



The All-Party Parliamentary  
**University Group**

**28 January 2020**

## **Agenda**

**The theme of the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary University Group is ‘what to expect in higher education policy in 2020’**

- 6:15pm**      **Daniel Zeichner MP**, Chair, All-Party Parliamentary University Group
- c6:20pm**      **Professor Julia Buckingham**, President, Universities UK
- c6:30pm**      **John Gill**, Editor, Times Higher Education
- c6:40pm**      **Viki Cooke**, Founding Partner, BritainThinks
- c6:50pm**      **Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP**, Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation
- c7:00pm**      Questions, comments, and discussion with university leaders, MPs and peers
- 7:30pm**      Speaker meeting concludes.

## **Speaker Biographies**

### **Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP**

Chris Skidmore is the Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation. He was appointed Minister of State jointly at the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on 10 September 2019.

Previously Chris Skidmore was Minister of State jointly at the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy between 5 December 2018 and 25 July 2019.



He was elected Conservative MP for Kingswood in May 2010. Chris was educated at Bristol Grammar School before studying history at Oxford, where he continued with postgraduate research.

### **Professor Julia Buckingham**

Professor Julia Buckingham is Universities UK's President. She chairs all Universities UK Members' Meetings, UK Board and Executive Committee meetings.

Professor Buckingham has been Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University London since 2012 following a number of senior leadership positions at Imperial College London and Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School. She has been an active member of UUK, supporting policy developments and using her experience of working with research funders, professional bodies, industry, NHS, the government and various national and international organisations to represent the sector at select committees and political meetings. Professor Buckingham was first elected to the Board of UUK in 2014 and was elected Treasurer in 2016.



She is currently a Director of Imperial College Health Partners and of the National Centre for Universities and Business, Chair of The Concordat Strategy Group, supporting the career development of researchers, and Chair of the Athena SWAN Review Steering Group.

## **Viki Cooke**

Viki has more than 25 years' experience providing insight based strategic advice to global and national clients from the private, public and third sectors. She works closely with Chief Executives, Secretaries of State and their management teams to ensure the voice of the people that matter to them is embedded in their thinking.

Viki has a track record for innovation in the development of deliberative research methodologies, best practice reputation research and stakeholder engagement.

Viki is a serial entrepreneur having co-founded a number of other successful companies over the last two decades including Opinion Leader Research, The SMART Company, Brand Democracy and Caucus.

Viki is also Vice Chair and Pro Chancellor of the University of Warwick Council and Chair of Hubbub Foundation.



## **John Gill**

John Gill has been editor of Times Higher Education since 2012. He joined THE as a reporter in 2007 and was news editor for four years before taking on his current role.

John has been closely involved in the development of THE's World University Rankings portfolio over the last eight years and was called to give evidence to the recent parliamentary inquiry into teaching metrics.

He regularly speaks at higher education conferences, including THE's World Summit Series.



## **Briefing: what to expect in higher education policy in 2020**

**Prepared for members of the All-Party Parliamentary University Group**

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either house or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of members of both houses with a common interest in particular issues.

This briefing document has been produced by Universities UK which provides the secretariat for the University APPG.

## **Introduction**

This meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary University Group will consider what we can expect in higher education policy in 2020, with contributions from speakers with a range of insight and experience including the current Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Minister. As this is the first meeting since the election of the new government, it is an opportune time to consider manifesto commitments, explore the implications of existing announcements and look ahead to the themes likely to emerge in 2020.

This guide will give further information on the Government's higher education policy announcements, items on the agenda and dates to be aware of in the coming months.

## **Government's Higher Education policy announcements**

Since Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in July 2019, his government has outlined a number of significant policies for the higher education sector. The Conservative's 2019 election manifesto contained several additional commitments that we can expect to be implemented in the coming months and years.

### **Immigration**

#### **Fast-Track Visa Route**

In December, Home secretary Priti Patel announced an immediate increase in accelerated visas for fellowships in Science and Research from 62 to more than 120. In line with the current process, individuals who receive these fellowships will only need to provide a letter from the relevant funding organisation, which will see them fast-tracked to the Home Office / UKVI visa application stage where immigration checks will be carried out.

As announced in August 2019, the Home Office will be bringing forward the plans to abolish the cap on the numbers under the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) route and an accelerated path to settlement for those who arrive under this scheme. The Home Office is working to implement these changes early this year.

#### **Post-study Work**

In September, the Department for Education announced that international students that had successfully completed a degree programme at a UK university will be able to stay in the UK to live and work for two years post-graduation.

The visa will allow eligible students to work, or look for work, in any career or position of their choice, for two years after completing their studies.

There will be no limit on the number of students that can stay in the UK under this route, and there will be no minimum skill-level requirement for their employment.

The new Graduate route will launch for the 2020/21 intake of students to university. After the two years, they will be able to switch onto the skilled work visa if they find a job which meets the skill requirement of the route. Further details will be announced in due course.

## **Research and Development**

### Investment in PhD researchers

Minister Chris Skidmore announced a £370 million investment in new PhD researchers. Of this, £200 million will fund 1,000 new PhD places over the next 5 years to study AI. A further £170 million will fund 1,700 places to study PhDs in biosciences. He also announced an additional £37.5 million for Turing AI Fellowships and a new investment of £13 million to build new AI conversion courses from 2020.

## **Health workforce**

### Return of NHS bursaries

From September 2020, students on health programmes will receive a bursary of at least £5,000 a year, with up to £3,000 further funding available for eligible students, including for:

- specialist disciplines that struggle to recruit, including mental health
  - an additional childcare allowance, on top of the £1,000 already on offer
  - areas of the country which have seen a decrease in people accepted on some nursing, midwifery and allied health courses over the past year
- Students will also be able to continue to access funding for tuition and maintenance loans from the Student Loans Company.

## **Universities' Civic role**

The Department for Education (DfE) has awarded £50,000 funding to the UPP Foundation to help establish a Civic University Network. The Network will work to support the growing Civic University Agreements (CUA) movement by sharing best practice between participating universities, develop a peer review scheme so that universities increase their civic impact, and connect universities with other sectors which are prioritising issues around 'place' to level up the economy and society. Universities, charities and sector bodies can bid to host the network with the winner will receiving £125,000 seed funding

## **Further Government Commitments**

### **Research and Development spending**

Boris Johnson pledged to double research and development (R&D) funding to £18 billion in the next Parliament, promising a major injection of funds for UK universities and research organisations. This increase in domestic public R&D spending will help meet the manifesto target of 2.4% of GDP being spent on R&D across the economy.

### **Funding for FE and Skills**

#### **National Skills Fund**

Government committed to investing £3 billion into a new National Skills Fund over the course of Parliament to “help people learn new skills and prepare for the economy of the future.” The fund is proposing to provide match funding for individuals and SMEs for high-quality education and training.

#### **Investment in Skills**

Alongside the National Skills Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund, the Conservative government have outlined a range of proposals to address the skills gap including a National Retraining Scheme, the creation of 20 Institutes of Technology, “significant investment in UK apprentices”, a capital investment of £1.8billion into the further education estate and the introduction of T Levels.

The Conservative manifesto also committed to look at improving the working of the apprenticeship levy given the reported fall in apprenticeship starts since it was brought in.

### **Other relevant commitments in the Conservative manifesto**

- Review the definition of R&D to cover investment in other areas such as data gathering and processing, and cloud computing
- Plan to increase the R&D tax credit rate from 12% to 13%
- Work with local universities to do more for the education, health and prosperity of their local areas
- Tackle the problem of grade inflation and low-quality courses
- Improve the application and offer system for undergraduate students
- Strengthen academic freedom and free speech in universities
- Improve the working of the Apprenticeship Levy

## On the Agenda

### European programmes

#### Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe, a proposed €94.1 billion research programme, is due to start in 2021.

The current programme, Horizon 2020, runs from 2014-20 and provides a ready-made platform for collaborating with key European partners, including six of the UK's top 10 research partners. Participation in Horizon 2020 allows access to a multi-national pooled financial resource that supports – and incentivises – collaboration.

The exact budget and regulations for the next Horizon programme have yet to be decided at European Commission level; these are expected to be agreed by mid-way through 2020.

The Universities Minister has regularly expressed the desire to associate to the next programme, which he reiterated on 20 January during education oral questions in the House of Commons: *“when it comes to Horizon Europe...I am absolutely determined that we work towards association”*

#### Erasmus+

The UK's participation in the next Erasmus scheme which will run from 2021-27 has been widely discussed following the defeat of an amendment to the Withdrawal Bill that would have required the government to negotiate continuing full membership of the Erasmus+ programme.

The Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP was asked a question on the UK's continued participation in the Erasmus+ scheme during Prime Minister's Questions. The Prime Minister responded: *“There is no threat to the Erasmus scheme, and we will continue to participate in it. UK students will continue to be able to enjoy the benefits of exchanges with our European friends and partners, just as they will be able to continue to come to this country.”*

It has since been clarified that this statement relates to association to the programme until 2020. Association with future Erasmus programmes is yet to be negotiated, and its exact budget and regulations have not yet been agreed at European Commission level.

Although association has not yet been secured, the government has regularly stated its intention for academic co-operation and student exchange with European partners to continue post-Brexit. Ministers have confirmed that domestic replacement schemes are being explored as association is undesirable or unachievable.

## **Conclusion of the Post-18 Education and Funding Review**

Chris Skidmore announced the Post-18 Education and Funding 'Augar' review is to be concluded by the next spending review, expected to take place in later on in 2020. The government are likely to outline their response to the review and any actions they propose to take forward.

The review delivers 53 recommendations for post-18 education. Key proposals within the review panel's report for higher education include:

- A tuition fee reduction to £7,500 per year, with lost fee income replaced by an increased teaching grant.
- Adjusting the teaching grant to reflect more accurately the subject's reasonable costs and its social and economic value to students and society.
- Expectation that the sector address poor retention, poor graduate employability and poor long-term earnings benefits. If not addressed, the government should intervene in the form of a contextualised minimum entry threshold, a selective numbers cap or a combination of both.
- Restoration of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students in line with the national minimum wage and a new post-18 maintenance support package should be provided for all students taking Level 4 to 6 qualifications.
- Withdraw financial support for foundation degrees.
- Students be given access to flexible lifelong learning entitlement with the introduction of a loan allowance for tuition loans at level 4,5 and 6 for those without a publicly funded degree.
- Replace the current system for widening participation with a Student Premium distributed to universities based on intake of socially and economically disadvantaged students.
- Further education and apprenticeships receive a substantial increase in capital investment and the creation of an FE network focused on delivering skills for levels 3-5.

The election manifesto, states that the government will consider the recommendations of the Augar review 'carefully' on tuition fees, balance of funding between universities, further education and apprenticeships.

## **Response to Smith Review**

The Smith review published its independent report in November 2019, which sets out the opportunities for the UK to extend its international collaboration. The new report by Sir Adrian Smith and Professor Graeme Reid provides a range of principles and ideas, setting out potential opportunities for the UK to extend its international collaborations globally and strengthen current partnerships, including options in the event the UK does not stay fully part of European funding programmes.

This includes options for:

- protecting and enhancing the UK's science, research and innovation base, including through building R&D capacity across the UK
- increasing the agility of research funding to react to new and unexpected international opportunities
- striding towards the government's commitment to increase research and development (R&D) investment to at least 2.4% of GDP by 2027 including attracting foreign direct investment to the UK
- developing a Global Talent Strategy to attract and retain a wide range of scientific talent in the UK

In response the government said they will consider the review carefully. No date has been given for formal response to the recommendations.

### **Points-based immigration system**

In June 2019, the government commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to carry out an in-depth analysis of potential future salary thresholds as well as the design of a new Australia-style points-based system.

Universities UK has called for a lowering of the salary threshold to £21,000 to allow universities to recruit early-career researchers, technicians and assistants that have vital skills but lower salaries.

The government has stated it will introduce the new immigration system by January 2021 once the Brexit transition period has finished. It is expected that salary thresholds for the skilled visa route will be scrapped in favour of a points-based system in which applicants are assigned points in different categories including English language proficiency and educational attainment.

EU nationals will be included in the new immigration system from 1 January 2021 and therefore the specific details of the new system will be incredibly important for all industries that currently employ a substantial number of EU and non-EU citizens. This includes universities as one in five academic and professional staff come from outside the UK.

### **UK's DARPA**

Science Minister Chris Skidmore announced plans to establish a new research agency modelled on the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) which would sit outside the framework of UK Research and Innovation. The new agency has a proposed investment of £800million over 5 years to support blue skies, high-reward, research and investment in UK leadership in artificial intelligence and

data. Chris Skidmore said it would focus on “project-led, intensive project management and [would need] to be able to distinguish itself from grant-led processes”.

The aim of the project is to channel more funding to emerging fields of research that are likely to lead to technological breakthroughs. The Minister said that he saw the planned funder as “sitting at the top of a pyramid, [with] a larger band of basic and blue skies research [funding] beneath that, of which QR [quality-related funding] is an important part”.

The government is expected to launch a consultation before establishing a new agency.

### **Replacing European Structural Funds**

The Government has promised to replace the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) with a UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to devote £500 million from this new fund to support disadvantaged people get the skills they need to succeed.

The stated objective of the UKSPF is to tackle inequalities between communities by raising productivity, especially in those parts of the country whose economies are furthest behind. The UKSPF will achieve this objective by strengthening the foundations of productivity as set out in the government’s modern Industrial Strategy to support people to benefit from economic prosperity.

A consultation from the UK government on the design of the UKSPF has yet to be released. The Scottish government launched a consultation in November 2019.

### **Budget 2020**

The first budget of the new government will be held on 11 March 2020. Reports suggest this will be one of the highest spending budgets in years with investment in infrastructure and public services prioritised.

It is not expected that any changes to the student finance system would be announced at the Budget as the government has recently stated the Post-18 Education and Funding Review will be concluded with the Spending Review, however further details about the National Skills Fund may emerge.









# The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

## **Future meetings**

**Tuesday 24 March 2020**

Subject TBC

18:00-19:30

Future meetings beyond March will be confirmed and publicised in due course.

For more information about the group please email [appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk) or visit [www.universityappg.co.uk](http://www.universityappg.co.uk)

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