Political Affairs Digest

A regular digest of House of Commons, House of Lords and higher education sector business. If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary Business

Statement from the Education Secretary

On Tuesday 9 June, Education Secretary Rt Hon Gavin Williamson gave a statement to parliament regarding plans to reopen schools in England. A few backbench MPs asked questions relating to higher education in the debate that followed the statement, including in relation to resuming in-person lectures, universities’ support for disadvantaged students and the decision to implement a cap on English students for devolved institutions.

The Education Secretary mentioned his work with Universities UK on resuming campus-based learning and reopening research facilities. Liberal Democrat MP Wendy Chamberlain asked Rt Hon Gavin Williamson to meet with Universities Scotland about the cap on English-domiciled students to which the Education Secretary insisted the government was working closely with the devolved administration.

A transcript of the session can be here.

Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill

The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination Bill began its Committee Stage in Parliament this week with sessions on Tuesday 9 June and Thursday 11 June. The aim of the Bill is to end free movement with the EU and pave the way for a points-based immigration system.

On 9 June, the Committee heard from witnesses from the business sector. During the session, Kate Green MP asked about provisions in the new Immigration Bill for graduates. Richard Burge, Chief Executive of the London Chamber of Commerce described the new graduate route as a ‘hugely positive step’ and called for mutual recognition of qualifications to further improve recruitment of international graduates. Martin McTague from the Federation of Small Business also reiterated the importance of a visa system which is attractive to international students.

The next session of the Committee Stage is scheduled for 16 June.

You can watch the Tuesday committee session at 9:25am here and 2:00pm here and the Thursday committee session at 11:30am here and 2:00pm here.

Universities Minister gives evidence to the Petitions Committee

On Thursday 11 June Universities Minister Michelle Donelan gave evidence to the House of Commons Petitions Committee regarding petitions calling for students to have their tuition fees reimbursed following Coronavirus-related disruption and USS strikes.

The session focused on the mechanisms and processes available to students to pursue complaints, the work universities had undertaken to maintain quality of teaching, and additional support that both universities and students need to mitigate the impact of the virus. Michelle Donelan stressed that it was up to universities, as autonomous organisations, to decide on the fees they charge up to the government-set maximum but emphasised that complaints should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The minister sympathised with students feeling disgruntled, but stressed the virus hadn’t been fair on any section of society when asked about ongoing students’ debt. She wanted students to think about the ramifications on their lives and what they would do instead if they deferred a year- limited travel and precarious labour market whereas universities have had time to perfect their offering.
On emerging from lockdown. The minister said universities needed to be as transparent as possible and that before self-release, students have opportunity to change their mind. Government is encouraging universities to have pastoral and mental health as a priority as well as student experience. "It's universities' jobs to find ways to get around the barriers and facilitate this [student experience]."

This session is available to watch here.

Lords debate on post-COVID-19 recovery strategies that will contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy

On Thursday 11 June, the House of Lords held a debate on the case for post-COVID-19 recovery strategies that will contribute to a fairer, cleaner, and more sustainable economy.

Peers noted widening generational inequalities, the challenging labour market for graduates and the importance of investing in research and development. Lord Blunkett’s contribution also talked about the drop in international students.

Baroness Hayman (CB), who tabled the debate, noted the “need to re-gear our national approach to education, apprenticeships, reskilling and life-long learning, not only to ensure a sustainable future but to support workers whose sectors cannot be sustained, and in regions which need regeneration.”

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick, Lord Tunnicliffe and Lord Sheikh’s contributions noted the challenges for graduate employment. Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick, particularly highlighted cancelled graduate placements, “Many companies have decided that well over a million graduate placements or internship opportunities should be cancelled and removed from their working opportunity. Surely [sectors that have thrived during Covid-19] could mop up the internships and graduate work necessary to protect more than a million young people from coming out of university and finding there is no sustainable work for them.”

Baroness Hayman, Lord Oates, Baroness Penn and Lord Blunkett highlighted the role of research and development in a creating a productive and competitive green economy and the need to invest in research and innovation. Lord Blunkett, in particular, emphasised the challenges Covid-19 has placed on the higher education sector and the risks associated with a drop in international student numbers, “The importance of research and knowledge transfer cannot be overestimated, but this is a devastating moment for our university sector, as money that was previously coming in from overseas students, particularly postgraduates, which funded and cross-subsidised the research agenda, will not be available. I hope that the Minister will be able to encourage the research sustainability task force to come forward urgently and encourage the Government to take up its recommendations and fund them properly… Linking job creation for young people and research and knowledge transfer from our universities with immediate action to avoid a return to the pollution that we experienced earlier this year will be vital if we are going to have that sustainability for the future.”

Finally, Lord Shipley spoke of the need for “universities to alter the courses they offer to reflect a changed economy and to be resourced accordingly.”

You can find a full transcript of the debate here.

Forthcoming business

BEIS Oral Questions
On Tuesday 16 June at 11:30am, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Ministers will answer questions on the floor of the House.

You can watch the session here.
Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill
On Tuesday 16 June at 9:25am & 2:00pm and Thursday 18 June at 11:30am and 2:00pm, a General Committee will continue to consider the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill

You can watch the Tuesday committee session at 9:25am here and 2:00pm here and the Thursday committee session at 11:30am here and 2:00pm here.

Lords oral question on recruitment of nurses onto degree courses
On Thursday 18 June, Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab) will ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to facilitate the recruitment of nurses onto degree courses beginning in September 2020.

You can watch the question here.

Written Questions

Coronavirus: paused research and development contracts

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate he has made of the number of business research and development contracts held by UK universities that have been paused as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [49680]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): Government announced a package of support for UK universities on 4th May to ensure that the university research base can fully contribute to the UK recovery and our economy in the longer-term post COVID-19. The Department does not hold any information about the number of business R&D contracts held by UK universities that have been paused as a result of COVID-19. However, BEIS is working with the sector to gather information and intelligence about the impact of COVID-19 on business-funded research.

Coronavirus: aviation and manufacturing research funding

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what recent assessment he has made on the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on levels of (a) aviation and (b) manufacturing research funding to universities. [49681]

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon): The Government recognises that the aviation and manufacturing sectors have been strongly impacted by Covid-19.

We do not have an assessment of the effect of the Covid-19 outbreak on the level of research funding to universities for aviation or manufacturing. According to the Office for National Statistics, UK business finance for Research & Development (R&D) in higher education in 2018 was £389 million. This is approximately 4% of all R&D performed in higher education. We do not have a breakdown by product or sector.

A Ministerial Taskforce, jointly led by BEIS and the Department for Education, on the sustainability of university research including those funded by businesses, has been established. The Taskforce will identify and assess impacts, as well as consider approaches to help manage these impacts over the coming months.
Coronavirus: student loan interest rates

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak and the Bank of England ‘s reduction in interest rates, what plans he has to reduce the interest rates applied to Plan 2 Income Contingent Repayment student loans. [52466]

Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire): The system for setting interest rates on student loans is set out in The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) Regulations 2009, as amended.

Student loans have much more favourable terms than commercial loans and the Government regularly monitors the interest rates set on student loans against the interest rates prevailing on the market. The most appropriate comparators for undergraduate student loans are the effective interest rates available on unsecured personal loans, as published by the Bank of England (data series CFMBJ77 and CFMBJ94).

We continue to monitor Covid-19 impacts on students and work to understand the issues they face.

Coronavirus: support for students in 20/21 academic year

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance his Department has issued to universities on support for students who are due to begin their studies in the 2020-21 academic year. [53437]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): We expect universities to be open for the autumn term and for them to offer a blend of online teaching and in-person tuition as they consider appropriate, while taking account of the need to minimise the risk to staff and students.

We have now published guidance for higher education providers on reopening campuses and buildings. This will support them in deciding when and how they can make facilities accessible again to students and staff, as long as they follow the relevant public health advice, available at the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses.

Coronavirus: financial support for students

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans the Government has to provide (a) financial and (b) other support to students who have lost income and are struggling to pay their rent during the covid-19 outbreak. [52131]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Government guidance makes clear how important it is that institutions operate a non-eviction policy, so that no student is required to leave halls if their contract is up, if their rental agreement does not cover holiday periods or if they are unable to pay their rent. This is particularly important in the case of international students, care leavers and students estranged from their families.

Students will continue to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year.

We have worked closely with the Office for Students to enable higher education providers to draw on existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-
19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding worth around £23 million per month for June and July, towards student hardship funds.

Students with a part-time employment contract should speak to their employer about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19), which has been set up to help pay staff wages and keep people in employment. We have also asked that higher education providers pay particular attention to the additional financial hardships that are being faced by student staff who have been reliant on income from campus-based jobs at this time.

**Coronavirus: Covid Corporate Financing Facility**

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of universities ability to repay loans under the Covid Corporate Financing Facility within the one-year repayment window. [49678]

Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden): Universities will be treated in the same way as any other issuer under the Covid Corporate Finance Facility (CCFF). This means that universities that are both investment grade and make a material contribution to the UK economy are able to participate in the facility. We expect all issuers to repay in full.

**Coronavirus: student numbers cap in Scotland**

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions the Government had the Scottish Government on the policy to limit the number of English-domiciled students studying at Scottish universities prior to the announcement of that policy on 1 June 2020. [53480]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, and I have regular meetings with Scottish ministers, and ministers from all the devolved administrations, about higher education issues. Meetings have included discussions on the development of student number controls policy.

Officials in the department also have regular meetings and discussions with their counterparts. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, we will continue to work closely with the devolved administrations on strengthening and stabilising the higher education system.

Student number controls for institutions in the devolved administrations only apply to the number of English-domiciled entrants who will be supported with their tuition fees through the Student Loans Company. The funding of English-domiciled students is not a devolved matter, and it is right and fair that this policy should apply consistently wherever they are studying in the UK.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore): To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, what consultations the Government undertook with relevant stakeholders prior to the decision that student number controls will be applied to Scottish universities’ recruitment of English students for 2020. [54202]
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway): Funding decisions affecting students domiciled in England are for the Department of Education to determine, however the Minister of State for Universities Michelle Donelan discussed the matter with Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochead on several occasions prior to the announcement.

This measure, which applies across the whole of the UK, will avoid harmful over-recruitment among providers which could go against the interests of both students and universities.

**Coronavirus: support for apprenticeships**

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will take steps to encourage the (a) take-up and (b) provision of apprenticeships in the childcare sector in response to the shortfall in recruitment during the covid-19 outbreak. [54857]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): We have introduced a broad range of flexibilities to ensure that apprentices can continue with their learning, as far as possible, and to encourage the take up of apprenticeships. These include encouraging the remote delivery of training, allowing changes to be made to end-point assessment, and removal of the requirement that level 2 apprentices should work towards or sit their level 2 English and maths GCSE or functional skills exams this academic year.

Apprenticeships will have an important role to play in creating employment opportunities, particularly for young people, and supporting employers in all sectors to access the skilled workforce they need to recover and grow post-COVID-19. We are looking to support employers of all sizes, and particularly smaller businesses such as childcare providers, to take on new apprentices this year. We will set out further details in due course. We will also ensure that there is sufficient funding to support small businesses wanting to take on an apprentice this year.

**Coronavirus: reopening residential accommodation for students**

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has held with representatives of the universities sector on reopening residential accommodation for students who return to the UK from abroad and who will need to provide a UK residential address in order to comply with the requirement to quarantine for 14 days. [51772]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): We are in discussions with Universities UK and other sector representatives on a regular basis to ensure that international higher education students are welcomed to the UK and we expect international students to be supported upon arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times.

We welcome the actions of Universities UK, who have set out principles for the sector to consider as it prepares for the autumn term, including encouraging higher education providers to think about how to support students during the self-isolation period.

The department has also published guidance to support providers in making decisions on re-opening campuses and buildings to students and staff ahead of the academic year 2020/21. Further information on this guidance can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses .

International students who are considering studying at a UK higher education provider from September 2020 should contact their chosen university to find out how they are adapting to the COVID-19 outbreak, including how international students can prepare themselves for an autumn start.

**Coronavirus: assistive technology services**
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure there will not be a gap in provision due to the delay in the tender for assistive technology services (ATSP Equipment & Training / 2019- SLC -002); and if he will make a statement. [51579]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Whilst the tender process is ongoing, the current arrangements for the provision of assistive technology remain in place. The Student Loans Company is continuing to fund assistive technology via Disabled Students Allowances and there should be no interruption to assistive technology provision to students.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when the Student Loans Company tender for assistive technology services (ATSP Equipment & Training / 2019- SLC -002) is planned to be completed. [51578]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Due to a number of pressures on the Student Loans Company (SLC), it has not been possible to progress with the tender approval process.

The tender approval process has therefore been paused until 31 July, by which time the SLC should be able to provide a revised timeline for the tender.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that tendering processes run by the Student Loans Company are delivered within the advertised time scale. [51580]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The Student Loans Company (SLC) is one of the department’s main arm’s length bodies.

The department continues to offer commercial support and advice to the SLC to help ensure that tendering processes run by the SLC are delivered within the advertised time scale.

Coronavirus: nursing bursary

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's press release of 18 December 2019, All nursing students on courses from September 2020 will receive a payment of at least £5,000 a year which they will not need to pay back, when student nurses will receive that payment. [55116]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): The Department of Health and Social Care has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

Coronavirus: effect of changes in number of international students

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of changes in the level of international students numbers on the higher education sector. [53482]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): In the 2018/19 academic year, tuition fees from international students at UK higher education providers accounted for around £7 billion of sector income. The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements
of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We have been working closely with the sector to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19 on international student numbers, including restrictions on travel. We understand that the COVID-19 outbreak and a possible reduction in the number of international students poses significant challenges and we stand ready to help the sector with various mitigations.

The government is working to ensure that existing rules and regulations, including visa regulations, are as flexible as possible for international students under these unprecedented circumstances. Higher education providers will also be flexible in accommodating applicants’ circumstances where possible, including if applicants are unable to travel to the UK in time for the start of the academic year.

On Monday 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced the package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. I wrote to all hon. Members on 4 May with full details of the package, which have also been published on GOV.UK: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students.

The new graduate route, due to be launched in summer 2021, provides an opportunity for international students who have been awarded their degree to stay and work in the UK at any skill level for 2 years. This represents a significant improvement in our offer to international students and will help to ensure that our world-leading higher education sector remains competitive internationally.

On Friday 5 June, the Department for Education announced Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a key deliverable of the 2019 International Education Strategy. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections. The International Education Strategy, published in March 2019 by the Department for Education and the Department for International Trade, set out a commitment to review progress following its publication. The review, which we intend to publish this autumn, will ensure that the International Education Strategy responds to this new context and the challenges that are posed.

**Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to support specialist higher education providers that are financially reliant on international student fee income and who have incurred losses as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. [52043]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We have been working closely with the sector, including specialist providers, to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19 on student numbers in 2020-21. We understand the COVID-19 outbreak and a possible reduction in overall student numbers poses significant challenges.

In response to this and calls from the sector, on 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

Temporary student number controls will be put in place for domestic and EU students for the academic year 2020/21 to ensure a fair, structured distribution of students across providers. Provider-level student number controls will be determined based on provider forecasts and allow for 5% growth above this. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places on top of the controls, of which 5,000 will be allocated to students studying nursing or allied health courses, to ensure growing numbers that will support our vital public services. This measure will only apply to full-time undergraduate UK/EU domiciled students, with certain specified exemptions. These controls will not apply to international (non-EU) students.
The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, has also consulted on a new temporary condition of registration. The OfS’ proposed condition would prohibit registered providers from engaging in any form of conduct which, in the opinion of the OfS, could reasonably have a material negative effect on the stability and/or integrity of the English higher education sector.

The government has also pulled forward tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of academic year 2020/21, announced £100 million of public funding will be brought forward to the current academic year to help protect vital university research activities in England and confirmed providers are eligible to apply for the government financial support schemes estimated by the OfS to be worth at least £700 million to the sector.

Universities have an integral part to play in our economy, society and culture, which is highlighted now more than ever through their leading role in the fight against the virus. That is why we are introducing a package of measures to boost support for students, stabilise the admissions system and ease the pressures on universities’ finances.

I have written to all hon. Members with full details of the package, which have also been published on GOV.UK: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students.

On Friday 5 June, the department announced Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a key deliverable of the 2019 International Education Strategy. Sir Steve will assist with opening up export growth opportunities for the whole UK education sector, tackling international challenges such as those posed to attracting international students and forging lasting global connections.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to support higher education providers that are financially reliant on international student fee income and who have incurred losses as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. [52044]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We have been working closely with the sector, including specialist providers, to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19 on student numbers in 2020-21. We understand the COVID-19 outbreak and a possible reduction in overall student numbers poses significant challenges.

In response to this and calls from the sector, on 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

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National skills fund

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to his oral contribution of 20 May 2020 (Volume 676 Column 574) on the new national skills fund worth £2.5 billion to support young people during the pandemic, what additional objectives have been allocated to the fund since it was announced in the Queens Speech. [52146]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): Over the course of this Parliament, the government are providing £2.5 billion (£3 billion when including Barnett funding for devolved administrations) for a new National Skills Fund to help adults learn new skills and prepare for the economy of the future.

The National Skills Fund will re-energise the adult skills landscape and help to ensure that businesses can find and hire the workers they need and help people fulfil their potential.

Work is progressing to develop detailed plans for the National Skills Fund, and a consultation will be launched at a time when all those who have an interest will be better able to engage actively in it. We will continue to engage closely with users, employers and stakeholders throughout the process, before setting out more detailed plans after the consultation.

The insights gained will help to build an understanding of how best to target the fund and which groups will benefit and what types of training it should cover, to ensure we can provide the best return on investment.

Graduate work visa

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what plans she has to extend the graduate work visa to students who currently hold a Tier 4 Visa. [53481]

Kevin Foster (Torbay): The Graduate route will be launched in the Summer of 2021.

To be eligible for the route, students must successfully complete a degree at undergraduate level or above at a Higher Education Provider with a track record of compliance and hold valid leave as a student when the route is introduced. Students who complete their courses prior to the introduction of the route will not be eligible.
Current Tier 4 students can benefit from the route, if their leave expires after the route is introduced, regardless of when their courses commenced.

**Investors in People accreditation**

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how many UK (a) businesses and (b) universities are Investors in People accredited. [53657]

Amanda Solloway (Derby North): Investors in People is responsible for awarding the Investors in People standard. Since 1 February 2017 this has been a Community Interest Company, which is not part of the Government.

**Child tax credit calculation for students**

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason income from student maintenance was disregarded for the purposes of calculating Child Tax Credits. [51819]

Will Quince (Colchester): Tax credits are designed to be closely aligned with the tax system, and therefore generally only take into account taxable income. As student loans are not liable to income tax, they are not included in the calculation of income for tax credits purposes.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason student maintenance income is taken into account for universal credit purposes but not for child tax credit purposes. [51820]

Will Quince (Colchester): Tax credits are designed to be closely aligned with the tax system, and therefore generally only take into account taxable income. As student loans are not liable to income tax, they are not included in the calculation of income for tax credits purposes.

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**Sector News**
‘Entering the UK’ travel advice regarding self-isolation

The UK government has released new guidance on how to enter the UK and on how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK. Entrants on or after 8 June must provide their journey and contact details on a form before they travel. The government will use this information to contact entrants if they or someone they’ve travelled with develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, and to check that the entrant is self-isolating for the first 14 days after arrival in the UK.

Further guidance was also released this week giving instruction to international arrivals on how to self-isolate. This includes information on how to travel to the place where you are self-isolating, how to self-isolate in your accommodation and what to do if you get coronavirus symptoms during the process.

You can find the guidance on entering the UK here and instruction on how to self-isolate here.

Scottish Funding Council to consider its model in light of Covid-19

On Thursday 4 June, the Scottish Government announced it was to commission a review into future provision and sustainability of colleges and universities in light of coronavirus (Covid-19). The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) will review the provision and delivery of teaching and research activity across the college and university sector, as well as how activity will be funded.

In response to the announcement a spokesperson from Universities Scotland said: “Universities are already focused on adapting their provision to support a new normal after the pandemic and want that to reflect learners’ needs, institutional strengths and the First Minister’s desire to go beyond rebuilding to create a better future for Scotland. We hope the review will be similarly focused on societal and economic need and keep a focus on universities as a real asset to recovery.

“More broadly, it’s important to retain sight of the fact that universities’ ability to respond effectively to the needs of learners, employers, business and economic growth after the pandemic will be severely compromised unless the Scottish and UK Governments can offer a meaningful package of devolved and UK-level support to enable higher education to be a key part of the nation’s recovery and success. Reviewing provision is not a substitute for that.”

You can find further information here.

New International Education Champion announced

On Friday 5 June, Professor Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter, has been named by the Department for International Trade as the new International Education Champion. Professor Sir Steve Smith will play a key role in leading the UK sector’s efforts to offer the world’s best student experience, and to communicate it internationally. This includes tackling barriers to education exports, and the need to offer an open and welcoming message to overseas students. Further information is included in the UK Government’s press release to accompany the announcement at today’s British Council Going Global online event.

You can find further details in the press release here.

Office for Students guidance to providers on student and applicant consumer rights

On Wednesday 10 June, the OfS published new guidance stating that registered providers must give students clear and timely information about how the delivery of their courses will change next year – including the extent to which they will be delivered online – as a result of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.
According to the guidance, current students should be made aware of what teaching will be delivered in what way. They should also be told whether any adjustments to their courses and teaching might need to be made to reflect different scenarios and changes to public health advice. Prospective students should receive enough information to be able to make an informed decision about starting that course, choosing a different course or deferring.

You can find the guidance here.

**UUK roundtable discussion with Education Secretary**

On Wednesday 10 June, UUK convened a roundtable discussion between the Education Secretary, the Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, and a group of vice-chancellors (reflecting the diversity of the sector) to discuss priority issues including how the government can support the sector to encourage domestic and international students to attend university in the autumn, the financial pressures facing universities and role universities will playing in the recovery of local communities, removing barriers to delivering more flexible learning, and the continuing concerns regarding financial sustainability and where government support is still required.

Following discussion about the work to ensure universities can deliver a full and high-quality offer for students next academic year, the Secretary of State issued a statement to media:

"Both Government and Universities UK understand that this is a difficult time for students, particularly those who are making decisions about their future during this period, and it is crucial that institutions are transparent about how they will deliver their courses in the next academic year.

"There is absolutely no need for students to defer entry this year - unless they particularly want to - and I urge students to think carefully about their options and make informed decisions which best serve their futures.

"We have already seen some fantastic and innovative examples of online learning delivered across the country, and I am confident that universities will continue to make every effort to continue this provision from September where required, and also provide excellent support for students joining university."

You can find more information here.

**Package of additional financial support for Scottish students**

On Thursday 11 June, Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced a package of additional financial support for Scottish students facing financial hardship this summer. Access to £11.4 million of discretionary funds have been brought forward by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which will be administered by colleges and universities.

In addition, Scottish students studying in Europe as part of EU Portability or historically arranged schemes will be able to access a £100,000 emergency fund administered by SAAS.

You can find more information here.

**Welsh government guidance for higher education: Keep Wales Safe (COVID-19)**

On Thursday 11 June, the Welsh government published guidance on measures higher education providers may need to follow in order to protect the health of students, staff and the communities they serve.
HE providers must ensure that face-to-face learning complies with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020 and that they have regard to the guidance issued by the Welsh Government in respect of those Regulations.

This guidance is first phase guidance and it is anticipated that future guidance will provide more detail in relation to:

- Accommodation
- Test, Trace and Protect
- International Students
- Community,

You can find the guidance document [here](#).

**£60m bailout for British Council**

On Thursday 11 June, Nigel Adams, Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has announced a £60m bailout for the British Council. In a written statement to Parliament Nigel Adams said that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had sought an advance from the Contingencies Fund to help the council, whose commercial income has been heavily hit by Covid-19 - leading to “significant losses” and the “risk of insolvency”.

You can find the written statement [here](#).

**OfS briefing note on supporting post graduate research students during Covid-19**

On Thursday 11 June, the Office for Students published its latest briefing note from the Office for Students looks at how universities, colleges and other organisations are supporting postgraduate research students during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

It the challenges faced by PGR students, such as being forced to put their research activity on hold, with access to research infrastructure like libraries and laboratories severely impacted. Supervision and examinations have also been affected, with much activity moving online. Postgraduate researchers not supported by major funders may also face challenges in addressing potential funding shortfalls.

The briefing note looks at how universities, colleges, research organisations, higher education sector bodies and funders have been responding to these and other challenges. It includes a number of case studies which show approaches such as:

You can find the briefing note [here](#).

**Education Secretary accelerates T Level roll-out**

On Thursday 11 June, Gavin Williamson announced the roll out of T-levels. Eighty-eight more providers selected to deliver T-level qualifications from September 2022 taking the total to over 180 across England

You can find out more [here](#).