Political Affairs Digest

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19 – 22 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

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Parliamentary business

Treasury – oral questions

On Tuesday 20 December, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, and his ministerial team answered oral questions in the House of Commons.

Steve McCabe MP (Labour) highlighted an Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report that found the real value of student maintenance loans were at their lowest level for seven years, whilst costs for food and accommodation were at a record high. He called for the Minister to increase the value of maintenance loans.

Rt Hon John Glen MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said that universities provided hardship funds and highlighted the £261 million of student premium funding to support disadvantaged students. The Minister noted that adjustments to the maintenance loan would take some time and the Department for Education would report on the matter in due course.

You can watch the session here.

Liaison Committee

On Tuesday 20 December, the House of Commons Liaison Committee held an evidence session on “the work of the Prime Minister.”

Robin Walker MP (Conservative), Chair of the Education Select Committee celebrated the contribution of international students and raised the recent suggestions to reduce recruitment. He asked the Prime Minister whether the targets set out in the International Education Strategy should continue to be pursued, extended, or reduced. In his reply, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister, noted the significant economic and cultural contribution of international students. He called it a “sign of success” that the 600,000 target in the International Education Strategy had been met.

Robin Walker further asked whether restricting the recruitment of international students to certain institutions would be a “non-starter”. The Prime Minister clarified that it was "not something [he] had spoken about" and called for the UK to attract the "best and brightest". He noted the need for the UK to be globally attractive in its visa offering.
You can watch the session here.
Forthcoming business

The House of Commons rose for Christmas recess on 20 December 2022 and will return on 9 January 2023.

The House of Lords rose for Christmas recess on 21 December 2022 and will return on 9 January 2023.
Written Questions

Overseas Students

**Dan Poulter**: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential economic effect on the UK university sector of restricting the number of (a) international students and (b) their dependants permitted into the UK. [UIN 104168]

**Robert Jenrick**: The Government’s International Education Strategy set out a target of attracting 600,000 international Higher Education students to the UK by 2030, which we have achieved almost a decade early.

The public rightly expects us to control immigration and ensure we have a system that works in the UK’s best interests. We keep our immigration policies under constant review to ensure they reflect our priorities.

Visas: Overseas Students

**Tommy Sheppard**: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of capping the number of graduate visas on the UK’s economy. [UIN 108260]

**Robert Jenrick**: The Graduate route provides an opportunity for international students who have been awarded their degree to stay in the UK and work, or look for work, at any skill level for 2 years, or 3 years for doctoral students.

An Impact Assessment was prepared to accompany the launch of the Graduate route. This can be found at the following link: Impact Assessment template (publishing.service.gov.uk)(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966659/Graduate_Route_Impact_Assessment.pdf)

The public rightly expects us to control immigration and ensure we have a system that works in the UK’s best interests. We keep our immigration policies under constant review to ensure they reflect our priorities.
**Medicine: Education**

**Lord Naseby:** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reasons why the new medical schools at Worcester, Brunel, and Chester universities are primarily recruiting foreign students rather than UK-based applicants. [HL4020]

**Lord Markham:** No specific assessment has been made. The Government has committed to publishing a workforce plan next year, which will include independently verified forecasts for the number of healthcare professionals required in future years.

**Research: Finance**

**Lord Campbell of Pittenweem:** To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Statement by the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation on 21 November (HCWS376), what proportion of the funding announced for the UK R&D sector they expect will be allocated to universities in Scotland; and what steps they are taking to ensure that universities in Scotland receive their full share of R&D funding. [HL3964]

**Lord Callanan:** The Government’s priority is to support the UK’s world class R&D sector. We have put in place this additional funding to shore up talent and invest in R&D infrastructure across the UK, while also aiming to secure the UK fusion sectors’ commercial leadership and capabilities.

We are committed to levelling up and where funding delivered via UKRI is England only, there will be an additional funding allocation for the Devolved administrations. The approach to funding distribution is being developed and my Hon. Friend the Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation has written to DA colleagues on this matter. Further details will be announced in due course.

**Overseas Students: Ukraine**

**Dan Jarvis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing financial support to Ukrainian nationals who are in the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, are continuing to study remotely for qualifications at Ukrainian education institutions and who are unable to access either universal credit or UK student loans because they are students at institutions outside the UK. [UIN 109569]
Robert Halfon: It is important to maintain parity of treatment for all students in higher education (HE), whether they are a domestic student or an international student studying remotely with an oversees education provider.

Student finance is available only for eligible students studying a course provided predominantly in the UK by a UK HE provider. In England, domestic students studying via distance learning are, in general, not eligible to receive student loans to cover maintenance costs. This is also the case for Ukrainian students in England, who are studying via distance learning.

To support those who are granted leave under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and have enrolled at UK universities, we have extended access to HE student support, home fee status, tuition fee caps, advanced learner loans and 19+ funding allocations. This ensures Ukrainians who have been affected by the war in Ukraine can access support on the same basis as those within other protection-based categories, such as refugees.

The government remains committed to supporting universities in Ukraine who are striving to maintain the education of their students under extremely challenging conditions. This includes through the provision of online distance learning for students enrolled at Ukrainian universities who now live in another country, including in the UK. This also includes those studying through the UK twinning programme of which the government announced funding to support in June 2022. The programme provides financial support to Ukrainian universities by establishing partnerships with those in the UK.

If a Ukrainian student decides to undertake a Ukrainian university course from the UK, the department encourages students to speak with their education provider in Ukraine to understand what support is available for them to continue their studies. They should also speak to their university about the intensity of study they are offering, as this may impact their ability to access government support, through Universal Credit, whilst in the UK.

Universities: Industrial Disputes

Munira Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many times (a) Ministers and (b) officials from her Department have met representatives of (a) the University and College Union, (b) Universities UK and (c) the Universities and Colleges
Employers Association to hold discussions on industrial action at universities since 25 October. [UIN 105586]

Robert Halfon: The department has regular meetings with representatives of trade unions that have members in the higher education sector, including the University and College Union, as well as with Universities UK and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association.

Universities are autonomous and responsible for the pay and pension provision of their staff. While the government plays no role in such disputes, we hope all parties can reach an agreement that delivers good value for students, staff, and the universities, so that industrial action can be avoided.

The department urges all sides to work together so that students do not suffer from lost learning, and we encourage any student worried about the impact of strikes on their education to raise this with their university.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Margaret Greenwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of Ukrainian students studying full-time at Ukrainian institutions remotely from the UK. [UIN 106536]

Robert Halfon: The department has worked alongside colleagues at the Home Office to explore what support can be made available for both Ukrainian students continuing their study remotely from the UK, and those studying at UK institutions.

Universities in Ukraine are striving to maintain the education of their students under extremely challenging conditions. This includes through the provision of online distance learning for students enrolled at Ukrainian universities who now live in another country, including in the UK. The department encourages these students to speak with their education provider in Ukraine to understand what support is available for them to continue their studies at their Ukrainian provider. This includes those studying through the UK twinning programme, of which the government announced funding to support in June 2022. Information about this can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-package-offers-a-lifeline-to-ukrainian-researchers-and-entrepreneurs(opens in a new tab). The programme provides support to Ukrainian universities by establishing partnerships with those in the UK.
Student finance is available only for eligible students studying a course provided predominantly in the UK by a UK higher education provider, including Ukrainian students who have enrolled at UK universities. In England, those studying via distance learning are, in general, not eligible to receive student loans to cover maintenance costs. This is also the case for Ukrainian students in England, who are studying via distance learning.

The department does not hold data on the number of Ukrainians who are studying online at Ukrainian institutions via distance learning in the UK.

**Overseas Students: Ukraine**

**Margaret Greenwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has plans to provide financial support to Ukrainian students studying full-time at Ukrainian institutions remotely from the UK. [UIN 106535]

**Robert Halfon:** The department has worked alongside colleagues at the Home Office to explore what support can be made available for both Ukrainian students continuing their study remotely from the UK, and those studying at UK institutions.

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The department does not hold data on the number of Ukrainians who are studying online at Ukrainian institutions via distance learning in the UK.

**Overseas Students: Hong Kong**

**Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to take steps with Cabinet colleagues to review the charging of overseas student fees to British National (Overseas) visa holders from Hong Kong who have moved to the UK. [UIN 102786]

**Robert Halfon:** To qualify for home fee status in the UK, a person must have settled status or a recognised connection to the UK. This includes people who are covered by the EU Withdrawal Agreement, have long residence in this country, or who have been granted international protection by the Home Office. There are also requirements associated with ordinary residence in the UK.

Subject to meeting the normal eligibility requirements, British Nationals (Overseas) status holders will be able to qualify for home fee status once they have acquired settled status in the UK. This is usually acquired after five years.

There are no plans to review British Nationals (Overseas) status holder’s access to home fee status.

**Universal Credit: Students**

**Barry Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many meetings he has had with the National Union of Students on access to Universal Credit for (a) full time students and (b) partners of full time students in the last 12 months. [UIN 109446]

**Guy Opperman:** No such meetings have taken place and no such assessment has been made.

**Students: Loans**

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment the Government has made of the adequacy of levels of student maintenance loans. [UIN 108239]
Robert Halfon: The department is currently considering options for changes to loans and grants for living and other costs for the 2023/24 academic year, starting in August 2023. An announcement will follow in due course.

The department has continued to increase living costs support each year, with a 2.3% increase to maximum loans and grants for living and other costs for the 2022/23 academic year. Students who have been awarded a loan for living costs for the 2022/23 academic year that is lower than the maximum, and whose household income for the 2022/23 tax year has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

The department recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year which have affected students. However, decisions on student finance will have to be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable and the costs of higher education are shared fairly between students and taxpayers, not all of whom have beneﬁted from going to university.

The department is working with the Office for Students to ensure universities support students in hardship using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium. As part of this, we have invested £261 million into the student premium this academic year to support disadvantaged students who need additional help.

To help with the cost of living 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 Act passed on 25 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 act are set out in the legislation.

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.
Any student that has concerns should speak to their university about securing additional support.

**Students: Cost of Living**

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to support students through the cost of living crisis. [UIN 108238]

**Robert Halfon:** The department is working with the Office for Students (OfS) to ensure universities support students in hardship using both hardship funds and drawing on the student premium. As part of this, we have invested £261 million into the student premium this academic year to support disadvantaged students who need additional help. Further to this, higher education providers offer additional support programmes.

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Any student that has concerns should speak to their university about securing additional support.

**Doctors: Training**

**Matthew Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to establish an NHS bursary scheme to train doctors. [UIN 108172]
**Will Quince:** The NHS Bursary scheme is already in place for medical students.

During relevant course years, eligible medical students can apply for the NHS Bursary which provides non-repayable funding for tuition fees of up to £9,250, maintenance costs of between £1,000 and £4,191, travel and dual accommodation costs, support for childcare, dependants and students living with a disability. Further funding is available to help students manage shortfalls between their income and expenditure of up to £3,000.

Eligible medical students can also apply for a reduced rate maintenance loan for living costs from Student Finance England during NHS Bursary years.

**Research: Investment**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pursuant to Answer of 7 December to Question 101725 on Research: Investment, when the ONS and his Department will (a) complete and (b) release granular regional data on R&D in 2023. [UIN 110681]

**George Freeman:** Precise timings and details for release are a matter for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is an independent body. On 21 September 2022 they said "To aid the delivery of the levelling up agenda, we are also developing statistics showing R&D at a regional level. Producing complex figures at a regional basis can be challenging, so we are exploring innovative techniques to map where R&D is taking place, not simply where expenditure has been allocated. This work will culminate in the publishing of regional Government and business R&D expenditure statistics in early 2023."

**Science: Japan**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the press release published 14 December 2022 on global science partnership with Japan, which budget this funding has been allocated from. [UIN 110684]

**George Freeman:** The press release announced the launch of the first phase of the new International Science Partnership Fund (ISPF), underpinned by £119m of funding. This is non-ODA funding for R&D-eligible activity, supporting our ambition to spend £20 billion on R&D per annum by 2024/25. The specific collaboration with Japan on neuroscience, neurodegenerative diseases and dementia is also non-ODA funding for
R&D-eligible activity. Relevant funding will count towards the overall spend on dementia research.
Sector News

Tacking Antisemitism in the UK report

On Monday 19 December, Lord John Mann, the Government’s Independent Adviser on Antisemitism, published a report titled “Anti-Jewish Hatred: Tackling Antisemitism in the UK 2023 – Renewing the Commitment.” The report includes ten recommendations for the UK government to address antisemitism throughout British society.

The report has a section dedicated to antisemitism on university campuses. It notes progress in the sector including Universities UK (UUK) guidance for institutions to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. The report states that a “renewed and concerted effort is required across all UK universities and colleges to make Jewish students safe and feel safe on campus.”

You can read the full report here.