influence from the Communist Party of China

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to protect universities from influence through donations from people connected to the Communist Party of China. [106664]

Michelle Donelan: The security guidelines commissioned at my request and published by Universities UK in October 2020, 'Managing risks in internationalisation: security-related issues', advise universities on engaging in secure international collaborations [here](#). This includes a recommendation that due diligence should be conducted on all international partnerships, including donations. Universities due diligence processes should consider reputational, ethical and security risks. As autonomous institutions, universities will have their own fundraising and gift acceptance policies in place.

Number of students from Africa studying in British universities

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students from Africa are studying in British universities in the 2021-22 academic year.

Michelle Donelan: The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes data on students enrolled in higher education.

Counts of student enrolments at UK Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are available by level of study and region of domicile for the academic years 2014/15 to 2019/20 in Table 28 of HESA's Higher Education Student Open Data pages [here](#).

In academic year 2019/20, there were 33,290 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled at UK HEPs who were domiciled in Africa prior to study.

HESA will update their open data to the academic year 2020/21 on 10 February 2022. Statistics relating to the academic year 2021/22 are expected to be available in February 2023.

Tuition fees and student debt for nursing, midwifery and allied healthcare students

Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to either (1) reimburse tuition fees, or (2) clear current student debt, for all nursing, midwifery and allied healthcare students affected by the removal of the NHS bursary.

Lord Kamall: There are no plans to do so. In September 2020, we introduced a non-repayable, training grant of £5,000 per academic year for eligible nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students studying pre-registration courses at English universities. We also made a further £3,000 available to support students with childcare costs and those studying a specialist subject. These grants are in addition to funding available through the Students Loan Company and through the NHS Learning Support Fund for travel expenses, accommodation expenses and exceptional hardship. We keep the funding arrangements for all National Health Service health professionals' education under review to ensure that students are appropriately supported.

Length of time that short-term exchange students are permitted to stay in the UK

Kirsten Oswald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions she has had with representatives of universities and other stakeholders on increasing the length of time that short-term exchange students are permitted to stay in the UK. [106749]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visitor route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months.

Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

International exchange student placements

Kirsten Oswald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the potential effect of the increased cost of immigration facing EU nationals coming to the UK as a result of the UK leaving the EU on international exchange student placements of over six months. [106750]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visitor route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months. Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Impact of proposed immigration changes on international exchange students

Kirsten Oswald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of her proposed changes to immigration on the (a) number and (b) duration of stay of international exchange students studying in the UK. [106751]

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visitor route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months. Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Merits of changing the length of visit period for international exchange students

Kirsten Oswald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of bringing the length of the visit period for international exchange students who are visiting the UK on a visitor visa in line with that of academics visiting the UK on an academic visitor visa.

Kevin Foster: Under the new simplified immigration rules which came into effect on 1 December 2020, study for up to six months at an accredited institution is permitted under the visitor route.

The visitor route is for a person who wants to come to the UK for a temporary period, usually up to 6 months. Visitors may also learn about and undertake research as part of a course they are studying overseas.

There are no plans to allow visitors to study for more than six months.

Research and Development spending target

Lord Allen of Kensington: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Callanan on 6 August 2020 (HL7418), (1) whether they are on track to increase public spending on research and development to £22 billion per year by 2024/25; and if not (2) why not, and (3) how they intend to increase spending on research and development to reach the OECD average for gross domestic expenditure on research and development by 2027.

Lord Callanan: At the Spending Review 2021 (SR21), my Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer set out the Government's plan to cement the UK as a global science and technology superpower, with public spending on R&D rising to £20 billion in 2024/25, an increase of around a quarter in real terms over the SR period. This settlement will make significant progress towards the government's ambition to increase R&D spending to £22 billion by 2026-27, and drive economy-wide R&D investment to 2.4% of GDP in 2027, with over £5 billion of additional annual investment per year by 2024/25.

This settlement represents a significant uplift against one of the most challenging fiscal positions of the last century and provides certainty to our R&D partners of government plans for the next three years. This will help the whole R&D sector plan ahead, which will be particularly welcome given recent fiscal challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private investment forms over two-thirds of current R&D activity, so it is only by working with innovative businesses and funders from the private sector that we will reach our goal. The Innovation Strategy sets out how we will use enablers such as procurement, regulation, and the identification of key technologies to create the conditions for private sector investment in innovation across the country.

Research and Development funding across nations and regions

Lord Allen of Kensington: To ask Her Majesty's Government when they intend to publish their plan to spread research and development funding across all nations and regions of the UK; whether that plan will seek to address the imbalance of research and development spending between London and the South East and other regions and nations; and how that plan will link with other Government policies aimed at supporting the levelling up agenda. [HL5283]

Lord Callanan: The 2021 Spending Review set out the government's plan to increase public R&D spending from £14.9bn in 2021/22 to £20 billion per annum by 2024/25. The substantial uplift to research and science funding will not only allow the UK to build on our core strengths but will also provide opportunities to grow research and innovation investment across the entire country as part of the Government's approach to levelling up the UK economy. Further details of how this funding will be allocated will be announced in due course.

The Government's Innovation Strategy, published in July, outlined our thinking on how to grow innovation clusters and ensure that research and innovation benefits the economy and society across the UK. The forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper will take a comprehensive place-based approach to economic growth and will set out more detail on how Government will support levelling up through R&D.

The Government is taking steps to increase the transparency of how places benefit from R&D funding. UKRI are publishing detailed breakdowns of their funding data at a regional level annually – the latest available data is on UKRI's website.

In person teaching

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that universities return to face-to-face teaching and in person learning.

Michelle Donelan: Face-to-face teaching is a vital part of getting a high-quality student experience. With the removal of the Plan B measures, there are no COVID restrictions that apply to higher education (HE) and providers should ensure that they are delivering the full programme of face-to-face teaching and learning that they were providing before the COVID-19 outbreak.

We know that, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, HE providers have delivered new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning and some providers continue to use some of these approaches alongside in-person provision. However, online learning should only be offered to enhance the student experience, not to detract from it, and it should not be used as a cost-cutting measure. The Office for Students (OfS) will be monitoring to ensure this is the case, and that universities are being open about what students can expect.

The government expects all universities to continue to deliver excellent learning, in line with guidance from the OfS. On 29 October I wrote to all English HE providers to make clear that we expect them to be offering a high-quality face-to-face student experience and, on 17 January, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education wrote an open letter to students about face-to-face teaching, setting out whether they feel they are not getting the teaching they signed up for, details of which can be found [here](#). In addition, I have been speaking with some university Vice Chancellors to ensure they can do if e they are offering students the amount of in-person teaching they should expect.

If students have concerns, they should first raise them with their HE provider. If their concerns remain unresolved, students at HE providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education to consider their complaint.

Student accommodation contribution to local authority finances

Thangam Debbonaire: To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if the Government will make an assessment of the potential merits of bringing forward legislative proposals for additional means by which student accommodation providers can contribute to local authority finances. [105591]

Christopher Pincher: Local planning authorities are able to collect developer contributions through the Community Infrastructure Levy and section 106 planning obligations. The levy is a set charge on most new development to help address the cumulative impact of development by funding infrastructure provision anywhere across the authority's area.

Different charges can be set for different types of development, based on viability evidence. In Bristol for example, the levy charge for student accommodation is currently £148 per square metre citywide, while the charge for other residential development in Bristol is either £103 or £74 per square metre, depending on location. Local planning authorities can also seek a bespoke section 106 planning obligation, where appropriate, to mitigate the impact of a specific development.

An Infrastructure Funding Statement, detailing an authority's request, receipt and use of developer contributions, is required to be published annually.

We are exploring replacing the existing system of developer contributions with a new Infrastructure Levy, which would also be chargeable on this type of development.

Value of UK research and development grants to the UK

Lord Jones: To ask Her Majesty's Government what was the value of UK Research and Development grants to UK industry in (1) 2010, (2) 2015, and (3) 2019. [HL5248]

Lord Callanan: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes estimates of flow of research and development (R&D) funds from government to other sectors. Table 9 of its annual publication on research and development (R&D) expenditure by the UK government shows that the aggregate destination of gross R&D expenditure (broader than grants) includes the following figures for private industry and public corporations:

£million	2010	2015	2019
Civil	576	895	1,149
Defence	1,359	1,286	893
Gross Total	1,935	2,181	2,042

Source: Research and Development Expenditure by the UK Government: 2019

The ONS also publishes figures for UK Business Enterprise R&D. Table 3 on sources of funds gives the following figures for businesses reporting funding from the UK Government:

£million	2010	2015	2019
UK Government	1,407	1,817	1,829

Source: Business Enterprise Research and Development, UK: 2020

Government support for business R&D also includes R&D tax credit schemes. HM Revenue and Customs publishes R&D Tax Credits Statistics and Table 2 gives the cost of support claimed for the R&D tax credit for all schemes by financial year on an accounting period basis:

£million	2010-11	2015-16	2019-20 (provisional)
Claims	1,110	3,975	7,445

Source: Research and Development Tax Credits Statistics: September 2021

Compulsory in person teaching

Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to encourage universities to make face-to-face teaching compulsory. [HL5269]

Baroness Barran: Face-to-face teaching is a vital part of getting a high-quality student experience. With the removal of the Plan B measures, there are no COVID restrictions that apply to higher education (HE) and providers should ensure that they are delivering the full programme of face-to-face teaching and learning that they were providing before the COVID-19 outbreak.

We know that in response to the COVID-19 outbreak HE providers delivered new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning and that some providers continue to use some of these approaches alongside in-person provision. However, online learning should only be offered to enhance the student experience, not to detract from it, and it should not be used as a cost-cutting measure. The Office for Students (OfS) will be monitoring to ensure this is the case, and that universities are being open about what students can expect.

The government expects all universities to continue to deliver excellent learning, in line with guidance from the OfS. On 29 October, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Higher and Further Education, wrote to all English HE providers to make clear that we expect them to be offering a high quality face-to-face student experience. On 17 January, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, wrote an open letter to students about face-to-face teaching, setting out what they can do if they feel they are not getting the teaching they signed up for. This letter can be found here: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/17/face-to-face-teaching-is-a-vital-part-of-getting-a-high-quality-student-experience-education-secretary-nadhim-zahawi-writes-to-students/> (opens in a new tab). In addition, the Minister of State for Higher and Further Education has been speaking with some university Vice Chancellors to ensure they are offering students the amount of in-person teaching they should expect.

If students have concerns, they should first raise them with their HE provider. If their concerns remain unresolved, students at HE providers in England or Wales can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to consider their complaint.

Support available in universities for those who have experienced sexual violence

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support is available in schools, colleges and universities for women and girls who have experienced incidences of sexual violence. [104366]

Mr Robin Walker: Schools and colleges have a critical role to play in protecting children and keeping them safe. 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE) is statutory guidance that schools and colleges must have regard to when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The guidance is clear on the actions a school or college should take if there are any concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing and/or safety. KCSIE also signposts to various sources of support for victims and perpetrators. Following Ofsted's review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges, the department strengthened KCSIE, and provided more support to designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), including trialling supervision and training for DSLs in over 280 schools with a focus on supporting DSLs to respond to sexual abuse issues.

In January 2022, the Home Office also announced a Harmful Sexual Behaviour support service for safeguarding professionals across England. It will offer advice on individual cases or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour.

For schools, the department published a blueprint for school counselling services. This provides schools with practical, evidence-based advice, informed by schools and counselling experts, on how to deliver high quality school-based counselling. It also offers information on how to ensure that vulnerable children can access counselling provision. We have provided significant funding towards provision of support in schools and colleges, including £9.5 million in the 2021/22 financial year, for

training for mental health leads. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is continuing to run a helpline which provides appropriate support and advice, including how to contact the police and report a crime.

This government has firm expectations that higher education providers also take a zero-tolerance attitude towards sexual harassment and ensure they are going above and beyond in their approach to preventing and tackling these issues. Across the sector, there are examples of good practice in aiming to reduce violence against women and girls. For example, the Office for Student (OfS) Catalyst fund provided support to 119 projects with a particular focus on sexual harassment, online harassment and hate crime, including religious-based hate crime. However, the government recognises there is more to be done. The OfS wrote to providers in June 2021 asking them to review and update their systems, policies and procedures in line with their statement of expectations on harassment and sexual misconduct by the beginning of this academic year. In September 2021, the OfS published a briefing note for providers on the intersection of sexual violence, alcohol and drugs at universities and colleges. This includes a series of case studies and advice for providers on tackling these issues.

The government is also taking firm action against the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in higher education. The use of NDAs against people reporting instances of harassment and abuse makes it harder for other victims to come forward, and helps perpetrators hide behind a cloak of anonymity. Therefore, in January 2022, my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Higher and Further Education launched a new pledge alongside my hon. Friend, the member for Basingstoke, Maria Miller, and the campaign group Can't Buy My Silence, which commits universities to not use NDAs to silence victims of sexual misconduct, bullying, or other forms of harassment. The list of those universities who have signed the pledge will be held by Can't Buy My Silence, and hosted on their website.

Beyond schools, colleges and universities, the department is working closely with colleagues across government, including in the Home Office, on delivering the 'Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy' and 'Violence against Women and Girls Strategy'. These were published last year and set out the government's ambition to prevent, tackle and respond to child sexual abuse by bringing offenders to justice, preventing offending and re-offending, and protecting and safeguarding children and young people.

Counselling services in universities for those who have experienced sexual violence

Rachael Maskell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what counselling services are available to support school, college and university aged young women who experience any form of sexual violence in or out of school, college or university. [104368]

Mr Robin Walker: Schools and colleges have a critical role to play in protecting children and keeping them safe. 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE) is statutory guidance that schools and colleges must have regard to when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The guidance is clear on the actions a school or college should take if there are any concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing and/or safety. KCSIE also signposts to various sources of support for victims and perpetrators. Following Ofsted's review into sexual abuse in schools and colleges, the department strengthened KCSIE, and provided more support to designated safeguarding leads (DSLs), including trialling supervision and training for DSLs in over 280 schools with a focus on supporting DSLs to respond to sexual abuse issues.

In January 2022, the Home Office also announced a Harmful Sexual Behaviour support service for safeguarding professionals across England. It will offer advice on individual cases or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour.

For schools, the department published a blueprint for school counselling services. This provides schools with practical, evidence-based advice, informed by schools and counselling experts, on how to deliver high quality school-based counselling. It also offers information on how to ensure that vulnerable children can access counselling provision. We have provided significant funding towards

provision of support in schools and colleges, including £9.5 million in the 2021/22 financial year, for training for mental health leads. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is continuing to run a helpline which provides appropriate support and advice, including how to contact the police and report a crime.

This government has firm expectations that higher education providers also take a zero-tolerance attitude towards sexual harassment and ensure they are going above and beyond in their approach to preventing and tackling these issues. Across the sector, there are examples of good practice in aiming to reduce violence against women and girls. For example, the Office for Student (OfS) Catalyst fund provided support to 119 projects with a particular focus on sexual harassment, online harassment and hate crime, including religious-based hate crime. However, the government recognises there is more to be done. The OfS wrote to providers in June 2021 asking them to review and update their systems, policies and procedures in line with their statement of expectations on harassment and sexual misconduct by the beginning of this academic year. In September 2021, the OfS published a briefing note for providers on the intersection of sexual violence, alcohol and drugs at universities and colleges. This includes a series of case studies and advice for providers on tackling these issues.

The government is also taking firm action against the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) in higher education. The use of NDAs against people reporting instances of harassment and abuse makes it harder for other victims to come forward, and helps perpetrators hide behind a cloak of anonymity. Therefore, in January 2022, my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Higher and Further Education launched a new pledge alongside my hon. Friend, the member for Basingstoke, Maria Miller, and the campaign group Can't Buy My Silence, which commits universities to not use NDAs to silence victims of sexual misconduct, bullying, or other forms of harassment. The list of those universities who have signed the pledge will be held by Can't Buy My Silence, and hosted on their website.

Beyond schools, colleges and universities, the department is working closely with colleagues across government, including in the Home Office, on delivering the 'Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy' and 'Violence against Women and Girls Strategy'. These were published last year and set out the government's ambition to prevent, tackle and respond to child sexual abuse by bringing offenders to justice, preventing offending and re-offending, and protecting and safeguarding children and young people.

Student accommodation settings that contain flammable cladding

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent estimate he has made of the number of student accommodation settings containing flammable cladding. [104382]

Christopher Pincher: Data on the remediation progress of high-rise student accommodation buildings in England identified with ACM cladding systems unlikely to meet Building Regulations is published in the Building Safety Programme data release. The latest data is available [here](#).

The Department's External Wall Systems data collection concerns residential buildings 18 metres and over, including student accommodation. The collection is ongoing, and we are working to improve the quality of data before publishing further summary information in due course.

We have begun a pilot data collection project for 11-18m residential buildings to identify those with unsafe cladding. We will publish further details in due course.

Plans to charge HE providers for access to the reserved stream of covid-19 tests

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans are in place to charge Higher Education providers for access to the reserved stream of covid-19 testing kits intended for education providers. [104391]

Michelle Donelan: There are no plans to charge higher education providers to access government supplied LFD test kits. These LFD test kits continue to be provided free of charge via the government's higher education asymptomatic testing programme, and providers should continue to order tests for their staff and students via their usual route, in line with public health advice.

Student Finance England loan fraud

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 7 January 2022 to Question 93857 on Students: Loans, what the financial value is of the 136 cases of full or partial loss to fraud relating to Student Finance England loans. [104384]

Michelle Donelan: The financial value of the 136 cases of full or partial loss to fraud relating to Student Finance England loans in the 2020-21 financial year is £963,806. The percentage of the 136 loans given out fraudulently out of the total number of loans provided by Student Finance England in the 2020-21 financial year is around 0.01%.

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 7 January 2022 to Question 93857 on Students: Loans, what percentage of the 136 loans given out fraudulently are of the total number of loans provided by Student Finance England in the 2020-21 financial year. [104385]

Michelle Donelan: The financial value of the 136 cases of full or partial loss to fraud relating to Student Finance England loans in the 2020-21 financial year is £963,806. The percentage of the 136 loans given out fraudulently out of the total number of loans provided by Student Finance England in the 2020-21 financial year is around 0.01%.

Sharia compliant loans

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of potential impact on Muslim students' participation in higher education of the absence of Sharia-compliant student finance. [104380]

Michelle Donelan: The government has been carefully considering an alternative student finance product, alongside wider reforms to the higher education system, and an update will be provided alongside the conclusion to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. The interim conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding was published on 21 January 2021, and we will conclude the Review in full at a future date.

The government undertook an assessment of the impact of interest-bearing loans on Muslim students in the impact assessment for the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which was published in December 2017, and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-and-research-act-impact-assessments>.

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to introduce Sharia-compliant alternative student finance. [104381]

Michelle Donelan: The government has been carefully considering an alternative student finance product, alongside wider reforms to the higher education system, and an update will be provided alongside the conclusion to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. The interim conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding was published on 21 January 2021, and we will conclude the Review in full at a future date.

The government undertook an assessment of the impact of interest-bearing loans on Muslim students in the impact assessment for the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which was published in December 2017, and can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-and-research-act-impact-assessments>.

Plans to increase the value of the Strategic Priorities Grant

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to increase the value of the Strategic Priorities Grant. [104389]

Michelle Donelan: The Strategic Priorities Grant is funding supplied by the government on an annual basis to support higher education providers' ongoing teaching and other related activities. In the 2021/22 financial year the Strategic Priorities Grant was worth £1.4 billion and we asked the Office for Students (OfS), which administers the grant, to prioritise funding towards high-cost, high-value subjects that support the NHS and wider healthcare policy, high-cost science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects and/or specific labour market needs. As a result, the total funding for high-cost subjects, such as medicine, engineering and other high-cost subjects, is 12% (£81 million) higher in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21. We also increased funding for specialist providers by £10 million.

The department is working to finalise funding for the Strategic Priorities Grant for the 2022/23 financial year and we will issue guidance to the OfS in due course.

Sector News

ONS: Education, social mobility and outcomes for free school meals students

On Tuesday 25 January, the Office for National Statistics [published its initial findings](#) on earnings outcomes by demographic and regional factors following an analysis of education, social mobility and outcomes for students receiving free school meals (FSM) in England.

You can read the main findings [here](#).

Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi MP hosts antisemitism summit

On Wednesday 26 January, the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP led antisemitism summit with vice-chancellors, university representatives and Jewish rights groups, ahead of Holocaust Memorial Day on Thursday.

The summit looked at the incidents of antisemitism on campus and discussed measures and commitments that could be taken to ensure Jewish students and staff feel safe in higher education.

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

OIA publishes Operating Report and Operating Plan 2021

On Wednesday 26 January, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) published its Operating Report 2021 and Operating Plan 2022.

The Operating Report 2021 records progress against the OIA's Operating Plan for 2021. The Operating Plan 2022 is based around the OIA's four key priorities: reviewing student complaints, sharing learning, working effectively with others and continually developing the organisation. The Plan sets out what the OIA intend to do in 2022 to advance each of these priorities and what they aim to have achieved by the end of the year.

The OIA received 2,763 complaints in 2021, which is a 6% increase on 2020. In addition, they received one complaint from a large group of students.

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

Education Committee inquiry into careers education, information, advice and guidance

On Thursday 27 January, the Education Committee launched an inquiry into the effectiveness of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG).

The inquiry will be a review of how well the current system for careers education, information, advice and guidance is working (CEIAG). It will have a particular focus on CEIAG for young people and children, exploring whether current careers advice provides sufficient guidance about career choice, employment, training, and further and higher education opportunities to young people.

The call for evidence closes on Thursday 17 March.

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