Political Affairs Digest

PD-2223-14

28 November – 2 December 2022

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:

Tom Lewis | tom.lewis@universitiesuk.ac.uk | 0207 419 5424

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Business</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education oral questions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEIS oral questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net migration debate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forthcoming business</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care - oral questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Security Bill – second reading</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Affairs Committee</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill – report stage</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Select Committee – accountability hearing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizon 2020</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research: Finance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Technology Approval Scheme</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European University Institute: Brexit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research: Investment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: Finance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: Finance</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: Finance</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM Subjects</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research: EU Countries</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students: Finance</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visas: Overseas Students</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education: English Language</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners: Higher Education</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visas: English Language 20
Research: Finance 20
Catapult Centres 21
Research: Finance 21
Research: Finance 22

Sector News 23
Research England invests in UK-Ukraine twinning scheme 23
UCAS care-experienced student report 23
Language learning in higher education report 24
UCU strike action 25
Prof. Graham Baldwin elected Chair of MillionPlus 25
National Centre for Universities and Business report 26
Co-creating intersectional student mental health initiatives report 26
UKRI publish diversity data for funding applicants and awardees 27
HEPI report on the future of digital learning resources 27
Parliamentary Business

Education oral questions

On Monday 28 November from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, and her ministerial team, answered education oral questions in the House of Commons.

The session began with a question from Patricia Gibson MP (SNP) regarding the cost-of-living crisis for students following the publication of ONS data. Gillian Keegan outlined the work that her department had conducted with the Office for Students (OfS) including the £261 million student premium budget. She celebrated the “fantastic work” of universities to increase their hardship funds and accommodation support, referencing the University of Leeds, Queen Mary University, and Buckinghamshire New University.

Rt Hon Sir David Evennett MP (Conservative) asked the Secretary of State whether recent reforms had made the student loan system fairer. Gillian Keegan said that the government had succeeded in creating a system that the whole House would welcome.

Paula Barker MP (Labour) highlighted the findings of recent ONS data on the cost-of-living crisis, noted that students risked becoming the “forgotten victims”, and called on the government to consider the recommendations from the Open University. Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, said that students were supported by the OfS £261 million student premium, the energy bill support scheme, and the freeze in tuition fees.

Matt Western MP, Shadow HE Minister, requested for an equalities analysis to be conducted in relation to the increased cost of living pressures for students. The Minister replied that the government recognised that cost of living was affecting students from all backgrounds including the most disadvantaged. He reiterated his previous commitments to increased hardship funds.

Anna Firth MP (Conservative) asked about the potential of degree apprenticeships to further partner with industry to improve outcomes. In her reply, Gillian Keegan celebrated the degree apprenticeship route, the local skills improvement plans, and highlighted the £8 million made available to higher education providers to run courses.
Virginia Crosbie MP (Conservative) asked what plans the government had to supply the STEM skills required in the nuclear industry. In his reply, Robert Halfon noted the reforms across the skills system to meet net zero targets.

John Penrose MP (Conservative) asked about moderating qualification standards in higher education to reduce “snobbery”. Robert Halfon replied that the Office for Students (OfS) regulated standards and reiterated that institutions must be judged on the skills they equip their students with.

Carol Monaghan MP, SNP spokesperson for education, cited reports on restricting international students to “elite universities”. She asked for the Secretary of State to reassure the House that the government would not implement the “mindless policy”. The Secretary of State said the government was proud to meet the targets set out in the International Education Strategy and celebrated the £25.9 billion contribution of international students.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms (Labour) highlighted that an estimated 4,000 Muslim students do not participate in higher education each year because their faith prohibits them from paying interest on a student loan. He called for the department to introduce an alternative system of student finance. Robert Halfon said an alternative system for student finance would be introduced in conjunction with the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).

Vicky Ford MP (Conservative) noted the positive work of Anglia Ruskin University and highlighted the importance of overseas student income to enable this. She called on the government to reassure members that the UK would remain welcome for international students. Robert Halfon replied that the government was proud to meet the targets in the International Education Strategy.

Richard Thomson MP (SNP) said that academics were being “hamstrung” by uncertainty of the UK’s association with Horizon Europe. He called for an update on the dialogue that the Minister had with his European counterparts in relation to association. Robert Halfon said that the government’s preference was association but noted the guarantee which would help short-term uncertainty.

Paul Blomfield MP (Labour) noted the contribution of international students particularly in areas that the government had identified for levelling up. He requested for the Minister to raise the concern of recent reports with the Home Secretary. Robert Halfon reiterated that the targets set out in the International Education Strategy would remain.
You can watch the session here.

**BEIS oral questions**

On Tuesday 29 November from 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, and his ministerial team, answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Chi Onwurah MP, Shadow Minister for Industrial Strategy, Science and Innovation, asked where the £484 million R&D investment would be funded from, and whether the government would retain their commitment to Horizon Europe association. George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, said the Treasury were supplying the funding, noted the ongoing negotiations to enable association, and committed to further support for fellowships, innovation and global partnerships in the new year.

You can read a full transcript of the session here.

**Net migration debate**

On Tuesday 29 November, following the publication of immigration statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Lord Green (Crossbench) asked how the government would “retighten the requirements for work visas for students and dependants”.

Lord Murray, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, noted that the net migration figures reflected unusual international circumstances including support for Hong Kong, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. He also highlighted that the level of immigration for study visas reflected government policy that recognised the benefit that international students bring to the UK.

Lord Blunkett (Labour) called the potential proposals “economically illiterate, intellectually unsustainable and incredibly damaging” and said they “would take us back 60 years”.

Baroness Ludford (Liberal Democrat) suggested that the government should respond by excluding student from the immigration statistics as they were artificially inflating
migration numbers. Lord Murray reassured her that the government had no plans to ban international students.

Lord Baker (Conservative) suggested that dependant relatives should not be allowed in the UK as it is the students that required access. The Minister replied that of the visas issued to students and dependants, about one in five went to dependants, and there was no reason for the government to change their position.

Baroness McIntosh (Labour) said that international student numbers distort immigration statistics and called for an explanation for including them. The Minister said that students were included for reasons of transparency and is only a part of the picture when considering the figures.

You can read a full transcript of the session here.
Forthcoming business

Health and Social Care - oral questions

On Tuesday 6 December from 11:30am the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, and his ministerial team will answer oral questions. These include:

- What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on increasing the number of university places for medical students; and if he will make a statement. [Michael Fabricant MP, UIN 902621]

You can read a full list of tabled questions here and watch the session here.

National Security Bill – second reading

In the afternoon of Tuesday 6 December, the National Security Bill will be scrutinised in the House of Lords for its second reading.

You can read a full list of amendments here and watch the session here.

European Affairs Committee

On Tuesday 6 December from 4:00pm, the House of Lords European Affairs Committee will be taking evidence for their inquiry into “the future UK-EU relationship”. Witnesses include:

- 4:00pm:
  - Mr Joss Croft (CEO, UKinbound)
  - Rhammad Afflick (Head of Advocacy and Communications, British Youth Council)
  - Emma English (Executive Director, British Educational Travel Association)

- 5:00pm:
Ellie Gomersall (President, National Union of Students Scotland)

Charley Robinson (Head of Global Mobility Policy, Universities UK International)

Anne Marie Graham (CEO, UK Council for International Student Affairs)

You can watch the session here.

**Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill – report stage**

In the afternoon of Wednesday 7 December, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be considered in the House of Lords for its report stage.

You can read a full list of amendments here and watch the session here.

**Education Select Committee – accountability hearing**

On Wednesday 7 December from 9:30am, the Education Select Committee will take evidence from Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State for Education, and Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, as part of its accountability hearings.

You can watch the session here.
Written Questions

Horizon 2020

Owen Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he has made an assessment of the potential economic impact of the reduction in funding from Horizon 2020 since the UK's withdrawal from the EU. [UIN 88946]

George Freeman: Association to Horizon Europe remains the UK's preference and the Government continues to do everything we can to secure this. The Government's priority remains to support the UK's research and development sector through this period.

In order to mitigate the impact of the EU's refusal to finalise the UK’s, on 21st November we announced an immediate package of investments (totalling up to £484 million). This immediate investment will help our excellent research sector to shore up their talent pools, invest confidently in infrastructure and protect the UK's reputation as a science superpower.

This additional package builds on the Horizon Europe guarantee scheme, extended in September, which continues to provide funding for eligible, successful UK winners of Horizon Europe calls to ensure UK researchers and businesses can continue to collaborate internationally.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to para 6.65 of the Autumn Statement, CP 751, published on 17 November 2022, whether the 35 per cent increase in funding for UK Catapults is a real terms increase; and in which five-year funding cycle the increase will be. [UIN 89808]

George Freeman: The £1.6bn funding announced for the UK's 9 Catapults on 17 November 2022 is for the Catapult's next five-year funding cycle starting April 2023 and running until March 2028.
The 35% increase for this next five-year funding cycle is the gross total increase from
funding provided for the current five-year funding period which runs from March
2018 to April 2023. The 'real terms' increase will be a function of the actual rate of
inflation over the next 5 years.

**Academic Technology Approval Scheme**

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and
Development Affairs, what the average wait time is for the approval of Academic
Technology Approval Scheme accreditation. [UIN 88805]

**Andrew Mitchell:** The UK takes its responsibility towards countering the proliferation
of weapons of mass destruction and advanced conventional military technology
seriously. The Academic Technology Approval Scheme is a thorough, necessary and
proportionate tool to protect UK research from misappropriation and divergence to
military programmes of concern. The majority of applications are processed within
published timescales, which is 30 working days between April and September. We are
aware that a small percentage of cases remain outside of target processing times and
our teams are working to clear those. We continue to improve the efficiency and
effectiveness of the scheme and a planned IT upgrade should provide greater
capability.

**European University Institute: Brexit**

**Lord Smith of Finsbury:** To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the letter from
the Deputy Director of the Department of Education's Disadvantage and International
Directorate dated 24 October, what consideration they have given to replacing "does
not include" with "includes" in section 7 of the European University Institute (EU Exit)
Regulations 2022. [HL3386]

**Baroness Barran:** While the UK's membership of the European University Institute
(EUI) convention ceased on exit of the EU, the department put in place an extension
of its previous arrangements with the EUI beyond the end of the transition period,
until 31 December 2022. This was to protect the status of UK-linked staff and
students at the EUI, so that they could continue in their posts and with their studies
while options for a future relationship with the EUI were considered.
Long standing government policy is to only grant privileges and immunities where there is a demonstrated and robust functional need for the running of the institution and never solely for personal benefit. In this case, in the absence of a negotiated international treaty compelling the government to do so, the department is unable to continue to grant privileges and immunities to EUI staff and students, including the UK linked ones.

The saving of the income tax privilege and the legal proceedings immunity for current staff is as considered appropriate and/or intended to give a reasonable period for those staff at the EUI to adjust, and they will be saved in relation to the current term of the staff member's employment contract without extension.

**Research: Investment**

*Chi Onwurah*: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Office for National Statistics dataset entitled Business enterprise research and development, UK, published on 22 November 2022, whether his Department has made an assessment of the impact of that dataset’s aggregation of regions into single figures on the ability of his Department to evaluate the impact of (a) local and (b) regional research and development investment; and if he will take steps to ensure the ONS provides more detailed data. [UIN 93537]

*George Freeman*: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is an independent body, and this update is part of a wider programme of work to improve economic statistics and data capture. The ONS published estimates of country and regional breakdown of expenditure on R&D in the UK by sector of performance for 2018, 2019 and 2020 in table 4 of their Gross Expenditure on R&D release on 22 November 2022, with business enterprise R&D shown separately and with English regions aggregated into three groups.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is in contact with the ONS and they intend to publish further detailed data on regional spend in due course.

**Students: Finance**

*Neil Hudson*: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the Autumn Statement 2022 on students. [UIN 89920]
Robert Halfon: The 2022 Autumn Statement ensures the most vulnerable are protected from the worst of the price rises, with increases to benefits, targeted support with energy bills, one-off payments to people on benefits, disabled people and increases to the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage.

There were significant increases in funding for other education sectors announced at the last Spending Review. The department is investing an additional £3.8 billion on skills over the course of this Parliament (comparing 2024/25 with 2019/20).

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and that have impacted students. Many higher education (HE) providers have hardship funds that students can apply to for assistance.

There is £261 million of student premium funding available this academic year to support disadvantaged HE students who need additional help. The department has also worked with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students in hardship using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

In addition, all households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Bill, introduced on 12 October, includes the provision to require landlords to pass benefits they receive from energy price support, as appropriate, onto end users. Further details of the requirements under this legislation will be set out in regulations.

Students whose bills are included in their rent, including energy charges, will typically have agreed their accommodation costs upfront when signing their contract for the current academic year. Businesses, including those that provide student accommodation, are covered by the Energy Bill Relief Scheme, which provides energy bill relief for non-domestic customers in Great Britain.

A Treasury-led review will be launched to consider how to support households and businesses with energy bills after April 2023.

The department provides a range of financial support for further education (FE) students aged 16-19 (or aged up to 25 with an Education and Health Care Plan) who need it to enable them to participate in post-16 education, including free meals, bursaries to help with the cost of education (such as travel, books, equipment, and trips), plus support for childcare and residential costs where required. We have increased total discretionary Bursary funding by 6.8% in 2022/23 to support disadvantaged students to continue in FE or training.
Students: Finance

Neil Hudson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to support post-16 students with the rising cost of living. [UIN 89919]

Robert Halfon: The 2022 Autumn Statement ensures the most vulnerable are protected from the worst of the price rises, with increases to benefits, targeted support with energy bills, one-off payments to people on benefits, disabled people and increases to the National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage.

There were significant increases in funding for other education sectors announced at the last Spending Review. The department is investing an additional £3.8 billion on skills over the course of this Parliament (comparing 2024/25 with 2019/20).

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and that have impacted students. Many higher education (HE) providers have hardship funds that students can apply to for assistance.

There is £261 million of student premium funding available this academic year to support disadvantaged HE students who need additional help. The department has also worked with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students in hardship using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

In addition, all households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Bill, introduced on 12 October, includes the provision to require landlords to pass benefits they receive from energy price support, as appropriate, onto end users. Further details of the requirements under this legislation will be set out in regulations.

Students whose bills are included in their rent, including energy charges, will typically have agreed their accommodation costs upfront when signing their contract for the current academic year. Businesses, including those that provide student accommodation, are covered by the Energy Bill Relief Scheme, which provides energy bill relief for non-domestic customers in Great Britain.

A Treasury-led review will be launched to consider how to support households and businesses with energy bills after April 2023.
The department provides a range of financial support for further education (FE) students aged 16-19 (or aged up to 25 with an Education and Health Care Plan) who need it to enable them to participate in post-16 education, including free meals, bursaries to help with the cost of education (such as travel, books, equipment, and trips), plus support for childcare and residential costs where required. We have increased total discretionary Bursary funding by 6.8% in 2022/23 to support disadvantaged students to continue in FE or training.

**Students: Finance**

**Munira Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department is taking steps to help support university students with the rising cost of living in winter 2022. [UIN 87998]

**Robert Halfon:** The department recognise the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and that have impacted students. Many higher education (HE) providers have hardship funds that students can apply to for assistance.

There is £261 million of student premium funding available in the 2022/23 academic year to support disadvantaged students who need additional help. The department has worked with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure that universities support students in hardship, using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium.

In addition, all households will save on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee and the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme discount. Students who buy their energy from a domestic supplier are eligible for the energy bills discount. The Energy Prices Bill, introduced on 12 October 2022, includes the provision to require landlords to pass benefits they receive from energy price support, as appropriate, onto end users. Further details of the requirements under this legislation will be set out in regulations.

Students whose bills are included in their rent, including energy charges, will typically have agreed their accommodation costs upfront when signing their contract for the current academic year. Businesses, including those that provide student accommodation, are covered by the Energy Bill Relief Scheme which provides energy bill relief for non-domestic customers in the UK.
A Treasury-led review will be launched to consider how to support households and businesses with energy bills after April 2023.

**STEM Subjects**

**Toby Perkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of introducing a STEM education strategy. [UIN 94733]

**Robert Halfon:** Several government strategies are already in place to support our STEM ambitions, including the 2021 UK Innovation Strategy, the 2021 National AI Strategy, and the 2022 UK Digital Strategy. They set out how the department will strengthen its reserves of talent and skills in order to drive success.

The department is focused on delivery. We are encouraging more students to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects across all key stages, from primary school to further and higher education, ensuring a strong pipeline of qualified students for STEM careers. By developing employer-centred skills programmes such as apprenticeships, T Levels, and Higher Technical Qualifications, the department is empowering industry to shape our training offers to meet their needs and create more routes into skilled STEM roles.

We are investing in programmes that support science, technology, and digital skills, such as programmes that support teachers to improve the quality of science teaching. From autumn 2022, early careers teachers can claim a levelling up premium of £3,000 tax free per year for up to three years, to teach mathematics, physics, chemistry, or computing in state funded secondary schools that have been identified as having a high need for teachers.

Alongside this, the department is investing in Institutes of Technology, which are leaders in the provision of high quality, higher level technical education and training across a range of STEM occupations and industries.

Additionally, the department is investing in STEM in higher education, delivering a 12% increase in grant funding for strategically important, high-cost subjects such as medicine, engineering, and computing.

The government cannot achieve its ambition to be a science and technology superpower alone, and so efforts to work closely with businesses, including through the new Digital Skills Council, are being made to drive forward industry led action to address current and future demand for digital skills.
**Research: EU Countries**

**Richard Thomson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the UK's participation in (a) Horizon Europe and (b) other European research projects. [UIN 902447]

**Robert Halfon:** The department has regular discussions with colleagues on a range of topics, and fully support colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on their work in this area. Our preference remains association to Horizon Europe, with international collaboration in science, research and development being a key priority.

**Students: Finance**

**Sir Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to launch Alternative Student Finance for Muslim students. [UIN 902446]

**Robert Halfon:** The department understands the concerns held by some Muslim students and their families about student finance. We want all learners with the potential to benefit from higher education to be able to do so. The department remains committed to delivering an alternative student finance (ASF) product for Muslim students.

Going forward, the department is introducing a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) that will significantly change the ways students can access learning and financial support.

The department’s consultation on the detail and scope of the LLE closed in May 2022. In this consultation, the department sought views on what barriers learners with protected characteristics might face in accessing or drawing on their LLE, noting that answers to this question could include consideration of an ASF product for students whose faith has resulted in concerns about traditional loans. We are currently considering if and how ASF can be delivered as part of the LLE.

We will provide a further update on ASF as part of the government response to the LLE consultation.
Career Development

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to publish a new careers strategy for England. [UIN 94732]

Robert Halfon: The careers strategy, published in 2017, set out the department’s long-term plan to achieve a high-functioning national careers system that is available to all, regardless of background. The subsequent careers measures announced in the 2021 Skills for Jobs and 2022 Schools white papers focus on continuing to meet these goals.

The department will set out future priorities for the careers system in England as part of our response to the conclusions of the current Education Select Committee inquiry into careers, which is due to report in 2023.

Visas: Overseas Students

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 14 November 2022 to Question 79326 on Visas: Overseas Students, whether her Department holds any data on the number of recipients of international student visas that are accompanied by five or six dependents. [UIN 90860]

Robert Jenrick: The Home Office does not routinely publish data on the number of recipients of international student visas who are accompanied by dependants.

Information on our immigration routes is available as part of our transparency data and can be found at: Visas and Citizenship data: Q2 2022

Higher Education: English Language

Lord Johnson: To ask His Majesty’s Government what measures are in place to ensure that applicants have English language skills at the level of proficiency required for courses when higher education providers have discretion to assess English language
ability other than by reference to the result of a Secure English Language Test.

[HL3361]

Lord Murray: An application for entry clearance to the UK or permission to stay as a student must show the student meets the English language requirement as specified in Appendix English Language of the Immigration Rules.

There is a degree of flexibility for sponsors that are Higher Education Providers (HEP) with a track record of compliance to self-assess the English proficiency of their students studying at degree level or above. The HEP choose their own method to assess the English ability of such students. Where they do so, they must state on the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) the method which they have used, including, where relevant, the applicant’s English language test scores in all four components (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

Additional discretion is available to such sponsors via their ability to waive the English language requirement if the student is studying at degree level and the sponsor considers the student to be gifted. This must only be done if English language proficiency is not integral to the course of study and a pre-sessional course would be inappropriate. If a sponsor wants to waive the English language requirement for a gifted student, their academic registrar, or the institution's equivalent, must approve this waiver. The CAS must state that the student is gifted, as well as including an explanation of why this is the case and the name and contact details of the academic registrar or equivalent.

Prisoners: Higher Education

Lord Bradley: To ask His Majesty's Government how many prisoners are currently participating in higher education courses. [HL3337]

Lord Bellamy: The latest available figures (October 2022) show that 1435 prisoners were studying with the Open University. In addition, 50 learners were enrolled on Access to Higher Education courses, with support from the Prisoners' Education Trust.

We have recently changed the law to allow prisoners to begin apprenticeships whilst in custody, working in key industries such as hospitality and construction.

Information on the support available for prisoners wishing to undertake Higher Education is available in prison libraries.
Visas: English Language

**Lord Johnson:** To ask His Majesty's Government how many of the applicants from non-English speaking countries for the Student Route visa in the last three years have taken a Secure English Language Test to prove that their English language skills are at the level required for higher education courses considered below degree level; and how many applicants did so with (1) IELTS SELT Consortium, (2) LanguageCert, (3) Pearson, (4) Trinity College London, and (5) PSI Services (UK) Ltd. [HL3359]

**Lord Murray:** The Home Office does not routinely publish data on the number of applicants for the Student Route visa who have used a Secure English Language Test to evidence their English language skills.

Research: Finance

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Written Statement of 21 November 2022, HCWS 376 on Programmes: Announcement of £484 million immediate investment for the UK R&D and fusion sectors, which body will decide (a) eligibly for and (b) which organisations will receive that funding. [UIN 92204]

**George Freeman:** As announced on 21st November, £484 million in targeted investment will provide immediate funding to the UK R&D sector whilst UK association to European Research Programs continues to be blocked. The Government's preference remains association to Horizon Europe and we continue to do everything we can to achieve this, but we cannot stand by and allow UK research to suffer.

The package aims to target support at universities and research organisations affected by the EU's continued refusal to finalise the UK's association to EU programmes. All aspects of the programme will be delivered by existing trusted and experienced UK delivery partners, such as UKRI who are experienced at delivering R&D funding at scale.
Catapult Centres

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to Paragraph 5.65 of the Autumn Statement 2022, CP 751 published on 17 October 2022, whether the Government plans to create new Catapults in the next 12 months. [UIN 90793]

George Freeman: The £1.6bn funding announced on 17 November 2022 will allow Innovate UK to fund the UK's Catapult Network to continue supporting innovation and de-risking the transition from research to commercialisation by providing access to world-leading facilities, skills, and equipment across the UK.

Innovate UK are responsible for ensuring the UK's Catapult Networks are maximising industrial R&D, co-investment and benefit to the UK economy and any new Catapults would need to be assessed against criteria for new Catapults to ensure they are addressing market failures or clear strategic opportunities and would be subject to sustainable funding plus Ministerial agreement.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the impact of ONS’s decision not to publish a calculation of R&D as a percentage of GDP; and what assessment he made of the impact of only knowing the overall effect on GDP at the end of 2023. [UIN 93719]

George Freeman: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is an independent body, and this update is part of a wider programme of work to improve economic statistics and data capture. Its 22 November 2022 release estimated that £59.7bn was invested in UK R&D in 2019, increasing to £61.8bn in 2020. The ONS has not published R&D as a percentage of GDP, to make clear that they have not yet incorporated the improvements to the measurement of R&D in the business and higher education sectors into the calculations of GDP.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) understands the complexity and timelines involved in feeding the R&D changes through to GDP as part of National Accounts and looks forward to this calculation in due course. If the ONS had made the calculation, BEIS believes it would have produced a figure between 2.6% and 2.7% of GDP for 2019 and between 2.9% and 3.0% for 2020.
Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the Written Statement of 21 November 2022, HCWS 376 on Programmes: Announcement of £484 million immediate investment for the UK R&D and fusion sectors, whether that funding represents an alternative to the UK's future participation in Horizon Europe. [UIN 92203]

George Freeman: The Government's preference remains association to Horizon Europe and while we push for association, we must also invest in the UK's world leading R&D sector.

At the 2021 Spending Review, the Government committed to funding association to EU R&D programmes, including Horizon Europe and that if the UK is unable to associate to Horizon Europe, the funding allocated to association will go to UK government R&D programmes.

As a result of the EU's delays, the Government are making an immediate investment from the EU programme funding allocation to support the UK R&D sector as we continue to pursue association.
Sector News

Research England invests in UK-Ukraine twinning scheme

On Monday 28 November, Research England announced £5 million investment in the twinning scheme by Universities UK International (UUKi) and Cormack Consultancy Group. It is intended to help UK and Ukrainian universities share resources and assistance to benefit Ukrainian institutions, staff and students.

Research England’s investment, which will be awarded through UUKi, will see partners collaborating on and building their capacity in research and innovation into the future.

George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, said: “I’m delighted that through our new twinning programme, Ukrainian universities are able to collaborate with UK universities to develop strong partnerships that will benefit both nations, while addressing global research and innovation challenges.”

Jamie Arrowsmith, Director of Universities UK International said: “It’s amazing to see our universities collaborate through this scheme. We hope that this investment will further strengthen the relationship between our 2 countries and signals the UK’s continued support for Ukraine throughout and beyond the current conflict.”

You can read the full announcement here.

UCAS care-experienced student report

On Wednesday 30 November, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), in partnership with Unite Foundation, published a report to explore the experiences and aspirations of care-experienced students in their progression to higher education.

Key findings include:

- Experience of being in care intersects with other personal characteristics which can create additional or hidden barriers.
- Care-experienced students are significantly more likely to be mature applicants, showing their progression to higher education is often longer – being 69% more likely to apply aged 21 or over.

- Accommodation is a key factor for care experienced applicants when deciding where to study – with value for money (77%) and overall cost (76%) the most important considerations when choosing where to live.

As a result of these findings, UCAS has made several recommendations aimed at improving the journey to higher education for students from a care background. These include personalised information, advice and guidance, better quality data collection and sharing, and support for Universities UK’s recommendations that universities and colleges should consider implementing minimum entry requirements for care-experienced applicants across the UK.

UCAS Chief Executive Clare Marchant said: “UCAS is committed to ensuring all students, regardless of their background, are able to access the full range of post-secondary opportunities, including apprenticeships, and we have made important strides through our Fair Access Programme.”

You can read the full report here.

**Language learning in higher education report**

On Wednesday 30 November, the British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages published a report analysing 10 years of admissions data for undergraduate modern language courses in the UK.

The report aims to understand the changing patterns in how students are applying and being accepted onto courses, where they are opting to study, and the diverging fate of some individual languages.

Key findings include:

- The three most commonly taught European languages – French, German and Spanish - have seen significant decreases in acceptances to courses where a language is named in the title of the degree.

- There has been considerable variation in language learning by UK region which threatens the emergence of cold spots in language learning.
- The only areas of growth have been languages courses taught in combination with a social science at Russell Group universities.

You can read the full report here.

**UCU strike action**

On Wednesday 30 November, the University and College Union (UCU) undertook its final day of strike action in the recent wave of industrial action.

Jo Grady, general secretary of the UCU, said: “University staff are taking the biggest strike action in the history of higher education. They have had enough of falling pay, pension cuts and gig-economy working conditions.”

Responding to the strike action, Universities (UUK), the representative for 340 employers in the USS pension scheme, said: “We are saddened to be here again – facing industrial action over USS pensions. Employers and UCU share the goal of a secure, valuable, and affordable retirement income for university staff...We continue to talk to the union in an attempt to reach an agreement.”

**Prof. Graham Baldwin elected Chair of MillionPlus**

On Thursday 1 December, MillionPlus, the association for modern universities, announced that Professor Graham Baldwin, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire, has been elected as the organisation's new Chair.

Professor Baldwin's election was ratified at an Extraordinary General Meeting of MillionPlus members with his term as Chair beginning on 1 January 2023. Professor Baldwin will succeed Professor Rama Thirunamachandran, Vice-Chancellor of Canterbury Christ Church University, who is stepping down after three years in the role.

On his election, Professor Baldwin said “I am privileged to be elected Chair of MillionPlus at such a pivotal time, not just for higher education in Britain, but for the wider country as well... As external and internal factors impact on university running costs and, crucially, the cost of living for our students and staff, and with important debates ongoing around, among others, quality assurance, international students, immigration and free speech, the voice of MillionPlus and modern universities has never been more needed.
National Centre for Universities and Business report

On Thursday 1 December, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) published the “State of the Relationship 2022” report which analyses the trends in UK university-business collaboration.

The report considers: policy context, collaboration trends, opportunities for the future, and conclusions.

In the foreword of the report, George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, said: “It is more important than ever that Britain delivers a bold, optimistic and ambitious plan to realise our vision for the UK as both a science superpower and an innovation nation. We can and should be the world’s most innovative economy, inventing and adopting the new innovations and technologies that will solve the challenges of tomorrow.”

You can read the full report here.

Co-creating intersectional student mental health initiatives report

On Thursday 1 December, a report commissioned for the Office for Students, considered lessons on students co-creating mental health initiatives. The report reflects on insights from project staff and students to identify areas of effective practice and the challenges encountered.

Key findings include:

- The Mental Health Funding Competition (MHFC) reached high numbers of students from groups who are typically underrepresented in support services or who face additional barriers to accessing support at university/college.

- Concerns around confidentiality, stigma and staff who will not understand their needs may mean students are reluctant to put themselves forward for projects with a mental health focus.
The involvement of staff who share a background with the target group was found to be an effective way of involving students in co-creation opportunities.

Rates of participation of male students were low across the programme. This suggests further work is still needed to ensure that male students feel able to participate in co-creation opportunities.

You can read the full report here.

**UKRI publish diversity data for funding applicants and awardees**

On Thursday 1 December, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) published data for 2020-21 on the funding profile of applicants and awardees. This is intended to aid transparency in funding and enable high-level monitoring of trends.

Key findings include:

- Breakdowns by gender and ethnicity show that white males received the largest percentage of awards as both principal investigators (PIs) and co-investigators (CIs), receiving 57% of PI awards and 49% of CI awards.

- After the white ethnic group at 81%, the highest percentage of PI awardees was from the Asian ethnic group, at 8%. The percentage of PI grant holders from the black, mixed, and other ethnic groups was lower, at 1%, 2% and less than 0.5% respectively.

- The percentage of PI and CI grant holders reporting a known disability remains low at 2%. This is below benchmarks for wider academic staff at 4%, and the wider labour market (employed) population at 13%.

You can read the full report here.

**HEPI report on the future of digital learning resources**

On Friday 2 December, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a policy note, based on polling conducted by UCAS, which compares students’ expectations with reality in digital learning resources.

Key findings include:
- The digital resources most widely available to students include lecture slides (92%), online reading lists (84%), and eBooks and e-journals (81%).

- 72% of students said that institutions should prioritise making resources ‘streamlined and easy to navigate’ when developing digital learning resources.

- When asked which resources would help improve their mental health, students’ most common answer was the wider availability of digital course resources (59%), followed by the wider availability of physical course resources (48%).

Dr Laura Brassington, the author of the report and HEPI’s Policy Manager, said: “As higher education institutions navigate the balance between in-person and online provision, it is important to hear from the student population. We should listen to those who have voiced their concerns for their wellbeing and improve accessibility by making lecture recordings available for the duration of courses and by cutting waiting times for access to digital resources.”

You can read the full report here.