

# Political Affairs Digest

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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 the team:

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Click on the items in the table of contents to go straight to debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc

## Contents

Parliamentary business	3
Value for money of automatic enrolment in the Teachers' Pension Scheme – HoL Oral Question	3
Impact of the University of the Air White Paper on lifelong learning opportunities – Westminster Hall debate	5
The work of the Department for Education – Education Committee oral evidence session	9
Forthcoming business	12
Education - Oral questions	12
Treasury - Oral questions	12
Written questions and statements	13
Department for Education: Higher Education: Regulation	13
Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance	13
Ministry of Defence: Defence: Higher Education	14
Ministry of Defence: Defence: Higher Education	14
Department for Education: Universities: Finance	15
Department for Education: Universities: Conditions of Employment	15
Department for Education: Lifelong Learning Entitlement	16
Department for Education: Lifelong Learning Entitlement	16
Department for Education: Academic Freedom: Subversion	17
Department for Work and Pensions: Employment and Support Allowance: Graduates	18
Written Ministerial Statement - The Future of the Turing Scheme	18
Department for Education: Further Education: Qualifications	19
Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Universities: Research	20
Sector news	21
Government agrees to improve tracking of regional innovation	21
How better connections could bolster UK R&D	21
Code of Higher Education Governance	22
The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 (Commencement No. 4) Regulations 2026	22



# Parliamentary business

## Value for money of automatic enrolment in the Teachers' Pension Scheme – HoL Oral Question

On Monday 15 June, Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Labour) asked a House of Lords oral question on what assessment the Government has made of the value for money of automatic enrolment in the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) for higher education providers, academics, students and taxpayers.

In her opening response, Skills Minister Baroness Smith of Malvern said the Department for Education had not undertaken a separate value-for-money assessment of the impact of automatic enrolment on TPS. She said TPS is subject to automatic enrolment legislation, but that the scheme's regulations have long required eligible staff to participate unless they choose to opt out. She added that participation rates have remained high and continue to exceed 90%.

**Baroness Warwick** then raised the disparity between the main pension schemes in the university sector, arguing that both employer and employee contribution rates are significantly higher in TPS than in USS. She said the Government has emphasised the need for universities to be financially independent, but that the requirement to commit to TPS undermines the flexibility and competitiveness of many post-1992 institutions. She also argued that TPS absorbs a high proportion of student fee income and that, while the recent valuation may provide some short-term relief, it is unlikely to address the structural issue. She urged the Minister to consider a sector-specific value-for-money assessment and to give institutions greater long-term flexibility.

Responding, **Baroness Smith** acknowledged the financial challenges facing universities, particularly post-1992 institutions, and said these had been exacerbated by large increases in TPS employer contribution rates, which have risen from 16.48% in 2019 to 28.6%. However, she said the Government Actuary's Department has written to HM Treasury stating that the average employer contribution rate across unfunded public service pension schemes, including TPS, is expected to fall significantly from 2027–28 as a result of the increase in the SCAPE discount rate. Across those schemes, employer contributions are expected to be more than £12 billion lower in 2027–28 than in 2026–27. Baroness Smith said this would provide "some relief" to post-1992 universities, while noting that TPS is widely welcomed and supported by many scheme members.

**Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative)** asked whether the Government would alleviate financial pressure on post-1992 higher education institutions by allowing

them flexibility to make their own pension arrangements, while preserving the accrued rights of existing staff. Baroness Smith said the Government would continue to look at the impact of TPS membership, as set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, through discussions with employers and staff who value the scheme highly.

**Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat)** raised the importance of teaching roles to the education system and asked whether the Government would examine the effect that uncertainty about the pension scheme may have on the supply of people entering these professions. Baroness Smith said there was “no doubt” about the overall position of TPS, describing it as a high-quality defined benefit pension scheme with 2.2 million members. She said it remained an important element of both recruitment and retention in the teaching profession.

**Lord Davies of Brixton (Labour)** focused on the volatility of contribution rates. He said the sector was awaiting the results of the 2024 valuations using the revised discount rate, and suggested his own calculations indicated the contribution rate could fall materially, potentially close to the previous rate of around 16%. He argued that moving from 16% to 28% and potentially back towards 16% was a “ludicrous way to run the country’s finances”, and asked whether the Government should return to using the social time discount rate to give participating institutions greater stability.

**Baroness Smith** said the revaluation approach was designed to maintain the sustainability of important public sector pension schemes. She accepted that there could be discussions about different approaches to valuation, but reiterated that it was highly likely there would be a considerable reduction in the average employer contribution rate following the Government Actuary’s Department’s letter to the Treasury.

**Baroness Blower (Labour)** raised reports of some universities seeking to move staff out of TPS to reduce employer costs, particularly against the background of a likely fall in contribution rates. She asked whether the Government would act to stop employers circumventing the scheme and protect staff’s statutory pension rights. Baroness Smith said TPS membership is an important part of terms and conditions for many staff. She recognised that universities are autonomous and independent in decisions about pension arrangements and remuneration, but urged institutions to ensure future decisions safeguard staffing, staff morale, and the interests of students, taxpayers and staff.

**Baroness Cash (Conservative)** linked TPS costs to the wider financial pressures facing higher education. She referred to the Education Committee’s recent report on higher education funding and said pension contributions were contributing to insolvency risk for a significant number of institutions. She asked whether the Government would act on the Committee’s recommendation for a bespoke higher education insolvency

regime, including an early warning protocol to identify financial distress before it affects students.

**Baroness Smith** acknowledged that the higher education sector faces considerable financial challenge, which she attributed largely to the previous Government's decision to freeze the maximum tuition fee cap. She said the current Government had lifted the cap to safeguard a significant part of university income, and pointed to a small improvement in the sector's financial position in the most recent OfS report. She said she had explained to the Education Committee why the Government does not consider a specific higher education insolvency regime necessary, but that it would continue to act to maintain and improve the sector's financial sustainability. Where individual providers face difficulties, she said the Government would prioritise the needs of the organisation and, most importantly, continuity of study for students.

**Lord Frost (Non-affiliated)** argued that one reason public service pension schemes impose a financial burden on universities is that they are "extremely generous". He suggested reform should focus on reducing the generosity of these schemes so they compare more closely with pensions available in the private sector. Baroness Smith rejected this approach, saying that undermining the terms and conditions of people working in public services was not among her priorities.

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

## **Impact of the University of the Air White Paper on lifelong learning opportunities – Westminster Hall debate**

On Tuesday 16 June, Patrick Hurley MP (Labour) led a Westminster Hall debate on the impact of the 1966 "University of the Air" White Paper on lifelong learning opportunities, marking 60 years since the White Paper which led to the creation of the Open University.

Hurley said the Open University was founded on the principle that higher education should not be limited to young, affluent or conventionally qualified students, but should be available to working people, parents, carers and others studying around the realities of their lives. He described the Open University as one of the central pillars of lifelong learning, noting that it is now the largest university in the country, with around 125,000 students, and that nearly a quarter of all part-time higher education students study there.

Hurley spoke about his own experience as an Open University graduate, saying he had not followed a conventional route into higher education and that the OU enabled him to study around work and family life. He argued that the university's wider value

lies not only in qualifications, but in building confidence, helping people retrain, and enabling adults to access second, third and fourth chances in education. He said this was increasingly important in the context of automation, AI, longer working lives, changing labour markets and economic inactivity.

Several Members highlighted the role of the Open University in widening access to higher education. Gregory Campbell MP (DUP) said lifelong learning was particularly important for young people from working-class communities who do not take part in traditional higher education. Alex Easton MP (Independent) praised the OU's work on modules, credits and credit transfers, and argued that funding changes since 2010 had badly affected part-time and mature learners. Uma Kumaran MP (Labour) said socioeconomic background remains the strongest predictor of university attendance, and asked whether the original mission to expand access to higher education and spread opportunity remained as relevant today as in 1966.

Hurley acknowledged that adult participation in higher education has fallen over the last decade, despite the success of institutions such as the Open University. He said the system still often feels designed around the traditional 18-year-old undergraduate rather than parents in their 30s or 40s, workers retraining after redundancy, or people managing long-term ill health. He welcomed the Government's broad direction on lifelong learning and flexible provision, including the lifelong learning entitlement, but said delivery would matter. He argued that the funding regime must be straightforward and fair, flexible provision must be properly supported, employers should be part of the conversation, and more adults need to know that higher education opportunities exist.

Robin Swann MP (UUP), also an Open University graduate, focused on the OU's role in Northern Ireland and its ability to deliver education across regions and to learners with different needs. Responding to an intervention from Richard Baker MP (Labour), who noted that 30% of Open University students in Scotland have a disability support need, Swann said one in five Northern Ireland students is registered as having a disability. He also highlighted the use of Open University provision in nursing and social work, saying that nearly 600 people in Northern Ireland are now training as nurses through the OU, enabling carers and others already working in health settings to train while remaining in their workplaces. He called for more flexible financial support for part-time students and a higher education funding review in Northern Ireland.

Jim Shannon MP (DUP) said the Open University had evolved from television, radio and handwritten papers into a model of digital and interactive online learning. He argued that the OU had been ahead of many institutions during the pandemic because it already had decades of experience delivering distance learning. He also highlighted its role in supporting working-class communities, women returning to education after raising families, prison education, and outreach through women's

centres in Northern Ireland. Shannon asked the Minister to consider whether the OU should be included more visibly in the UCAS system, arguing that it should be seen as a legitimate post-A-level option alongside traditional “brick” universities. Robin Swann also noted that the OU supports members of the armed forces.

Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrat) welcomed the OU’s access mission and said that in his constituency there were 240 Open University students, including 210 undergraduates and 30 postgraduates. He said that nationally, 19% of OU students live in the most economically disadvantaged areas, nearly 70% are already in work when they begin studying, and three in four arrive with no previous higher education qualification. He also stressed that the 1966 White Paper envisaged the OU as part of a wider adult education ecosystem, working with university extra-mural departments, the Workers’ Educational Association, local education authorities and FE colleges. He argued that this wider ecosystem had been weakened by reductions in adult skills and community learning funding.

Sollom raised concerns about the financial sustainability of adult and part-time higher education. He said the Open University’s latest accounts showed an accounting deficit of £27 million, with a small underlying operating surplus achieved only through cost reductions, including the loss of more than 300 full-time equivalent roles. He argued that the part-time higher education market in England has been shrinking for years and that the OU cannot rebuild the adult learner market alone. He welcomed the lifelong learning entitlement as a step in the right direction, but said loans alone may not be enough for mature learners, who are often more risk averse and face financial anxiety. He called for grants of £5,000 to £10,000 at key stages of life to support retraining and reskilling, alongside good guidance and use across FE colleges, universities and the OU.

Jack Rankin MP (Conservative), responding for the Opposition, praised the Open University’s role in making adult education and lifelong learning possible for people unable to access traditional campus-based study. He said the OU had supported more than 2.3 million people since opening to students and noted that 67% of OU students worked full or part-time during their studies last academic year. He welcomed the upcoming launch of the lifelong learning entitlement from January 2027 and said it had been put forward by the previous Government to give adults a loan entitlement of up to four years of post-18 education. He asked how the Department for Education would raise awareness of the new funding options and attract learners who might not otherwise seek out lifelong learning opportunities.

Rankin also used the debate to raise wider concerns about higher education quality, apprenticeships and skills. He said high-quality university degrees can be important for lifelong learning, but argued that some traditional university courses do not deliver the employment outcomes they claim to offer. He said quality apprenticeships should be a real and equally esteemed alternative to university. He criticised the

Government's decision to withdraw public funding for level 7 apprenticeships, arguing that it would damage social mobility for adult learners, affect skilled routes such as nursing, and destabilise university providers including the Open University.

Responding for the Government, Education Minister Josh MacAlister praised the Open University's mission and said it was not a "makeshift second chance", but a world-class route to opportunity for people who were not on academic pathways at 18. He said the OU is now the largest academic institution in the UK, with students in all 650 parliamentary constituencies, and has taught more than 2.5 million students worldwide since 1969. He said three quarters of OU undergraduates arrive with no previous higher education qualifications, more than 15,000 people without A-levels have earned higher education qualifications through the OU in the last five years, and two thirds of its students are working while studying. He also said 82% of the OU's research impact was rated world-leading or internationally excellent at the last assessment, and that the university had received gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework.

On UCAS, MacAlister said the Open University chooses to manage applications directly because of the need for flexibility beyond the normal academic cycle, but that information about OU courses, including modular courses, is available on the UCAS website. On level 7 apprenticeships, he said the Government disagreed with the Opposition and wanted growth and skills levy resources targeted at those who might not otherwise have taken the university route, particularly entry-level apprenticeship routes.

MacAlister linked the debate to the Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper and its target for two thirds of young people to participate in higher-level learning, including academic, technical and apprenticeship routes. He said the lifelong learning entitlement is one of the most significant student finance reforms in a generation, creating a single flexible funding system for levels 4 to 6 across further and higher education. He said it would allow people to learn, upskill and retrain throughout their working lives, with funding following the learner "module by module" from January 2027. He argued that this is necessary because more than a third of vacancies go unfilled due to skills shortages and around 80% of the 2030 workforce is already in employment.

In his closing remarks, Hurley returned to the issue of affordability, saying he had only been able to study at the Open University once he realised he could pay for modules using Tesco Clubcard vouchers. He said the principle behind the OU, that education should be affordable and accessible to all, must hold true for the next 60 years as well as the last 60. The motion was agreed.

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

## **The work of the Department for Education – Education Committee oral evidence session**

On Wednesday 17 June, the Education Committee held an oral evidence session on the work of the Department for Education.

The Committee heard evidence from the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP.

**Relevant points included higher education finance, international students, student support, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, post-16 routes, apprenticeships and AI/assessment.**

**Higher education finance and financial sustainability:** Darren Paffey MP raised the department's £230 million uplift for higher education priorities in 2026–27 and asked what it would be used for. Phillipson said the priority was ensuring that the higher education system is financially sustainable, while stressing that universities are autonomous institutions. She linked this to the recent decision to increase tuition fees, saying this had given universities greater certainty where costs had risen but fees had not. She also referred to ongoing Office for Students work, led by Edward Peck, on sector financial sustainability. Asked whether there would be a further £100 million reduction to the Strategic Priorities Grant, she declined to give a substantive answer and said the position would be set out "very soon".

**International students and the Home Office:** The Committee returned to its previous inquiry into university financial solvency and international students. Paffey asked whether the Home Office had agreed to become a co-owner of the government's international education strategy. Phillipson said "not to my knowledge", but said DfE works closely with the Home Office on a system that is fair to international students and to the country overall. She explicitly recognised that international students make a critical contribution to universities, local communities and society, as well as building trade, friendship and country-to-country links.

The Chair pushed further, arguing that Home Office decisions are having a significant impact on university finances and the operating environment for higher education, but that the Home Office is not formally bound into a mechanism that forces it to consider those impacts. Phillipson defended close ministerial and official-level engagement, but also said the Home Office must be able to act where there are concerns about non-compliance, overstaying or illegal migration. Acland-Hood said normal collective decision-making and collective responsibility apply across government. The Chair responded that this process is "not working from the perspective of universities terribly well". Phillipson then said the international student market remains "incredibly strong and competitive", but added that some

universities had become “overly dependent” on international students, which she described as a challenge.

**Student loans and repayment threshold:** Caroline Voaden raised the Treasury Committee’s inquiry into student loans and asked whether the freeze in the repayment threshold was a Treasury decision or a joint decision with DfE. Phillipson said these decisions are taken at fiscal events, but that DfE works closely with Treasury colleagues and will consider the Treasury Committee’s recommendations. She acknowledged concerns about the current system, but did not signal any immediate change to repayment terms.

**Care leavers and student support:** The Committee noted that care leavers are more likely to drop out of university and asked whether maintenance provision should automatically cover all 52 weeks of the year for those without a family home to return to. Phillipson did not commit to this, but said she would take it away. She said the government had expanded the maximum loan available to care leavers and had worked with universities on year-round accommodation and out-of-term support for care-experienced young people.

**Maintenance loans and grants:** The Committee raised the real-terms erosion of maintenance loans, saying this was leading students to take on more paid work, stay at home to study and face financial challenges. Phillipson accepted that both fee income for institutions and maintenance support for students had eroded over time. She said the government had increased maintenance loans, though not enough to close the whole gap, and highlighted the return of **maintenance grants for less well-off students in further and higher education**.

**Lifelong Learning Entitlement:** The Committee challenged the government on whether the Lifelong Learning Entitlement would achieve widespread take-up, given low interest in pilots. Phillipson said the LLE would launch in the 2026–27 academic year, starting from 1 January 2027, and would create a single flexible funding system covering levels 4 to 6 across further and higher education. She framed it as a way for working-age adults to upskill and retrain throughout their working lives, rather than relying on a student finance system designed mainly around younger full-time students.

**Post-16, skills and university routes:** There was a substantive exchange on V levels, T levels and apprenticeships. Phillipson said the post-16 technical and vocational landscape is too mixed and confusing for students, parents and employers. She argued that V levels would be the same size as A levels, could be taken alongside A levels, would offer applied learning and would be linked to occupational standards. She also said apprenticeships were being refocused towards young people. Notably, she said schools and colleges need to provide better advice on all routes, including apprenticeships, because some young people, particularly post-18, feel they are

advised that university is the only option. She described university as “a great option”, but “certainly not the only option”.

**NEETs, colleges and the Youth Guarantee:** The Committee discussed Alan Milburn’s warning that one in six young people could soon be out of education, employment or training. Phillipson said the government’s response included the Youth Guarantee, extra investment in further education, refocusing apprenticeships on young people, V levels, expanded T levels, level 2 reforms and stronger English and maths preparation for 16 to 19-year-olds. Acland-Hood also highlighted pilots to give any 16-year-old without another identified plan a default place in college, so that young people do not simply fall out of the system.

**AI, assessment and qualifications:** The Committee raised concerns that schools lack a comprehensive framework for AI and that AI could undermine assessment, particularly coursework and take-home assignments. Phillipson said AI has potential benefits for learning and teacher workload, including lesson planning and marking, but that DfE is setting expectations around safety, quality, infrastructure and pedagogy. Acland-Hood said DfE has issued and updated generative AI product safety standards for schools, is launching a call for evidence on screen use in classrooms, and is working with edtech firms and schools to test AI tutoring tools.

On assessment, Phillipson said AI sharpened the case for maintaining the integrity of exams, including the continuing value of traditional pen-and-paper assessment. Acland-Hood added that AI presents both risks and opportunities for non-exam assessment: the risk is that AI writes portfolios for students, but the opportunity is that AI could support more direct assessment of practical skills, including in vocational qualifications and V levels.

**Other education issues covered:** The session also covered mobile phones in schools, citizenship education and media literacy ahead of votes at 16, falling school rolls and rural school closures, GCSE English and reading for pleasure, the Year 8 reading test, safeguarding in early years, historic forced adoption, child poverty, VAT treatment for FE and sixth-form colleges, private school VAT, teacher retention and support staff. These were less directly relevant to universities, but several connect indirectly to the future student pipeline, widening participation, skills progression and the government’s broader “opportunity mission”.

[You can also watch the whole session.](#)

# Forthcoming business

## Education - Oral questions

On Monday 22 June, at 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 questions include:

Bob Blackman (Conservative): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisemitism on university campuses.

## Treasury - Oral questions

On Tuesday 23 June, at 11.30am, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

# Written questions and statements

## Department for Education: Higher Education: Regulation

**Andrew George MP (St Ives) (Lib Dem):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether mechanisms are in place to provide compensation to higher education providers in cases where regulatory penalties imposed by the Office for Students are overturned by the courts. (6718) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator for higher education in England and operates within the legal framework set out in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Where the OfS takes regulatory action against a registered higher education (HE) provider, the provider has the right to make representations and to challenge that decision, including through the courts.

Where a court finds that a regulatory decision has been made unlawfully, the decision, including any associated monetary penalty, may be overturned.

There is no automatic mechanism operated by the department or the OfS to provide compensation to HE providers in such circumstances. As with other public law decisions, any matters relating to costs or damages would be determined by the courts.

[Source](#)

## Department for Education: Higher Education: Finance

**Andrew George MP (St Ives) (Lib Dem):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of higher education providers in England are expected to record an operating deficit in each of the next three financial years. (6716) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** The Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England, is responsible for monitoring the sector's financial sustainability. Its most recent report on the sector's financial health, published in May 2026, can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/financial-sustainability-of->

[higher-education-providers-in-england-2026/](#).

The department greatly values the hard work of staff across the HE sector who continue to deliver for students and universities during a challenging period. We are aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing to safeguard their financial sustainability.

Given universities are independent, the government does not have a role in intervening with specific providers in pay and staffing matters, nor does it collect specific data on redundancies within HE.

However, we encourage providers to work constructively with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent and expertise and provide stability for the workforce and the institution.

Grouped Questions: 6717

[Source](#)

## **Ministry of Defence: Defence: Higher Education**

**Mr Andrew Snowden MP (Fylde) (Con):** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any of the courses funded by the Strategic Priorities Grant will require students to obtain security clearance. (8393) (Ministry of Defence)

**Luke Pollard MP (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport) (Lab):** The Strategic Priorities Grant funds additional capacity from home-fee students in level 4 to 6 engineering and computing courses. The nature of these undergraduate degrees and technical qualifications does not require access to classified information and, therefore, security clearance for students is not needed.

[Source](#)

## **Ministry of Defence: Defence: Higher Education**

**Mr Andrew Snowden MP (Fylde) (Con):** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the geographical distribution of the additional student places funded through the Strategic Priorities Grant competition. (8392) (Ministry of Defence)

**Luke Pollard MP (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport) (Lab):** As part of the Defence Industrial Strategy skills package, the Ministry of Defence is investing £80 million into the Strategic Priorities Grant. This is administered by the Office for Students (OfS), who are responsible for designing and evaluating the competition as an independent, impartial body. All eligible Higher Education institutions in England were able to

apply.

After 112 bids were received in the competition, the OfS have allocated this funding to 24 colleges and universities across England. This regional spread will ensure that a wide spectrum of students and the defence industry will benefit from this funding, helping to drive regional growth.

Source

## **Department for Education: Universities: Finance**

**Mary Kelly Foy MP (City of Durham) (Lab):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the number of universities at risk of insolvency in each of the last five years, broken down by Russell Group and non-Russell Group institutions. (2842) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** The Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education in England, is responsible for monitoring the sector's financial sustainability. Its most recent report on the sector's financial health, published in May 2026, can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/financial-sustainability-of-higher-education-providers-in-england-2026/>.

While the OfS has statutory duties in relation to the financial sustainability of the sector, the government has a clear interest in understanding the level of risk across the sector. As such, we continue to work closely with the OfS to understand the sector's changing financial landscape.

If a provider was at risk of failure, our priority would be to work with the OfS, the provider and other government departments to ensure the best interests of students and taxpayers are protected.

Source

## **Department for Education: Universities: Conditions of Employment**

**Hannah Spencer MP (Gorton and Denton) (Green):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has issued guidance to universities on the Employment Rights Act; and what steps she is taking to prevent university employers engaging in fire and rehire practices before January 2027. (4964) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** Universities are autonomous institutions and, as such, like any other employer, are expected to comply with UK employment laws. The government has not issued specific guidance to universities on the Employment Rights Act, but clearly they should comply with it as they should any other law.

The government does not have an intervening role with specific providers or in resolving disputes between providers and their staff. Providers are however expected to work with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent and expertise, and provide stability for the workforce and the institution.

Source

## **Department for Education: Lifelong Learning Entitlement**

**Lee Anderson MP (Ashfield) (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she has considered the potential merits of adding non level 4 (a) training, (b) adult education and (c) skills based courses to the eligibility for lifelong learning entitlement loans. (4544) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** The government offers support for a range of level 2 and 3 courses through existing funding streams such as the Adult Skills Fund, Advanced Learner Loans and Free Courses for Jobs. The Adult Skills Fund fully funds or co-funds education and skills training for eligible adults aged 19 or older from pre-entry to level 3, to help them gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning. Individuals can also take out an Advanced Learner Loan for level 3 courses.

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will offer support for higher level courses. Subjects in scope for LLE modular funding are aligned to the priorities set out in the Industrial Strategy and informed by the work of Skills England.

Grouped Questions: 4543

Source

## **Department for Education: Lifelong Learning Entitlement**

**Mr Andrew Snowden MP (Fylde) (Con):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the readiness of the student

finance system for the launch of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. (7824) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will transform the student finance system in England, broadening access to high-quality, flexible education and training. The LLE will launch in the 2026/27 academic year for learners studying courses starting on or after 1 January 2027.

When launched, it will support individuals to learn, upskill and retrain across their working lives. It will create opportunities for both young people and adults to develop the skills needed to succeed in life, contributing to growth across the country.

We are working closely with Student Loans Company and the Office for Students, as well as higher and further education providers, to make sure the student finance system is prepared for this change.

The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority's 2024-2025 Annual Report on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) reported that the LLE had an Amber SRO Delivery Confidence Assessment.

[Source](#)

## **Department for Education: Academic Freedom: Subversion**

**James McMurdock MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's press release entitled New powers to protect vital free speech at universities, published on 20 April 2026, whether she has had discussions with the security services on identifying threats from hostile state actors in higher education. (2947) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** In February 2026, we hosted an event for university Vice Chancellors on foreign interference alongside my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Security, MI5 and cyber security services. At the event, we announced a new Academic Interference Reporting Route and issued additional guidance on GOV.UK to help students and staff identify concerns and know how to escalate issues.

We continually assess potential threats to our higher education system and develop our measures accordingly. However, it is the longstanding policy of successive UK governments that we do not comment on matters of operational intelligence.

[Source](#)

## **Department for Work and Pensions: Employment and Support Allowance: Graduates**

**Neil O'Brien MP (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con):** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many claimants of Employment and Support Allowance obtained a higher education qualification in the five years preceding their claim. (9065) (Department for Work and Pensions)

**Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP (East Ham) (Lab):** The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Grouped Questions: 9063, 9064

[Source](#)

## **Written Ministerial Statement - The Future of the Turing Scheme**

**Statement made by Josh MacAlister, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
(Minister for Children and Families)**

Following the decision to leave the EU and the related end of our association with the Erasmus+ scheme, the last government introduced the Turing Scheme. The scheme has been the UK Government's global programme for students to study and work abroad, funding students studying across the UK and British Overseas Territories, in higher education, further education and schools.

The scheme is about to start its sixth year and applicant education providers will shortly be informed of the outcome of their application. I can confirm a budget of up to £78 million for the Turing Scheme for the 2026/27 academic year.

The Government's decision to associate with Erasmus+ in 2027 will build on the Turing Scheme's success in opening up world-class opportunities for learners, educators, young people and communities, while further strengthening our partnership with the European Union. Our renewed participation in Erasmus+ will increase the opportunities available to young people across the UK. We will therefore transition to this broad, expanded Erasmus+ in the 2027/28 academic year, ending the Turing Scheme as Erasmus+ placements begin.

The Turing Scheme has delivered strong outcomes in widening access to international opportunities, with the proportion of students funded who are from a disadvantaged

background increasing from 39% in 2021/22 to 56% in 2024/25, with an estimated 61% planned in 2025/26. It has also provided additional funding for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), Additional Support Needs (ASN) or Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

We will build on the success of the Turing Scheme through maximising the opportunities our association to Erasmus+ brings, including supporting the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs. Erasmus+ offers a broader scope of activity than the Turing Scheme, providing opportunities not only for students but also for staff, and extends to the adult education, youth and sport sectors. The programme also supports a wide range of institutional partnerships and policy development. These activities help drive quality, encourage research links and enhance international reputation.

Like the Turing Scheme, Erasmus+ offers additional funding to help participants with fewer opportunities, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, take part in mobility opportunities.

We expect that over 100,000 people in the UK could benefit from mobility and partnership opportunities through Erasmus+ participation in 2027.

Erasmus+ participants can travel to any European Union member state, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye. As part of Erasmus+, grant holders in some sectors can also allocate up to 20% of project funding to support international mobilities to some countries that are not associated with the programme. Erasmus+ also supports global collaboration through partnership projects, with opportunities to involve non-partner countries under certain actions.

[Department for Education](#) | [View Source](#)

## Department for Education: Further Education: Qualifications

**Rt Hon Maria Eagle MP (Liverpool Garston) (Lab):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what consultation has been conducted with colleges and providers on her Department's proposals to withdraw funding for Access to Higher Education diplomas. (8500) (Department for Education)

**Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab):** Access to higher education (HE) diplomas remain an important pathway to support adults to go into HE. These qualifications are designed for those over 19 years old. We are not removing funding for students aged 19 or over, who remain funded through Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs). Students who take out an ALL for an Access to HE diploma will have the

outstanding balance written off if they complete an eligible HE course, such as an undergraduate degree.

Following the completion of our post-16 pathways qualification reforms, students aged 16 to 19 will have a clear choice between A Levels, V Levels and T Levels at level 3. The department is working in close partnership with the sector to support the development and implementation of the reforms and will continue to engage widely with providers, representative bodies and employers to share learning, respond to feedback and refine delivery over time.

Source

## **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology: Universities: Research**

**Jim Shannon MP (Strangford) (DUP):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps she is taking to accelerate translational research from universities to commercial applications. (7417) (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology)

**Kanishka Narayan MP (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab):** Government is committed to accelerating the translation of world-class UK research at universities into commercial applications that drive economic growth and societal benefit.

Through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) programmes we support universities' journey from discovery to market. UKRI are providing £7.4 billion to support innovative companies' growth. Key investments we are making include the Higher Education Innovation Fund which provides £280 million per year to support knowledge exchange between universities and business; £25m to support new venture doctorates and £4m each year for new entrepreneurial fellowships; and the £1.6 billion over 5 years to support the Catapult network.

Source

## Sector news

### Government agrees to improve tracking of regional innovation

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee published [the government's response to its report, 'Flying Blind: Innovation, growth and the regions.'](#)

- [Read the government response \[HTML\]](#)
- [Report: Flying Blind: Innovation, Growth and the Regions \[HTML\]](#)

The report identified “major shortfalls” in the government's approach to tracking and sharing data on its policies to support innovation across the country, making it “impossible” to evaluate these policies and ensure funding is targeted effectively or to measure the economic benefits.

In its response, the government accepts that reliable, more granular data is essential, but argues that there needed to be a “balance” between improving data collection, and the time and resources required to collect it.

The government stated that over the next year it would develop “a more robust and joined-up approach” to monitoring innovation clusters but rejected the committee's calls for a standalone national framework to develop these clusters. It said that this was already addressed through the industrial strategy.

The government has, however, committed to publishing an updated innovation cluster map and to establishing a portal to connect innovators with public funding.

The government confirmed plans to introduce an improved approach to measuring Catapult performance ahead of the Catapults' next funding cycle, which begins in 2028.

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

### How better connections could bolster UK R&D

A [new HEPI Report](#) published says transport connectivity should play a greater role in how the UK assesses research investment.

The report argues that world-class research capabilities exist across the whole UK, yet poor physical connectivity means they rarely function as a national system. Transport infrastructure can drive measurable innovation gains, with one study even showing that linking two cities with cost-effective flights can increase scientific collaboration by 30 to 50 per cent.

**The paper's four key recommendations are:**

1. research investment should be assessed for both individual excellence and contribution to the national ecosystem;
2. research funders should prioritise investment in assets but also in the connective tissues – networks, platforms, shared infrastructure and mobility schemes – that support connected capabilities;
3. infrastructure decisions should reflect research and innovation impacts; and
4. place-based funding should incentivise connection rather than self-sufficiency.

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

## **Code of Higher Education Governance**

The Committee of University Chairs has published a revised Code of Higher Education Governance, which applies to its members' governance arrangements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The updated code sets out **six core principles for governance**, alongside the standards it expects "must" and "should" be followed.

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

## **The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 (Commencement No. 4) Regulations 2026**

The regulations bring parts of the **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023** into force in stages, mainly covering the OfS free speech complaints scheme and new mandatory registration conditions for providers.

From **1 September 2026**, the regulations commence the provisions allowing the **Office for Students (OfS)** to operate a free speech complaints scheme for certain higher education provider complaints. This will allow the OfS to review and determine complaints where a person claims they suffered adverse consequences because a registered higher education provider, or one of its constituent institutions, breached its free speech duties.

However, the commencement is limited. The complaints scheme will apply to complaints from current or former staff, certain members of a provider or institution, applicants for academic posts, and invited visiting speakers. It will **not yet apply to students' union free speech complaints**, and it will **not apply to complaints from students or people whose membership of a provider or institution is solely because they are or were students**.

From **1 April 2027**, the regulations bring into force most of the Act's provisions on **mandatory freedom of speech registration conditions**. This means the OfS must ensure that relevant registered higher education providers have registration conditions requiring compliance with the new freedom of speech duties. The only part not commenced is the requirement for providers to keep the OfS informed about their students' unions.

The regulations also bring into force related minor and consequential amendments to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and other legislation.

No further impact assessment has been produced for these regulations, as the Government does not expect them to create any additional impact beyond that already assessed for the 2023 Act.

## **Future Universities / Universities UK**

Universities UK has opened submissions for **50 Future Innovators**, a UK-wide showcase celebrating individuals whose innovative work has been meaningfully supported or enabled by a connection to a UK university.

The initiative forms part of UUK's wider **Future Universities** campaign, and sits within the **Future Innovators** strand. It aims to demonstrate that universities are central to national renewal, future prosperity and innovation across the UK. The campaign defines innovation broadly, covering economic, social, cultural and community impact, and is seeking nominations from every discipline and region.

Anyone over 18 can be nominated, including self-nominations. Nominations will be assessed against four criteria: whether the work is **groundbreaking**, whether it has emerged within the last five years and has future potential, whether a **UK university was instrumental** in making it possible, and whether it is creating meaningful impact in people's lives.

Submissions are open until **17 July 2026**. UUK's editorial team will review submissions and develop a shortlist over July and August, before an independent panel of expert judges scores the shortlist between August and September. The final 50 will be confirmed in September and publicly launched in October.

The judging panel includes Dr Darren Henley CBE, Chief Executive of Arts Council England; Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE, CEO of Stemettes; Baroness Beeban Kidron OBE, Honorary President, founder and former Chair of the 5Rights Foundation; Baroness Martha Lane Fox MBE, co-founder of lastminute.com; and Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser DBE FRS, Regius Professor of Botany at the University of Cambridge and former Chief Executive of UKRI.

Successful nominees will be profiled on the published 50 Future Innovators list, with a photograph shared with their consent. UUK, member universities and the wider campaign will promote the final list, including through national media, the innovation community and possible follow-on content such as interviews and spotlight features.

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



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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