



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

14 – 17 April 2025

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, please contact:

Rosanna Marsh | appug@universitiesuk.ac.uk

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Forthcoming business

Industrial Strategy – oral evidence session

On Tuesday 22 April, the Business and Trade Committee will hear evidence from the following witnesses about the Industrial Strategy:

- Professor David Greenwood, Chief Executive Officer, Warwick Manufacturing Group
 - Brian Holliday, Managing Director, Digital Industries, Siemens UK
 - Stephen Phipson CBE, Chief Executive Officer, Make UK
 - Markus Grüneisl, Chief Executive Officer, BMW (UK) Manufacturing Ltd
 - Steve Turner, Assistant General Secretary, Unite the Union
 - Alan Johnson, Senior Vice President, Region Manufacturing, Supply Chain & Purchasing, Nissan AMEIO
 - Mike Hawes, Chief Executive, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders
- You can [watch the session live here](#).

Financing and Scaling UK Science and Technology: Innovation, Investment, Industry – oral evidence session

On Tuesday 22 April, the Lords Science and Technology Committee will hear evidence from Sir Paul Nurse, Chief Executive and Director, The Francis Crick Institute and Sir John Bell, President, Ellison Institute of Technology.

You can [watch the session live here](#).

Renters' Rights Bill Committee – House of Lords

Tuesday 22 April is day 1 of the Renters' Rights Bill committee stage. You can see [more information](#) about the Bill and view the [order paper](#).

Further Education and Skills – oral evidence

On Wednesday 23 April, the Education Committee will hear evidence from the following witnesses on further education and skills:

- Phil Smith CBE, Chair at Skills England
- Sir David Bell, Vice Chair at Skills England
- Sarah Maclean, Joint CEO at Skills England
- Tessa Griffiths, Joint CEO at Skills England
- Ben Rowland, Chief Executive at Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Dr Katerina Kolyva, Chief Executive at Education and Training Foundation (ETF)
- Emily Rock, Chief Executive at Association of Apprentices
- Jane Hadfield, Co-Chair, The St Martin's Group and National Lead, Apprenticeships at NHS England

You can [watch the session live here](#).

Recess

The House of Lords will be in recess from 4 April until 22 April. The House of Commons will be in recess from 9 April until 22 April.

Written questions and statements

Students: Neurodiversity

The Rt Hon. the Lord Patten (Conservative): (HL6368) To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the role of the Office for Students in protecting the interests of university students self-identifying as neurodivergent.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator of higher education (HE) in England and aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of HE that enriches their life and career.

The OfS is committed to supporting an inclusive experience of HE for disabled students and uses a range of regulatory tools in order to identify issues and support continuous improvement.

The OfS uses access and participation plans to support and challenge the HE sector to improve equality of opportunity. These are agreements that set out how universities and colleges will improve equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups, including learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, to access, succeed in and progress from HE.

In the summer, we will set out our plan for HE reform and the part we expect HE providers to play in improving access and outcomes for all disadvantaged students.

Office for Students

The Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Labour): (HL6530) To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to strengthen mutual trust and respect between the Office for Students and those it regulates.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): The government recognises the importance of the relationship between the independent regulator for higher education, the Office for Students (OfS), and those providers it regulates. We are confident in the OfS's ability to engage and communicate with providers appropriately, and we are pleased to see the OfS's sustained willingness to strive to make improvements in these areas wherever possible.

Independent research published in October 2024 found that perceptions of the OfS's engagement and communications with the sector have improved. Positive feedback

included direct engagement with Vice Chancellors and principals through regular mailings and briefings.

The OfS are acting on insights from this research to make further improvements. They have introduced more interactive formats for many of their events and have made changes to tailor their engagement work. This includes over 40 different engagement events since January 2024 and 44 provider visits since the start of the 2024/25 academic year.

Innovation and Research: Apprentices

Chi Onwurah (Labour) (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West): (43863) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of apprenticeships as pathways into (a) research and (b) innovation careers.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): There are a number of apprenticeships to support careers in research and innovation, including the level 6 product design and development engineer and level 6 materials science technologist.

Apprenticeships deliver strong outcomes and high satisfaction rates for learners and employers.

94% of apprentices go into work or further training, with 93% in sustained employment, and many apprentices remain with the employer following their apprenticeship.

In addition, latest data shows that 83% of employers were satisfied with their apprenticeship programme and 77% of employers reported improved productivity, while 86% of apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeships and 88% felt their career prospects had improved since starting their apprenticeship.

Overseas Students: Visas

Jessica Toale (Labour) (Bournemouth West): (44116) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of visa policies on university finances.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): This government welcomes international students who enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK. The government expects the UK to remain a highly attractive study destination. We have a world class

higher education (HE) sector with four universities in the top 10 and 15 in the top 100, alongside a wide array of high quality institutions which can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students from around the world.

The department recognises that the Office for Students (OfS), which is responsible for monitoring and reporting on the financial sustainability of English HE providers, has identified reliance on international student fee income as a risk. In its most recent update on the sector's financial health, published in November 2024, the OfS found that international recruitment is significantly below the sector's previous expectations. While we agree with the OfS' assessment that more providers will need to adapt their business models to protect their financial stability, we are clear that high quality international students are welcome in the UK.

While the sector is autonomous and independent, the government is determined to secure the future of our world leading HE sector. That is why we have taken decisive action to support providers in moving towards a more stable financial footing.

In March, Professor Edward Peck was appointed as substantive Chair of the OfS. Professor Peck will continue the excellent work of interim Chair, Sir David Behan, focusing on the sector's financial sustainability and increasing opportunities in HE. The department continues to work closely with the OfS in order to better understand the sector's changing financial landscape.

Moreover, in November, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education announced the difficult decision to increase tuition fee limits in line with forecast inflation. The maximum fee for a standard full-time undergraduate course in the 2025/26 academic year will increase by 3.1%, from £9,250 to £9,535. In return for the increased investment we are asking students to make, we expect the sector to deliver the very best outcomes, both for those students and for the country.

The government also recognises the impact that financial pressures are having on the HE workforce. We are aware that some providers, including Bournemouth University and the Arts University Bournemouth, are making difficult decisions around staffing in order to safeguard their financial sustainability. Given universities are independent, they are responsible for pay and provision of staff and the government does not have a role in intervening. However, we expect providers to work with staff, using their knowledge and experience to help identify how best to reduce unnecessary spend. All efficiency measures taken by the sector should provide better long term value both for students and the country.

This government is determined to build a HE system fit for the future. Ministers and departmental officials remain dedicated to engaging with the OfS, HE unions, the employer body and the wider sector. Regular discussions are being held to gain a deeper understanding of the issues impacting HE providers, students, and staff. This collaborative effort will contribute to the development of the department's plan for HE reform, which we will publish in the summer.

Students: Loans

Ellie Chowns (Green) (North Herefordshire): (44184) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the (a) Plan 5 student loan repayment threshold and (b) annual pay for someone on the minimum wage in a full-time job from 1 April 2025 on the net income of graduates with student loans.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): In 2022, the department conducted a government consultation to assess the impact of policy reforms on higher education funding and finance, including changes to repayment thresholds from Plan 2 to Plan 5. More details on the consultation can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62223cfb8fa8f549071fc82c/Higher_education_policy_statement_reform_consultation_-_Equality_analysis.pdf.

Comparing the previous threshold of £28,470 under Plan 2 with the new threshold of £25,000 under Plan 5, the monthly repayments under the new repayment plan would result in an individual who was previously earning £28,470 and not repaying their loan, to now repaying approximately £26 per month.

From 1 April 2025, the National Minimum Wage has increased to £12.21 for workers aged 21 and over. If working a standard 37.5 hours per week, a minimum wage worker will earn £23,809.50, which is below the annual threshold for both Plans 2 and 5. This calculation is based on the average actual weekly hours of work for full-time workers.

Sector news

Report on employment outcomes of disabled graduates – AGCAS

On Monday 17 April, AGCAS published a report on employment outcomes of disabled graduates from the 2021/22 academic year. The report focuses on disabled graduates, but they have also evaluated outcomes by gender and ethnic background.

Key findings include:

- Disabled graduates have lower rates of full-time employment than graduates with no known disability across all ethnic backgrounds.
- White disabled graduates are more likely to be in full-time employment than disabled graduates from all other ethnic backgrounds.
- Disabled Asian and Black graduates both report full-time employment levels that are 7% lower than Asian and Black graduates with no known disability.

You can read more [here](#).