

Political Affairs Digest

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6 – 10 March 2023

A regular digest of House of Commons, House of Lords, and higher education sector business.

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary business

Statement on new Science and Technology Framework

On Tuesday 7 March, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, delivered a statement on the new Science and Technology Framework.

The Secretary of State spoke about her new department and its “singular goal” of making the UK a science and technology superpower by 2030. She proceeded to outline how the framework provided 10 key actions to achieve this goal. She highlighted how the UK outperformed its main competitors in science and was a main challenger to the US, adding that the UK had four of the world’s top universities.

Chi Onwurah MP, Shadow Minister for Science, Research and Digital, said she was concerned that there was no mention of Horizon Europe in the statement, or indeed the “chilling impact” of not associating to the “world’s greatest” scientific collaboration programme.

Greg Clark MP (Conservative), Chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee, asked whether the £1.6 billion “claw-back” of funds allocated for Horizon Europe association would be spent on science. In response, Michelle Donelan said that the £1.6 billion was earmarked for Horizon Europe association but stressed that it would not impact the government’s commitment to spending £20 billion on R&D by 2024–25 and highlighted that the guarantee had provided £882 million to researchers so far.

Several MPs asked for an update on negotiations with the EU for association. Michelle Donelan said that she welcomed the recent comments from the EU and looked forward to engaging with them in more deep and meaningful discussion.

Asked about the government’s position on Horizon, the Secretary of State said that this had not changed and that terms for association would have to be favourable to the UK. Probed on timings for Plan B, she said they could not afford to wait around for another two years and that is why they had put together the alternative funding package.

Dr Matthew Offord MP (Conservative) highlighted the benefits of Horizon Europe, saying that the main benefit was the fact that UK based researchers were able to take out more from the scheme that we put in. He also cited his concerns about reports in

the media that the Prime Minister was sceptical about its benefits. In her reply, Michelle Donelan said the government had recently announced the guarantee as well as the suite of long-term announcements. She did not directly respond to the points about perceived scepticism of the Prime Minister.

Jonathan Edwards MP (Plaid Cymru) raised the immediate cliff-edge that many research and innovation projects faced with EU funds running out at the end of March, highlighting 60 projects affected in Wales and 1000 associated jobs. He added that this issue affected the whole of the UK but was a particularly prevalent issue in Wales due to the concentration of EU funding in the past. He asked whether the Secretary of State could raise the possibility of bridge funding with the Treasury ahead of the Budget next week. In response, Michelle Donelan said that she was aware of this issue and was working on it alongside her ministerial team, as well as pledging to meet with him to discuss this in detail in the coming weeks.

Stephen Metcalfe MP (Conservative) welcomed the new department and said that science was a global endeavour. He asked the government to look at the visa system to ensure the UK attracted world-leading scientists and technicians. Several MPs also highlighted evidence from the Royal Society which suggested that visa costs in the UK were up to 6 times higher than comparative countries.

The Secretary of State recognised the need to attract talent, but also highlighted the need to improve our ability to foster homegrown talent. She added that the visa system needed to enable talented individuals to come to the UK and would continue to work across government on that point.

Chi Onwurah welcomed the ambition to diversify the science and technology workforce and offered to work together to make the ambition a reality. Member of the Science and Technology Select Committee, Tracey Crouch MP (Conservative), raised the Committee's work on diversity in STEM and asked which department was leading on these efforts. The Secretary of State said that each area of the framework would be led by different government departments but stressed that her department would work closely with each of them to ensure they met the intended goal.

Chi Onwurah raised the framework's focus on start-ups and scale-ups, and suggested the government take on the recommendations made in Labour's Start-up Review. She criticised the £10 million allocated for UK Innovation and Science Seed Fund within the new funding and said that this would not be enough to fund one unicorn. She asked how much of this new funding would be outside of the South East of England. In response, Michelle Donelan highlighted that the funding would be spread

geographically and that it was a strategic commitment that 55% of the new £360 million would be spent outside of the South East of England.

Chi Onwurah asked whether the £360 million of funding announced earlier this week was all new funding. The Secretary of State clarified that it was all new funding.

Rebecca Long Bailey MP (Labour) said that the goals of the framework and new department would be severely limited by research funding available, highlighting that the UK recently came 27th out of 36 OECD nations on R&D funding levels. She asked whether the government would commit to becoming number one. The Secretary of State said the goal was clear, reaffirming the commitment to record levels of R&D funding by 2024/25, and that strategic funding rather than an endless pot of money was important.

Barry Sheerman MP (Labour) said that the morale in the higher education sector was low and that universities required resources and good management to succeed in this area. He added that universities needed to be open to dialogue and partnerships with businesses and to ensure they were equipped for enterprise and innovation. Michelle Donelan said that this was the heart of the Sir Paul Nurse Research Landscape Review and that the diversification of the research sector would open up how that research was delivered. She proceeded to reflect on being a former higher education minister and recognised the challenges universities can face in this area. She added that her door was always open and that she worked closely with universities to break down these barriers.

John Redwood MP (Conservative) highlighted the US Inflation Reduction Act, which he said offered favourable regulatory conditions for onshoring science and technology. He asked what efforts the UK was making to replicate this. Michelle Donelan said that regulation was at the heart of their work and Sir Patrick Vallance would report on regulation of emerging technologies imminently.

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

National Security Bill – report stage

On Tuesday 7 March, the National Security Bill continued its report stage in the House of Lords.

Lord Wallace (Liberal Democrat) outlined two amendments aimed at ensuring the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS) was proportionate and kept under review.

The first of these amendments sought to ensure registration under FIRS was not required when the arrangement was already registered under other legislative requirements. Lord Wallace highlighted that, as drafted, the FIRS would impose a huge bureaucratic burden on those engaged with international research, at the same time the government was strongly against adding to bureaucracy and red tape for science and research. He added that while joining Horizon Europe was vital, under the FIRS, all countries associated with the scheme would be listed as foreign powers and would therefore be captured under this bureaucracy. Lord Wallace suggested that government departments needed to share information to prevent this risk.

Responding on behalf of the government, Lord Sharpe said that the government did not want to impose unnecessary burdens but stressed that there was a clear difference between the FIRS and existing legislation such as the National Security and Investment Act, the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) and the export control regime. He added that the government would consider the limited circumstances where there was a risk of duplication and would work closely across government departments and potential registrants to keep the burden of registration to a minimum. He reiterated that the government had already committed to a consultation on the guidance ahead of bringing the scheme into force. Risk of duplication would also be considered on a case-by-case basis when specifying foreign powers and entities. Lord Wallace withdrew this amendment.

Lord Wallace also asked the Minister to provide an assurance that the government would consult with the academies, the Royal Society and Universities UK to make sure that the element of duplication is reduced to the absolute minimum. He added that “we do not want universities having to fill in forms unnecessarily widely”. Lord Sharpe reiterated the government’s commitment to consult but said that he could not, at this moment, say precisely who would be consulted.

Lord Wallace’s second amendment would have required the Secretary of State to produce an annual report on the impacts of the FIRS enhanced tier. Lord Sharpe said that the government recognised the importance of keeping the impacts of the scheme under consideration, and that Clause 82 of the Bill already required the Secretary of State to produce and lay before Parliament an annual report every 12 months after the scheme is implemented. Lord Wallace withdrew this amendment.

The Bill will now conclude its stages in the House of Lords with a third reading tabled for Monday 13 March.

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

Lords Industry and Regulators Committee – the work of the OfS

On Tuesday 7 March, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee heard evidence as part of their new inquiry into ‘the work of the Office for Students’. The committee heard from Dame Nicola Dandridge CBE (Former Chief Executive at Office for Students) and Sir Michael Barber (Former Chair at Office for Students).

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Labour), acting Chair of the Committee, began the session by probing the basis for the creation of the Office for Students (OfS).

Michael Barber noted that the fees review of 2011 required a regulator to assess whether students were getting value for money. He said the clarity of the initial remit of the OfS was never a concern. He described stewardship of the sector as being crucial for all aspects of UK society and economy, noting specifically the research and export value. Nicola Dandridge added that the path of the OfS was clear with a focus on the quality of teaching.

Lord Leong (Labour) asked how the OfS used its regulatory framework to achieve its objectives.

Nicola Dandridge explained that the framework set out how higher education providers should operate. She highlighted how the OfS learnt through experience and amended the Framework in 2021 with a focus on quality and outcomes. On institutional autonomy, Michael Barber said he recognised the need to allow freedom of teaching and experiences but noted that the OfS had been required to intervene on issues of value for money and issues affecting the reputation of the sector.

Baroness McGregor-Smith (Conservative) asked about guidance issued to the OfS from the government.

Michael Barber explained that that while the OfS were given prescriptive guidance, they sought to assert their own independent path. He added that he wanted to avoid public rows with the government given this would not be beneficial for the sector. Nicola Dandridge stated that the OfS worked well with the Department for Education and added that while they wished they had got the framework right the first time, this was a path of an evolving regulator. Michael Barber raised the political turmoil during the establishment of the OfS and clarified that any disagreements with government were always done in a constructive way.

Lord Burns (Crossbench) raised the numerous "chops and changes" within government and its implications for the operation of the OfS. In his reply, Michael

Barber stated the need to get on with the job and reiterated that he was not the type of Chair to pick a public fight with the government.

Viscount Chandos (Labour) asked about higher education for domestic students compared to overseas students. Michael Barber explained that university research was often subsidised by international students and highlighted the need for this to be kept under constant review.

Lord Cromwell (Crossbench) asked whether there should be a limit for international students. Michael Barber outlined that they had never wanted to put a cap on recruitment and if domestic students were not pushed out, international students enhanced the UK's global leadership. Nicola Dandridge highlighted quality issues for overseas students and the financial vulnerability/risk exposure for some universities.

Lord Cromwell proceeded to ask how the OfS calculated 'value for money'. Nicola Dandridge explained that tuition fees were not in their remit, but the focus was on quality of teaching, consumer rights, and ensuring transparency. She added that this also came from a tax-payer perspective given the amount of public money invested.

Nicola Dandridge described how the OfS consulted students, noting that they had student representatives on their Board as well as the creation of a Student Board. She emphasised that the OfS made it their business to speak directly to students. She noted that some of their concerns, such as cost of living and mental health, were outside of their remit, but issues such as the quality of courses, contact hours and assessments were key points to take forward.

Lord Burns addressed the notion of a degree standing the test of time. Michael Barber recognised the Leo data and the importance of degree prospects. He added that students were much more concerned with this now than in previous years.

Lord Clement-Jones (Liberal Democrat) probed the relationship of the OfS with higher education institutions.

Michael Barber explained that at the beginning, institutions were uneasy with the OfS, but that they were striving to get the right combination of collaboration and dialogue. He commented that overall, it was a good and professional relationship as both sides sought to tread new paths. He added that in a handful of cases, the fact that the OfS had powers to threaten was a useful tool.

Considering whether the OfS should also take responsibility for the financial sustainability of the sector, Nicola Dandridge explained that their remit was to protect students, rather than the sector as a whole. She recognised that failings of

the sector would have knock on consequences for students and that there was a concern that the whole system needed nurturing and protection. She explained that the OfS did not need a specific statutory duty on this as it was intertwined with the role already.

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

Forthcoming business

National Security Bill – third reading

In the afternoon of Monday 13 March, the National Security Bill will receive its third reading in the House of Lords.

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

Lords Industry and Regulators Committee – the work of the OfS

On Tuesday 14 March from 10:30am, the Lords Industry and Regulators Committee will hear evidence as part of their ongoing inquiry into ‘the work of the Office for Students’. The committee will hear from:

- Rt Hon Lord Johnson, Former Minister of State at Universities, Science, Research and Innovation.
- Rt Hon Charles Clarke, Former Minister at Department for Education.

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

Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology – oral questions

On Wednesday 15 March from 11:30am, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Tabled questions include:

- What steps her Department is taking to support the research and development sector. [Robert Courts MP, Conservative] [David Davis MP, Conservative] [Tim Loughton MP, Conservative]

You can [read a full list of tabled questions](#) here and [watch the session](#) here.

Spring Budget Statement

In the afternoon of Wednesday 15 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, will deliver a statement on the Spring Budget in the House of Commons.

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

Impact of university industrial action on students – oral question

On Thursday 16 March from 11:30am, the House of Lords will consider the ‘impact of industrial action in universities on students.’ This oral question has been tabled by Lord Storey (Liberal Democrat).

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

Written Questions

Higher Education: Nottingham South

Lilian Greenwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many places in higher education are guaranteed for disadvantaged students in Nottingham South constituency. [UIN 155099]

Robert Halfon: We want to provide a ladder of opportunity so that everyone can get the education and skills they need for job security and prosperity, and to support levelling up across the country, including in Nottingham South constituency.

Our access and participation reforms are playing a key role in ensuring that the young people of Nottingham South can get the support they need to make decisions that are right for them, regardless of their socio-economic background, whether that is progressing into higher education (HE), further education, or apprenticeships.

The department wants universities to:

- Work more with schools and colleges to raise standards so that students have more options and can choose the path that is right for them.
- Move away from just getting disadvantaged students through the door, and instead tackle dropout rates and support students through university to graduation and into high skilled and high paid jobs.
- Offer more courses that are linked to skills and flexible learning such as degree apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications, and part-time courses.

Examples of this can already be found in Nottingham, where both local universities offer degree apprenticeships with Nottingham Trent University providing access to alternative routes to higher education at its Mansfield campus.

The majority of providers who submitted requests for variations to their access and participation plans to the Office for Students are carrying out work in line with these priorities.

HE providers are autonomous bodies, independent from government. They are responsible for their own admissions decisions. It is a matter for individual providers to consider whether to use contextual information about applicants, such as their socio-economic background.

Students in Nottingham South, regardless of their background, should feel confident that getting into HE is a fair process. In 2022, a record numbers of students progressed into HE, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, how much funding her Department plans to provide for research and development in 2022-23; and if she will make a statement. [UIN 156130]

George Freeman: The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) was allocated a budget of £39.8 billion over this current Spending Review period (2022/23 to 2024/25) for research and development (R&D). The majority of this settlement will transfer to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), while some R&D budget for specific sectoral and net zero programmes will transfer to the Department for Business and Trade, and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Some details are still being worked through between Departments and with His Majesty's Treasury. Full financial details will be set out in due course.

Employment: Training

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to ensure that training programmes offered by his Department to people seeking work reflect the skills required by local economies. [UIN 903885]

Guy Opperman: Jobcentre Plus employer partnership leads work closely with local employers to understand labour market need and with local training providers to ensure provision is available to address skills gaps. This approach is exemplified in our successful Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAPs) which combines work experience, job specific training and a guaranteed interview to support claimants into local vacancies. The benefit of this integrated approach is clear, having achieved over 88,000 SWAPs starts this financial year.

Jobcentre Plus leads also engage with national employers to identify regional employment opportunities and will play a key role in the development and implementation of employer representative body led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). LSIPs will set out local priorities needed to ensure training is more responsive and aligned with the employer view of the skills most needed to support local

economic growth and boost productivity and improve employability and progression for learners.

Nurses: Higher Education

David Warburton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to increase the number of people studying nursing in higher education. [UIN 153899]

Will Quince: The National Health Service has launched its fifth consecutive national recruitment campaign 'We are the NHS' to inspire people to consider a career in healthcare and increase applications for healthcare courses, including nursing.

The Student Loans Company provides the primary funding support package for students in further education. Student loans are subsidised by the taxpayer, this is a conscious investment in the skills and people of this country. Eligible nursing students also have access to a non-repayable grant of £5,000 per academic year plus additional grants and supports depending on their circumstances.

The Government continues to widen access to nursing careers through blended learning and apprenticeship routes. We now have a complete apprentice pathway for nursing, from entry level to postgraduate advanced clinical practice.

Horizon Europe: Northern Ireland Protocol

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether it was (a) her or (b) her predecessors policy to seek association with Horizon Europe once issues related to the Northern Ireland Protocol were resolved. [UIN 156955]

George Freeman: The Government's position has, for two years since signing the TCA, been to associate with Horizon Europe for deeper innovation collaboration. The EU's signal of openness to now renew those discussions is welcome, following two years of delays.

We continue to be ready to work swiftly and constructively together on a range of issues including UK association, which will need to properly reflect the financial reality that we are now over 2 years into the 7 year programme and have had to commit significant funds to both the Horizon guarantee and support for the UK sector.

Students: Debts

Sir Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of a debt forgiveness programme for students who were financially affected by covid. [UIN 153703]

Robert Halfon: Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the government was clear that universities were expected to maintain academic standards and the quantity of tuition should not drop. All universities were expected to continue to deliver excellent learning, in line with guidance from the Office for Students, to provide students with a full experience.

The tuition fee and student loan system in England is designed to be sustainable, fair to students and taxpayers, while ensuring that those who benefit financially from higher education make a fair contribution towards its cost.

Borrowers are only liable to repay after leaving study when earning over the relevant repayment threshold. The student finance system continues to protect lower earners and borrowers who experience a reduction in their income. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold (£27,295 for a post-2012 undergraduate plan and £21,000 for a post graduate loan), and do not change as a result of interest rate charges or the amount borrowed. If a borrower's income drops, so does the amount they repay. If income is below the relevant repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, then they do not have to make repayments at all. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off after the loan term ends (or in the case of death or disability), at no detriment to the borrower.

To further protect borrowers, the government, by law, must cap maximum student loan rates to ensure the interest rate charged on the loan is in line with market rates for comparable unsecured personal loans. On 8 February 2023, the Student Loan Company announced that the interest on Plan 2 and Plan 3 student loan repayments will be capped to 6.9% from 1 March 2023. Without this cap, student loan borrowers may have faced interest rates between 9 to 12%.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Universities

Stephen Kinnock: To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the UK Shared

Prosperity Fund on (a) research, (b) innovation and (c) skills in universities. [UIN 153795]

Dehenna Davison: DLUHC recognises the important role of universities and has made them an integral part of local partnership groups in the development of UKSPF investment plans and ongoing delivery. Local authorities can choose to support research, innovation and skills in universities through interventions under the 'supporting local business' and 'people and skills' investment priorities. Universities are entitled to apply for UKSPF funding in their local areas.

Mathematics: Higher Education

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of the potential reductions to university mathematics departments including Birkbeck University on the UK's status in science and technology. [UIN 148525]

Robert Halfon: Higher education (HE) providers are independent, autonomous institutions responsible for their own decisions on staffing issues, including how they structure themselves to deliver research and teaching priorities. Where it is necessary to reshape their activities, it is important that universities carefully consider the impact of job losses on staff and students and the overall sustainability of teaching and research.

The department will continue to work closely with the Office for Students (OfS) and various parties including a variety of HE providers across the sector, mission groups and other government departments to understand the ongoing impacts and changing landscape of financial sustainability in the HE sector. The OfS collects financial data from HE providers, and analyse this to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector. Where the OfS identifies concerns about the financial viability of an HE provider, they will implement enhanced monitoring of that provider.

The government is committed to securing the UK's status as a science and technology superpower, and in doing so, levelling up across the country. To achieve this, the department is investing in programmes that aim to achieve this at all levels of education, such as the Prime Minister's recently announced mission to ensure all pupils study some form of maths up to the age of 18. Additionally, the department is investing in science, technology, engineering and maths in higher education, with an additional £750 million over the next three years to support high quality teaching and facilities including in science and engineering, subjects that support the NHS, and

degree apprenticeships. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade. Several government strategies are also in place to support the science and technology superpower ambition and levelling up aims, including the UK Innovation Strategy (2021), the National AI Strategy (2021), and the UK Digital Strategy (2022). These strategies set out how we will strengthen our reserves of talent and skills in order to drive success.

Higher Education: Nottingham South

Lilian Greenwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help improve social mobility in higher education for students in Nottingham South constituency. [UIN 155101]

Robert Halfon: We want to provide a ladder of opportunity so that everyone can get the education and skills they need for job security and prosperity, and to support levelling up across the country, including in Nottingham South constituency.

Our access and participation reforms are playing a key role in ensuring that the young people of Nottingham South can get the support they need to make decisions that are right for them, regardless of their socio-economic background, whether that is progressing into higher education (HE), further education, or apprenticeships.

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HE providers are autonomous bodies, independent from government. They are responsible for their own admissions decisions. It is a matter for individual providers to consider whether to use contextual information about applicants, such as their socio-economic background.

Students in Nottingham South, regardless of their background, should feel confident that getting into HE is a fair process. In 2022, a record numbers of students progressed into HE, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Advanced Research and Invention Agency: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the Supplementary Estimates 2022-23 published by his Department on 21 February 2023, whether the unused funding for the Advanced Research and Invention Agency will be made available in the 2023-24 financial year. [UIN 155116]

John Glen: The unused funding for the Advanced Research and Invention Agency in 2022-23 will be made available to ARIA in the 2023-24 financial year.

Horizon Europe

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what her Department's planned timescale is for the implementation of the UK's association to Horizon Europe; and for what reasons association has been delayed. [UIN 156956]

George Freeman: The Government's position has, for two years since signing the TCA, been to associate with Horizon Europe for deeper innovation collaboration. The EU's signal of openness to now renew those discussions is welcome, following two years of delays.

We continue to be ready to work swiftly and constructively together on a range of issues including UK association, which will need to properly reflect the financial reality that we are now over 2 years into the 7 year programme and have

Universities: British Overseas Territories

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department provides support to universities located in the British Overseas Territories. [UIN 153712]

Robert Halfon: The department does not provide support to universities located in the British Overseas Territories.

Medicine: Training

Preet Kaur Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of barriers to student finance for those studying medicine as a second degree. [UIN 156215]

Will Quince: No assessment has been made. Students studying medicine as a second degree can access a range of financial support from Student Finance England and through the NHS Bursary.

Refugees: Afghanistan

Lord Kamall: To ask His Majesty's Government what legal asylum or immigration routes there are for Afghan academics who worked with visiting British academics under the Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DeIPHE) scheme, and who have subsequently been threatened by the Taliban regime, but have had their application to come to the UK under Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) rejected. [HL5684]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The UK has made one of the largest commitments to support Afghanistan of any country and, so far, we have brought around 23,000 people affected by the situation in Afghanistan to safety. This includes more than 6,300 vulnerable Afghan nationals through the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS).

This is one of the most ambitious resettlement schemes in our country's history and we are proud to offer a safe and legal route to those affected by events in Afghanistan.

Those who are not offered resettlement under the ACRS or ARAP including Afghan academics will need to apply to come to the UK under our existing economic or family migration rules. Further information can be found on the website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration>

Whilst the UK has made a generous resettlement commitment, we must bear in mind the capacity of the UK to resettle people is not unlimited and therefore difficult decisions about who will be prioritised for resettlement have to be made.

Sector News

UK Science and Technology Framework published

On Monday 6 March, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, and Secretary of State for Science, Innovation, and Technology, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, launched a new Science and Technology Framework. This framework sets out how the UK can “cement its place as a science and technology superpower by 2030”.

The framework includes 10 key actions that the government believes are necessary to achieve this ambition:

- Identifying, pursuing and achieving strategic advantage in the technologies that are most critical to achieving UK objectives.
- Showcasing the UK’s science and technology strengths and ambitions at home and abroad to attract talent, investment and boost our global influence.
- Boosting private and public investment in research and development for economic growth and better productivity.
- Building on the UK’s already enviable talent and skills base.
- Financing innovative science and technology start-ups and companies.
- Capitalising on the UK government’s buying power to boost innovation and growth through public sector procurement.
- Shaping the global science and tech landscape through strategic international engagement, diplomacy, and partnerships.
- Ensuring researchers have access to the best physical and digital infrastructure for R&D that attracts talent, investment and discoveries.
- Leveraging post-Brexit freedoms to create world-leading pro-innovation regulation and influence global technical standards.
- Creating a pro-innovation culture throughout the UK’s public sector to improve the way our public services run.

The framework was accompanied by an announcement of £370 million of new funding for R&I projects. These include:

- £250 million investment in AI, quantum technologies and engineering biology.
- Up to £50 million to spur co-investment in science from the private sector and philanthropists.
- A £50 million uplift to World Class Labs funding.
- A £10 million uplift to the UK Innovation and Science Seed Fund
- £9 million in government funding to support the establishment of a quantum computing research centre.

You can [read the full framework](#) here.

Horizon Europe Guarantee extension announced

On Monday 6 March, the government announced an extension to support provided to UK Horizon Europe applicants until the end of June 2023.

The extension will ensure that eligible, successful UK applicants will continue to be guaranteed funding, supporting them to continue their work in research and innovation.

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, said: “We are determined to ensure our world-class researchers are given the clarity and certainty they need to continue their sterling work, which is why I am taking the immediate step to extend the Horizon Europe guarantee, worth £882 million to date, for an additional 3 months to the end of June.”

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

UK Research, Development and Innovation organisation landscape review published

On Tuesday 7 March, the independent review of the research, development, and innovation (RDI) organisation landscape was published. This independent review was led by Sir Paul Nurse, Chief Executive and Director of the Francis Crick Institute.

The review acknowledges the enormous strengths of the UK research base and explores the fragilities in the research landscape that are currently holding back achievement of government objectives. These include excessive bureaucracy, funding arrangements that incentivise competition over collaboration, lack of “end to end” funding for research, and policy turmoil that disincentivises long term planning and investment.

The review recommends the government adopt a single strategic framework for RDI, which could guide efforts to reform funding arrangements, reduce bureaucracy, and boost diversity of organisations in the research ecosystem.

You can [read the full review](#) here.

Universities role in Foreign Direct Investment – HEPI report

On Tuesday 7 March, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report on the opportunities for universities to enhance their role in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the UK.

The report intends to begin a conversation – within universities and across local economic organisations and national government – about what this role currently looks like, how it can be co-developed for mutual gain and what benefits this could create for local innovation-led growth and the UK’s global competitiveness.

It demonstrates that a more intentional and coordinated approach could create an array of additional benefits for universities, local economies, and the whole UK, including helping to overcome growth and productivity challenges; supporting the expansion of innovation clusters with universities at their heart; and enabling universities to leverage their global connections for greater economic benefit.

You can [read the full report](#) here.

Government response to LLE consultation published

On Tuesday 7 March, the government published its response to the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) consultation, along with an impact assessment, and equality analysis.

The LLE will replace the previous student finance system from the start of the 2025/16 academic year. In the response, the government confirmed:

- People up to age 60 will be entitled to the LLE, equivalent to £37,000 in today's fees, including returning students who will have access to any remaining funding once previous student loans are taken into account.
- To encourage as many people as possible to retrain or return to study later in life, the "Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) exception rule" will also be removed.
- To put technical study on a par with academic routes, maintenance support will be offered across all eligible technical and part-time courses.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said: "The removal of ELQ requirements and the expansion of part-time maintenance support should be celebrated and will help new and returning people access the courses they need to thrive. If we get the communication out to learners right and keep the burden on providers low, then the Lifelong Loan Entitlement has the potential to be truly transformative."

You can [read the full consultation response](#) here.

Jisc publishes framework for digital transformation in higher education

On Tuesday 7 March, Jisc published a framework for digital transformation in higher education. This provides perspective on how the digital environment can support positive work, research and learning experiences, and promote a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

The framework has been developed through consultation with a range of UK professional bodies including Advance HE, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and Universities UK.

The aim of the framework is to:

- Support the development of a shared understanding of digital transformation across the sector and within HE organisations.
- Encourage a holistic approach - identifying patterns and connections across traditional boundaries.
- Focus on people and practices, not just processes and technology.

You can [read more about the new framework](#) here.

Russell Group warns of ATAS delays

On Wednesday 8 March, the Russell Group warned that waiting times for students and researchers applying to the Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) was undermining the UK's science superpower ambitions.

A survey of over 1450 students and staff from 21 UK higher education institutions coordinated by the Russell Group revealed significant delays in 2021 and 2022, with student application approvals taking over 10 weeks.

The Russell Group has called for urgent action to tackle this before the 2023 student applications cycle. It is calling on the government to work with the sector to enhance guidance, improve the application form, and ensure the teams administering the programme are properly resourced. Universities recognise the need for safeguards to protect national security, but it is important that the vetting process is agile and does not undermine efforts to bring leading global talent to the UK.

Commenting on the survey results, Dr Tim Bradshaw, Chief Executive of the Russell Group, said: "The UK has always been a magnet for the most talented people from around the world and while no-one disputes the need for due diligence when they are working in sensitive areas, that process must be clear, efficient and properly resourced. That has not been the case for the last two years and this has caused real problems - undermining vital research and putting off some of the most talented people from around the world."

You can [read the full press release](#) here.

Public perception of immigration - Universities UK polling

On Thursday 9 March, new polling commissioned from Public First by Universities UK revealed that the UK public does not see reducing legal migration as a priority compared to other issues, and are not in favour of cutting the number of international students.

Following speculation that the government may look to restrict the ability for international students, and their dependents, to come to the UK, the polling found:

- 64% believed the UK should host the same or more international students.

- 32% believed that international students should be classed as immigrants in official figures.
- 48% thought that international students should be able to stay in the UK somewhere between 1-5 years.

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said: “This new polling confirms that public perceptions of immigration, and of international students, are not what the government may believe. The public understands the enormous contribution that international students make to our economy, institutions, and research outputs, as well as enormously benefiting the UK’s international reputation. Our international institutions are cherished by the public, and we would hope that government policy follows suit.”

You can [read the full polling results](#) here.

MillionPlus outlines priorities for Spring Budget

On Thursday 9 March, MillionPlus called on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to commit to six policies ahead of the Spring Budget on 15 March. These include:

- Increase maintenance funding for students, ideally through grants, and ensure students are included in any further cost-of-living measures introduced.
- Extend the existing Energy Bill Relief Scheme for 12 months to support universities through this challenging period.
- Boost teacher recruitment and retention by applying an in-year uplift to initial teacher training bursaries to help tackle these concerns while prioritising the strategic planning of bursaries for future years.
- Invest in expanding nursing clinical training placements in the NHS and social care to enable a pipeline of skilled workers.
- Alleviate workforce shortages by exploring fee-loan forgiveness for trainee teachers and nurses.
- Focus R&D investment on supporting regional economic growth, for example through the Higher Education Innovation Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Rachel Hewitt, Chief Executive of MillionPlus, said: “This Spring Budget offers an opportunity for the government to make a statement and demonstrate its seriousness when it comes to fairness, boosting public services and investing in growth.”

You can [read the full press release](#) here.

London Higher and HEPI publish report on student life and experience in London

On Thursday 9 March, London Higher and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report focused on student life and experience in London compared with the UK. It aims to show the real experience that students have when studying in London.

Key findings include:

- Students enrolled at small and specialist institutions tend to be happier and think their courses are serving them well.
- International students are more likely than home students to say they regard their courses as providing good value for money, despite paying higher fees.
- London students are among the happiest, with more rating their happiness as 9/10 out of 10 than in any other part of the UK.

Nick Hillman, Director of HEPI, said: “It is hard to think of any other single city anywhere in the world that has so many first-rate higher education institutions. Despite serious and valid concerns about the cost of living in London which may deter some people from studying there, the data clearly show that the decision to study in London is paying off for most students that have made it.”

You can [read the full report](#) here.

OfS award £9.6 million to improve performing arts courses

On Thursday 9 March, the Office for Students (OfS) announced £9.6 million in funding to improve teaching and access to performing arts courses at specialist higher education providers across England.

The funding will support:

- The development of partnerships with other higher education providers, nationally and internationally, or relevant industries to improve study and career opportunities for students.
- Access to specialist performing arts education for students from underrepresented groups.
- Provision of specialist equipment for students, such as musical instruments, costumes, or computing equipment.

Susan Lapworth, Chief Executive of the OfS, said: “The OfS’s investment will ensure that current and future generations of students – whatever their background – are able to succeed during their studies and into their careers. The small size and highly specialised approach of the institutions we are funding play an important role in their educational experience of students, and this funding will ensure they can continue to deliver a high-quality experience.”

You can [read the full press release](#) here.

OfS consultation on investigation fees

On Thursday 9 March, the Office for Students (OfS) published a consultation on how it may charge universities and colleges to cover the cost of investigations.

The OfS’s ability to charge these fees is established by regulations laid in Parliament in December 2022. Under the proposals, the OfS could charge fees in a number of circumstances, including where it:

- Finds that a provider is breaching, or has breached, any ongoing condition of registration.
- Imposes a specific ongoing condition of registration on a provider.
- Recommends that, in order to mitigate what the OfS considers to be the increased risk of a breach of an ongoing condition of registration of a provider, the provider should take or refrain from taking any action specified by the OfS.

Nolan Smith, director of resources and finance at the OfS, said: “The OfS operates a risk-based approach to regulation, and we believe there is a strong case that where we investigate the university or college involved should shoulder the costs of our work. At the same time, we will continue to take steps to understand and tackle

unnecessary regulatory burden for those universities and colleges providing high quality courses and good outcomes for their students. We encourage all universities and colleges regulated by the OfS to share their views with us.”

The consultation closes at 5pm on Friday 14 April 2023.

You can [read more about the consultation and respond here](#).