Universities UK

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: politicalaffairs@universitiesuk.ac.uk

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

Contents

Parliamentary business

Advanced Research and Invention Agency - HoL Science and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 8 September, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee held an oral evidence session with Kathleen Fisher, Chief Executive of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA), examining the agency's progress, funding model, regional reach and relationship with the wider UK research and innovation system.

Fisher said ARIA was beginning to deliver on its original ambition, with more than 300 researchers and innovators working across 15 programmes. She said her priorities as chief executive were to grow the organisation, deliver its existing programmes and use its £1.2 billion funding allocation effectively. ARIA would judge success primarily through scientific breakthroughs, economic and societal impact, and its ability to change how ambitious research is pursued. Programmes are typically funded for three to five years and are actively managed against milestones, with funding able to be increased, redirected or withdrawn depending on progress.

A significant part of the session focused on how ARIA translates research into economic value. Fisher said ARIA plans for commercialisation and other routes to impact from the outset and has created a Chief Translation Officer role to help promising technologies cross the “valley of death” between research and deployment. ARIA's priority was to help build world-class companies and maximise their chances of remaining in the UK, although Fisher said overseas investment could still be beneficial where it enabled UK-based companies to scale rather than fail. ARIA generally places intellectual property with the researchers and companies it funds, which Fisher argued gives creators the strongest incentives to develop and commercialise their work.

The Committee also questioned ARIA about the geographical distribution of its funding. Fisher acknowledged that the “Golden Triangle” remained strongly represented and said ARIA was not yet where it wanted to be in terms of regional diversity. Programme directors are required to conduct discovery work across all UK nations and regions before programmes are approved, identifying relevant researchers and ensuring a representative range of scientists has been consulted. Fisher said ARIA had engaged universities and research organisations across Scotland, Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK and had in some cases delayed programme approval where sufficient UK-wide engagement had not taken place.

ARIA is also improving its data collection to understand whether regional disparities reflect lower application rates or differences in funding success.

Fisher highlighted ARIA's funding model as one way of widening participation, noting that it funds 100% of project costs rather than the 80% offered by some research funders, meaning institutions with fewer financial resources are not required to subsidise participation themselves. ARIA can also allocate up to 20% of a programme's research funding outside the UK where essential expertise is unavailable domestically, although Fisher said such proposals face a higher bar and must demonstrate clear benefits to the programme and to UK value creation.

On ARIA's relationship with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Fisher said a healthy UKRI system was essential to ARIA's success because UKRI supports the underlying research base, infrastructure and longer-term work on which ARIA programmes depend. She described the two organisations as complementary: UKRI supports long-term research pathways, while ARIA uses shorter, programme-led funding to accelerate progress in specific high-risk areas. She argued that the UK had previously lacked an organisation with ARIA's high-risk, high-reward model and that both bodies could learn from one another.

Fisher also said ARIA welcomed government involvement where this could help successful technologies reach deployment, including through procurement or the creation of new markets, but stressed the importance of preserving the agency's operational independence. On governance, she said ARIA had not been involved in decisions relating to former Chair Matt Clifford and that appointments were a matter for BIST. She said board members' interests were published and monitored, with appropriate mitigations where conflicts arose.

Education and skills reform - House of Commons statement

On Wednesday 9 September, Education Secretary Lucy Powell MP (Labour) made a statement to the House of Commons setting out the Government's approach to education and skills reform. Powell said the current system works well for many young people but leaves too many behind, pointing to regional attainment gaps, persistent absence and around one million young people not in education, employment or training. She argued for a broader system combining academic knowledge with practical and technical skills, describing the ambition as moving from an "exam factory" towards a "talent factory".

A central element of the reforms will be expanding technical and vocational education from age 14 while maintaining academic routes. Powell said new technical qualifications would create clearer pathways into T-levels, A-levels, the Government's planned V-levels, apprenticeships and universities. She stressed that the reforms were not intended to create separate academic and vocational tracks, but multiple pathways capable of leading to similar destinations, including higher education and skilled employment. Mayors and strategic authorities will also have a greater role in connecting education with local employment opportunities, including control over 16-19 education budgets and support for work experience.

The statement included a specific commitment on higher education. Adam Thompson MP (Labour) asked about the role of degree apprenticeships, drawing on his previous experience teaching degree-level apprentice engineers. Powell said she wanted to see an **expansion of degree apprenticeships across higher education**, alongside greater provision of level 4 and 5 apprenticeships, to create clearer progression pathways between education and employment.

Further education and work-based learning were also prominent. Helen Hayes MP (Labour), Chair of the Education Committee, raised college funding and the disadvantage created by colleges being unable to reclaim VAT in the same way as schools. Powell said FE was particularly important for young people who had been poorly served by the wider education system and noted that funding and the school-to-college transition were central to the ongoing Milburn review. Sam Rushworth MP (Labour) highlighted difficulties securing sufficient placements for T-level students; Powell acknowledged that placements had been challenging and said employers and mayors would be expected to play a stronger role in providing work experience and placements.

The Opposition raised concerns that introducing technical pathways from age 14 could narrow opportunities for disadvantaged pupils. Shadow Education Secretary Laura Trott MP (Conservative) argued that pupils could be directed away from rigorous academic routes too early, while Munira Wilson MP (Liberal Democrat) called for genuine parity of esteem, funding and rigour between academic and technical options. Powell rejected the suggestion of a two-tier system, saying students should be able to combine technical and academic subjects and move through different routes towards the same career or higher education destinations.

Powell also confirmed that the Government intends to reform the current approach to repeated post-16 English and maths GCSE resits, while retaining students' right to resit where they choose. She said further proposals on curriculum and assessment would follow the Becky Francis review, including greater emphasis on practical learning, critical literacy, creative subjects and skills such as speaking and presenting.

You can read the full transcript.

Industrial Strategy - Business and Trade Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 8 September, the Business and Trade Committee continued its inquiry into the Government's Industrial Strategy, with evidence from regional leaders followed by Minister for Reindustrialisation Blair McDougall MP (Labour) and BIST officials. The session focused on devolution, local growth plans, skills, research and innovation funding, and how the Industrial Strategy can translate national priorities into growth across different parts of the country.

Regional leaders repeatedly highlighted universities as central to local growth. David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, said successful local growth plans required buy-in from universities, colleges, training providers and businesses, arguing that universities were essential both to developing the workforce needed by priority sectors and to exploiting existing regional strengths. He pointed to the University of York and other local institutions as important assets in areas including agritech, food production, crop resilience and green jobs. Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands, similarly said the Industrial Strategy was helping to align regional priorities with universities and R&D, highlighting collaboration with university partners around initiatives such as Coventry's GreenPower Park.

The Committee also heard concerns about supporting innovation beyond the initial start-up phase. Skaith said Innovate UK provided valuable early-stage support, but that businesses could struggle as they moved towards commercialisation, with some leaving regions or moving overseas in search of finance. He argued that devolved authorities needed better tools to support companies throughout their growth journey, particularly in areas with strong university links and large numbers of small and microbusinesses.

Skills and post-16 education were another major theme. Parker called for greater devolution of post-16 skills funding, arguing that mayors, employers, universities, colleges and training providers could work together more effectively to address high levels of young people not in education, employment or training. He cited a partnership between the West Midlands Combined Authority, DWP and University College Birmingham as an example of taking skills provision directly into communities. More broadly, witnesses warned that areas without mayoral strategic authorities should not be excluded from skills, innovation and growth funding as devolution progresses.

In the ministerial panel, McDougall described reindustrialisation as growing high-value manufacturing and service sectors through innovation, with success measured through business investment, productivity, exports, jobs and the creation of larger UK companies, alongside a stronger emphasis on geographical distribution. He said the

Government expected around **1.5 million jobs** to emerge across the Industrial Strategy's priority sectors and construction, and linked this to apprenticeships, technical excellence colleges and forthcoming sector skills plans.

On research and innovation, McDougall said UKRI was already reserving a significant share of funding for the Industrial Strategy's eight priority sectors. He also pointed to the Local Innovation Partnerships Fund as a model for combining national priorities with local expertise. BIST Industrial Strategy Director Kalada Bruce-Jaja said the fund demonstrated how government could work in partnership not only with mayors but with **universities, local authorities and devolved governments**, including through investment in shared research infrastructure that smaller businesses could access. The Government has committed to exploring further devolution of research and innovation funding, including later-stage innovation funding.

The Committee also questioned how the Government would coordinate the growing number of national skills, industrial and devolution initiatives. McDougall said the aim was to make the system straightforward for industry despite the number of institutions involved, pointing to locally focused technical excellence colleges and forthcoming sector skills plans as mechanisms for connecting national strategy with local clusters. He said further plans would be published shortly to set out how skills, place, employers and industrial priorities fit together.

You can read the full evidence from the regional leaders panel and the ministerial panel.

Forthcoming business

Education - Oral questions

On Monday 14 September, at 2.30pm, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP, and her ministerial colleagues will answer oral questions in the House of Commons.

Several tabled questions are directly relevant to universities and post-16 education. Tessa Munt MP (Liberal Democrat) will ask what steps the Government is taking to improve the student loan system; Christine Jardine MP (Liberal Democrat) and John Grady MP (Labour) will ask about support for young people not in education, employment or training; Bradley Thomas MP (Conservative) will ask about apprenticeships; Wera Hobhouse MP (Liberal Democrat) will ask about support for colleges and training providers to develop international skills partnerships; Ian Sollom MP (Liberal Democrat) will ask about the adequacy of further education funding; and Chris Ward MP (Labour) will ask what steps the Government is taking to support universities.

Machinery of government changes - Science, Innovation and Technology Committee oral evidence session

On Tuesday 15 September, the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee will hold an oral evidence session examining the Government's recent machinery-of-government changes affecting science, research, innovation and technology policy.

The inquiry follows the Government's decision to close the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and redistribute its responsibilities between the Cabinet Office, the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The Committee has previously raised concerns that the changes could fragment responsibility for science and innovation policy and has sought clarity on where former DSIT teams, ministerial responsibilities and accountability will sit.

Witnesses include:

- 9.30am – Dr Simon Kaye, Director of Policy and Research at Re:State, and Alex Thomas, Executive Director at the Institute for Government

- 10.15am – Dr Alicia Greated, Executive Director at the Campaign for Science and Engineering, and Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society
- 11.00am – Dr Laura Gilbert, Senior Director of AI at the Tony Blair Institute, and Dom Hallas, Executive Director at Startup Coalition.

Government response to Student Loans: Broken and unfair? - Treasury Committee statement

On Tuesday 15 September, Dame Meg Hillier MP (Labour/Co-op), Chair of the Treasury Committee, will make a Select Committee statement in the House of Commons on the Government's response to the Committee's report *Student Loans: Broken and unfair?*.

Published in July following an inquiry which included evidence from Universities UK Chief Executive Vivienne Stern, the report concluded that the student loan system was "broken and unfair". Its recommendations included moving towards a 50:50 balance between state and individual contributions to higher education, reversing the planned Plan 2 repayment-threshold freeze, replacing RPI with CPI for calculating interest, and strengthening protections and information for borrowers.

Student finance (review) -Ten Minute Rule Motion

Also on Tuesday 15 September, Tom Gordon MP (Liberal Democrat) will introduce a Ten Minute Rule Motion entitled **Student finance (review)** in the House of Commons.

Written questions and statements

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Universities: New Businesses

Callum Anderson MP (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what steps he is taking to ensure that publicly funded research which results in a commercially viable spin-out is accompanied by sufficient access to later-stage finance to support its growth in the UK. (24362) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): Since 2015, the UK has grown share of global VC investment at all stages. It now matches the Bay Area at early stage, though still lags at breakout and late stages. UK companies also progress between VC rounds at a higher rate than European peers.

To improve later-stage capital, alongside wider government measures, we have increased the British Business Bank's total financial capacity to £25.6 billion, including £5 billion for growth-stage funds such as the £1 billion+ UK S&T Scale Up Fund. Pensions reforms could unlock up to £50 billion, supported by British Business Bank programmes helping pension funds invest in venture. In parallel, Innovate UK is working with the public finance institutions to create a connected investment pipeline to support science and technology firms from innovation to capital at scale.

Grouped Questions: 24361

Department for Education: Universities: Reorganisation

James Naish MP (Rushcliffe) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with the Office for Students on the adequacy of governance and consultation processes at universities undertaking large-scale restructuring programmes. (19512) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Higher education (HE) providers are independent from government and are responsible for managing their business models, including decisions relating to staffing. The department encourages providers to work with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent and expertise and provide stability for the workforce and the institution. All efficiency measures taken by the sector should provide long-term value for staff, students and the country.

The Post-16 Education and Skills White paper sets out the government's ambition for stronger governance in the HE sector.

We welcome the Committee of University Chairs' new Code of Governance, published in June, which sets clear and robust expectations for accountability, transparency and effective oversight across the sector. We will also support the Office for Students' strengthening of its management and governance conditions of registration.

Department for Education: Universities: Admissions

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2026 to Question 15242 on Universities: Admissions, if she will publish the Office for Students guidance on the use of TUNDRA. (19355) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department does not issue guidance to higher education providers on the use of tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) in admissions decisions. Universities are autonomous institutions and are responsible for their own admissions policies and decisions. The Office for Students (OfS) already publishes information and guidance on area-based measures of higher education participation, including participation of local areas (POLAR) and TUNDRA, available at:
https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/,
https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/mesjucep/regulatory-advice-6-how-to-prepare-an-access-and-participation-plan-may-2025.pdf

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. Higher education providers remain responsible for determining whether and how such measures are used in admissions processes.

Department for Education: Students: Community Relations

Rt Hon Sir James Cleverly MP (Braintree) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 16 June 2026 to Question 7455 on Students: Community Relations, whether her Department assessed the National Union of Students' position to oppose Prevent activity on university campuses when deciding to co-create a cohesion charter; and if the charter will reference Prevent. (20232) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department formally re-engaged with the National Union of Students (NUS) on 18 November 2024. This followed progress by the NUS in addressing concerns about antisemitism, including its acceptance and implementation of the recommendations of the independent inquiry led by Rebecca Tuck KC.

Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, universities must have due regard to preventing people from being drawn into terrorism.

The (NUS) has publicly opposed the Prevent programme and the department is aware of this position. However, the government is clear that higher education providers remain subject to their statutory Prevent duty.

The Cohesion Framework, being developed by the department, the University of Salford and the NUS, aims to promote belonging, empathy and social cohesion on and beyond campus. It will establish principles to support constructive student engagement. A first draft of the framework will be produced by the end of the year, working with students across the country.

Grouped Questions: 20231

Department for Education: Students: Community Relations

Rt Hon Sir James Cleverly MP (Braintree) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 16 June 2026 to Question 7455 on Students: Community Relations, on what date her Department officially re-engaged with the National Union of Students. (20231) (Department for Education)

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Grouped Questions: 20232

Department for Education: Educational Institutions: Industrial Disputes

Cameron Thomas MP (Tewkesbury) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with trade unions involved in sustained strike activity at educational bodies. (19303) (Department for Education)

Georgia Gould MP (Queen's Park and Maida Vale) (Lab): Strike action is damaging to pupils' education and the department encourages unions and employers to work together constructively to resolve disputes. Through the department's 'Handling strike action in schools' guidance, we provide advice to headteachers to take all reasonable steps to keep schools open for as many pupils as possible and minimise the impact on children's education. Departmental officials and ministers regularly engage with trade unions on a wide range of issues, including matters relating to the workforce and supporting good industrial relations.

Grouped Questions: 19301, 19302

Department for Education: Educational Institutions: Industrial Disputes

Cameron Thomas MP (Tewkesbury) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to facilitate special consideration by exam boards for pupils and students affected by sustained strike activity at educational bodies. (19305) (Department for Education)

Georgia Gould MP (Queen's Park and Maida Vale) (Lab): Special consideration is available where a student experiences a temporary illness, injury or other unforeseen event immediately before or during an exam or assessment that significantly affects their performance. It is intended to address disruption at the time of the assessment itself and can only be awarded where a student was fully prepared for the assessment.

Special consideration does not apply to wider disruption to a student's learning, including disruption caused by teacher absence or strike action. As the independent regulator of exams and assessments, Ofqual's legal framework is clear that qualifications must reflect what students know, understand and can do at the time of their assessment.

Throughout any strike action, schools and colleges should take the necessary steps to ensure that students are supported and prepared for their exams, this may include prioritising school places for exam year students or offering catch up lessons and additional revision sessions.

Grouped Questions: 19304

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether HMRC's new international student levy will be charged on (a) EU students and (b) Erasmus+ students studying in the UK. (19036) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The international student levy, payable by English higher education (HE) providers, will be introduced from the 2028/29 academic year to raise revenue to be reinvested into the HE and skills system, including the reintroduction of maintenance grants. The government has already announced that transnational education delivered outside of the UK will be out of scope of the levy. As part of the ongoing policy development, the department is considering the merits of exempting any additional groups of international students and will update on this in due course.

The UK has committed to participate in Erasmus+ in the 2027/28 academic year. This is the year prior to the levy coming in, meaning providers will not be required to pay the levy for Erasmus+ students in 2027/28. Any continued UK participation in Erasmus+ thereafter will need to be agreed under the next Multiannual Financial Framework and interactions with the levy would be clarified as part of this.

Written Ministerial Statement - Economic Growth

Statement made by John Healey, The Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Government is committed to delivering good growth in every postcode of the United Kingdom.

Today, I am setting out more detail on how we will deliver on this promise - in order that people and places see the benefits of this growth as soon as possible.

The UK has significant strengths and economic potential: life sciences, defence, technology, creative industries and financial services.

However, global instability continues to present challenges. Conflicts and trade tensions have driven up inflation and interest rates, while borrowing and debt costs have increased.

We have shown resilience in the face of these challenges. Borrowing is falling, while still fragile, growth was the fastest in the G7 in the first half of this year, and productivity is increasing.

In the context of continued global uncertainty, we must not become complacent. Fiscal credibility is indivisible from growth, and is my first priority.

The Prime Minister set out last week a clear diagnosis of what has gone wrong. Political power was centralised, economic enablers have been privatised or outsourced, and the country deindustrialised.

The Government will change this through a fundamental shift that starts with restoring power and resources to local leaders to build infrastructure, boost private investment, and develop local industrial strategies. This will unlock the potential of their region to do the things they do best in a way that Whitehall simply cannot. Greater public control through a more effective and strategic state at all levels will enhance oversight of the essentials. This will create the conditions for a new civic partnership between government, business and academia. Alongside this, national policy on investment, innovation and jobs will create the right conditions for the private sector.

The UK has had the lowest investment rate among G7 countries for most of the last 20 years, and the regional disparities between current levels of public investment per head are too great. We have made progress recently but need to do more. This includes sharpening the focus of our Public Financial Institutions to align with this Government's priorities, reducing unnecessary consultation, litigation and administration, and changing the Green Book to support projects with more long-term potential in places across the country.

The UK has a strong record on innovation - world leaders in frontier technologies, including quantum, nuclear fusion and space technology, as well as AI, a general-purpose technology that requires oversight but also brings great opportunity. The Government will earmark dedicated funds to back British innovation through public investment, procurement and closer cooperation between local leaders, universities, investors and businesses. It will strengthen support for high-growth businesses and emerging technologies, with the ambition of doubling the number of unicorn firms in this country.

We need to take advantage of our human potential and recognise that skills and labour markets vary across the country. The Prime Minister has set out his plan on technical education. We are moving funding and power for the skills system to local areas to improve work experience and employment opportunities for young people, tailored to the needs and strengths of places. This autumn, Alan Milburn will set out his full recommendations to government on how to address the blight of youth unemployment.

These measures will increase investment, accelerate innovation, and support more people into work, ultimately raising productivity and growth.

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Science and Technology Facilities Council: Cost Effectiveness

Matt Vickers MP (Stockton West) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, whether his Department will conduct a facility by facility review of the savings proposed by the Science and Technology Facilities Council before any final decisions are taken. (22027) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): UK Research and Innovation and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) have already undertaken an evidence-based prioritisation exercise across STFC's portfolio, and the resulting decisions have been published. The process considered a range of funding scenarios and was informed by extensive engagement with the research community, expert advisory bodies and facilities’ leadership teams. The recommendations were subsequently reviewed by the UKRI Executive Committee and approved by the UKRI Board. These decisions were reached through UKRI's established prioritisation and governance processes, drawing on expert advice. The Government therefore has no plans to undertake a separate review. The Science and Technology Facilities Council's core budget has been maintained over the Spending Review period, from £835 million in 2025/26 to £842 million in 2029/30.

Source

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

Olly Glover MP (Didcot and Wantage) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what information his Department holds on the potential impact of funding cuts to the Science and Technology Facilities Council on the expected loss of scientific talent to other countries. (24979) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): The Department holds advice from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) relating to the prioritisation decisions agreed by the UKRI Executive Committee and Board. UKRI and STFC undertook a structured assessment of the impacts of different funding options across STFC's portfolio, considering factors including scientific excellence, long-term research impact, strategic importance to the UK, international leadership, value for money and the preservation of capabilities that would be difficult or impossible to recreate if lost. As part of this process, STFC grant funding for Particle Physics, Astronomy and Nuclear Physics postdoctoral researchers was maintained at 2025/26 levels, protect funding for grant funded postdoc researchers at 25/26 levels, while PhD studentships and fellowships were also protected helping to sustain the UK's skills base, research expertise and long-term scientific capability.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Science and Technology Facilities Council

Dr Luke Evans MP (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what recent discussions he has had with the Science and Technologies Facilities Council about the impact of [i] increasing energy costs and [ii] changing foreign exchange rates due to the STFC's subscriptions to international projects. (21833) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): I met with the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) Executive Chair, Professor Michele Dougherty, in August to discuss the council’s strategic programmes and infrastructure investments. UK Research and Innovation undertook a comprehensive, evidence-based prioritisation exercise to address rising operational costs while maintaining a financially sustainable portfolio. The reprioritisation has come as a result of increased cost pressures from energy, inflation, foreign exchange, staffing costs and an expanded portfolio of activity. STFC has set out a plan to live within its budget while protecting the capabilities that matter most to the UK’s long-term scientific and international standing.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Innovation

Gordon McKee MP (Glasgow South) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what metrics his Department uses to assess the effectiveness of the Government's innovation strategy. (19204) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): The Government uses a range of international and UK metrics to track progress on innovation.
For international comparisons, we use several metrics such as rankings from the World Intellectual Property Organization’s Global Innovation Index, data from the OECD Science and Technology Indicators, and numbers of patents, academic publications, citations and other bibliometric data from several other sources.
To understand UK innovation, we use official statistics such as the number of innovation active businesses from the UK Innovation Survey, R&D expenditure by government and businesses from the Office for National Statistics, and R&D tax credit data from HMRC. We also utilise metrics on university knowledge exchange and commercialisation from the Higher Education Statistics Agency.
The Government also uses our Innovation Clusters Map to identify emerging clusters.

The 2025 update will allow year-by-year performance tracking of priority clusters with metrics such as levels of public R&D investment, company formation, and job creation.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Artificial Intelligence: Vacancies

Shivani Raja MP (Leicester East) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of artificial intelligence adoption on the number of entry-level and graduate vacancies. (22516) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Rt Hon Kanishka Narayan MP (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): AI will transform workplaces, demanding new skills and augmenting existing roles. To prepare for this, the AI Economics Institute (AIEI) was set up as a cross-government function to help ensure that AI delivers positive outcomes for the economy, jobs and workers. The AIEI recently published a snapshot of entry-level hiring, produced with LinkedIn, which found that entry-level hiring is falling broadly in line with the wider market, though further research is needed before conclusions can be drawn on AI's role. We have also launched the Early Careers Jobs Alliance to map how entry-level work is changing and help maintain entry-level career pathways.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Universities: New Businesses

Callum Anderson MP (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of the use of public procurement to provide university spin-out companies with opportunities to demonstrate and scale innovative technologies. (24366) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): Government recognises the key role that public procurement can play in helping innovative firms, including university spin-outs, demonstrate and scale new products and services.
The Procurement Act 2023 supports contracting authorities to take broader value into account when awarding contracts, while the National Procurement Policy

Statement encourages the use of innovative solutions by public bodies.
To support this, we have established a Commercial Innovation Hub to help departments adopt innovative procurement practices and accelerate the deployment of new technologies across the public sector. Additionally, each department is appointing a Procurement of Innovation Champion to support and advocate for increased innovation within their own departments.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Space Technology: Higher Education

Rt Hon Sir Oliver Dowden MP (Hertsmere) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what funding or resources are being made available through the UK Space Agency to support university-led propulsion testing initiatives and competitions to encourage more STEM graduates into the domestic space sector. (21184) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): The UK Space Agency provides dedicated support for university-led rocketry and propulsion skills through its £5 million Rocketry Research, Training and Teaching programme. This funds research and doctoral training and student competitions, including Race2Space, where university teams design, build and hot-fire rocket engines at the Westcott Space Cluster, home to the National Space Propulsion Test Facility.
UKSA funds approximately 50 paid internship placements with space-sector employers yearly, providing students which hands-on experience of current space projects, and practical work experience. Internship placements include multiple propulsion projects.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Investment

Callum Anderson MP (Buckingham and Bletchley) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what discussions she has had with institutional investors on supporting university spin-outs. (24317) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): The government is taking steps to encourage institutional investment. This includes working with major institutional investors - Aegon UK, NatWest Cushon and M&G - on the first £200m British Growth Partnership Fund, investing in promising British businesses including spinouts. The British Business Bank also launched Venture Link, which shares their venture fund due diligence with pension funds to help them invest. Alongside the City of London Corporation, the government has launched the Sterling 20; a new partnership between 20 of the largest institutional investors. The group will work to channel the nation’s savings into key sectors, from which spinouts will benefit.

Source

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade: Horizon Europe: Copernicus Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, what is the annual cost of payments to (a) Horizon Europe and (b) Copernicus; and what assessment has been made of the potential impact of the EU’s proposed Multiannual Financial Framework on the cost of UK contributions. (19031) (Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade)

Chris McDonald MP (Stockton North) (Lab): The UK contributes around £2 billion per year to Horizon Europe, providing UK businesses and researchers with access to curiosity driven research funding, world-class collaborations, and opportunities to grow and scale up their innovations. The UK's association agreement includes a mechanism under which the UK would be compensated if UK researchers and innovators receive significantly less funding from the programme than the UK contributes.

The UK's current annual contribution to participate in Copernicus is approximately £130 million per annum, which is tied to annual Gross Domestic Product metrics. This contribution provides UK users with access to Copernicus Earth observation data and services and enables UK organisations to compete for industrial contracts to develop and operate the system and create value-added products and services.

The Government is monitoring discussions on the European Commission's preparations for the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework for the period from 2028. It is not yet possible to provide a definitive estimate of any impact on future UK contributions.

Source

Department for Education: Pay: Graduates

Neil O'Brien MP (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Graduate labour market outcomes (LEO) statistics published on 25 June 2026, if she will publish data on graduate and non-graduate earnings broken down by prior attainment at A-Level and BTEC. (21397) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Data on graduate earnings broken down by prior attainment at A-level and BTEC have been published in previous releases of the graduate labour market outcomes (LEO) statistical release series.
These breakdowns have not been included in the latest release of the series (published 25 June 2026), as the latest release shifted to using key stage 4 (GCSE) results as the primary measure of prior attainment by which to group outcomes and earnings. Providing multiple different prior attainment measures risked confusing users. This shift was implemented after discussion with various sector experts and stakeholders, who generally advised that key stage 4 attainment was the more robust measure of prior attainment for comparing graduate and non-graduate outcomes, since it is the final attainment measure in compulsory education and the qualification landscape is less fragmented than at key stage 5.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: Staff

Munira Wilson MP (Twickenham) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to support university employees. (21814) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department is aware that some providers are making difficult decisions around staffing to safeguard their financial sustainability. Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous institutions, and the government therefore cannot intervene in pay and workforce matters, unlike in other sectors. Nevertheless, we expect providers to work with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent and expertise and provide stability for the workforce and the institution.
The department remains committed to creating a secure future for our HE sector so it can continue to deliver for students, taxpayers, staff and the economy. Our decision to increase tuition fees annually in line with inflation, demonstrates this commitment.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: Staff

Adam Jogee MP (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the employment support available to staff at universities in England. (23746) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Higher education (HE) providers are autonomous institutions, therefore the government cannot intervene in pay, and workforce matters unlike in other sectors. However, we remain committed to creating a secure future for our HE sector so it can continue to deliver for students, taxpayers, workers and the economy. Our decision to increase tuition fees annually in line with inflation, demonstrates this commitment.
We expect providers to work with their staff to develop sustainable models that retain talent, expertise and provide stability for the workforce and the institution.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Standards

Shivani Raja MP (Leicester East) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of trends in higher education grade distributions. (22478) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The Office for Students publish analysis of degree classifications over time which is available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time-changes-in-graduate-attainment-from-2010-11-to-2023-24/
This report analyses graduate attainment rates and assesses to what extent the increases and decreases in these rates could be statistically accounted for by changes in the prior attainment of, and distribution of subjects studied by, the graduate populations.
The data shows that between the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 academic years, the percentage of UK-domiciled, full-time first-degree graduates at English providers attaining a first class or upper second class degree fell. In 2023/2024, 77.2 per cent received a first or upper second class degree compared with 77.6 per cent in 2022-2023. This decrease of 0.4 percentage points is the third successive year that rates have fallen, having previously increased considerably between 2010-2011 and 2020-2021.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: Admissions

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2026 to Question 15242 on Universities: Admissions, whether TUNDRA can be used to determine (a) whether an individual has an offer of admission and (b) the academic requirements for an offer. (20998) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): 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 (HE). It does not contain information on whether an individual has received an offer of admission to HE or on the academic requirements associated with an offer.
Information on TUNDRA and other area-based measures of HE participation is publicly available on the Office for Students website: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-tundra/.
The entry requirements needed to access a course and individual admissions decisions are matters for autonomous HE providers.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Ben Maguire MP (North Cornwall) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has made an estimate of the potential revenue raised by introducing a voluntary discounted settlement scheme for Plan 2 student loan borrowers whose loans are not projected to be repaid in full. (25240) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): One of the fundamental principles of student loans is that repayments are income contingent and only due when the borrower is earning over the relevant repayment threshold. Outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is cancelled at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower. These protections exceed what discounted settlement schemes typically offer to borrowers.
Borrowers already have the ability to make additional, voluntary repayments towards their student loan, with no penalty, if they wish to do so.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the answer of 22 April 2026 to Question 124528 on Students: Loans, how that cost will be financed; and from which budget. (20937) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The costs of the interest rate cap will be set out at Budget on 28 October 2026 in the usual way.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Skilled Workers

Nadia Whittome MP (Nottingham East) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to identify higher education courses that teach skills where there is currently a shortage; and what steps her Department is taking to reduce the risk of these courses being cancelled. (22043) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) continues to provide targeted funding in areas of strategic importance, helping to align higher education (HE) investment with skills needs set out in the Industrial Strategy.

For the 2026/27 academic year, we have asked the Office for Students (OfS) to prioritise funding which supports the highest cost strategically important subjects. Over two-thirds of the £1,252 million SPG recurrent (programme) budget for the 2026/27 academic year has been allocated to providers to support the provision of high-cost subjects.

We are also working together with the OfS to review and reform the SPG to ensure that high-cost subject funding is more effectively targeted towards subjects that support future skills needs and the Industrial Strategy. This includes the priority subjects set out in the ‘Pathways to Priority Occupations’ policy paper and underpinned within the Skills Needs analysis published by Skills England.

HE providers are autonomous bodies and are therefore responsible for decisions about the courses they offer.

Source

Department for Education: Apprentices

Shivani Raja MP (Leicester East) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans her Department has to incentivise local businesses and public bodies to offer targeted apprenticeships and skills training for young people at risk of dropping out of formal education. (22422) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): This government is committed to expanding high-quality pathways into work and training for young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement from education.
Our wider vocational reforms will strengthen technical education and skills pathways, giving young people clearer routes into high-quality training and employment that meet local and national skills needs.
To expand apprenticeship opportunities for young people, the government is now fully funding apprenticeships for eligible young people under 25 and introducing a £2000 hiring payment for non-levy paying employers, typically small and medium-sized enterprises, that recruit apprentices under 25 from October. We have also introduced foundation apprenticeships to provide entry level opportunities in sectors, such as construction, hospitality and retail.
Alongside this, our Youth Guarantee will ensure that every young person can access education, training, an apprenticeship, or support to find work. We are also working with employers, colleges, local authorities and strategic authorities to improve access to careers advice, work experience and local apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

Source

Department for Education: Vocational Education

James McMurdock MP (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Ind): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Government press release entitled Government invests in young people with more opportunities close to home, published on 28 July 2026, what recent assessment has been made of the long-term economic return expected from the additional investment in post-16 education and training. (25743) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): As set out in the government press release on 28 July 2026, entitled “Government invests in young people with more opportunities close to home,” we are introducing a new bursary to support more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will support the small number of households that are financially worse off when a young person starts

an apprenticeship, so that no young person is discouraged from undertaking one.
The government is also investing £375 million to expand post-16 capacity, ensuring sufficient local further education (FE) and skills places for young people.
The department publishes a variety of evidence showing the economic benefits from investment in post-16 education and training, including analysis on the economic returns from FE, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measuring-the-net-present-value-of-further-education-in-england.
Additional data on the outcomes of FE learners are published annually and are available at: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-outcomes/2022-23.

Source

Department for Education: Student Finance England

Adam Jogee MP (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she will take to ensure Student Finance England supports young people into higher education. (23745) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department works closely with the Student Loans Company (SLC), which delivers Student Finance England (SFE), to ensure that prospective and current students receive the information and financial support they need to access and participate in higher education (HE).
The department monitors SLC's performance and works with the company to maintain and improve customer service and digital services, helping students access funding and obtain support when needed.
SLC engages directly with students through advisory groups to improve communications and customer services. SLC also works closely with higher and further education providers to ensure that accurate information about student finance is available to prospective students and their families.
Through this ongoing partnership, the department and SLC seek to ensure that student finance support remains accessible and effective for those considering HE.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the British Council has a definition of a woman for initiatives supporting women under Erasmus+. (19353) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): I refer the hon. Member for Kingswinford and South Staffordshire to the answer of 1 July 2026 to Question 9013.

Source

Department for Education: British Council: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much funding is being provided to the British Council in (a) 2026-27 and (b) 2027-28 for it to act as the lead authority on Erasmus+. (20606) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): National Agencies receive a financial contribution from the European Commission towards the costs of managing the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme. National Authorities are responsible for ensuring that National Agencies have the resources they need to fulfil their functions, including through national co-financing where required.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme: Per Capita Costs

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 8 July 2026, to Question 14610, on Erasmus+ Programme: Per capita costs, what assessment has been made of the reasons for the higher per student cost of the Erasmus+ programme compared to Turing. (20913) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The Erasmus+ programme is much broader than the Turing Scheme and includes mobility opportunities for more sectors, including adult education, youth and sport, as well as funding staff mobility across the sectors, supporting professional development. It also funds a wide range of partnership and policy development opportunities. The increased funding available through Erasmus+ will enable many more participants to benefit from the programme.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme: Finance

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on whether the British Council has produced guidance on grant reductions relating to the Erasmus programme. (20920) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Information on grant reductions is set out in EU documents, including the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide. An example of the relevant model grant agreement is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/agr-contr/ls-mga_en.pdf.
As the Granting Authority, the National Agency will direct grant awardees to all relevant European Commission guidance on grant reductions under EU funding programmes as part of the grant management process.
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Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 9 July 2026, to Question 11487, on Erasmus+ programme, whether the £810 million non-discounted cost will be the default payment in second year of affiliation. (20916) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Any participation in Erasmus+ into the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will need to be agreed in the future and be based on a fair and balanced contribution. The EU has not yet agreed the overall budget for the 2028-34 MFF, nor the budget for the next Erasmus+ programme.

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 15 June 2026 to Question 4240 on Erasmus+ Programme, whether a UK beneficiary is a British citizen receiving education or training under the programme. (20870) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which can be accessed here: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide) defines a beneficiary as 'a natural person or an entity with or without legal personality with whom a grant agreement has been signed'. In practice, beneficiaries are usually organisations, such as schools, colleges, universities, training providers or youth organisations, that apply for Erasmus+ funding and sign grant agreements.
Participants are the eligible individuals who take part in Erasmus+ activities through beneficiary organisations, including those who are enrolled at, work for, volunteer with, or are otherwise involved with those organisations. The department estimates that around 100,000 participants from UK beneficiary organisations will benefit from Erasmus+ mobility and partnership opportunities from participation in 2027.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Fees and Charges

Nadia Whittome MP (Nottingham East) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make it her policy to cancel the International Student Levy. (22044) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): As confirmed in the government's technical consultation response, the International Student Levy is due to be legislated for in the Finance Bill this autumn. The consultation is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/international-student-levy-technical-detail.
The draft primary legislation was published on 13 July 2026.
The levy will come in from the 2028/29 academic year, raising revenue to be reinvested into the higher education and skills system.

Source

Department for Education: Schools: Antisemitism

Christine Jardine MP (Edinburgh West) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of making education on antisemitism mandatory in schools. (21345) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): There is no place for antisemitism in our society.
There are opportunities in school to learn about contemporary antisemitism in lessons such as citizenship. It is also covered in a historical context as part of Holocaust education, which is an important mandatory part of the national curriculum.
The department supports teachers through our Educate Against Hate website, which provides teachers with a range of free, quality-assured resources, including on building resilience to antisemitism, teaching about tolerance and rejecting discrimination.
The department has asked Sir David Bell to undertake an independent review into antisemitism in schools and colleges, which will include a consideration of learning in schools. This review is due to be published later this autumn.
We have also committed £7 million to fund projects and programmes to improve confidence and resilience in tackling antisemitism in education.

Source

Department for Education: Antisemitism

Lisa Smart MP (Hazel Grove) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of education on preventing antisemitism. (22570) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): There is no place for antisemitism in our society.
The department has asked Sir David Bell to undertake an independent review into antisemitism in schools and colleges, which will include a consideration of learning in schools and colleges. This review is due to be published later this autumn.
We have committed £7 million to support schools, colleges and universities, including £1 million for an innovation fund, to help young people identify and challenge antisemitism, misinformation and harmful narratives. We are committed to

evaluating each of these programmes.
The department supports teachers through our Educate Against Hate website, which provides a range of free, quality-assured resources on building resilience to antisemitism, teaching about tolerance and rejecting discrimination.

Source

Department for Education: Chemistry: Higher Education

Nadia Whittome MP (Nottingham East) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what data her Department holds on the percentage of chemistry degree courses which are due to (a) close and (b) reduce in the 2026-27 academic year. (19493) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Higher education (HE) providers are independent of government and are responsible for managing their finances. The department is aware that some providers are making difficult decisions about the courses they offer in order to safeguard their long-term financial sustainability.
The Office for Students (OfS) is taking forward the development and delivery of the Market Monitoring Function, announced in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, to improve the evidence base on the demand for and supply of HE provision. The Market Monitoring Function will highlight any gaps between demand, supply and local need, and help identify areas where there are cold spots in availability of provision to inform better regional coordination.
In her 6 July letter to the OfS setting out her priorities for 2026/27, the former Secretary of State for Education asked them to maintain targeted funding through the Strategic Priorities Grant for subjects in price group B, which includes chemistry.

Source

Ministry of Defence: Defence: Higher Education

Stuart Anderson MP (South Shropshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 10 of his Department’s Defence Industrial Strategy, published 8 September 2025, what progress his Department has made on the UCAS defence portal. (21670) (Ministry of Defence)

Luke Pollard MP (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport) (Lab): We are currently working with UCAS and the defence industry, through the Defence Industries Joint Council, to create a defence portal on the UCAS website. This will raise awareness and interest in careers in the defence industry to students at an age where they are considering future careers and their education pathways. Further details about the portal will be announced in due course.

Source

Ministry of Defence: Defence: Finance

Stuart Anderson MP (South Shropshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 7 of his department's Defence Industrial Strategy, published 8 September 2025, what progress has been made on the £182 million investment to improve the future skills of the workforce. (21652) (Ministry of Defence)

Luke Pollard MP (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport) (Lab): In the Defence Industrial Strategy, we committed £182 million to a Defence Industry Skills package that will ensure the defence industry has the workforce it requires both now and in the future. Since the Strategy's publication, we have announced £50m for five Defence Technical Excellence Colleges (DTECs) in England. The DTECs will be specialist training centres for students aged 16 and above that will equip them with the cutting-edge technical skills required for critical defence roles. We are also working to establish two DTECs in Scotland and one in Wales.
£80 million has been invested in 24 Higher Education institutions across England, which will support the creation of 2,400 new student places on courses strategically important for defence. This capacity increase will start from the 2026-27 academic year.
The Defence Universities Alliance has been launched, whose aim is to promote careers within the defence industry, grow defence research and support collaboration between the MOD, academia and industry.
Work continues across government and with industry partners to develop and deliver the remaining elements of the Defence Industry Skills package.

Source

Ministry of Defence: Defence: Skilled Workers

Stuart Anderson MP (South Shropshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 10 of his department's Defence Industrial Strategy, published 8 September 2025, what progress has been made on a Defence Skills Passport. (21672) (Ministry of Defence)

Luke Pollard MP (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport) (Lab): The Defence Skills Passport will support those at the mid-career stage who are looking to move into and within the defence sector. It will create a digital record of an individual's skills which should enable smoother movements between Armed Forces, the defence industry and neighbouring sectors.
The MOD is currently working with colleagues across Government to ensure plans to introduce the Defence Skills Passport align with existing activity. Further details will be announced in due course.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Loans

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi MP (Slough) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to prevent abuse of the student loans system from overseas students who fail to repay their loans. (21362) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): This government is resolute in its commitment to protecting public money in higher education, and we are taking firm action to address serious concerns about exploitation of the student funding system.
To be compliant with their loan repayment obligations, borrowers must inform the Student Loan Company (SLC) if they reside outside the UK for more than three months and make the required repayments if they are above the relevant repayment threshold.
If borrowers based overseas fail to remain in contact with the SLC, they are placed in arrears by SLC applying a default required repayment rate, the outstanding balance of which can be pursued as debt.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Loans

Shivani Raja MP (Leicester East) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to Student Loans Company administrative data showing an increase in the proportion of student finance loans awarded to non-UK nationals from 10.2 per cent in the 2014-2015 academic year to 19.3 per cent in 2024-2025, what assessment her Department has made of the policy, legal and demographic factors driving this increase. (22394) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department cannot validate the numbers quoted, however, previously published data shows non-UK nationals increased from 12.1 per cent of student loan recipients in 2020/21 to 18.8 per cent in 2024/25.

Eligibility for student support is based on residency and immigration status, not nationality, targeting resources on students who are likely to stay indefinitely and contribute to the economy. To qualify for student support, including student loans, a person residing in England must be settled or have a recognised connection to the UK.

This includes persons who are covered by the EU Withdrawal Agreement, have long residence in this country, or who have been granted international protection by the Home Office. Persons who are settled must have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for three years prior to the first day of the first academic year of their course.

The department keeps the student finance system under review and is taking action to protect public money, including strengthening oversight of franchised higher education provision.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Loans

Shivani Raja MP (Leicester East) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the factors contributing to the disparity between repayment rates between UK and non-UK students for their student loans. (22396) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): All student loan borrowers are required to make repayments towards their loan once they have passed their statutory repayment due date and are earning above the relevant repayment threshold. This includes UK and non-UK students, whether they reside within the UK or without.

Borrowers whose earnings are below the repayment threshold are not required to make repayments. This is a key protection for lower earning borrowers and an accepted part of the subsidy for student loans.

However, if a borrower is non-compliant, the Student Loans Company (SLC) will use the application of fraud detection and investigatory techniques. Where this fails, SLC work with a debt collection agency to target borrowers with arrears balances. Further action, including legal action, can also be taken to secure recovery.

Source

Department for Education: Students: Loans

Mr Joshua Reynolds MP (Maidenhead) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of maintaining the Plan 2 student loan repayment threshold at its 2026-27 level for three years from April 2027 on the disposable income of graduates earning below median earnings. (25214) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The department has produced the following analysis regarding the impact of freezing the Plan 2 repayment and interest thresholds for three years starting April 2027:

		Average lifetime repayments (2024/25 financial year prices)			
		Baseline (£)	Post- policy (£)	Impact £	Impact %
Entire cohort Average		27,000	28,300	1,300	5
Lifetime graduate earnings decile	1	2,000	2,000	0	0
	2	4,300	4,700	400	9
	3	7,700	8,100	400	5
	4	11,600	13,000	1,400	12
	5	16,900	18,500	1,600	9
	6	23,100	25,200	2,100	9
	7	31,300	33,600	2,300	7
	8	41,200	43,500	2,300	6

9	54,500	56,100	1,600	3
10	59,100	59,500	400	1

If a borrower is earning above the repayment threshold and their income stays the same, their repayments will remain the same. If a borrower is not earning above the repayment threshold and their income remains the same, they will continue to not be required to make any repayments.
The department will release an equalities impact assessment, including the impact on lifetime repayments, alongside other borrower impacts for the Plan 2 repayment threshold and interest threshold freeze announced at the Autumn Budget. Published results may differ from those provided due to model and data updates.

Source

Department for Education: Universities: Equality

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment has been made by (i) his department, (ii) the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and (iii) the Office for Students of adequacy of the number of white British working class students that participate in (a) Russell Group and (b) Oxbridge diversity schemes. (20999) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Higher education (HE) must be a gateway for all who have the ability and desire to pursue it. We have called on providers to play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.
HE providers, including Russell Group universities, are autonomous and responsible for their own access and diversity initiatives. However, providers that wish to charge higher tuition fee levels must have an Access and Participation Plan (APP) approved by the Office for Students (OfS).
APPs set out the steps a provider will take to improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. In developing their APPs, providers are expected to consider the OfS' Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, which identifies groups at greater risk of experiencing unequal outcomes, including white students and students from lower socio-economic groups.
The Quality Assurance Agency regulates the Level 3 Access to Higher Education Diploma but is independent of government.

Source

Department for Education: Higher Education: Complaints

Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP (Oxford East) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, on what grounds complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator are dismissed; and what equality impact assessments on age, race and disability have been made. (21374) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): In 2025, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) resolved 3,950 student complaints. Of these, 2% were found to be 'justified' and 5% were found to be 'partly justified'. A further 13% were settled in favour of the student before a formal decision was reached. Following OIA recommendations, higher education providers offered £875,933 in compensation and £962,979 through settlement agreements reached before a final OIA decision. The OIA does not publish an average compensation figure because not all complaints require financial remedy. Many are resolved through reconsideration of decisions, repeat assessment opportunities, apologies or procedural improvements.
In 2025, 43% of complaints were found to be 'not justified' because the provider had followed procedures and reached a reasonable decision, 7% were 'not justified (reasonable offer made)' where the provider had already offered a fair remedy, and 20% were 'not eligible' because they fell outside the OIA's remit. The OIA reports that 'not justified' outcomes are particularly common in academic appeals and disciplinary cases where providers generally have well-established processes and standards in place.
The OIA is responsible for meeting its own equality duties. It publishes information on the characteristics of students who bring complaints and use this data to monitor accessibility and outcomes. In 2025, 42% of students who complained disclosed a disability. The OIA reports that complaints involving reasonable adjustments to accommodate a disability were more likely than average to be upheld or settled.
The 2025 OIA Annual Report can be found here: https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/xfljp10u/oia-annual-report-2025.pdf.

Grouped Questions: 21373

Source

Department for Education: Erasmus+ Programme

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will set out the source of funding for the Erasmus+ programme in the 2027/28 academic year, including additional Resource

Departmental Expenditure Limit and funding from other budget lines including higher education; and whether devolved administrations have any liability for the cost. (20869) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): The UK has committed to associating to the Erasmus+ programme in 2027.
Erasmus+ costs were scored at Spring Statement. As reported in the Office for Budget Responsibility's Economic and Fiscal Outlook of March 2026, £0.6 billion has been allocated in 2027-28.

Source

Department for Education: Adult Education

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2026, whether the EU Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) guidance applies to the UK. (20914) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): UK applicants may choose to use relevant SALTO tools and resources to help support their Erasmus+ projects. The UK National Agency is not required to host an Erasmus+ SALTO Resource Centre in 2027.

Source

Department for Education: Public First

Mike Wood MP (Kingswinford and South Staffordshire) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how much (a) her Department and (b) the Office for Students has spent on public affairs services provided by Public First since July 2024; and for what purposes. (19346) (Department for Education)

Paul Waugh MP (Rochdale) (Lab): Between 1 July 2024 and 17 July 2026, the department spent £32,400 with Public First on strategic advice and insight on education, with a specific focus on schools and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
The department reimbursed Public First £1,414 to indemnify costs incurred attending a conference. The Office for Students (OfS) has had no spending with Public First in relation to public affairs services.

Source

Department for Education: Overseas Students: Student Numbers

Pete Wishart MP (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions officials in her Department have had with a) the Scottish Government and b) representatives of Scottish universities regarding the fall in overseas student numbers since Brexit. (19853) (Department for Education)

Josh MacAlister MP (Whitehaven and Workington) (Lab): Education is a devolved matter. As such, the Scottish Government is responsible for higher education (HE) policy in Scotland

The independent regulator of the English HE sector, the Office for Students (OfS), is responsible for monitoring the sector's financial position. We work closely with the OfS to understand emerging issues and risks within the sector. As HE providers in England are independent of government, they are responsible for managing their own finances. All providers must continue to adapt their business models as necessary to safeguard their long-term financial sustainability.

Our world class HE sector rightly attracts students from across the globe, who positively impact our HE sector, economy, and society as a whole and become global ambassadors for the UK.

The UK government's International Education Champion, Sir Steve Smith, is a member of the Scottish government's International Education Strategy Governance Group and there are regular engagements between officials of both governments on matters pertaining to international students.

Grouped Questions: 19850, 19851, 19852

Source

Sector news

OIA: The student experience of higher education provider closure

On 8 September, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) and SUMS Consulting published a report examining the experiences of students affected by course or provider closures. The report comes against the backdrop of continuing financial pressures across higher education and argues that closure should not be treated solely as an operational or regulatory event, but as a process that can have significant and lasting effects on students.

Students involved in the research reported disruption to teaching, uncertainty about completing their qualifications, financial pressures and impacts on their wellbeing and future careers. In some cases, students said the deterioration in their experience began before a formal closure announcement, including through cancelled classes, staff departures and reduced provision. The report also identifies particular risks for international students, disabled students, mature students and those from widening participation backgrounds, and finds that transferring to another provider does not necessarily prevent disruption or provide the same academic and pastoral experience.

The report argues that student protection should focus on the **continuity of students' overall experience as well as continuity of study**. Recommendations include earlier and more transparent communication from providers; named support for students that remains available after closure; appropriate funding and resourcing for institutions receiving transferred students; and automatic transfer of reasonable adjustments for disabled students. It also calls on government and regulators to ensure providers can access appropriate administration arrangements, consider mechanisms to protect students from financial losses, and establish a single independent source of advice covering academic continuation, consumer rights, visas and wellbeing during closures.

You can read the full report.

IFS: What does the Lifelong Learning Entitlement mean for post-18 education?

On 8 September, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published analysis of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), which opens for applications this month for courses beginning from January 2027. The LLE will give learners in England access to tuition fee loans equivalent to four years of full-time study - £39,160 in 2026-27 - which can be used throughout their working lives up to age 60. It will cover study at levels 4 to 6 and allow funding to be used for individual modules as well as complete qualifications.

The IFS highlights three main changes under the new system: bringing higher education student loans and Advanced Learner Loans into a single funding system; removing Equivalent or Lower Qualification restrictions, allowing people to retrain at the same or a lower level than qualifications they already hold; and introducing loan funding for modular study. Maintenance support will also be extended to eligible level 4 and 5 further education courses. However, modular funding will initially be restricted to modules of at least 30 credits which form part of existing qualifications and are predominantly in priority subject areas linked to the Industrial Strategy.

The analysis places the reforms in the context of declining adult participation in higher education. Entry to undergraduate provision below degree level, including HNCs and HNDs, has fallen by around three-quarters over the 15 years since 2010, while England continues to have comparatively low participation in level 4 and 5 technical education. The IFS argues that the LLE could help address this "missing middle" by making it easier for adults to retrain and study flexibly.

However, it cautions that expanding access to student finance may not be sufficient to substantially increase adult participation. While 24% of adults not recently engaged in learning cited cost as a major barrier in 2025, other barriers included feeling too old to learn, lack of interest, time pressures and low confidence. Previous government trials of modular learning have also seen much lower take-up than expected, including a 2022-23 short-course trial which attracted 125 learners against an expectation of more than 2,000. The IFS concludes that the success of the LLE will depend not only on finance, but on whether flexible and modular provision develops into recognised pathways that learners and employers value and which deliver worthwhile employment and earnings returns.

You can read the full IFS analysis.

King's College London: Polarised trust in scientists driven by values, identity and politics

On 9 September, the Policy Institute at King's College London and Sense about Science published a major study on public trust in scientists, funded by Wellcome and based on a nationally representative YouGov survey of 4,262 UK adults. It finds that trust remains relatively strong overall, with 63% reporting high trust in scientists, but that attitudes are increasingly shaped by people's values, political identities and whether they believe scientists are "on the side of people like them".

The research identifies significant political differences. Seventy-one per cent of Green supporters and 69% of Labour supporters believe scientists are on the side of people like them, compared with 50% of Conservative and 32% of Reform UK supporters. Reform supporters are also more likely to believe scientists are "in cahoots" with politicians and businesses and that society should rely more on common sense than scientific studies. The researchers warn that this could indicate the beginnings of the kind of political polarisation around science seen in the US.

Climate science is the most politically polarised field examined. Overall, 54% of the public report high trust in climate scientists, compared with 63% for scientists generally. However, this rises to 84% among Green supporters, 76% among Labour supporters and 72% among Liberal Democrats, compared with 46% of Conservatives and just 19% of Reform supporters. The study also finds that trust affects attitudes towards public funding for research, willingness to follow scientific advice and support for governments using scientific evidence in policymaking.

The research suggests that openness and transparency are important drivers of trust, alongside personal connections to scientists. When asked what would increase trust, the most commonly selected actions were scientists actively correcting misinformation (45%) and explaining how their work improves ordinary people's lives (44%). The authors argue that universities, research institutions and scientists should therefore focus on demonstrating the practical benefits of research and building relationships with different sections of the public, rather than adopting a single approach to science engagement.

You can read the full King's College London analysis.

Education to play a vital role in building belonging in divided communities - DfE

On 9 September, the Department for Education announced a new national community cohesion framework for colleges, universities and students' unions, developed in partnership with the University of Salford and the National Union of Students (NUS). The initiative is intended to strengthen belonging, inclusion and constructive engagement between students amid concerns about increasing social and political polarisation.

The framework will set out agreed principles to support student conduct and engagement on issues that can strengthen or undermine cohesion within education settings and their wider communities. It will be co-designed with students from a range of backgrounds and experiences, with student involvement continuing through implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The work responds to the Government's *Protecting What Matters* policy paper and has been accelerated in response to rising antisemitism and other forms of hatred.

Initial development will take place across five areas: Greater Manchester; the North West and North London; Bristol and Gloucestershire; Sunderland and the North East; and Derby and the East Midlands, before wider testing and implementation. Universities, colleges and students' unions will be able to use the framework to review existing policies and strengthen student relationships and civic participation. An accompanying toolkit will provide practical examples of approaches to building cohesion and guidance on monitoring their effectiveness.

Research will be led by the University of Salford through student focus groups, stakeholder interviews and desk-based research. The project is also being supported by an expert advisory group including representatives from the Office for Students, Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Association of Colleges, Advance HE, Student Minds, GuildHE and Universities UK Chief Executive Vivienne Stern. A first draft of the framework and toolkit is expected by the end of 2026.

You can read the full announcement.

Future Jobs Roadmap - Universities UK

On 10 September, Universities UK launched its **Future Jobs Roadmap**, the first major piece of work from the Future Universities programme. Developed with support from Pearson and the British Chambers of Commerce following conversations with around 200 employers, business groups and universities, the Roadmap sets out practical actions for universities, employers and government to strengthen graduate employability and help businesses access the skills they need.

A central commitment is an ambition for **all undergraduates to have access to meaningful work-based learning by 2035**, with an interim milestone of 50% by 2030. This could benefit around 1.4 million students a year by the 2030s. The Roadmap also commits universities to making AI tools accessible to every undergraduate and ensuring every course has an "AI trailblazer" lecturer, alongside expanding employer co-designed learning and more flexible, modular provision.

Other proposals include providing graduates with a **lifetime entitlement to university careers support**, developing regional graduate schemes to connect graduates with SMEs, and making it easier for employers to engage with universities. The Roadmap also calls on government to take further action on youth employment, including reducing the costs to businesses of recruiting younger workers.

The work responds to evidence gathered through the Future Jobs programme that employers continue to value graduate skills but want stronger links between education and the workplace. Earlier UUK polling found that 81% of employers wanted graduate numbers maintained or increased and 87% believed graduates had some or all of the skills they expected, while 47% of employers with vacancies reported difficulties filling graduate or equivalent-level roles. Seventy per cent said they would be more likely to recruit graduates if work experience formed part of their courses.

Skills Minister Baroness Smith welcomed the Roadmap's focus on outcomes and employability, particularly the commitment on universal access to work-based learning, describing it as an important step towards recognising employment outcomes as a fundamental part of higher-level education.

You can read the full announcement.

Education to play a vital role in building belonging in divided communities

On 9 September, the Department for Education announced that it is working with the University of Salford and the National Union of Students to develop a new national community cohesion framework for colleges, universities and students' unions. The initiative is intended to strengthen belonging, inclusion and constructive engagement between students at a time of heightened political and social polarisation.

The framework will establish a set of agreed principles covering student conduct and engagement on issues that can either support or undermine cohesion within education settings and their wider communities. It will be co-designed with students from a range of backgrounds and experiences, with students involved in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The work responds to the Government's *Protecting What Matters* policy paper and has been accelerated in response to rising antisemitism and other forms of hatred.

Initial work will take place across five areas: Greater Manchester; the North West and North London; Bristol and Gloucestershire; Sunderland and the North East; and Derby and the East Midlands, before being tested and implemented more widely. An accompanying toolkit will provide practical examples for universities, colleges and students' unions on building cohesion, developing local initiatives and evaluating their effectiveness. Research will be led by the University of Salford through student focus groups, stakeholder interviews and desk research.

The project is being supported by an expert advisory group bringing together higher and further education, civil society, faith and student organisations. Members include the Office for Students, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Advance HE, GuildHE and Universities UK Chief Executive Vivienne Stern. A first draft of the framework and toolkit is expected by the end of 2026.

You can read the full announcement.

£19.75 million boost for collaborations between universities - Research England

On 10 September, Research England announced a new **Collaboration for a Sustainable Future** programme, backed by £19.75 million, to support greater collaboration between universities and strengthen the long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the research and innovation system. The programme will fund work to identify barriers to collaboration, test new models of partnership and develop cross-UK regional innovation partnerships.

The first funding stream will provide £750,000 for projects worth between £10,000 and £100,000, bringing groups of English universities together to identify barriers to strategic institutional collaboration and develop potential solutions. Research England will also launch a wider survey to gather evidence from across the sector.

A further £4 million will support pilot projects led by English universities, with awards of between £100,000 and £1 million for collaborations designed to improve efficiency, share research and innovation capabilities and contribute to sector sustainability. Separately, £15 million will provide seed funding of between £1 million and £5 million for ambitious **cross-UK innovation partnerships**, bringing together universities and other partners within geographical areas to combine complementary strengths, support economic growth and deliver wider regional benefits.

Research England said the programme could support initiatives including shared institutional research and innovation infrastructure, joint engagement with businesses and communities, and new regional innovation partnerships. Executive Chair Jessica Corner said the initiative responds to the “acute and accelerating pressures” facing universities and is intended to help establish more structured and strategic collaboration across the sector. The two funding opportunities will open on **1 October 2026**.

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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