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

Education Oral Questions

On Monday 24 October, the former Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP, and his ministerial team, answered questions in the House of Commons.

Cat Smith MP (Lab) highlighted the findings of the MillionPlus report, “Learning with the lights off: students and the cost-of-living crisis”. She requested a meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the implementation of the recommendations. Kit Malthouse replied that the Office for Student (OfS) had increased hardship funding and said that students not living in halls of residence would benefit from the wider cost of living support package.

Matt Western MP (Lab) said that students were “anxious” about cost-of-living pressures. He cited the 2.3% increase in student loan amidst general inflation at over 10%, causing a shortfall of £439 per month for the average student. He asked how students should respond to this shortfall. The Secretary of State reiterated his previous comments and added that there would be an announcement on the uplift to the student loan shortly as part of ongoing evaluation.

Andrew Lewer MP (Con) cited his concerns about mandating university staff and students to conduct training in “contested subjects” such as implicit bias. He referenced findings from King’s College Policy unit that found some students were reluctant to engage in debate. In his reply, Kit Malthouse shared his concern and said there was a duty on educators to present a range of arguments to students.

Carol Monaghan MP (SNP) asked for reassurance on imminent research funding given the uncertainty surrounding association with Horizon Europe. The Secretary of State replied that he recognised science and technology was “critical” to the future economy, praised the commitment of the government to this agenda, and called for the question to be directed at his “European friends”.

You can watch the session here.
Women and Equalities Oral Questions

On Wednesday 26 October the Minister for Women and Equalities, Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP, and her ministerial team answered questions in the House of Commons.

Philip Hollobone MP (Con) asked what steps the Secretary of State for Education had taken to ensure that the proportion of white state school students obtaining a place in higher education would be raised to the same proportion as mixed heritage, black, Asian and Chinese students.

Andrea Jenknys MP, Minister for Skills, said that access to higher education should be based on a student’s attainment and their ability to succeed, rather than their background. She noted that the Office for Students (OfS) had been tasked with refreshing its access and participation work and would consider white student access.

You can watch the session here.
Forthcoming business

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) – Grand Committee stage

On Monday 31 October and Wednesday 2 November, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will be considered in the Grand Committee.

You can watch the session here (Monday 31 October and Wednesday 2 November) and read a full list of amendments here.

House of Lords Science and Technology committee:

On Tuesday 1 November from 10:15am the House of Lords Science and Technology committee will hear evidence on “People and skills in UK science, technology, engineering and mathematics.” Witnesses include:

- Paul Kett (Director General for Skills at Department for Education)
- Isabel Allgeyer (Deputy Director, Research Talent and European Programmes at Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

You can watch the session here.

House of Lords Communications and Digital committee:

On Tuesday 1 November from 2:30pm the House of Lords Communications and Digital committee will hear evidence on “a creative future”. Witnesses include:

- 2:30pm:
  - Dinah Caine CBE (Chair of Governing Council at Goldsmiths, University of London)
  - Eliza Easton (Deputy Director of Policy and Communications, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre at Nesta)
  - Olly Newton (Executive Director at The Edge Foundation)
- 3:30pm:
  
  o Dr Paul Thompson (Chair of Specialists Institutions Forum at Universities UK, and Vice-Chancellor at Royal College of Art)
  
  o Simon Field (Director at Skills Policy)
  
  o Corrienne Peasgood OBE (President at Association of Colleges)
  
  o Alun Francis OBE (Principal and Chief Executive Officer at Oldham College)

You can watch the session here.

**Westminster Hall debate: Contribution of international students to the UK**

Alyn Smith MP (SNP) has tabled a Westminster Hall debate titled “contribution of international students to the UK” on Wednesday 2 November from 4:30pm.

You can watch the session here.
Written Questions

Overseas Students

**Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth**: To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to promote the UK as a destination for international students [UIN HL2463].

**Baroness Barran**: To ensure that the UK remains a top destination for international students, the department has launched Study UK. The Study UK campaign, delivered by the British Council, promotes UK universities to the world and encourages international students to study in the UK.

Attracting the brightest students from around the world is good for our universities, delivers growth at home, as well as supporting the creation of more places for UK students.

Overseas Students

**Daniel Zeichner**: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to place a limit on the number of international students who are able to study at UK universities [UIN 64110].

**Tom Pursglove**: Our offer to international students is extremely competitive and ensures that we continue to attract the best and brightest students from around the world.

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 also rightly expects us to control immigration and ensure we have a system that works in the UK’s best interests.

As the Growth Plan set out, the Government is looking at how immigration contributes to growth and will set out further details in due course.
**Overseas Students**

**Luke Pollard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessments she has made of the potential effect of restricting the number of international students and their dependants in UK universities on (a) tuition fee income for universities, (b) living cost expenditure received by universities and local communities and (c) knock-on expenditure in universities and local communities [UIN 66010].

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**Educational Institutions: Health**

**Richard Foord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to utilise new technology to support people’s physical and mental wellbeing in educational settings [UIN 63050].

**Kelly Tolhurst:** Schools, colleges, and universities have the flexibility to decide what provision is appropriate for their students’ mental and physical wellbeing. This may include the use of technology, such as apps and fitness trackers, but it is for individual educational establishments to decide whether and how technology is appropriate to their educational contexts and circumstances.

**Department for Education: Public Expenditure**

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what representations he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer ahead of the fiscal event announced for 31 October 2022 on (a) his Department’s revenue budget, (b) the adequacy of
revenue funding for England's schools, (c) the adequacy of revenue funding for England’s further education colleges, (d) the adequacy of revenue funding for England's universities and (e) the adequacy of revenue funding childcare provision; and if he will make a statement [UIN 59689].

Jonathan Gullis: The Department works closely with HM Treasury to support the education sector, including last year’s Spending Review where the Department secured an additional £18.4 billion of funding over the Parliament.

My right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has confirmed that he will publish his Medium-Term Fiscal Plan on 31 October 2022 alongside the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecast. Decisions within the Fiscal Plan are for the Chancellor and will be confirmed in his statement. The Department has no plans to make a statement.

Higher Education: Admissions

Richard Holden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many students were accepted onto higher education courses by each A-level grade combination in England in each of the last three years [UIN 66047].


Students: Energy

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to support students with the rising cost of energy [UIN 65642].

Andrea Jenkyns: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen as a result of global events this year and that have impacted students. Many higher education (HE) providers have hardship funds that students can apply to for assistance.
To support disadvantaged students and those who need additional help, the department confirmed in guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) on funding for the 2022/23 financial year that universities will continue to be able to support students in hardship through their own hardship funds and the student premium, for which up to £261 million is available for academic year 2022/23.

Maximum loans for living costs and grants have been increased this academic year, 2022/23. The government is reviewing options for uprating maximum loans and grants for the 2023/24 academic year. An announcement will follow in due course.

In addition, maximum tuition fees have been capped at £9,250 for the 2022/23 academic year, in respect of standard full-time courses. The department is also freezing maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years.

As part of the package of support for rising energy bills, the government is also giving a council tax rebate payment of £150 to households that were living in a property in council tax bands A to D as their main home on 1 April 2022. This includes full-time students that do not live in student halls or in property that is not considered a House in Multiple Occupation for council tax purposes.

All households will save money on their energy bills through the Energy Price Guarantee. This is in addition to the £400 energy bills discount for all households. 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: Finance**

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the level of hardship funds for universities [UIN 65652].

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.
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**Higher Education: Low Incomes**

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to help support students from low income backgrounds with the costs of attending university [UIN 65779].

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

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onto end users. Further details of the requirements under this legislation will be set out in regulations.

Engineering: Education

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to increase the number of students studying electronics and engineering at (a) further and (b) higher education in order to develop the skills required to meet vacancies in UK companies involved with chip design [UIN 65763].

Andrea Jenkyns: The department is investing £3.8 billion more in further education and skills over the course of this Parliament to ensure people can access high-quality training and education that addresses skills gaps and boosts productivity, to ensure that industries such as engineering and electronics get people with the skills that they need.

Through this investment, we are creating a wide range of different opportunities for people to acquire in-demand skills. In particular, we have made key reforms to technical education to encourage people to take up technical routes, which could lead to them entering careers in engineering and electronics.

Our high-quality apprenticeships continue to provide young people with the opportunity to earn and learn the skills needed for a career in the engineering and manufacturing sector. Employers can choose from over 147 employer-designed apprenticeships in the sector, and we are raising awareness of apprenticeships among young people through our ‘Get the Jump’ campaign.

T Levels are also strengthening vocational options for young people finishing their GCSEs. They are two-year, technical qualifications designed with businesses and employers, equivalent in size to three A levels and with 20% of the course time in an industry placement. Three T Levels in Engineering and Manufacturing and three T levels in Digital sectors are now available.

The Free Courses for Jobs offer, which was launched in April 2021, allows eligible adults to access over 400 Level 3 qualifications (A-level equivalent) for free, in subject areas including engineering and digital.

We are establishing 21 Institutes of Technology (IoTs) across the country, providing access to industry standard facilities which focus on the needs of employers and learners in their specific geographical areas. IoTs are partnerships between further education providers, universities (HE) and employers, with employers at the heart of
decision-making, curriculum development and delivery. IoTs aim to help close skills gaps in key STEM areas, including digital, construction, engineering and manufacturing, and life sciences.

Through the Strategic Priorities Grant, the department supplies funding to support HE providers’ ongoing teaching and other related activities. Over half of this funding is directed towards the provision of high-cost subjects, including engineering and technology subjects.

We are investing an additional £750 million over the next three years to support high quality teaching and facilities including in engineering. This includes the largest increase in government funding for the HE sector to support students and teaching in over a decade.

**Higher Education: Racial Discrimination**

**Cat Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on tackling institutional racism in higher education institutions [UIN 65853].

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Any form of racism is abhorrent and unacceptable anywhere, including in higher education (HE). HE providers are autonomous institutions with clear responsibilities. Under the Equality Act 2010, they should have robust policies and procedures in place to comply with the law in investigating and swiftly addressing reports of racism.

The department is clear that HE providers should be proactive in confronting and preventing racism, ensuring campuses are safe, welcoming environments for students of all races and backgrounds, and empowering those students to feel confident in reporting issues. The 2020 Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report found that most students from ethnic minority groups do relatively well in accessing and completing HE.

However, the department continues to work with universities, sector organisations, student organisations, and the regulator to drive racism out of HE institutions.

The Office for Students (OfS) has published data showing that black students are less likely than white students to achieve a first or 2.1 degree. The department notes that the OfS will be tracking this further as part of its range of new performance indicators.
The department is in regular contact with other government departments, such as the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, to align activity and ensure effective practice in prevention and victim support is shared widely.

Students: Cost of Living

Mary Kelly Foy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help support students in full-time higher education with the rising cost of living [UIN 66014].

Andrea Jenkyns: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

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

To support disadvantaged students and those who need additional help, the department confirmed in guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) on funding for the 2022/23 financial year that universities will continue to be able to support students in hardship through their own hardship funds and the student premium, for which up to £261 million is available for academic year 2022/23.

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As part of the package of support for rising energy bills, the government is also giving a council tax rebate payment of £150 to households that were living in a property in council tax bands A to D as their main home on 1 April 2022. This includes full-time students that do not live in student halls or in property that is not considered a House in Multiple Occupation for council tax purposes.

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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: Private Rented Housing**

**Mary Kelly Foy**: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help support students in full-time higher education with increased private rental costs [UIN 66015].

**Andrea Jenkyns**: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

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

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**Students: Energy**

**Mary Kelly Foy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the rise in price of energy bills on the finances of student households. [UIN 66017].

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

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

To support disadvantaged students and those who need additional help, the department confirmed in guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) on funding for the 2022/23 financial year that universities will continue to be able to support students in hardship through their own hardship funds and the student premium, for which up to £261 million is available for academic year 2022/23.

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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: Cost of Living

Matt Western: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has conducted an equalities analysis of the potential impact of the rising cost of living on students [UIN 67166].

Andrea Jenkyns: The government recognises the additional cost of living pressures that have arisen this year and impacted students.

To support disadvantaged students and those who need additional help, the department confirmed in guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) on funding for the 2022/23 financial year that universities will continue to be able to support students in hardship through their own hardship funds and the student premium, for which up to £261 million is available for academic year 2022/23.

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.

As part of the package of support for rising energy bills, the government is also giving a council tax rebate payment of £150 to households that were living in a property in
council tax bands A to D as their main home on 1 April 2022. This includes full-time students that do not live in student halls or in property that is not considered a House in Multiple Occupation for council tax purposes.

Decisions on student support are taken on an annual basis. Maximum loans for living costs and grants have been increased by 2.3% this 2022/23 academic year. The government is reviewing options for uprating maximum loans and grants for the 2023/24 academic year, and an announcement will follow in the autumn.

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 tax year 2022/23 has dropped by at least 15% compared to the income provided for their original assessment, can apply for their entitlement to be reassessed.

In addition, maximum tuition fees and the subsidised loans available from government to pay them remain at £9,250 for the 2022/23 academic year in respect of standard full-time courses.

The department is also freezing maximum tuition fees for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. By 2024/25, maximum fees will have been frozen for seven years. As well as reducing debt levels for students, the continued fee freeze will help to ensure that the higher education system remains sustainable, while also promoting greater efficiency at providers.

**Students: Housing**

**Dr Matthew Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of student accommodation in England [UIN 66950].

**Andrea Jenkyns:** Higher education and private accommodation providers are autonomous. The department plays no direct role in the provision of student residential accommodation, whether the accommodation is managed by universities or private sector organisations.

Neither the Department for Education nor the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities have made an assessment of the adequacy of the availability of student accommodation in England. It is for local areas, through their Local Plans and in response to local needs and concerns, to determine the level of student accommodation required in their area.
Sector News

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP appointed as PM

On Monday 24 October it was announced that Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP was the only MP to reach the threshold for nominations, thereby making him leader of the Conservative Party. On Tuesday 24 October he was invited by King Charles III to form a government.

You can watch his first speech as Prime Minister here.

UCU strike action

On Monday 24 October, it was announced that members of the University and College Union (UCU) had voted “yes” to supporting strike action in two national ballots.

In the pay and working condition ballot, the “yes” vote for strike action was 81.1% and the turnout was 57.8%. In the pension ballot, the “yes” vote for strike action was 84.9% and the turnout was 60.2%.

Jo Grady, UCU general secretary, said: “Today history has been made by our members in universities, who in huge numbers have delivered an unprecedented mandate for strike action. University staff are crucial workers in communities up and down the UK. They are sending a clear message that they will not accept falling pay, insecure employment, and attacks on pensions.”

In response to the ballot outcome, Raj Jethwa, chief executive of University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), said: “We hope UCU will carefully consider how to react to this ballot outcome. If UCU is genuinely interested in discussing the challenges facing the sector, UCEA is willing to work with them, but attempts to try and take more industrial action may simply hurt some students and staff for no realistic outcome.”

A Universities UK spokesperson, on behalf of USS employers, said: “We understand that the ballot results may leave students concerned about the impact that potential industrial action could have on their degrees. Universities are adept at mitigating the
impact of strikes on student learning, and so prepared for any further possible industrial action over the coming months.”

You can read the full UCU announcement here.

**Government appointments**

From Tuesday 25 October Rishi Sunak announced his new cabinet and government appointments. This included:

- Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP reappointed as Chancellor of the Exchequer.
- Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP reappointed as Home Secretary.
- Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP appointed as BEIS Secretary.
- Rt Hon Michael Gove MP appointed as Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
- Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP appointed as Minister of State for Immigration.
- Gillian Keegan MP appointed as Education Secretary.
- George Freeman MP appointed as Minister for Science, Technology, and Innovation.
- Nus Ghani MP reappointed as Minister for Science and Investment Security.
- Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP appointed as Minister of State in Department for Education (this triggers an election for Education Select Committee Chair).
- Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP appointed as Minister of State in Department for Education.

You can read a full list of ministers and briefs here.

**Sector response to reappointment of Home Secretary**

On Tuesday 25 October Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP was reappointed as Home Secretary.
Speaking to Times Higher Education, Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Unit, said: “There was a loud sector-wide groan when she was reappointed as home secretary. It will be much harder for universities to help deliver economic growth if you tie one of their hands behind their back by making it harder for international students to come to the UK. The end result will also be less soft power for the UK and less vibrant universities.”

Paul Blomfield MP (Lab) wrote on Twitter: “Ditched last week as a security risk; reinstated this week as Home Secretary. Anyone who thinks Rishi Sunak marks a fresh start should think again after Suella Braverman’s appointment.”

Sanam Arora, chairperson of the National Indian Students and Alumni Union UK, said: “We remain concerned about the future of international students from the perspective of the overall UK offer to them, as well as the India-UK FTA [free-trade agreement], given prior comments from the home secretary.”

You can read the full Times Higher Education article here.

Universities UK growth and opportunity report

On Tuesday 25 October Universities UK published its report “our universities: generating growth and opportunity.”

The report celebrates the impact that universities make to local communities in addressing economic and social disparities. It calls on universities to capitalise on these strengths with support from the government.

The recommendations include:

- Establish University Enterprise Zones (UEZs) in every university.
- Bring together local communities by creating more enterprise and opportunity hubs.
- Make us world leaders for university–employer partnerships.
- Place universities at the heart of policymaking everywhere in the UK.

Professor Chris Day, Chair of the Universities UK Economic and Social Recovery Task Force and Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University, said: “What we have achieved so
far is only the tip of the iceberg of what universities could do. Now is the time for universities, colleges, national and local governments, employers and other partners to join together to do everything we can to support growth, jobs and opportunity across the UK.”

You can read the full report here.

**Labour Council of Skills Advisers’ report**

On Wednesday 26 October the Labour Council of Skills Advisers released its report. The council is chaired by Rt Hon Lord Blunkett and the report is intended to inform the Labour Party’s immediate policy development ahead of the next general election.

It makes specific proposals to further and higher education as well as lifelong learning. These include:

- A substantially enhanced role for further education, reinforcing collaboration and a seamless link with higher education, apprenticeships, and progression within work.

- The reintroduction of the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16–19-year-olds, including support for those undertaking apprenticeships in the same age group.

Commenting on the report, Jess Cole, Director of Policy at Russell Group, said: “The report is right to highlight the importance of investment in high-level skills to the country’s long term economic growth and productivity. Our universities are at the heart of this, delivering technical as well as academic education to address national priorities and local skills needs.”

You can read the full report here.

**HM Treasury announce date for Autumn Statement**

On Wednesday 26 October Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, announced that the Autumn Statement would be delivered on 17 November.

Ahead of the statement, the Chancellor said that it was likely that “some taxes will go up”, and that public spending would increase at a slower rate than expected.
Jeremy Hunt also reiterated that any fiscal measures would be informed by forecasts by the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) which will accompany the statement.

**Changes to the National Student Survey**

On Friday 28 October the Office for Students announced changes to the National Student Survey (NSS) following a consultation process.

The review of the NSS considered a range of issues that may affect students' higher education experience, including support for their mental wellbeing, which may have an effect on a student’s attainment, engagement and continuation of study.

The introduction of a question on mental wellbeing services across the UK, and freedom of expression in England, will capture views on these issues, and will follow refreshed core survey questions.

Conor Ryan, chair of the UK Student Information Group and Director of External Relations at the OfS, said: “For the NSS to remain fit for purpose, it must adapt to reflect changes in teaching and learning. After a thorough consultation, our changes will provide improved insight to help us regulate the quality of education and ensure the survey provides a consistent measure of students’ academic experience.”

You can read the full report here.

**Women in Public Affairs annual survey**

The Women in Public Affairs (WiPA) have launched their 2022 survey. This survey focuses on the challenges facing women working in the public affairs industry, particularly given the cost-of-living crisis.

Please fill in the WiPA survey before 18 November.