

Political Affairs Digest

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28 October – 1 November 2024

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill – HoC committee stage

On Tuesday 29 October, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill committee heard evidence from a range of stakeholders. Gary Stephen, Head of Security at the University of Glasgow, gave evidence on behalf of the Association of University Chief Security Officers executive group.

Tim Roca MP (Labour) asked what his view was on the Security Industry Authority (SIA) being designated as the regulator, given there are already many regulators operating in the higher education sector. Gary Stephen said that, while he was aware of SIA having a poor reputation in some parts of the security industry, the creation of a separate entity within SIA to manage the enforcement of the legislation was “logical and practical”.

Chris Murray MP (Labour) asked what the Bill would look like on the ground in the higher education sector. Gary Stephen said the majority of higher education institutions will fall into the enhanced tier with public protection measures. He said he “strongly believe[s] that most of [his] peers have significant experience in dealing with counter-terrorism risk assessments and security plans”, though not all organisations have “an experienced security professional to manage events on campus”. He stressed it will be important for Vice-Chancellors and Chief Operating Officers (COOs) to be aware of their obligations under the new legislation.

Kirith Entwistle MP (Labour) asked if the Bill makes it clear where liabilities lie between premises owners and event organisers. Gary Stephen said it will be important “there is a clear understanding between the organisation and the event organiser about who exactly is responsible for what” through having the correct risk assessments and security plans.

Tim Roca MP (Labour) asked what conversations he has had with student unions to ensure they are aware of this legislation, given many run their own venues. Gary Stephen said that many organisations with a responsibility for large venues that are intertwined with university towns – sports clubs, nightclubs, student unions, theatres – have been looking to universities for guidance. He pointed out that most higher education institutions own buildings and lease them out to smaller organisations. He expressed that he believes “the original standard tier threshold of 100 people would be more beneficial for the Bill” as it would bring more smaller venues into scope and make them prepared to deal with incidents.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#).

Renters Rights Bill – HoC committee stage

On Tuesday 29 October, MPs debated amendments to the Renters' Rights Bill.

The Shadow Parliamentary Under Secretary for Housing, Communities and Local Government, David Simmonds MP, proposed amendments which would ensure the same notice period for evicting students living in house in multiple occupation (HMOs) and purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA). The bill currently provides for four months' notice for students living in HMOs while the notice period for PBSA is two weeks. The Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP explained that the new ground for possession introduced in the Bill allows a limited carve-out which will ensure that non-typical students can enjoy the benefits of the new tenancy system, as well as typical students, within the limited confines of that ground for possession. He noted that there is no evidence to suggest that tenants overstay their tenancies en-masse and that a limited carve-out provides what is needed to maintain the unique business model in the student sector. He said the government will reject the proposed amendments on the basis that there is no place for fixed terms in the new tenancy regime that the Bill introduces. He said that as a point of principle, the Government will not deny any type of tenant, including full-time students, the rights and protections afforded to them under the new tenancy system the Bill introduces.

Gideon Amos MP (Liberal Democrat) tabled amendments that would reduce the notice period for the new student ground for possession from four months to two weeks. He said this would align with the two weeks' notice that the Bill provides that students would have in purpose-built student accommodation. He also encouraged the government to consider the benefits to students of reducing their tenancies from 12 to 10 months.

The Minister explained that the purpose of the student ground is to try to balance security of tenure with the need to preserve the annual cycle of typical student tenancies. He argued that Gideon Amos' amendments do not assist the ground in that purpose.

In concluding, the Minister highlighted that the new ground for possessions will allow landlords renting to students in HMOs to seek possession ahead of each academic year. There will be conditions on this, including the requirement for landlords to give prior written notice. He said that the ground will only apply to HMOs where all of the tenants on a particular tenancy agreement are full-time students. While this will cover the majority of the student market, he noted that it is not possible to cover every circumstance without undermining the security of tenure that some

households—such as families with children —need. The Minister also highlighted that the government is considering how to address the issue of landlords demanding extortionate rents in advance, something which several MPs have raised concerns about in relation to student lets.

The Bill committee is scheduled to report by Thursday 28 November.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#).

You can [read Universities UK's evidence submission](#).

Budget Statement

On Wednesday 30 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP, delivered the Budget Statement in the House of Commons.

Relevant announcements for the higher education sector were:

General taxation and pay

- From April 2025 the National Living Wage will rise to £12.21 an hour for over-21s, a rise of 6.7%. The minimum wage for 18 to 20-year olds and apprentices will also rise from April to £10 and £7.55 an hour respectively.
- Employers' National Insurance contributions will rise by 1.2%, to 15% from April 2025. The threshold at which employers pay NI will be reduced threshold from £9,100 to £5,000. These measures will raise £25 billion per year by the end of the forecast period.
- There will be an increase in the employment allowance from £5,000 to £10,500 meaning 856,000 employers will not pay any national insurance this year.

Department for Education

- The Department for Education's (DfE) settlement means resource spending on the education system in England will increase by £11.2 billion from 2023-24 levels by 2025-26, a 3.5% real terms increase.
- £6.7 billion of capital funding will be provided in 2025-26 for education in England, a real terms increase of 19% from 2024-25. Most of this will go to schools, however £950 million has been allocated to 'skills capital', which includes an additional £300 million to further education in England.

- The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will be launched in September 2026, for courses starting from January 2027, a year delay. This will amount to an additional £10 million each year in 2027-28, 2028-29 and 2029-30.
- An additional £2 million will be spent next year on Holocaust remembrance and education.
- £40 million will be spent to help deliver new foundation and shorter apprenticeships in key sectors, as part of initial steps towards a reformed Growth and Skills Levy.

Research, Development and Innovation

- R&D investment levels are protected with £20.4 billion allocated in 2025-26. DSIT has £13.9 billion to invest in R&D in 2025-26, including at least £6.1 billion of support for core research (which covers for these purposes Research England, Research Council, UKRI talent, UKRI international subscriptions, and National Academies funding).
- An uplift to DSIT's budget covers the costs associated with Horizon, Copernicus, and the Guarantee.
- At least £25 million is committed in 2025-26 to launch a multi-year R&D Missions Programme, with future phases to be decided on at the Spending Review.
- Support for spinouts and research commercialisation activity, including £40 million of funding over five years for the Proof of Concept (POC) fund, and wider improvement to support for researchers.
- Extension of the Innovation Accelerators programme to continue supporting high-potential innovation clusters in Glasgow City Region, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.
- Funding for some of the growth-driving sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy, including £975 million for the aerospace sector over 5 years, over £2 billion over 5 years to support the automotive sector, and up to £520 million for a new Life Sciences Innovative Manufacturing Fund.

Other relevant announcements

Local Growth

- For the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, there will be a transitional arrangement for a further year with a reduced level of funding of £900 million, in advance of wider funding reforms to support local growth.

- Funding for the Investment Zones and Freeports programmes UK-wide was confirmed, including the approval of the East Midlands Investment Zone to support advanced manufacturing and green industries.
- Government will proceed with City and Growth Deals in Northern Ireland for the Mid South-West and Causeway Coast and Glens, and for Argyll and Bute in Scotland.

Mental health

- £26 million to open new mental health crisis centres, reducing pressure on A&E services.

Universities UK's full statement on Autumn Budget:

“Universities understand the difficult decisions facing the Chancellor for this budget, and so to see the transformative power of higher education recognised, both in the commitment to research funding, and to life long education, was heartening.”

“But we cannot stop there. With recent analysis highlighting the £14 return for every pound spent on higher education, we must go further in supporting universities in order to drive economic growth. Our sector is already adapting to an increasing need for flexible and life-long learning, as well as educating the estimated 11 million more graduates we will need by 2035. But as some of the largest employers in the country, squeezed university finances will be made even more precarious by the estimated £372 million increase in national insurance contributions announced today, and the sector cannot address this alone.”

“We hope that this budget marks the beginning of a new conversation on university funding, and we now ask government to take further action urgently to ensure our world-leading sector can continue to be a national engine for opportunity and growth.”

Responding to today's Budget, Raj Jethwa, UCEA Chief Executive said:

“Today's Budget amplifies the significant funding challenges facing HE institutions. The 1.2 percentage point increase in employer National Insurance (NI), together with lowering the threshold at which employers start to pay NI, will add around £372m to the sector's pay bill – equivalent to 2.1%. This comes on top of substantial increases in employer pension contributions for very many HE institutions in the Teachers' Pension Scheme earlier this year, falling student numbers and stagnant fee income. HE institutions will now be left with difficult decisions on how they can balance their budgets.”

“The important announcement regarding the National Living Wage reinforces the need to begin urgent work on the review of the pay spine. This is one of four areas of

work which we wish to carry out in partnership with the HE trade unions, together with action to make meaningful progress on contract types, workload and pay gaps.”

Responding to the Budget, University and College Union (UCU) general secretary Jo Grady said:

“Today's Budget is thin gruel for those working in universities. Employer national insurance rises will hit the sector hard when higher education is already on its knees. Universities are crying out for increased public funding to secure their future as Britain's last world-leading sector, yet the Chancellor failed to deliver. There will be no decade of national renewal if the government's approach to universities continues to be one of de facto disinvestment. This is not a matter of special pleading: a properly funded higher education sector is a foundation stone of economic growth.”

“Increases to the apprentice and national minimum wage are welcome; this will not only improve the lives of the lowest paid, but raise the bar for all workers and help grow the economy. Further education lecturers now also urgently need a pay rise. The £300m in additional funding must be used to match the 5.5% pay rise that schoolteachers received and help close the £9k pay gap. If pay doesn't rise, colleges will continue to haemorrhage staff and there will be no one left to train the workforce of tomorrow.”

Responding to the lack of higher education measures in the Budget Statement, Carl Cullinane, Director of Research and Policy at the Sutton Trust, said:

“The lack of clarity on future higher education funding is concerning. Many students are struggling with the rising cost of living, with over a quarter skipping meals to save on food costs. Student maintenance levels haven't increased with inflation for several years, increasing maintenance support and re-introducing the maintenance grant for students who need it is long-overdue.”

“The government has clearly identified the need to increase the national minimum wage due to cost of living pressures, so why does student maintenance remain inadequate?”

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#).

[House of Commons Paper \('Red Book'\)](#)

[Autumn Budget Policy Costings](#)

The contribution of science and technology to the UK economy – HoL debate

On Thursday 31 October, the ‘contribution of science and technology to the UK economy’ was debated in the House of Lords. The debate was tabled by Viscount Stansgate (Labour).

Viscount Stansgate highlighted the UK’s record in science and technology, citing the fact that the UK has 1% of the world’s population yet produces 16% of the most highly rated scientific papers. He said the UK needed to take advantage of its unique strengths and welcomed the renewed commitment to an industrial strategy.

The UK needed to maximise all available international co-operation, which he said was ‘key to the future.’ He noted that an expanded role in Framework Programme 10 needed to be prioritised, as well as a visa system that ‘attracts talent rather than deters it.’

Specifically on universities, he said the UK must not take universities for granted. The House was aware of financial sustainability in the sector, which he noted was a topic at a breakfast briefing Universities UK recently hosted.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat) noted the exceptional scientific and technological base in the UK but warned that it ‘cannot simply be assumed to continue despite batterings.’ She noted the ‘huge damage’ to the scientific and university sector caused by Brexit, the delays in Horizon Europe association, and the barriers to international students and researchers coming to the UK. She reiterated Viscount Stansgate’s concerns regarding the university sector and called for a more joined up approach from government.

The Lord Bishop of Newcastle focused her remarks on the growing science and technology in the North East. She noted that at the heart of the region were ‘five distinguished universities’ that had announced a new partnership, known as ‘Universities for North East England.’ She explained that this intended to strengthen collaboration, benefitting everyone who lives, works, and studies in the region. She highlighted partnerships between universities and businesses, referencing that spinouts from Newcastle University alone raised £40 million in investment in 2023. She concluded his remarks by welcoming the emphasis that the Budget placed on the sector through record levels of R&D investment.

Lord Mair (Crossbench) said the UK’s world-class, research-intensive universities were undoubtedly national assets. He highlighted the key roles of universities in education, training, and curiosity-driven research, as well as being ‘hugely important drivers of economic growth’, but warned that universities were in a precarious financial state.

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill (Conservative) described how the business model of universities did not work anymore. He cited the £5 billion funding gap in research and noted that the cross-subsidisation was vulnerable. It was vital that the government turned their attention to this.

Lord St John of Bletso (Crossbench) explained how the UK stood at a pivotal moment in its scientific and technology development. He said that the UK was currently failing to fully commercialise advantages in research excellence in top global universities. He also warned that many spin-outs had lost substantial equity to foreign interest, with UK universities retaining only 20% equity.

Lord Liddle (Labour) probed on the government's approach to building research bases outside the golden triangle and asked what help was given to universities outside the golden triangle to build on their strengths. On stimulating innovation and new enterprise, he asked what the government was doing to make spin-outs from universities more effective and to increase the number of them.

Lord Stevens of Birmingham (Crossbench) noted that there was no significant reference to universities in the Budget and no attempt to deal with the underlying funding pressures and cross-subsidies. He warned that this would create a 'slow and inexorable decline in the relative performance of UK science and research.' He particularly highlighted the issue of full economic cost of research.

Lord Taylor of Warwick (non-affiliated) highlighted the importance of skills but noted that the current visa system acted as a barrier for attracting international talent.

Lord Tarassenko (Crossbench) warned of the mounting evidence that an unintended consequence of the rise in the undergraduate tuition fees was a loss of home PhD students in STEM subjects. The spinout ecosystem that exists around research-intensive universities should also be nurtured further, not only with human capital but with finance to start new companies, scale them, and grow them.

Lord Rees of Ludlow (Crossbench) focused on the talent pipeline and ensuring the prospect of a scientific career was attractive for young people and research institutions are attractive to international talent. In this context, he noted the years of precarity and financial sacrifices facing researchers as well as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which he said was discouraging high-risk and long-term projects.

Baroness Neville-Jones (Conservative) and Baroness Donaghy (Labour) both cited concerns of financial sustainability in the higher education sector, although this was not the primary subject of their remarks.

Responding on behalf of the government, Lord Vallance of Balham, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation said 'science, technology, and engineering are fundamental to every aspect of modern government.' He noted that Growth was the

first mission of the government and the first mission of the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

On the Budget, the Minister celebrated the record level of £20.4 billion in public R&D spending and noted that they had a plan for 10-year funding for 'certain types of science activity.' He also highlighted the £40 million to support researchers spinning out from UK cutting-edge research into firms the future.

On skills, visas, and talent, the Minister agreed it was important that the UK got this right. He also noted that he was working very closely with the Department for Education to ensure that universities received the right support.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the debate](#).

Forthcoming business

Education – oral questions

On Monday 4 November from 2:30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Relevant tabled questions include:

- What steps she is taking to help ensure that young people have the necessary skills to gain employment. [James Asser MP, Labour]

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

Renters Rights Bill – HoC committee stage

On Tuesday 5 November at 9:25am and 2pm, the Renters Rights Bill will be debated at committee stage.

You can [read more](#) and [watch the first](#) and [second session](#).

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology – HoL Science and Technology Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 5 November from 2:15pm, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee will hear oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP.

Among the questions likely to be raised are:

- What are the Government's science and technology priorities?
- What are the Government's ambitions for the digital transformation of public services?
- How will DSIT help to prioritise key technologies and sectors in support of the industrial strategy?

- What opportunities are there for AI to be used in Government and more widely, and how will DSIT approach regulation for the sector?
- What is the impact of announcements at the Budget on R&D in the UK, and what is the plan for sustained funding of R&D in universities?

You can [find out more](#) and [watch the session](#).

November recess

On Wednesday 6 November, the House of Lords and House of Commons will rise for November recess. Both Houses will return on Monday 11 November.

You can [find out more about recess dates](#).

Written questions and statements

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Damian Hinds MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Written Statement of 26 July 2024 on Higher Education Regulation Update, HCWS26, when she plans to confirm her long term plans for the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. [UIN 9426]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: This government took the decision to pause the implementation of further parts of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act to ensure that it is workable in practice and that the impacts of the Act on providers, staff, students' unions and minority groups are fully considered.

The department is continuing to meet with a full range of stakeholders, including groups of academics supporting provisions of the Act, minority groups and unions representing staff and students. This will feed into decision making on the future of the Act and this government's longer-term policy on protecting freedom of speech across the higher education (HE) sector.

The department will confirm, as soon as possible, plans for the Act and long-term plans for continuing to secure freedom of speech in HE.

Turing Scheme

Alex Burghart MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will publish the most up-to-date figures for the (a) number of applications, (b) number of placements and (c) location of placements for the Turing Scheme. [UIN 9534]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The figures for the number of Turing Scheme applications and placements were recently published on GOV.UK and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-funding-and-assessment-outcomes-2024-to-2025>.

For the 2024/25 academic year, education providers and other eligible organisations from across the UK have been allocated over £105 million to send more than 43,000 students on study and work placements across the globe. Around 23,000 (53%) of these opportunities will be for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

More applications were successful this year than ever before, with significantly higher interest in the scheme from colleges and schools and more competitive, high quality applications overall.

The Turing Scheme received 755 applications, compared with 619 last year. 642 applications were successful, including 118 more schools than last year and 44 more further education providers, with participants expected to travel to over 160 destinations around the world.

With regard to the location of Turing Scheme placements, providers are currently in the process of replanning their placements following the announcement of finalised funding allocations. As such, the department is unable to currently confirm these details. However, it will publish further information on destinations in due course.

Universities: China

Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help counter the influence of the Chinese state in British universities. [UIN 9792]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The UK welcomes international partnerships and students, including from China, who make a very positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, our economy and society as a whole. However, the government will always protect its national security interests, human rights and values.

There are a set of measures that protect against undue foreign interference in our universities. These range from the Academic Technology Approval Scheme, which vets students and researchers seeking to study in sensitive areas, to the provisions of the Education Act 1986, which require HE providers to uphold freedom of speech within the law for staff, students and visiting speakers. In England, all registered providers must also uphold applicable public interest governance principles to meet the regulatory requirements of the Office for Students, including principles on academic freedom and accountability, such as operating openly and with integrity.

To support the HE sector to maximise the opportunities of international collaboration whilst managing the risks, the government offers practical advice through the National Protective Security Authority, the National Cyber Security Centre and the Research Collaboration and Advice Team. The department works alongside these partners and engages directly with the sector to increase their understanding of the risks and their ability to respond to them.

This government will take a consistent, long term and strategic approach to managing the UK's relations with China, rooted in UK and global interests. The department will

co-operate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must. We are contributing towards the government's audit of the UK's relationship with China as a bilateral and global actor, to improve our ability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Claire Coutinho MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will meet the senior Jewish academics who wrote to her on 11 August 2024 on the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. [UIN 9793]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: My noble Friend, the Minister for Skills Baroness Smith confirmed to the House of Lords on 10 October 2024 that she will meet with the Jewish academics who wrote to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education on 11 August. That meeting has now been arranged by her office.

Departmental officials and Minister Smith have met with over 40 individuals to discuss the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, including academics with concerns about constraints on freedom of speech and academic freedom, as well as representatives from minority groups. These meetings will inform decision making on the future of the Act.

Overseas Students

Baroness Barran (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the financial risk to universities as a result of volatility in international student numbers. [UIN HL1367]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England. The OfS is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the financial sustainability of HE providers in England to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the sustainability of the sector.

The OfS' most recent report, which was published in May 2024, is available in the attached document. In the report, the OfS stated that the HE financial model had become reliant on fee income from international students, with a particular vulnerability where recruitment is predominantly from a single country.

The department continues to work with the OfS and other relevant parties to understand the ongoing impacts and changing landscape of financial sustainability in the sector.

Pharmacy: Staff

Josh Newbury MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of qualified pharmacists working in (a) community pharmacy, (b) general practice, (c) hospitals and (d) mental health services. [UIN 10818]

Minister for Care, Stephen Kinnock MP: The Government will make sure the National Health Service has the staff it needs to be there for all of us when we need it and reform the way we deliver care, so more care is delivered in the community.

NHS England and the General Pharmaceutical Council have been working with education providers to increase pharmacy training places. Recent announcements include the establishment of new schools of pharmacy at Plymouth University, Teesside University, and the University of Leicester, which will improve training opportunities and build resilience across all pharmacy settings.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

John Hayes MP (Conservative): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has held recent discussions with (a) the Russell Group, (b) the University Alliance, (c) MillionPlus and (d) the 1994 Group on the bringing into force of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. [UIN 10044]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Department officials and my noble Friend, the Minister for Skills are continuing to engage with a wide range of stakeholders on the future of the Act.

These stakeholders include academics and others with concerns about constraints on freedom of speech and academic freedom, representatives of the higher education sector, including those from the Russell Group, the University Alliance and MillionPlus (aside from the 1994 Group, which the department understands dissolved in 2013), minority groups and unions.

Overseas Students: Finance

Luke Taylor MP (Liberal Democrats): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make a comparative assessment of the (a) tuition fee status and (b) student financing arrangements for students under the (i) Ukraine and (ii) Afghanistan humanitarian visa schemes and (iii) the British National (Overseas) visa scheme. [UIN 10191; Grouped Question: 10190]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Generally, to qualify for higher education (HE) student support and home fee status in England, a person must have settled status and have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for the three years preceding the first day of the first academic year of their course. There are exceptions to this for persons who have been granted international protection by the Home Office. This includes persons granted refugee status, humanitarian protection, or leave under one of the Afghan or Ukraine schemes.

The creation of a bespoke immigration route for Hong Kong British National (Overseas)'s (BN(O)) reflects the unique and unprecedented circumstances in Hong Kong and the UK's historic and moral commitment to BN(O) citizens. The BN(O) route is not a form of international protection and is not, therefore, comparable to the Afghan and Ukraine schemes. However, it remains open to a Hong Kong BN(O) to apply for refugee status or humanitarian protection should they believe they qualify.

There are no plans to extend HE student support and home fee status to Hong Kong BN(O)s before they are settled in the UK.

Overseas Students

Lord Lexden (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what data they have on the number of international students studying in English universities who attended English independent schools, and what assessment they have made of any potential loss of income for English universities as a result of levying VAT on independent school fees. [UIN HL1724]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The department does hold some information on the type of school attended by students prior to entering higher education in the UK. However, this is only mandatory for UK domiciled students and is optional for providers to complete for international students. Therefore, the information held by the department is of unreliable quality and Higher Education Statistics Agency publish this information for UK domiciled students only.

HM Treasury will publish a Tax Information and Impact Note that considers the impact of these tax changes at Budget on 30 October.

Students: Grants

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to re-introduce student maintenance grants; and if so, whether a student in receipt of a grant would also be eligible for a maintenance loan. [UIN HL1591; Grouped Question: HL1590]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The department recognises that UK higher education (HE) creates opportunity, is an engine for growth in our economy and supports local communities. We are determined that the HE funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students, and the government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university. We have already started reviewing options to deliver a more robust HE sector but it will take time to get it right.

We will be announcing further details on HE student finance for the 2025/26 academic year in due course.

Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Lord Lexden (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government how many international students are currently studying in English universities, and what is the total amount these pupils will pay in tuition fees this academic year. [UIN HL1723]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The Higher Education Statistics Agency is responsible for collecting and publishing data about UK higher education (HE), including on international student numbers and tuition fee income.

In the 2022/23 academic year there were 630,005 international students studying at English universities and other HE providers, generating a total tuition fee income of £10.1 billion.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

Baroness Barran (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the letter signed by over 600 academics and seven British Nobel laureates to the Secretary of State for Education calling for the implementation of the remaining provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. [UIN HL1704]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: I, as Minister for Skills, can confirm that I have considered the letter and the concerns raised in it. Officials and I have met with over 40 individuals to discuss the future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, including academics with concerns about constraints on freedom of speech and academic freedom. A number of these academics were signatories to the open letter sent to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education on 15 August 2024. This includes representatives from Academics for Academic Freedom, Committee for Academic Freedom and the London Universities Council for Academic Freedom. Officials have also met with representatives of nine sector mission groups, unions and representatives of minority groups.

This stakeholder engagement will feed into decision making on the future of the Act and this government's longer-term policy on protecting freedom of speech across the higher education sector.

Universities: Freedom of Expression

Baroness Barran (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the likely impact of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 on the prevalence of hate speech in universities. [UIN HL1661]

Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government fully supports peaceful protest and lawful free speech in universities. However, that does not extend to unlawful free speech, including that which incites hatred and violence, or which causes harassment.

One of the reasons the government has paused further implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 is because the higher education (HE) sector, minority groups and unions representing staff on campus have raised concerns about the Act, believing it to be disproportionate, burdensome and damaging to the welfare of students, and that fears of sanction could push providers to overlook minority groups' safety. All students, regardless of race or religion, should be free to focus on their studies rather than worry about their safety. By pausing further commencement of the Act in order to consider all options, the government is ensuring that HE remains a space for constructive dialogue and diverse opinions, rather than a battleground for ideological clashes.

Sector news

The Value of History in UK Higher Education and Society – Royal Historical Society briefing

On Monday 28 October, the Royal Historical Society published a briefing highlighting a growing divergence between the popularity of history—as a subject of study and public interest—and the security of historians within UK higher education.

The briefing summarises data and analysis, based on the Society’s daily engagement with historians. This includes the results of a recent RHS survey of its members who work as academic historians in the UK. These show that the extent and impact of cuts is far greater than the Society’s previous work suggests. The survey also confirms how negative change is concentrated in departments at post-92 universities.

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

New nurse numbers collapsing in every English region, as RCN warns Government’s 10 Year Plan at risk – RCN press release

On Monday 28 October, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) published a press release warning new analysis shows the number of people studying to become nurses has collapsed in every region in England, putting the government’s plan to rescue the NHS at risk.

Latest regional data from the university admissions service UCAS shows the number of people accepted onto nursing courses fell by up to 40% in parts of England between 2020 and 2023.

RCN General Secretary and Chief Executive Professor Nicola Ranger said:

“The prospect of huge debt and lack of financial support is putting off the nurses of the future, threatening to leave patients without the highly trained nursing professionals they desperately need. Nursing is an incredible career, but to fix a broken NHS, the government must fix a broken nurse education model.

“Across the NHS alone there are tens of thousands of vacancies and demand for services continues to rise. We desperately need more people to join the profession, but the reality is nursing numbers are going in the wrong direction.

“Ministers are right to want to modernise the NHS and shift care into the community, but to do that you must make nursing an attractive career once again. That means forgiving the tuition fee loans of those who commit to working in the health service and funding their living costs. Investment in nursing is always money well spent.”

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

Education Committee membership appointed – UK Parliament announcement

On Tuesday 29 October, the House of Commons formally appointed the membership of the Education Committee.

The following Members of Parliament were appointed:

Name	Party
Helen Hayes MP [Chair]	Labour
Jess Asato MP	Labour
Sureena Brackenridge MP	Labour
Dr Caroline Johnson MP	Conservative
Amanda Martin MP	Labour
Darren Paffey MP	Labour
Manuela Perteghella MP	Liberal Democrats
Mark Sewards MP	Labour
Patrick Spencer MP	Conservative
Marie Tidball MP	Labour
Caroline Voaden	Liberal Democrats

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

Science, Innovation and Technology Committee membership appointed – UK Parliament announcement

On Tuesday 29 October, the House of Commons formally appointed the membership of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee.

The following Members of Parliament were appointed:

Name	Party
Chi Onwurah MP [Chair]	Labour
Emily Darlington MP	Labour
George Freeman MP	Conservative
Dr Allison Gardner MP	Labour
Tom Gordon MP	Liberal Democrat
Kit Malthouse MP	Conservative
Steve Race MP	Labour
Josh Simons MP	Labour
Dr Lauren Sullivan MP	Labour
Adam Thompson MP	Labour
Martin Wrigley MP	Liberal Democrat

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

Supporting care experienced students: A handbook for professionals working in higher education – Children’s Commissioner handbook

On Tuesday 29 October, the Children’s Commissioner published a handbook to help professionals working in higher education institutions recognise the challenges faced

by care experienced students and encourage them to embed policies which would help to improve their lives.

The handbook aims to provide professionals working in all types of higher education institution, including smaller provisions and distance learning, with ideas to improve their offer to care experienced students over time.

You can [read the full handbook](#).

Government backs UK R&D with record £20.4 billion investment at Autumn Budget – DSIT press release

On Thursday 31 October, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) published a press release highlighting the Autumn Budget's support for R&D.

The press release highlights:

- £20.4 billion in investment for UK R&D to drive economic growth, including fully funding association to Horizon Europe research programme
- Up to £520 million Life Sciences Fund to unlock £1.8 billion in private investment, advance health resilience and create high-quality jobs across the country
- New R&D investments to power the UK's national missions, with regional innovation accelerators supporting growth across the country

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