Political Affairs Digest

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

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Parliamentary business

UK Research and Innovation – HoL Science and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On 14 July, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee questioned Professor Sir Ian Chapman, Chief Executive of UK Research and Innovation, about UKRI's new five-year strategy, grant reform, higher education sustainability, regional investment and pressures on the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

Sir Ian said UKRI would place greater emphasis on measurable outcomes across its three central objectives: advancing knowledge, improving lives and driving economic growth. UKRI has published performance indicators alongside the strategy and is developing a new version of Gateway to Research to provide greater transparency about its funding portfolio. He also argued that UKRI should move beyond transactional grant-making towards more strategic partnerships with universities, investors and other organisations.

On grant funding, Sir Ian said the current median time from application to award was 189 days and confirmed an ambition to reduce this by more than half. UKRI is testing reforms including distributed peer review, desk rejection and the use of AI, while considering fewer and larger grants, greater staff triage and more programme-led commissioning. He acknowledged that the current peer-review system was not fit for purpose and that the growth of AI-generated applications would increase pressures. UKRI's overall award rate was approximately 20%, although this varied between research councils.

Baroness Willis of Summertown raised the effect of university and departmental closures on national research capacity. Sir Ian said responsibility for the sustainability of higher education ultimately sat across government, although individual research councils had a duty to monitor the health of disciplines. He said coordination between UKRI, DSIT and DfE was improving but that further action was needed.

The Committee also questioned UKRI's handling of financial pressures at the STFC. Sir Ian said UKRI had redirected an additional £135 million from other research councils over three years to protect major facilities and place the council on a more sustainable footing. He rejected suggestions that political considerations or a deliberate shift from discovery to applied research had driven the decision, but accepted that UKRI could have communicated the situation more clearly.

On regional growth, Sir Ian said UKRI had deliberately diversified the geographical distribution of funding, with every region outside London and the greater South East receiving a larger percentage increase during the previous Spending Review period. He highlighted the £500 million Local Innovation Partnerships Fund and said UKRI was aligned with the incoming government's devolution agenda. He also confirmed a growing focus on commercialisation, with Innovate UK moving from funding individual projects towards supporting companies and coordinating more closely with the British Business Bank, National Wealth Fund and other public investment bodies.

You can watch the full session.

The work of Innovate UK and the Regulatory Innovation Office – HoC Science, Innovation and Technology Committee oral evidence session

The session examined how the UK can improve the commercialisation and diffusion of innovation. The first panel focused on Innovate UK's new strategy; the second considered the work of the Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO), chaired by Lord Willetts. The committee broadly welcomed the direction of travel but repeatedly challenged both organisations over the absence of sufficiently clear metrics, delivery plans and regional accountability.

Innovate UK

The Executive Chair said Innovate UK was shifting from simply "funding projects" to supporting companies throughout their development. Its central purpose would be to connect the UK's research base with private capital and help turn breakthrough ideas into internationally competitive industries.

Innovate UK will concentrate approximately 80% of its activity on areas aligned with the Industrial Strategy. It intends to prioritise research-based and "deep-tech" innovation, interpreted broadly to include AI, quantum, engineering biology, space, advanced manufacturing and technology applications in sectors such as the creative industries. Businesses based primarily on service or conventional business-model innovation are less likely to be prioritised.

The organisation has a Spending Review allocation of approximately £4.4 billion over four years, or slightly more than £1 billion annually. Its programmes currently have a minimum target of attracting £3 of private investment for every £1 of public funding, although the Executive Chair reiterated an aspiration to reach a 10:1 ratio. The committee was concerned that Innovate UK could not yet provide sector-level baselines, international comparisons or detailed investment targets. Sector delivery plans are expected by the end of September 2026, with all programmes intended to be aligned with the new strategy by April 2027.

Research and universities

Universities and the wider research base were presented as the starting point of Innovate UK's model. The Executive Chair described the UK's research base as one of its strongest competitive advantages but argued that there remains a serious disconnect between excellent research and the private capital needed to commercialise it.

Innovate UK is therefore working more closely with UKRI's research councils so that research competitions and commercialisation support are designed together. Advanced manufacturing was cited as an example where EPSRC and Innovate UK activities were being adjusted to avoid creating "orphan projects" that receive research funding but have no subsequent pathway to development or market.

This creates a potentially stronger route for university spinouts and research-intensive businesses from:

- research funding;
- through Innovate UK grants and Catapult facilities;
- into government procurement, British Business Bank support and private investment.

Innovate UK also wants to act as a "tech due diligence engine", using its knowledge of companies and their engagement with the research and innovation system to give institutional investors greater confidence. The evidence suggested that some pension funds and other investors currently have limited awareness of UKRI, Innovate UK and the UK's underlying research strengths.

The quantum sector was presented as the model Innovate UK wants to replicate. The Executive Chair argued that substantial public investment had successfully created UK quantum companies, but that the country had initially failed to prepare UK investment and procurement routes for their later growth. This had contributed to at least one promising company being acquired by a US business because there was no competitive UK alternative. Innovate UK is now seeking to link research funding, scale-up investment and public procurement much earlier.

There was, however, little substantive discussion of the education and skills system. Although the "talent pipeline" was repeatedly identified as one of the foundations of successful sectors, the role of universities in producing researchers, technicians, entrepreneurs and specialist graduates was not explored in detail.

Regional innovation and university clusters

The committee strongly challenged Innovate UK over its approach to regional innovation. The Executive Chair said 62% of funding in the previous year had gone outside the Greater South East, including approximately 8% to the North East and 7% to the East Midlands. He agreed that Innovate UK should provide better geographical data.

However, Innovate UK's allocation model remains primarily programme- and company-led. Regional clusters are treated as an outcome of sectoral programmes rather than as a first-order organising principle. Committee members argued that this made it difficult to demonstrate how public funding supports specific research and innovation clusters, including those based around universities.

Innovate UK committed to improving its understanding and publication of regional data, potentially as part of the autumn delivery plans. This is relevant to universities seeking recognition as anchor institutions within local innovation ecosystems: the committee clearly expects future funding decisions to be accompanied by better evidence on regional research strengths, company formation, private investment and cluster performance.

Catapults and translational infrastructure

Innovate UK is reviewing whether it has the right mix of Catapults and whether they are properly aligned with the Industrial Strategy. Catapults account for roughly one-third of Innovate UK's annual expenditure.

The Executive Chair acknowledged considerable variation in Catapult performance. Some work effectively with major companies and early-stage projects, but support for companies in the middle of the scale-up journey was described as weaker. Innovate UK wants greater use of Catapult equipment, facilities and expertise by growth companies.

The review may also consider whether Catapult activities are located in the right places. Examples of geographically embedded infrastructure included advanced manufacturing in Sheffield, semiconductors in Newport, offshore renewable energy in Blyth and AI computing infrastructure at the Hartree Centre.

The evidence was less clear about the direct role of Catapults in attracting finance or opening public procurement. The Executive Chair ultimately argued that these should be coordinated centrally by Innovate UK rather than duplicated across each Catapult. Catapults would contribute evidence of technological credibility, while Innovate UK would connect cohorts of companies to investors and government customers.

Diversity and research priorities

The committee highlighted that Innovate UK applicants remain disproportionately male and white and are unlikely to report a disability. Innovate UK intends to embed diversity and regional inclusion into programme design rather than relying solely on separate initiatives.

Importantly for universities and research councils, the committee also questioned whether the subjects supported were sufficiently diverse, citing the comparative underfunding of conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis and chronic urinary tract infections. Innovate UK said it was downstream of research funding decisions but accepted that commercialisation data should be fed back to the research councils where there appeared to be a mismatch between research activity, societal need and the companies emerging from the system.

The Executive Chair also confirmed that Innovate UK had agreed to defer some planned activity as part of a UKRI-wide response to financial pressures at STFC. The scale and practical effects of this were not set out but may merit monitoring because of the potential implications for Innovate UK programmes and research infrastructure.

Regulatory Innovation Office

Lord Willetts described RIO as a unit of slightly more than 30 officials within DSIT. It is not a statutory super-regulator and cannot direct other regulators. Instead, it works with regulators case by case, supported by ministerial pressure, small funding interventions and collaboration with DBT.

Its original priorities were:

- drones;
- AI in healthcare;
- engineering biology;
- space launch.

Robotics and the civil-defence interface, particularly autonomous systems operating across civil and military regulatory regimes, have since been added. Further priorities are expected to be agreed by ministers in autumn 2026.

RIO operates the approximately £8 million Regulators' Pioneer Fund and a £4 million AI capability fund. Lord Willetts also referred to a further £70 million to be deployed over the Spending Review period.

As with Innovate UK, the committee challenged the lack of consolidated and publicly available performance measures. Individual projects have targets, for example, halving approval times for novel foods, but RIO does not presently publish a comprehensive set of organisation-wide metrics.

You can watch the full session.

Lifelong Learning (Fee Limits) Regulations 2026 – House of Lords Grand Committee

On Wednesday 15 July, the House of Lords Grand Committee considered the **Lifelong Learning (Fee Limits) Regulations 2026** yesterday, the first of three statutory instruments required to implement the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) ahead of its introduction for courses and modules starting from January 2027. The regulations replace the current annual tuition fee cap with a credit-based fee limit system, allowing students to access tuition fee loans for individual modules as well as full qualifications while keeping the overall fee cap unchanged.

Opening the debate, **Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab)** described the LLE as "one of the most significant reforms to student finance in a generation", arguing it would create a more flexible funding system across Levels 4–6 that better supports adults to retrain and upskill throughout their working lives. She said the reforms would help bring further and higher education closer together, improve learner mobility, support the Government's growth and skills missions, and contribute to the ambition for two-thirds of young people to access higher-level learning by age 25. She confirmed that two further statutory instruments covering student support and loan repayments would follow.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Con) welcomed the regulations and the continuation of reforms originally recommended by the Augar Review, but argued that the real test would be whether the LLE led to a meaningful increase in adult participation rather than simply creating a new funding architecture. He questioned how the LLE would operate alongside the **Growth and Skills Levy**, particularly where workers need to retrain in response to AI, and asked whether the Government intended eventually to extend modular funding to **Level 7** qualifications. He also questioned the restriction limiting funded modules to those drawn from existing qualifications, arguing that greater flexibility would be needed to respond to rapidly changing employer demand. Lord Johnson further called for maintenance support for distance learners and asked how the Government would measure the success of the reforms over the next three to five years.

Baroness Wolf of Dulwich (CB) strongly welcomed the regulations and reflected on the original intentions of the Augar Review. She argued that the LLE should not be viewed as an additional policy sitting alongside the existing higher education system, but as a fundamental redesign of student finance intended to build flexibility throughout post-18 education. She highlighted the importance of removing the rigidity created by Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) rules and emphasised that success should be judged by whether flexible lifelong learning becomes part of the mainstream system rather than a niche offer. Baroness Wolf also raised concerns about **institutional incentives**, noting that universities facing financial pressures remain incentivised to recruit students onto traditional three- and four-year degrees. She questioned how Government would encourage mainstream institutions to embrace modular provision and asked about the forthcoming consultation on requiring institutions to offer alternatives to standard three-year degrees.

Lord Mohammed of Tinsley (LD) supported the principle of lifelong learning but argued that the technical reforms alone would not widen participation. He highlighted the financial barriers facing adult learners, including caring responsibilities, lost earnings and access to maintenance support, and stressed the need for stronger careers advice and employer engagement. He also focused on the pressures facing universities and colleges, arguing that institutions were being asked to redesign provision, develop modular courses and invest in new administrative systems while already under significant financial strain. He asked what assessment had been made of the impact on mature and disadvantaged learners, what support providers would receive to implement the reforms and how success would be measured beyond changes to the fee system.

The Earl of Effingham (Con) welcomed the regulations, arguing that removing financial barriers to modular learning would become increasingly important as labour market demands evolve. However, he questioned whether a credit-based system alone could ensure educational quality and sought reassurance that increased flexibility would not reduce opportunities for face-to-face teaching. He also asked how implementation would be monitored and how providers would be supported with the costs of transitioning to the new system.

Responding to the debate, **Baroness Smith** confirmed that the Government intended the LLE and **Growth and Skills Levy** to operate as complementary reforms, with shorter employer-funded courses sitting alongside broader higher education opportunities supported through the LLE. She said the Government was deliberately introducing the reforms incrementally, prioritising quality and learner outcomes over rapid expansion, while encouraging greater collaboration between higher and further education providers and employers. She confirmed that the LLE would initially remain focused on **Levels 4-6**, with existing postgraduate loan arrangements continuing for Master's and doctoral study. On maintenance support, she confirmed that eligibility would be expanded to part-time and technical courses requiring in-person attendance but not to distance learning.

A particularly relevant exchange for universities came when **Lord Willetts (Con)** intervened to ask how the LLE's emphasis on flexible, modular learning could be reconciled with the Office for Students' **B3 quality measures**, which currently treat non-continuation and non-completion as negative outcomes. He argued that, under a genuinely modular system, learners may legitimately leave and return to study at different points in their lives, meaning current regulatory metrics risk discouraging the very flexibility the LLE seeks to promote. Baroness Smith agreed that this was an important issue, acknowledging that the current regulatory framework is designed around traditional three-year degrees. She confirmed that the Government would work with the **Office for Students** to ensure regulation supports rather than acts against flexible learning as the LLE is implemented. This closely reflected concerns raised in UUK's briefing about ensuring that regulatory metrics distinguish between genuine poor outcomes and successful modular study.

The Minister also acknowledged concerns about implementation costs for providers, noting that while developing modular provision would involve upfront investment, institutions would have flexibility over whether to participate and could benefit strategically from new opportunities to attract learners. She reiterated the Government's commitment to improving quality through the Teaching Excellence Framework, linking future fee increases to quality improvements and strengthening regulation of large franchise providers. The regulations were agreed without division.

You can find the full transcript here.

Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment Debate

On 16 July, MPs took part in the Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate, with several contributions highlighting the role of universities in local economies, communities, research and regional growth.

Pam Cox MP (Labour) focused her contribution on the University of Essex and its decision to close its Southend campus. She said Southend had benefited significantly from a university presence and that the closure was already affecting residents, staff and students. She noted that the university had attributed the decision to the wider financial pressures facing higher education and would consolidate teaching in Colchester, where job losses were also expected.

Cox highlighted concerns raised by UCU and Unison about jobs, workloads and the long-term sustainability of universities. She welcomed UUK's **Future Universities** initiative, describing it as an urgent exploration of how the sector can better support jobs, innovation, communities and students. She said universities were central to the country's economic and social prosperity and should be high on the incoming Prime Minister's priorities. She added that the University of Essex supports thousands of jobs, attracts investment and enriches the area's cultural life.

Wendy Chamberlain MP (Liberal Democrat) raised the impact of cuts to the Science and Technology Facilities Council budget on the University of St Andrews' astronomy department. She argued that reducing research and development funding was the wrong approach and called for the decision to be reconsidered.

Adam Jogee MP (Labour) briefly highlighted local pride in Keele University and Newcastle College alongside the constituency's schools and other educational institutions.

Chris Kane MP (Labour) highlighted the University of Stirling's civic contribution, noting that university volunteers organise a weekly parkrun bringing hundreds of local people together.

You can read the full transcript.

Written questions and statements

Department for Education: Universities: Antisemitism

James McMurdock MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data she holds on the number of antisemitic incidents on university campuses in the academic year 2025/26. (15621) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The Community Security Trust (CST) collects and publishes data on antisemitic incidents, including those on university campuses.
The most recent CST data, set out in its Antisemitic Incidents Report 2025 published February 2026, recorded 78 university-related antisemitic incidents in 2025, a 41% drop from 133 in 2024, but still significantly above levels recorded before October 2023. CST will publish data for 2026 in due course.

Source

Department for Education: Special Educational Needs: Further Education

James McMurdock MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what measures are in place to provide support for SEND students in accessing further education. (15619) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) code of practice emphasises the importance of supporting young people with SEND to make a successful transition into further education (FE). Planning should begin early and involve the young person, their family, schools, colleges, and local authorities. The focus is on helping learners access and progress within FE by identifying their aspirations and ensuring appropriate support and reasonable adjustments are in place.
FE providers are required to use their best endeavours to meet learners' SEND needs, provide tailored support, and ensure equal access to learning opportunities. For learners with more complex needs, education, health and care plans can continue up to age 25, providing continuity of support through transition and participation in FE.

The government's 2026 SEND reform proposals aim to strengthen pathways into FE through earlier intervention, improved multi-agency working, enhanced mainstream provision and more consistent support, enabling young people with SEND to achieve positive post-16 outcomes.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: Admissions

Charlie Dewhirst MP (Bridlington and The Wolds) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether there is any guidance from (a) her Department and (b) the Office for Students on the use of POLAR3 and POLAR4 for university admissions by higher education providers. (15242) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department does not issue guidance to higher education (HE) providers on the use of Participation of Local Areas (POLAR)3 or POLAR4 in admissions decisions. Universities are autonomous institutions and are responsible for their own admissions policies and decisions.
The Office for Students (OfS) publishes information on area-based measures of higher education participation, including POLAR and TUNDRA. POLAR measures participation rates in higher education by local area, while TUNDRA Tracking Underrepresentation by Area (TUNDRA) uses linked individual-level data on state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to identify areas with lower rates of progression to higher education. The OfS recommends the use of TUNDRA where an area-based measure of young participation is needed, as it provides more precise targeting and improved consistency with other participation measures, although POLAR may still provide additional insights in some circumstances. HE providers remain responsible for determining whether and how such measures are used in admissions processes.

Source

EDM - London South Bank University industrial dispute (589)

That this House notes with concern the escalating industrial dispute between London South Bank University (LSBU) and University and College Union (UCU) over fire and rehire proposals to terminate the contracts of all academic staff and require them to compete in a redundancy selection process as part of a restructuring of roles; is concerned these proposals will establish a two-tier academic workforce, increase working time without a corresponding pay increase, and see new teaching and scholarship staff employed through a subsidiary company outside the national pay framework and without access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme; believes these proposals could have disproportionate equality impacts, particularly for women working in nursing and midwifery; regrets LSBU has declined to participate in ACAS talks to resolve this dispute, as suggested by UCU; recognises the essential contribution of LSBU staff to higher education and to the education of much of London's nursing workforce; expresses solidarity with UCU members who have already taken strike action in defence of their jobs, pay and working conditions; calls on LSBU to suspend these proposals, undertake a full equality impact assessment and engage in meaningful negotiations with recognised trade unions to achieve a negotiated settlement that protects staff, students and the university's long-term future; and further calls on the Government to work with the sector and unions to halt the growing use of redundancy threats and subsidiary companies across the higher education sector undermining national pay, pensions and employment standards, and to ensure a sustainable funding settlement for higher education.

Sponsors: John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Labour) (Primary Sponsor)

Source

Department for Education: Students: Part-time Education

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP (Slough) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions has she had with (a) Universities and (b) the Student Loans Company regarding (i) support and (ii) alternative arrangements available for students impacted by the misclassification of weekend-only courses by providers. (16505) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department is continuing to work closely with both the Student Loans Company (SLC) and providers on this issue.
To provide clarity for affected students, we instructed the SLC to recover loan payments through the student loan system in line with existing loan terms and to pause any action on recovery of targeted grant funding until at least September while we review the position.
Around 85% of affected students have now transferred to an eligible in-attendance model and are receiving the maintenance support they are entitled to.
We have been clear that providers should support affected students, including through appropriate advice and guidance, hardship support, and signposting to relevant sources of information during this period.

Source

Home Office: Immigration Controls: Gaza

Wendy Chamberlain MP (North East Fife) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to written statement UIN HCWS144, what plans her Department has to help support the dependents of eligible students from Gaza travelling to UK universities. (16543) (Home Office)

Mike Tapp MP (Dover and Deal) (Lab): On 24 June the Government confirmed its support for high achieving students from Gaza to take up fully funded scholarships at UK universities for the 2026/27 academic year.
This will build on support already provided by the government in the current academic year, through which we have enabled over 100 students from Gaza to pursue their studies. The Government will continue to prioritise students who hold fully funded and verifiable scholarships, and who meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules.
Departures from Gaza remain highly complex and are dependent on factors outside the UK Government's control. However, we will continue to work with relevant authorities to facilitate departures and onward travel in a third country to ensure the students, and the dependants of those students who meet the relevant requirements of the Immigration Rules, can leave Gaza and undertake biometric checks before coming to the UK.

Source

Home Office: Immigration Controls: Gaza

Wendy Chamberlain MP (North East Fife) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether steps will be taken to support students from Gaza currently studying at UK universities to remain temporarily in the UK following graduation further to the eighteen months allowed under the UK Graduate visa. (16544) (Home Office)

Mike Tapp MP (Dover and Deal) (Lab): Upon successful completion of their course of study, students may be eligible to apply for a Graduate visa, which allows them to remain in the UK for up to 2 years (or 3 years for PhD graduates). For those who submit their Graduate application on or after 1 January 2027, the permitted stay will be up to 18 months (or 3 years for PhD graduates).
Should students wish to remain in the UK beyond this time, they can apply for further permission to stay under existing routes within the Immigration Rules, as with other international students.

Source

Department for Education: Debts Written Off: Students

Lord Hain (Lab): To ask His Majesty's Government what is their latest estimate of the total public liability for student debt written off by the Treasury. (HL1481) (Department for Education)

Baroness Smith of Malvern: The department estimates the government subsidy on student loans issued in any particular financial year via the Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge. This is calculated as the present value of student loan outlay less expected future repayments, in accordance with relevant International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and guidance from HMT's Financial Reporting Manual (FReM). In financial year 2024-25, the RAB charge was £6.2 billion, or 29.6% of the £20.7 billion of student loans issued.

Under the ONS's methodology for measuring the impact of student loans, what counts to public sector net borrowing and public sector net financial liabilities is the transfer less modified interest – i.e. the portion of the student loan that will not be repaid, less the interest accruing on the portion that will. The forecast transfer portion in 2025-26 for full-time Plan 5 loans is 31%.

Source

Department for Education: Loans: Students

Lord Hain (Lab): To ask His Majesty's Government whether University student fee loans are classified as public sector borrowing. (HL1480) (Department for Education)

Baroness Smith of Malvern: The fiscal impact of student loans is measured by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The statistics the ONS publishes are independent, following methodologies designed in consultation with the international statistical community and in line with the European System of Accounts (ESA). The ONS treat student loans partly as loans, since some portion will be repaid, and partly as capital transfers, since some will not. This treatment applies both to tuition fee loans and maintenance loans. Under this partitioned loan-transfer approach, what counts to public sector net borrowing and public sector net financial liabilities is the transfer, less modified interest – the interest accruing on the loan portion.

Source

Home Office: Visas: Afghanistan

Baroness Gohir (C/B): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the suspension of student visas on Afghan women who are prohibited by the Taliban from accessing higher education in Afghanistan; and whether they will introduce an exemption for women offered places at UK universities. (HL1478) (Home Office)

Lord Hanson of Flint (Lab): The Government has no current plans to introduce exceptions to the visa brake. However, the government has recently announced the development of new safe and legal routes to offer sanctuary to those fleeing war and persecution from around the world. We will ensure that these routes will be sustainable, well-managed and in line with UK capacity to support new refugees. It is expected that the student refugee route will be open for applications from Autumn 2026, with the first students arriving in Autumn 2027.

The visa brake is being kept under regular review. It is not intended to be permanent and will be released once the government considers it appropriate to do so.

Grouped Questions: HL1477

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Horizon Europe

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, further to the policy paper entitled Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes Minutes: 15 December 2025, published on 29 June 2026, what are the barriers to UK participation in Horizon in respect of (a) InvestEU and (b) the European Competitiveness Fund. (17741) (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

Kanishka Narayan MP (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): Whilst the UK has been successful in overturning all exclusions that were subject to assessment by the Commission, there remain a small number of exclusions, including in areas that are delivered through InvestEU, to which the UK is not associated.
The UK is following the Commission proposal for the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) with interest, including on the scope of associated country participation and implications for associated third country participation in Horizon Europe’s successor (FP10)

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Science and Technology Facilities Council: Finance

Peter Fortune MP (Bromley and Biggin Hill) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what discussions she has had with the Institute of Physics and the Royal Astronomical Society on reductions to Science and Technology Facilities Council programmes. (16733) (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

Kanishka Narayan MP (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has committed a record £58.5 billion investment in R&D over the next 4 years, including £38.6 billion for UKRI. STFC's core budget is being maintained, at £835 million in 2025/26 and £842 million in 2029/30. Applicant-led research grants will increase from £83 million in 2026/27 to £90 million in 2029/30.
UKRI and STFC have undertaken a detailed prioritisation exercise to manage cost pressures from rising energy, inflation, foreign exchange and ambitious commitments from the previous Spending Review. On 9 July, STFC set out the outcomes of this exercise and its plan for living within its budget while seeking to protect the capabilities that matter most to the UK's long-term scientific and international standing, and to the long-term health of UK physics. STFC will protect particle physics, astronomy and nuclear physics (PPAN) grant postdoctoral funding at 2025/26 levels, protecting around 400 postdoctoral researchers, as well as PhD studentships and fellowships. All major multidisciplinary facilities will remain operational and international subscriptions will be fully protected, safeguarding UK access to world-leading facilities and collaborations. STFC will also generate more external income through supporting a more entrepreneurial model. While some activities will be reduced or reprioritised, this plan protects the fundamentals on which university physics departments depend: a strong research talent pipeline, access to world-leading facilities and research infrastructure, and participation in leading international scientific collaborations. More broadly, UKRI is investing heavily in areas that benefit the wider physics community, including around £1.6 billion in AI, £1 billion in quantum, and £750 million toward a new national supercomputer.
UKRI and STFC engaged extensively with the research community to shape this plan, including through more than 10 engagement events, written input from 48 Project Leads, and more than 30 Science Board, Council and expert advisory panel meetings and advice, including assessment of impacts across STFC's portfolio, including PPAN, facilities and laboratories. This engagement included discussions with the Institute of Physics and Royal Astronomical Society, and Minister Vallance has corresponded with

both organisations in his capacity as Minister for Science, Innovation, Research and Nuclear.
More broadly, DSIT continues to work across government to understand developments across the higher education sector and their implications for research and development in universities. Through the reforms set out in the Post-16 White Paper, we are strengthening universities' long-term financial sustainability, to ensure the UK's R&D base continues to be world-leading and capable of delivering excellence, innovation and economic growth.

Grouped Questions: 16732

Source

Department for Work and Pensions: Apprentices

Mr Andrew Snowden MP (Fylde) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many of the proposed 50,000 new apprenticeships for young people have been allocated to (a) England, (b) each region and (c) each sector to date. (16134) (Department for Work and Pensions)

Andrew Western MP (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Skills is a devolved matter and the department is responsible for apprenticeships in England only.
This Government is transforming the apprenticeships levy into a new growth and skills levy in England. This is backed by £1 billion of additional investment which will support 50,000 more young people into apprenticeships across England, give employers greater flexibility to develop the workforce they need, and support the Industrial Strategy.
We are expanding opportunities for young people through: new foundation apprenticeships in hospitality and retail; launching a level 2 Administrative Assistant apprenticeship from August; and introducing a £2,000 hiring payment for non-levy paying employers (typically SMEs) that recruit 16-24-year-old apprentices.
We will also fully fund apprenticeship training for all eligible 16–24-year-olds at non-levy paying employer from August 2026 and launch a £140 million pilot, in conjunction with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, to better connect young people to local apprenticeship opportunities.

Source

Department for Work and Pensions: Apprentices: Investment

Dr Luke Evans MP (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the press notice entitled 50,000 more young people to benefit from apprenticeships as Government unveils new skills reforms to get Britain working, published in December 2025, if he will take steps to ensure comparable investment within non-mayoral strategic authorities for linking young people with employers for apprenticeship opportunities. (16082) (Department for Work and Pensions)

Andrew Western MP (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The government is investing £140 million over the current spending review period, to pilot, with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, new approaches to better connect young people aged 16-24, including those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), to local apprenticeship opportunities. Funding beyond this is subject to future spending review processes.

The new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) brokerage service pilots will enable us to test and learn from different local approaches as we build the evidence base for what works. MSAs are best placed to deliver these pilots due to their strategic oversight of local skills systems, established relationships with employers and training providers, and ability to operate at scale across functional economic areas.
We will announce further details about the pilots in due course, including which areas will take part. We expect the pilots to launch later this year, and we will share learning and best practise widely throughout the pilot.
More widely, to support our ambition of 50,000 more young people into apprenticeships, from August we are fully funding apprenticeship training for 16-24-year-olds with non-levy paying employers (typically SMEs), and from October we are introducing a new hiring payment of £2,000 for non-levy payers which take on 16-24 year old apprentices as new employees. This funding support is available to eligible employers across England.

Source

Department of Health and Social Care: Health: Research

Harpreet Uppal MP (Huddersfield) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of regional allocation of health research funding; and what steps he is taking to address differences in funding per head. (16767) (Department of Health and Social Care)

Preet Kaur Gill MP (Birmingham Edgbaston) (Lab): The Department funds health and care research via its research operational arm, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), across England. The Department is committed to ensuring that research is inclusive and representative of the population geographically and demographically. Inclusion is one of the top four priorities for the NIHR, reported against publicly in the NIHR Annual Report.
From November 2024 the Department made inclusion a condition of NIHR funding for all domestic research awards. All applicants must demonstrate how their research will address existing inequalities, including place-based inequalities in health and social care, and researchers will be held to account for delivering on their plans.
The Department does not allocate research funding on a per-head population basis. Funding decisions are made through open competition and peer review to ensure support for the highest-quality research. The NIHR's funding committees prioritise research that addresses the most important health and care evidence gaps, with strong potential for impact, and also consider scientific excellence and value for money.

The Department, through the NIHR, is taking action to ensure health research funding across England by targeting research in areas with significant health inequalities, encouraging applications from a wider geographical spread of institutions, and investing in research capacity in underserved regions. This includes establishing Commercial Research Delivery Centres (CRDC), Primary Care CRDCs, Health Determinants Research Collaborations, and support for new medical schools, alongside a Research Delivery Network (RDN) that operates across all regions in England. From April 2026, a new national RDN funding model for research delivery support aims to reduce regional variation in investment and expand opportunities to participate in research across all parts of the country.

Source

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Rented Housing: Landlords

Jayne Kirkham MP (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the change in the Renters' Rights Act from fixed term tenancies to rolling, periodic tenancies on student HMO landlords. (17583) (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)

Matthew Pennycook MP (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): My Department engaged extensively with the student sector when developing the Renters' Rights Act and its Impact Assessment received a green rating from the RPC.

We continue to monitor trends across the private rented sector and are conducting a robust evaluation of the impact of the Act. Evaluation reports will be published two and five years after implementation.

Source

Department for Education: Teachers: Workplace Pensions

Afzal Khan MP (Manchester Rusholme) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with representatives of the higher education sector on ensuring that universities retain appropriate institutional autonomy in relation to pension provision; and whether she is considering any changes to the regulatory framework governing participation in the Teachers' Pension Scheme by higher education institutions. (17396) (Department for Education)

Georgia Gould MP (Queen's Park and Maida Vale) (Lab): The primary objectives of public service pension valuations are to ensure schemes are affordable, sustainable, and fair to both taxpayers and workers. The government remains committed to these objectives.

The Teachers' Pension Scheme employer contribution rates will be 17.68 percent from April 2027 to March 2031. This rate was determined using a consistent and well-established methodology set by HM Treasury and informed by advice from the Government Actuary's Department.

The department recognises the importance of giving employers sufficient notice of contribution rate changes and will continue to engage with stakeholders throughout future valuation exercises to support effective financial planning. The next valuation is not due to complete until 2030 and will be based on future data and assumptions that are not yet available. It is too early to speculate on the potential outcome of the next valuation.

The department recognises that changes in employer contribution rates can affect the financial planning of participating higher education (HE) institutions and understands the importance of having timely clarity as they prepare for the implementation of any changes from April 2027. The valuation cycle provides employers with advance notice of changes, and a clear and stable contribution rate for the years covered. The department will continue to support transparency and predictability in future contribution rate setting.

HE providers, as autonomous institutions, are responsible for making their own business decisions in response to changes in Teachers' Pension Scheme employer contribution rates. As set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, the government continues to engage with HE providers and workforce representatives to better understand concerns relating to pension provision in the post-1992 HE sector, including affordability and sustainability.

Grouped Questions: 17394, 17395

Source

Department for Education: Schools: British Nationals Abroad

Luke Taylor MP (Sutton and Cheam) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to amend the British Schools Overseas standards to prohibit accredited schools from using non-disclosure agreements to prevent disclosure of harassment or discrimination; and whether the approved inspectorates will be required to assess compliance. (18250) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): British Schools Overseas schools must abide by the local laws of the host country. There are no current plans to amend the British Schools Overseas Standards.

Source

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Employment: Science

Kevin Bonavia MP (Stevenage) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, will she take steps to introduce economic incentives for people to work in the science industry. (17460) (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

Kanishka Narayan MP (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): The UK's science and research strengths are central to this Government's mission to deliver economic growth, raise productivity and improve living standards. To realise that ambition, the research and innovation system must attract, retain and support the very best talent. DSIT is investing over £5 billion in research talent over the Spending Review period, including funding for prestigious fellowships and studentships through UKRI and the National Academies, and the £54 million Global Talent Fund launched last summer to attract top researchers and their teams. DSIT has also recently launched a new voluntary Women in Research Charter which includes a headline commitment of a minimum standard on family leave for doctoral researchers, as well as commitments to enabling more flexible working, eliminating bias from grant and job application processes, and ensuring inclusive workplace cultures.

Source

Home Office: Visas: Students

James McMurdock MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether antisemitism on university campuses forms part of her Department's assessment when developing student visa policy. (18948) (Home Office)

Mike Tapp MP (Dover and Deal) (Lab): The Student visa route is designed to enable genuine international students to study at eligible UK education providers while maintaining the integrity of the immigration system.
When developing student immigration policy, the Home Office considers matters relevant to the effective operation and integrity of the immigration system, alongside the Government's wider migration objectives.
Licensed Student sponsors must act with integrity as education providers and assess whether prospective students meet the requirements of the route and are likely to comply with the conditions of their permission, including complying with the law.
Higher education providers are responsible for meeting their sponsor duties and managing their campuses and student communities. The Government is clear that antisemitism has no place in our society.

Source

Home Office: Visas: Skilled Workers

Steve Darling MP (Torbay) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans the Government has to provide full grandfathering or full transitional protection for Skilled Worker visa holders and their dependants who were already granted leave before any earned settlement rule change, by allowing them to apply for settlement under the 5-year qualifying period that applied when they entered or extended their visas. (17827) (Home Office)

Mike Tapp MP (Dover and Deal) (Lab): The government's proposals for settlement reform were set out in the Command Paper 'A Fairer Pathway to Settlement' (CP1448) and were the subject of a public consultation between 20 November 2025 and 12 February 2026.
We received over 200,000 responses from the public and organisations and are now considering all responses received. This will help inform the development of the final earned settlement model.
Once the final model has been decided, the Government will communicate the outcome publicly. This will also include both economic and equality impact assessments.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Finance

Lord Hain (Lab): To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to introduce a graduate tax to replace tuition fee loans that would not incur additional borrowing above the current level for university student finance. (HL1587) (Department for Education)

Baroness Smith of Malvern: The government has no plans to implement a graduate tax, but the current loans system has many of the features of one. Income-contingent student loans and grants are an equitable way of funding higher education, as individuals who benefit financially from higher-level study make a fair contribution towards its cost, while lower earners are protected.

Source

Sector news

International student levy technical detail - Department for Education

The government has published its response to the technical consultation on the design and delivery of the International Student Levy.

The consultation received 91 responses from respondents associated with higher education providers, companies or organisations, including representative bodies, student unions and individuals. Respondents sought clarification on the scope of the levy, its calculation and administration, and its application to different types of providers and students.

The government's response confirms and clarifies the operational design of the levy, in response to the key queries raised by respondents. The government is also announcing that the Office for Students (OfS) will run 2 trial delivery calculations based on student data from academic years 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028, which will be shared with providers to support their financial planning and enable the OfS to test its processes and draft guidance.

The response sets out a clear timetable for next steps, and the government will continue to work with the OfS and the sector ahead of the levy's introduction.

Alongside the consultation response, the government has published draft primary legislation for the levy. Subject to parliamentary approval, the levy will come into effect from 1 August 2028.

You can read the full announcement.

New Defence Universities Alliance brings together 35 UK universities

The Ministry of Defence has launched a new **Defence Universities Alliance**, bringing together 35 universities from across the UK to strengthen defence research, develop specialist skills and support the pipeline of graduates entering the defence sector. The founding members were selected from almost 100 applicants and will work with the Armed Forces and government on areas including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace engineering, advanced manufacturing and medical innovation.

The alliance forms part of the government's **£182 million defence skills package** and follows an £80 million investment in 2,500 defence-related student places across 24 universities and colleges. It is intended to connect academic research more closely with defence priorities, improve routes from study into employment and ensure that regions across the UK benefit from increased defence investment.

Please see the UUK statement following the launch of the Defence University Alliance (DUA):

Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive Universities UK:

"The UK is changing rapidly and so is what the country needs from its universities. By equipping students with the skills needed for the defence sector jobs of tomorrow and carrying out cutting edge research, universities have an integral role in our national security.

Universities are committed to backing the nation's security, with almost 100 applying to be part of the DUA.

The UK's defence and university sectors have a proud history of working in partnership to strengthen Britain's defence capability and keep communities safe.

We look forward to the new opportunities that the DUA will bring for scaling up strategic partnerships to develop future talent, research and innovation."

You can read the full announcement.

Barnsley Tech Town's £800,000 AI skills fund opens for applications - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has opened an **£800,000 AI Upskilling Challenge Fund** as part of the Barnsley Tech Town initiative. Organisations from across the UK can apply to develop tailored AI training for Barnsley residents, workers and businesses, particularly manufacturers, small businesses, older residents and people entering the labour market.

The government is seeking innovative programmes rather than existing off-the-shelf provision, with successful projects required to demonstrate how their approach could be scaled elsewhere in the UK. Findings will inform the government's wider ambition to equip **10 million workers with AI skills by 2030**, making the fund relevant to universities' work on adult learning, digital skills, employer partnerships and place-based economic growth.

Applications close on **12 August 2026**, with successful applicants expected to be announced in September. Programmes must be delivered to people and businesses in the Barnsley area, although applicants may be based anywhere in the UK.

You can read the full announcement.

UKRI publishes five-year research and innovation strategy

UK Research and Innovation has published a new five-year strategy setting out how it will deploy the government's **£38.6 billion research and innovation settlement**. The strategy prioritises AI, quantum technologies, clean energy, regional growth and innovation-led productivity, while committing to maintain support for curiosity-driven research.

By 2031, UKRI aims to support more than **20,000 new doctoral studentships**, strengthen place-based research and innovation partnerships and leverage at least £3 of private investment for every £1 of relevant public funding. It will also deliver elements of the UK Compute Roadmap, including a new national supercomputing service in Edinburgh from April 2028.

UKRI has committed to reducing grant-processing times by at least 50%, including through testing distributed peer review and greater use of data, digital systems and AI. The strategy is accompanied by a 2026–27 delivery plan setting out initial implementation measures.

The strategy will be significant for universities as it shapes UKRI funding priorities and the balance between strategic technologies, commercialisation, regional growth and investigator-led research. Sector responses broadly welcomed the continued commitment to discovery research and reduced bureaucracy, while highlighting the importance of long-term funding, international collaboration and recognition of the contribution made by disciplines across both STEM and the social sciences, humanities and arts.

You can read the full strategy.

UK Research and Innovation publishes 2025 to 2026 annual report

From new ways to treat aggressive cancers to replacing polluting plastics with plants, UKRI is advancing knowledge, improving lives and driving growth.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) has published its annual report and accounts for the 2025 to 2026 financial year, which looks at the range of research and innovation it has supported.

Highlights include:

- supporting the development of a promising new antibiotic that's effective against drug-resistant diseases, like MRSA
- investing in new solar cells that can use indoor light to produce electricity
- revealing 2,000 hidden galaxies, to better understand our Universe
- funding semiconductor innovation to produce more effective and cheaper electric vehicles and 5G communications
- investing in key industries, like Belfast firm Re-Vana Therapeutics, which has just signed a £744 million agreement with a major pharmaceutical firm

You can read the full announcement.

British Academy warns of declining academic capacity in strategically important subjects

New British Academy analysis shows a widespread decline in academic staffing across humanities, social sciences and arts subjects during 2024–25, with early-career and teaching posts particularly affected. Early-career staff numbers fell by nearly 20% in both the North East and East Midlands, while senior and professorial staffing remained broadly stable or increased.

The Academy warns that falling staff numbers, alongside emerging regional “cold spots” where access to SHAPE degree courses is shrinking, could weaken the UK’s pipeline of teaching and research expertise. Languages, English and Classics are among the subjects most affected, with potential consequences for capabilities including diplomacy, national security, tackling misinformation and the safe adoption of AI.

The British Academy called for a coordinated cross-government response and a long-term plan for the financial sustainability of universities, arguing that protecting teaching and research capacity is essential to regional prosperity and the delivery of the government’s industrial strategy.

You can read the full analysis.

Record number of applicants enter results period with university offers

New UCAS data shows a record **695,740 applicants** applied to UK undergraduate courses by the 30 June deadline, up 4.6% on last year. This included 344,760 UK 18-year-olds, a 5% increase, although the application rate remained broadly stable at 41.4% because of growth in the school-leaver population. Universities and colleges made 1.3 million offers to UK 18-year-olds, with 99% of those who applied by the January deadline receiving at least one offer.

Demand from mature UK applicants also recovered during the cycle, rising 1% to 87,180, although this remained the second-lowest level recorded in a decade. International undergraduate applicants increased by 7.1% to 148,350, including a 12% rise in applicants from China. UCAS cautioned that its data provides only a partial picture of international recruitment, as it excludes many direct applications and all postgraduate students.

Applications to nursing increased by 3.5%, the strongest annual rise since 2021. The figures indicate continued strong demand for higher education, but UCAS highlighted the extent to which living costs are shaping students' decisions ahead of results day and Clearing.

You can read more about the full results.

Universities UK (UUK) is the collective voice of the UK's universities, bringing them together to pursue a common cause: thriving universities, serving society.

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