



Political Affairs Digest

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25 – 29 September 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

Recess

On Tuesday 19 September, the House of Commons rose for Conference recess. It will return on Monday 16 October.

On Thursday 21 September, the House of Lords rose for Conference recess. It will return on Monday 16 October.



Forthcoming business

Recess

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Written Questions

Visa: Graduates

Baroness Wolf of Dulwich: To ask His Majesty's Government how they identify the non-UK universities whose graduates are eligible for a High Potential Individual (HPI) entry visa; and which universities have either been removed from or added to the list of these universities since the HPI visa was introduced. [UIN HL10392]

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The High Potential Individual (HPI) route is for recent graduates of top global universities. Details of universities on the Global Universities List (GUL) and how the list is compiled is set out in paragraph 6 of the Immigration Rules (www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-introduction).

Applicants must have graduated from a top global university in the five years immediately preceding the application. Eligible institutions can be found on the Global Universities List for the relevant graduating year (www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-potential-individual-visa-global-universities-list).

This list of universities relates to qualifications awarded between 1 November 2022 and 31 October 2023.

Alphabetical Rankings Lists 2022 (establishments from Top 50 rankings which appeared on 2 or more lists)	Country
California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	USA
Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
Columbia University	USA
Cornell University	USA
Duke University	USA
Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL Switzerland)	Switzerland
ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)	Switzerland
Harvard University	USA
Johns Hopkins University	USA
Karolinska Institute	Sweden
Kyoto University	Japan
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	USA
McGill University	Canada
Nanyang Technological University (NTU)	Singapore
National University of Singapore	Singapore
New York University	USA
Northwestern University	USA
Paris Sciences et Lettres – PSL Research University	France
Peking University	China
Princeton University	USA
Stanford University	USA
Technical University of Munich	Germany
Tsinghua University	China
University of British Columbia	Canada
University of California, Berkeley	USA
University of California, Los Angeles	USA
University of California, San Diego	USA
University of Chicago	USA
University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	USA
University of Melbourne	Australia
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	USA
University of Pennsylvania	USA
University of Queensland (UQ)	Australia
University of Texas at Austin	USA
University of Tokyo	Japan
University of Toronto	Canada
University of Washington	USA
Yale University	USA
Zhejiang University	China

Universities: Care Leavers

Lord Laming: To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to improve the number of care leavers who have access to university education. [UIN HL10041]

Baroness Barran: This government is committed to ensuring that all care leavers are supported to succeed in education and achieve positive outcomes. The 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy sets out the department's plans to reform the children's social care system, including improving the education, employment and training outcomes of children in care and care leavers. This includes, from 2027, a year-on-year narrowing of the gap in care leaver higher education participation rates compared to the general population.

We will introduce a gold standard accreditation scheme for further and higher education institutions supporting care leavers, working with an expert advisory group to develop the accreditation in partnership with the sector, and will consult on plans to expand the Virtual School Head role to include children in care and care leavers up to age 25. Local authorities must also provide a £2,000 bursary for care leavers who go to university.

Turing Scheme

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what is the average cost to the public purse per participant supported by the Turing Scheme. [UIN 199454]

Robert Halfon MP: The department cannot currently calculate the actual average cost to the public purse per participant supported by the Turing Scheme in each academic year. Currently the only data available are the allocated funding amounts and projected participant numbers published on the Turing Scheme website. These will differ from actual expenditure and participation figures.

The department will shortly be publishing actual data regarding the international mobilities that were delivered in the first year of the Turing Scheme, the 2021/22 academic year, including the actual number of participants and expenditure by organisations who received Turing Scheme funding. The department will also be publishing finalised data for the 2022/23 academic year in the coming months, following collection of final reports from participating education providers and other organisations in the Turing Scheme, analysis and quality assurance.

Funding was allocated for 41,024, 38,374, and 40,206 planned participants in the 2021/22, 2022/23, and 2023/24 academic years respectively. The total cost to the public purse of the Turing Scheme is not known until final reporting is complete.

Entry Clearances: India

The Lord Taylor of Warwick: To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the case for making thousands of student visas available to Indian citizens to help secure a trade deal. [UIN HL9854]

The Lord Offord of Garvel: While I cannot comment on ongoing negotiations, student visas are not part of FTA negotiations. Only business mobility would be negotiated in an FTA and negotiations could only ever cover temporary business travel. Any FTA commitments are for limited, temporary, and specific purposes.

Any agreement would be consistent with the points-based immigration system.

Research: Scientists

Baroness Randerson: To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of research scientists who have left the UK in the past three years to move to EU countries in order to take up European Research Council grants; and, based on previous levels of income to UK from Horizon, what is their estimate of the amount lost to UK research as a result of the gap in UK membership of the scheme. [UIN HL10197]

Viscount Camrose: The Government has made no assessment of the number of research scientists leaving the UK.

The Government's Horizon Europe Guarantee scheme maintained a lifeline for UK researchers and businesses by guaranteeing the funding of bids into the Horizon Europe programme, meaning no UK researchers have been left out of pocket, nor needed to leave the UK. The Guarantee scheme has issued over 2,500 grant offers worth £1.35 billion to the end of August 2023.

Sector News

Impact of work on students' lives and studies – NUS survey

On Monday 25 September, the National Union of Students (NUS) published new survey data revealing the impact of work on university students' lives and studies.

With a cost-of-living crisis continuing to bite and soaring inflation increasing prices and rents, more students than ever are being forced to take on paid job alongside their studies. The report finds that for a sizeable percentage this is having a negative impact on their studies and lives.

Of 1,367 full-time students in higher education surveyed:

- 69% work part time on top of their studies.
- Of those who work, 65% reported working more this year than last.
- Of those who work, almost 1 in 5 worked more than 20 hours per week alongside their studies.
- 34% of those who work say it has a somewhat negative impact on their studies. 4% say it has a very negative impact.
- Of those reporting a negative impact, tiredness, juggling commitments, and less time for studying are all reported.

NUS UK Vice President for Higher Education, Chloe Field, said: 'We are sleep-walking into a world where higher education is increasingly the preserve of the wealthy. Poorer students are forced, in effect, to attend university part-time. They must juggle their studies with paid work in order to simply eat and put a roof over their heads.'

You can [read more](#) here.

Students polled about prevalence of sexual misconduct in HE – OfS

On Monday 25 September, the Office for Students (OfS) launched a pilot survey on the prevalence of sexual misconduct within higher education providers in England.

Independent research organisation, IFF Research, has been commissioned to deliver the survey. Thirteen higher education providers have volunteered to participate. They range in size from large multi-faculty universities to specialist providers with smaller student cohorts.

All students at the participating providers will be invited to complete the survey and to answer questions about their experiences of sexual misconduct, how these experiences have affected their lives and studies, and their experiences of using the reporting mechanisms in their university.

Susan Lapworth, chief executive of the OfS, said: 'We know that sexual misconduct can have a devastating impact on the lives of students and damage their education. But we don't know enough about how often it happens, where it happens, and who it happens to. The launch of today's pilot prevalence survey is an important step in addressing these gaps in the evidence base and improving our understanding of the experiences of students across England.'

You can [read more](#) here.

New UCAS chief executive announced

On Tuesday 26 September, Dr Jo Saxton, the current Ofqual Chief Regulator of Qualifications was announced as the new chief executive of the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS).

Her appointment follows the departure of Clare Marchant in September 2023, after 6 years in the position, to take up the role of Vice Chancellor at the University of Gloucestershire.

Dr Saxton will join UCAS in January 2024. Sander Kristel, Chief Operating Officer at UCAS, will act as interim Chief Executive.

Dr Jo Saxton said: 'I am absolutely delighted to be taking up the opportunity to serve as UCAS' Chief Executive. In all my education roles I've seen what a powerful difference can be made to students of all ages when they are given the opportunities to achieve. UCAS is at the heart of this, supporting 1.5 million students every year to explore higher education, employment and apprenticeships.'

You can [read more](#) here.

#WeAreInternational campaign launch

On Tuesday 26 September, a second burst of the #WeAreInternational was launched with institutions and organisations from across the higher education sector sharing content developed with the Universities UK International toolkit.

The campaign aims to celebrate the social, civic, and cultural value that international students bring to towns and cities across the UK, as well as reverse the decline in how welcoming a study destination the UK is perceived to be by prospective international students.

As part of the launch, the first episode of the #WeAreInternational docu-series was published which follows the experiences of international students in the UK.

You can [read more](#) here and [access the toolkit](#) here.

Strategies to improve the supply of clinical staff to the NHS – Nuffield Trust

On Thursday 28 September, the Nuffield Trust published a report examining the scale of losses caused by clinical staff dropping out of training and opting out of careers in the NHS.

The Nuffield Trust's calculations draw on over 190,000 student records and represent the most comprehensive look to date at attrition rates across the clinical career pathway – in training, post qualification and into the first few years of work.

It concludes that loans forgiveness should be immediately made available to the 28,000 nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals (AHPs) joining eligible public services each year. Such a scheme would gradually write off outstanding student debt - currently averaging around £48,000 per nurse - reducing it by 30% after three years of service, 70% after seven years and writing it off completely after ten years, in recognition of workers' contribution to public services.

This proposal is outlined in detail in an accompanying paper jointly authored by Dr Billy Palmer of the Nuffield Trust, Dr Gavan Conlon of London Economics and Dr John Cater CBE, Vice-Chancellor of Edge Hill University.

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

Degree apprenticeship funding competition

On Thursday 28 September, the Office for Students (OfS) launched a funding competition to boost the capacity and equality of opportunity within degree apprenticeship provision in higher education.

The funding competition aims to:

- Expand course provision at higher education providers already offering Level 6 degree apprenticeships.
- Increase the number of students on Level 6 degree apprenticeships.
- Expand course provision at higher education providers who are new to offering Level 6 degree apprenticeships.
- Increase equality of opportunity within Level 6 degree apprenticeships.

The OfS will distribute up to £40 million through a competitive bidding exercise, which is now open for applications from OfS-registered higher education providers. The funding competitions will occur in three waves, with the deadline for first wave bids closing on 20 November 2023.

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, said: 'This extra £40 million will allow even more people to benefit, and I am delighted that the OfS has asked universities and colleges to show how their projects will create more opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as part of their bids for this funding.'

You can [read the guidance on how to submit bids](#) here.

Student mental health report – King's College London

On Thursday 28 September, King's College London and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) published data that found a growing share of undergraduate students were experiencing mental health difficulties.

The analysis found a significant part of the increase occurred in the last 12 months, a period during which the cost-of-living crisis intensified. However, the general upwards trend in mental health problems predates both the rise in inflation and the Covid-19 pandemic, the researchers say, indicating other factors are likely also at play.

Dr Omar Khan, chief executive officer of the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), said: 'This report highlights the persistent and widespread mental health challenges faced by students. While Covid and the cost of living crisis have clearly exacerbated such challenges, the upward trend is not new. We're working with the higher education sector to better understand what works to improve mental health outcomes for all students.'

You can [read more](#) here.

Teaching Excellence Framework results

On Thursday 28 September, the Office for Students (OfS) announced 46 universities and colleges had been awarded Gold ratings in the latest Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise.

The ratings, which are awarded by a TEF panel of independent academic experts and student representatives, are designed to identify excellent undergraduate teaching and student outcomes and help prospective students to choose their courses.

For the first time, each higher education provider has been awarded a rating for each 'aspect' of the TEF: the student experience and student outcomes. This gives students more information about where the panel found excellent performance for each university and college.

In total 73 universities and colleges were awarded Gold for at least one aspect. The results for providers who have chosen to appeal the initial panel judgement are pending.

Of the Gold ratings awarded:

- Ten are for low entry tariff providers. A further seven low tariff providers have been awarded a Gold aspect.
- Seven are for medium entry tariff providers. A further five have been awarded a Gold aspect.
- Ten are for high entry tariff providers. A further eight have been awarded a Gold aspect.
- Nine are for specialist providers in creative arts subjects.

- Three are for specialist providers in other subjects. A further three have been awarded a Gold aspect.

Commenting, Susan Lapworth, chief executive of the OfS, said: 'This is a moment for celebration of the very best of higher education in England. The TEF ratings we've published today clearly demonstrate the excellence on display in universities and colleges. Institutions right across the sector, and right around the country, have demonstrated that they deliver an outstanding student experience and outcomes.'

Professor Dame Sally Mapstone DBE FRSE, UUK President and Principle and Vice Chancellor of St Andrews University, said: 'These awards are a testament to the hard work and commitment of staff, as well as providing a helpful marker, to inform student choice and to highlight to universities where they can make further improvements. The university sector is committed to delivering high quality higher education, and supports regulation that can help it achieve this.'

You can [view the full results](#) here and [read a UUK explainer article](#) here.

Let's Get Technical – University Alliance policy briefing

On Thursday 28 September, University Alliance published a new policy briefing outlining five policy goals for the next UK government, with a set of policy suggestions to help deliver each goal.

The goals highlight how University Alliance, its members and its partners in industry can support the government in addressing some of the big challenges facing the country, as well as some of the big challenges facing the higher education sector.

In the briefing, University Alliance calls on the next government to:

1. Develop a long-term post-18 education and skills strategy.
2. Support innovative regions and SMEs across the UK.
3. Embed universities in NHS and social care workforce planning.
4. Reform the funding and regulation of degree apprenticeships.
5. Address financial shortfalls for students and universities.

Vanessa Wilson, CEO of University Alliance said: 'Alliance universities are delivering quality research and innovation, educating our NHS workforce, and equipping

graduates with the high-level skills that employers need. To truly capitalise on these strengths, we have proposed a series of policy changes to help us support long-term economic growth and deliver the pipeline of high-skills the country will need in the future.'

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

Early-in-year student withdrawal notification – Student Loans Company

On Thursday 28 September, the Student Loans Company (SLC) published statistics on the number of notifications of student withdrawals for the academic year 2018/19 to 2022/23. This applies to England, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

The SLC figures compared the number of students withdrawing from university over five academic years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

- In 2019-20, a total of 29,630 withdrew.
- In 2020-21, a total of 31,279 withdrew.
- In 2021-22, a total of 39,405 withdrew.

You can [view the full data release](#) here.