



# All-Party Parliamentary University Group

## Weekly update

19 – 23 May 2025

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

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# Parliamentary business

## Autism Act 2009 Committee - oral evidence

On Monday 19 May, the House of Lords Autism Act 2009 Committee held an oral evidence session examining the effectiveness of the government's current autism strategy. The Committee heard from:

- Professor Kim Hoque (Professor of Human Resource Management at King's College London)
- Professor Anna Remington (Director of the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at University College London (UCL))
- Laura Davis (CEO at British Association of Supported Employment)

Opening the discussion, Professor Anna Remington reflected on the data from the Office for National Statistics in 2022-23, which suggests that autistic people in the UK have an employment rate of about 29%, which is the second lowest of all disability groups. The overall employment rate for all people with disabilities is 55% and for the general population it is 75%.

She also mentioned data specifically on those graduating from higher education, and it is a similar pattern. The figures for 2021-22 suggest that autistic people are twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled graduates and least likely to be in full-time employment. Again, this is lower than for any other disability type, for those with either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees.

You can [read more](#) and [watch the session](#).

## Science and Innovation: Alan Turing Institute - HoL oral question

On Monday 19 May, an oral question on the Alan Turing Institute was asked by the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Science Innovation and Technology, Lord Clement-Jones.

Lord Clement-Jones opened the discussion by raising concerns about recent reports that the institute is cutting at least 21 science and innovation projects, and has experienced several high-profile resignations, including three of its four science and innovation directors. He noted serious internal tensions, including a staff letter of no

confidence, and asked whether the institute would continue to play a key role in AI ethics, standards and responsible innovation.

Responding for the Government, Lord Vallance of Balham, the Minister for Science, Research, and Innovation, confirmed that the Alan Turing Institute, while independent, is undergoing a major strategic realignment under its new “Turing 2.0” strategy. He explained that the institute is narrowing its focus to four key areas—health, environment, defence and security, and fundamental AI—to ensure greater depth of impact. He emphasised that the institute had been established by a consortium of six universities and now works with around 65, making it a central node in the UK’s wider university research ecosystem.

Baroness Bull (Crossbench) highlighted the importance of linking science and innovation with arts and humanities research. She stressed that many university-based start-ups draw from both domains and that interdisciplinary work helps embed innovation in social contexts. Lord Vallance agreed, stating that start-ups often require people with a range of backgrounds and that universities play a critical role in producing such talent. He reaffirmed government support for arts and humanities research, particularly for its contribution to the innovation economy.

Baroness Royall (Labour) drew attention to the role of Oxford and Cambridge universities in driving innovation, and asked the Minister to recognise the importance of including local government and communities in infrastructure and skills development across the wider region. Lord Vallance agreed, noting that the Oxford-Cambridge corridor must be seen not just as two “shiny objects” but as an inclusive ecosystem involving regional stakeholders. He stressed that research-intensive universities are not only economic drivers but must also uplift local communities.

Baroness Blackwood (Conservative), a former trustee of the Alan Turing Institute, asked whether the institute would help train public servants and regulators in the application of AI. Lord Vallance responded that the institute continues to play a leading role in this space, citing its Centre for Emerging Technology and Security and the AI Standards Hub. He noted that many of the institute’s ongoing projects are being conducted in partnership with government and universities, and remain integral to broader national goals for AI adoption in public services.

Lord Patel (Crossbench) raised concerns about governance failures at the Alan Turing Institute and asked what oversight the government retained. Lord Vallance confirmed that although the institute is an independent charity, it receives substantial public funding - including £20 million annually from 2024 to 2029. He stressed that with this funding comes responsibility, and the government would maintain oversight to ensure governance reforms are implemented effectively. He said he had met with institute leaders recently to monitor progress.

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

## UK-EU Summit - HoC Ministerial Statement

On Tuesday 20 May, a Ministerial Statement on the UK-EU Summit took place in the House of Commons.

Opening the debate the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP, said “the deal will deliver for our young people, because we are now on a path towards a controlled youth experience scheme, with firm caps on numbers and visa controls - a relationship we have with so many countries around the world, some of which were even set up by the Conservative party. We should be proud to give our young people that opportunity.”

Afzal Khan MP (Labour) opened the discussion on higher education, welcoming the agreement in principle for a youth mobility scheme. Representing a constituency with over 100,000 students, he emphasised the importance of restoring international student exchange programmes. Afzal Khan described the youth mobility framework as “life-changing,” enabling young people to study, work, and travel across Europe.

Sarah Olney MP (Liberal Democrat) noted that the Government had previously denied interest in a youth mobility scheme but now appeared to have rebranded it as a “youth experience scheme.” She called for clarity on the timing of implementation and asked whether caps, visa limits, and other conditions had been finalised. The Prime Minister confirmed that talks would now proceed “at pace” and that the Government would keep the House informed as the programme progressed.

Luke Taylor MP (Liberal Democrat) pressed the Government on the *Erasmus+* scheme, citing the number of students who had missed out on international opportunities due to its post-Brexit exclusion. Luke Taylor asked directly when students could expect Erasmus to be reinstated. While the Prime Minister reiterated support for youth mobility more broadly, he stopped short of committing to rejoining Erasmus, instead focusing on the new bilateral youth experience framework.

Dr Rupa Huq MP (Labour) shared her personal perspective, referencing her own son and staff who had been denied access to opportunities once available through EU schemes. She described the new youth mobility announcement as “brilliant” and long overdue. Dr Rupa Huq emphasised that entire cohorts of young people had already missed out, and called for urgent progress on implementation. She also echoed concerns about the need for similar access to creative sectors, where university graduates often work across borders. The Prime Minister assured her that work was underway and that implementation would move quickly.

Darren Paffey MP (Labour) welcomed what he called a “common-sense reset” and criticised the Conservatives for slamming “the door of opportunity” on young people through their Brexit deal. He praised the youth mobility scheme as offering “life-changing experiences” for students in Southampton and asked how schools and universities could help shape its design. The Prime Minister agreed, describing the scheme as a great opportunity and confirmed that the sector would be involved in its development.

Rachael Maskell MP (Labour) asked the Prime Minister to specifically outline how the UK-EU deal would benefit higher education. She described the university sector as York’s second-largest export and pressed for assurances that the new arrangements would enhance both the UK’s research base and its ability to attract top international talent. In response, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government’s ambition to bring “the very best into our country,” adding that the measures announced “will help in that effort,” though he acknowledged they do not represent the totality of the Government’s work in this area.

Joshua Reynolds MP (Liberal Democrat) turned the discussion toward research cooperation, asking what steps the Government would take to ensure continued UK participation in EU research programmes after the *Horizon Europe* agreement expires. The Prime Minister replied that the UK remained committed to scientific cooperation with the EU and that dialogue would continue, though he gave no specific policy announcements.

You can [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#)

## **Financing and Scaling UK Science and Technology: Innovation, Investment, Industry - Science and Technology Committee oral evidence**

On Tuesday 20 May, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee held a session on the role of universities in financing and scaling UK science and technology. The Committee heard from:

- Sir John Kingman.
- Sir John Lazar (President, The Royal Academy of Engineering)

Opening the session, the Chair, Lord Mair (Crossbench), questioned witnesses on the role of universities in the science and technology ecosystem. Sir John Kingman expressed serious concerns about the current state of the British university system, warning that it was “not in a good place.” He criticised the peer review process as

broken and said that policy interventions to date had been piecemeal, adding that a “first principles” review of the sector was urgently needed. He urged the government to avoid further ad hoc reforms that were only exacerbating existing problems.

Sir John Lazar highlighted the essential role universities play in nurturing innovation and enterprise. He praised the UK's progress in supporting early-stage deep tech companies, many of which are university spin-outs, but said that the system needed to operate more cohesively. He pointed to Cambridge as an example of a mature ecosystem built around a research-intensive university, and contrasted this with the difficulty most spin-outs face in navigating licensing and funding processes. He called for greater national replication of the Cambridge model.

Baroness Walmsley (Liberal Democrat) asked how universities could be better integrated into the upcoming industrial strategy. In response, Sir John Kingman stressed that universities were “an industry in their own right,” and one of the UK's greatest export assets. He called on the government to formally recognise the economic and strategic value of the higher education sector in its industrial planning, warning that the current lack of coordination was undermining long-term growth.

Sir John Lazar drew attention to the Academy's Enterprise Hub, which had supported around 10% of UK spin-outs over the past decade. He said universities remained central to its success, particularly in supporting complex, IP-heavy engineering companies. He welcomed government support for the Hub and its fellowship programme with Imperial College, but said more needed to be done to link up activity outside the so-called “Golden Triangle.”

Lord Mair raised concerns about energy costs and lab access for university spin-outs. Sir John Lazar agreed, calling the UK's energy prices “a major constraint” on scaling innovation. He pointed to recent improvements in standardising spin-out terms—led by Oxford Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey—but warned that the process remained too slow and burdensome, often deterring investment and limiting growth.

Sir John Kingman further emphasised the broader societal value of universities, noting their impact on local communities, the economy, and skills development. He stressed that continued public investment in university research was essential to preserve the UK's global standing in science and innovation. He also called on universities to strengthen partnerships with industry and ensure that academic research had real-world impact.

Responding to questions on attracting global talent, Sir John Kingman described the UK's immigration policy as a missed opportunity. He criticised the Immigration White Paper's limited focus on Nobel laureates and said that younger researchers and their families were the real key to future university success. He called on the government

to articulate a clear and welcoming approach to academic talent before the opportunity passed.

Baroness Walmsley asked about cross-sectoral links. Sir John Lazar noted that universities are often the anchor institution in regional innovation clusters. He pointed to the Academy's work establishing regional hubs in cities such as Swansea, Glasgow, and Newcastle, where universities drive local entrepreneurship and technical skill-building. He stressed the importance of recognising and supporting this place-based role.

Lord Borwick (Conservative) asked about the challenges facing university-linked engineering companies. Sir John Lazar listed energy costs, access to wet and dry labs, and slow licensing processes as key barriers. He said universities must do more to create frictionless pathways for innovation, and called on the government to build on recent reforms and further streamline spin-out procedures.

Concluding his remarks, Sir John Kingman said the UK's future prosperity depended on the success of its universities. He called on government to work in partnership with the sector to develop coherent, long-term policy and ensure sufficient capital, talent, and infrastructure to sustain the university-led innovation pipeline. Without this, he warned, the UK would struggle to compete globally.

You can [watch the session](#).

# Forthcoming business

## Recess

On Thursday 22 May, the House of Commons and House of Lords both rose for Whitsun recess and will return on Monday 2 June.

# Written questions and statements

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of student loan debt on young people's ability to (a) save for a home and (b) contribute to the economy. [UIN50917]

**Janet Daby:** UK higher education (HE) creates opportunity, is an engine for growth in our economy and supports local communities. The department is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background, where they live and their personal circumstances.

It is reasonable to ask graduates who benefit financially from HE to contribute towards the cost of their studies. Graduates can expect, on average, to earn around £100,000 more in their lifetime than someone who does not attend HE. The government is determined that the HE funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students.

Student loans have very different terms and conditions to commercial loans and carry significant protections for borrowers. For lower earners who will not repay much of their loan, any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off at the end of the loan term (or in case of death or disability) with no detriment to the borrower. This government subsidy of student loans is a deliberate investment in our young people and the economy.

Student loans are subject to interest, set with reference to inflation, to ensure that those who can afford to do so contribute to the full cost of their degree. Interest rates do not impact monthly repayments made by student loan borrowers. Regular repayments are based on earnings above the repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or interest rates. As an additional borrower protection, interest rates on loans taken out after 2012 are automatically capped by the prevailing market rate for comparable unsecured personal loans. This cap was triggered and protected borrowers during the recent spikes in inflation. Interest rates for undergraduate loans taken out before 2012 are also capped at the retail price index or the Bank of England base rate plus 1%, whichever is lower.

## Education: Freedom of Expression

**Rupert Lowe (Reform UK):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to protect academic and student freedom of speech in schools and universities. [UIN51017]

**Janet Daby:** This government is absolutely committed to freedom of speech and academic freedom in schools, universities and beyond. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, confirmed to Parliament on 15 January the government's plans for future of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which will create a more proportionate, balanced and less burdensome approach to protecting academic freedom and freedom of speech.

On 28 April, the Secretary of State signed commencement regulations, bringing the following provisions into force from 1 August 2025:

- Strengthened higher education (HE) provider duties in relation to securing freedom of speech and academic freedom and promoting the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom.
- A requirement for HE providers to put in place effective codes of practice on freedom of speech and academic freedom.
- A ban of non-disclosure agreements in HE for staff and students where there is a complaint about bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.
- A requirement for the Office for Students to promote free speech and enable it to give advice and guidance on it.

Schools have a statutory duty to ensure a balanced presentation of political issues, but older pupils can engage with the political issues provided activity is conducted sensitively and not targeted at others. The promotion of fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs is considered by Ofsted in their inspections.

## Department for Education: Students: Loans

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to review (a) Plan 2 and (b) Plan 5 student loan repayment terms, in the context of decreases in levels of inflation. [UIN50913]

**Janet Daby:** It is important that we have a sustainable higher education (HE) funding system that provides opportunities for all, supports students, and maintains the

world-leading status of our universities. This government keeps the student finance system under continuous review to ensure that it delivers good value for both students and taxpayers. We are determined that the HE funding system should deliver for our economy, for universities and for students, and the government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university. We will set out this government's longer term plan for HE reform by summer 2025.

Interest rates do not impact monthly repayments made by student loan borrowers. Regular repayments are based on a fixed percentage of earnings above the applicable student loan repayment threshold, not on amount borrowed or the rate of interest. If a borrower's income drops, so does the amount they repay. If income is below the relevant student loan repayment threshold, or a borrower is not earning, repayments stop.

Any outstanding debt, including interest built up, is written off after the loan term ends at no detriment to the borrower. This protects lower and lower-middle earners in particular. This government subsidy of student loans is a deliberate investment in our young people and the economy.

A detailed impact assessment for the current student loan system is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reform-equality-impact-assessment>.

To consider both students and taxpayers, and ensure the real value of the loans over the repayment term, interest rates on student loans are linked to inflation by being set in reference to the Retail Price Index (RPI), from the previous March, and applied annually on 1 September until 31 August. The next annual update will be based on the RPI from March 2025 and will apply from 1 September 2025.

As an additional borrower protection, interest rates on post-2012 loans are automatically capped by the prevailing market rate for comparable unsecured personal loans.

## Higher Education: Finance

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if her Department will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a publicly funded model of higher education with reduced reliance on individual debt financing.[UIN50914]

**Janet Daby:** The higher education (HE) sector needs a secure financial footing. After seven years of frozen fee caps under the previous government, the government took

the difficult decision to increase maximum tuition fee limits for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of inflation. We also recognise the impact that the cost-of-living crisis has had on students, and are increasing maximum maintenance loans for living costs for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of inflation.

Student loans have significant protections for borrowers and are subsidised by the government. For lower earners, who will not repay much of their loan, any outstanding loan balance, including interest built up, will be written off at the end of the loan term. This write-off is the government's subsidy, and it is a deliberate investment in our people and the economy.

The government also provides funding for HE through the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) to support teaching and students in HE, including expensive-to-deliver subjects, students at risk of discontinuing their studies, and world-leading specialist providers. The total recurrent SPG funding to be distributed by the Office for Students for the 2024/25 academic year is £1,426 million.

## Research: Ukraine

**Scott Arthur (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to encourage academic research collaboration between UK and Ukrainian universities. [UIN51215]

**Feryal Clark:** The UK-Ukraine 100 Year Partnership sets out how the UK and Ukraine build long-term military, economic and cultural ties. This includes through science, technology and innovation collaboration – both to drive mutual growth and support Ukraine's R&D sector. Since 2022, we have supported over 100 pairs of UK and Ukrainian universities through the University Twinning Programme, providing over £5 million of Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Research England funding to work together. We also support UK and Ukrainian Innovators to work together through the UK-Ukraine Techbridge and over 170 Ukrainian researchers to continue their research at UK universities through the Researchers at Risk Programme.

## Antisemitism: Universities

**Andrew Bowie (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, with reference to StandWithUs' report entitled StandWithUs UK Report: Voice of Students 2024/25 Report, published in May 2025, if he will have discussions with vice chancellors of universities in Scotland on antisemitism on campuses. [UIN52642]

**Ian Murray:** The Scotland Office and I meet regularly with Scottish universities on a wide range of issues and this Government utterly condemns antisemitism in the strongest possible terms. We are committed to ensuring a safe learning environment for all students while upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom on campus.

## Research: North West

**Andrew Gwynne (Independent):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will take steps to help support industrial research in the North West. [UIN51330]

**Feryal Clark:** The North West has unique industrial and scientific strengths that the government is committed to continue to grow as part of our ambition to drive the development of high-potential science and technology clusters across the UK.

Between the financial years 2021/22 and 2023/24 UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) annual investment in the North West rose from £671 million to £903 million. UKRI's investments have supported key industrial research projects in the region including the Medicine Discovery Catapult, pioneering the next generation of complex medicines through the development of cutting-edge technologies and assay.

## Research: North West

**Andrew Gwynne (Independent):** To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether his Department plans to provide funding for projects relating to (a) energy, (b) life sciences, (c) advanced materials and (d) other scientific fields in the North West in the 2025-26 financial year. [UIN51329]

**Feryal Clark:** The government is committed to protecting record levels of R&D investment, having allocated £20.4 billion for the 2025/26 financial year. This substantial funding underpins a broad spectrum of scientific research and innovation, supporting areas such as energy, life sciences, and advanced materials.

In April 2025, DSIT confirmed UKRI's allocation for 2025-26 of £8.8bn, this will support investments in the North West across these important scientific fields including the Henry Royce Institute – the UK National Institute for advanced materials research and innovation. The hub for the institute is at The University of Manchester, with University of Liverpool also a partner.

## Higher Education: Taxation

**Scott Arthur (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed levy on higher education provider income from international students on Scottish universities. [UIN51662]

**Janet Daby:** This government welcomes international students who enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK. Our world-class higher education (HE) sector can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students from around the world.

The Immigration White Paper sets out a series of measures that will achieve a reduction in net migration, while maintaining the UK's globally competitive offer to international students and making a significant contribution to growth by boosting our skills base. This includes the commitment to explore the introduction of a levy on HE provider income from international students, with proceeds to be reinvested in the domestic HE and skills system. We will set out more details around this in the Autumn Budget. Analysis of the potential impacts is based on the levy applying to English HE providers only. We will fully consult all the devolved governments on the implementation of the international student levy.

In March, Professor Edward Peck was appointed as substantive Chair of the Office for Students. 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.

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.

Alongside this, we expect all universities to have a sustainable business model. Our forthcoming plans for reform of the HE sector will set out how we will support universities in this regard.

## Apprentices: Finance

**Adam Thompson (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to ensure the adequacy of funding for apprenticeships. [UIN51493]

**Janet Daby:** This government is widening the apprenticeships offer into a levy-funded growth and skills offer. This will create opportunities for learners of all ages and give employers greater flexibility to address critical skills shortages in their workforce, while driving economic growth.

As a first step, this will include shorter duration apprenticeships and new foundation apprenticeships for young people in targeted sectors. This will fuel innovation and help more people learn new high quality skills at work.

Future funding for the growth and skills offer, including apprenticeships, will be determined following the spending review.

## Higher Education: Disadvantaged

**Andrew Gwynne (Independent):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she has taken to help reduce regional disparities in (a) exam results and (b) access to higher education. [UIN51331]

**Catherine McKinnell:** All children and young people should have every opportunity to succeed, no matter where they are from. However, the department knows pupil attainment varies considerably across the country. This is not acceptable, which is why the Opportunity Mission will break down barriers and the unfair link between background and success so all children can achieve and thrive.

High and rising standards are at the heart of this mission and the key to unlocking stronger outcomes and a better future for all children and young people, no matter where they live.

To deliver these improvements and reduce disparities, we have introduced new regional improvement for standards and excellence teams and launched an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review that is looking closely at the key challenges to attainment. We are also committed to recruiting 6,500 new expert teachers across the country.

We will support the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university, regardless of their background, where they live or their personal circumstances.

All higher education (HE) providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) that intend to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the Office for Students. These need to set out how HE providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups and the support that they will provide to do this. While there are many examples of interventions that show a real commitment to widening successful participation, we want the sector to go further and be even more ambitious.

## Apprentices: Publicity

**Sojan Joseph (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the proposed removal of funding for the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme on the ability to (a) promote and (b) increase apprenticeship engagement among (i) students and (ii) teachers. [UIN51674]

**Janet Daby:** Promoting apprenticeships and technical education routes remains a key part of this government's education policy. The decision to not continue the Apprenticeships Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme was based on the following:

- Growth in awareness of apprenticeships, which is now on a par with awareness of A Levels.
- The government's apprenticeships programme has evolved since ASK was introduced, with the emphasis moving more towards supporting successful participation and completion.
- The tight fiscal climate means we have had to make tough decisions about which programmes and activities we can afford to extend.

Schools and colleges seeking support to raise awareness of apprenticeships and technical education can access a range of online and in-person initiatives, including:

- The Skills for Careers Apprenticeships support page, which can be found here: <https://www.skillsforcareers.education.gov.uk/pages/training-choice/apprenticeships>.
- The Careers and Enterprise Company's (CEC) resource directory, which can be found here: <https://resources.careersandenterprise.co.uk/>.
- 'Amazing Apprenticeships' offer a wide range of free resources and support for schools and colleges.

- The CEC's network of Careers Hubs (covering 95% of schools and colleges) helps co-ordination with schools and colleges to support their careers education.
- CEC also supports enhanced Provider Access Legislation which specifies schools must provide at least six encounters with approved providers of apprenticeships and technical education.

Around 2,000 volunteers, comprising of employers and apprentices, have formed the Apprenticeship ambassador network (AAN), a department-supported network. The AAN visit institutions sharing compelling experiences about apprenticeships. The AAN covers 70% schools and colleges in England and aims to align an ambassador to every secondary school and further education college by March 2026.

## Students: Loans

**John Hayes (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps she has taken to reduce fraudulent claims for student loans. [UIN50457]

**Janet Daby:** My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has asked the Public Sector Fraud Authority to coordinate action against the threat of the student funding system being exploited. The department will act on its findings and take quick decisions on whether we need to make more fundamental changes to the system.

There is a programme of investigations underway between the department and the Office for Students. Where investigations find abuse of the student finance system there will be serious consequences. The department will always take steps to recover student funding that has been paid in respect of students who have, for example, not been attending their courses. Depending on the precise circumstances, recovery will be pursued either from the institution or the student.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) is responsible for processing student funding loan applications and delivering student funding in line with student support regulations.

The SLC continues to monitor student funding applications for suspicious activity and will investigate where there are any concerns around individual applications or a collection of funding applications. Where fraudulent claims are identified, the SLC follows its published sanctions model which can result in individuals being 'unfitted' for support, and/or report to Cifas, a fraud prevention service in the United Kingdom.

## Apprentices: Taxation

**Lauren Edwards (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of the potential impact of the time taken to publish guidance on funding rules and criteria for the Growth and Skills Levy on the number of apprenticeship starts in the 2025-26 academic year. [UIN52152]

**Janet Daby:** The apprenticeship funding rules for the 2025/2026 academic year were published on 15 May 2025 on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding-rules-2025-to-2026>.

These include guidance for employers and providers on the growth and skills offer, including on foundation and shorter duration apprenticeships. All apprenticeships starting on or after 1 August 2025 will be subject to these rules unless otherwise specified.

## Diabetes: Research

**Gregory Campbell (Democratic Unionist Party):** To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 7 May 2025 to Question 48852 on Diabetes, whether he has had discussions with universities on how studies into the causes of (a) diabetes 2 and (b) other related health conditions are funded. [UIN50827]

**Ashley Dalton:** The Department funds research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), which works in partnership with universities, the National Health Service, local government, other research funders, patients, and the public. The NIHR welcomes applications for funding in all topic areas, including diabetes. Funding opportunities are openly published on the NIHR website, which is available at the following link:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/>

Universities and other stakeholders can propose research topics to the NIHR through its website, specifically at the following link:

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/get-involved/suggest-a-research-topic>

Each application is peer reviewed, and awards are made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and health and care services, value for money, and scientific quality.

## Universities: Antisemitism

**Greg Smith (Conservative):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference pages 19-20 of StandWithUs' report entitled StandWithUs UK Report: Voice of Students 2024/25 Report, published in May 2025, if she will have discussions with the Vice Chancellor of Brunel University of London on (a) reported comments made to a Jewish student at that University and (b) that University's subsequent actions in response. [UIN52325]

**Janet Daby:** This government condemns antisemitism in the strongest possible terms and we are actively taking steps to prevent and tackle it on campus, as in all parts of society. The antisemitic incidents detailed in StandWithUs UK's report are wholly unacceptable and the wellbeing and safety of our Jewish students remains a priority.

Universities have a duty to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law, but the department has been clear that this does not extend to unlawful hate speech or incitement of hatred against any individual or group.

It is important to recognise the efforts that university Vice Chancellors and their staff are making to foster cohesion on campuses across the country. However, as the StandWithUs UK report highlights, there is still more for us to do. That is why my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education is hosting a roundtable on antisemitism to which she has invited several leading Vice Chancellors, many whose students and universities are featured in StandWithUs UK's testimonials, including Professor Andrew Jones, Vice Chancellor of Brunel, University of London. This will be an opportunity to discuss what more can be done collectively, and at all levels, to make our universities a safe and inclusive environment for all.

## Students: Grants

**Jim Shannon (Democratic Unionist Party):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to extend eligibility for university grants. [UIN50110]

**Janet Daby:** Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The government is looking at its position on Lifelong Learning Entitlement-targeted grants policy and student finance and will make an announcement in due course.

# Sector news

## Government to set new ten-year budgets for R&D funding

On Monday 19 May, the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT) announced new criteria to give certainty to world-class research organisations, helping to attract greater private investment and grow the UK economy.

- New plans unveiled to support long-term, ten-year funding for certain R&D activities.
- Change will provide long-term certainty to researchers and industry, deepening opportunities for partnerships in vital R&D work that could transform UK economy.
- Introduction of guidance meets key manifesto commitment, supporting the government's upcoming Industrial Strategy and delivering growth as part of our Plan for Change.

Vital R&D work exploring innovation in areas as diverse as human health and cutting-edge computing will be given much-needed long-term certainty under new criteria unveiled by Lord Vallance, Minister for Science, Research, and Innovation

It will enable and support government departments and other public bodies to fund R&D over a ten-year period – giving certainty to world-class research organisations that their work will continue over the long-term, helping to attract greater private investment, grow the UK economy and deliver on the government's [Plan for Change](#).

Evidence shows that the average £1 invested in public R&D leverages double that in private investment and generates £7 in net benefits to the UK economy in the long run – providing a major boost to the UK economy. This also delivers on a manifesto commitment and on calls from research organisations, innovators and milestone independent reports such as the Landscape Review of R&D.

Specific funding is to be determined in the coming weeks.

You can [read the full press release](#).

## UK-EU Summit

On Monday 19 May, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP, hosted European leaders in London for a UK-EU Summit that produced a wide-ranging agreement across trade, security, and mobility. Among the most significant developments for the higher education sector was a renewed commitment to international cooperation on youth mobility and skills exchange.

As part of the summit outcomes, both sides agreed to work towards a youth mobility scheme, which would facilitate greater access for young people to live, work, and study across borders. While the final details remain under negotiation, the inclusion of this provision signals a potentially important shift in post-Brexit higher education policy. Introducing The Post-18 Project

The Post-18 Project, launched by Wonkhe's Mark Leach MBE and Dr Debbie McVitty, calls for a major rethink of the UK's post-18 education system. The project, which brings together policymakers, education leaders, and students, sets out practical proposals to reshape higher education and skills policy in ways that deliver greater public value. Against a backdrop of political uncertainty and growing scrutiny of the higher education sector, the project argues that a new national vision is urgently needed.

Drawing on recent developments in the sector, the project highlights that:

- Universities are facing rising financial pressures, and the government has proposed measures such as linking vice-chancellor pay to graduate outcomes and potentially introducing a levy on income from international students
- There is growing concern about the quality and oversight of franchised provision, with the Office for Students expected to gain new powers to tackle fraud and ensure accountability
- The current post-18 education system is poorly aligned with economic and civic priorities and fails to provide sufficient flexibility, particularly for students who do not follow traditional full-time university routes
- The political debate around higher education has become polarised between market-led and state-controlled approaches, with the project calling instead for a new "civic compact" that ensures strong public oversight while preserving institutional autonomy

The project will continue to engage stakeholders throughout 2025 and beyond, with the Festival of Higher Education scheduled for 11–12 November 2025 at the University of London.

You can [read more about the project](#).

## **Royal Society announces £30m fund to attract global talent over next two years**

On Monday 19 May, the Royal Society announced up to £30 million in funding over the next two years to attract global talent and support the development of world-leading research groups in UK Universities and Research Institutes.

The new Faraday Fellowship accelerated international route will provide up to £4 million per researcher or group over 5-10 years. While up to £4 million will be the normal amount, in exceptional circumstances the Society will be willing to consider larger awards.

You can [read the full press release](#).

## **Universities UK writes to Chancellor on how research can contribute to growth**

On Monday 19 May, Universities UK published a letter send to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP, setting out how research contributes to the growth agenda.

The letter stresses the importance of protecting research funding, and supporting the higher education sector more generally, in the upcoming spending review. The letter also highlights the representative body's recent survey which found 79 per cent of institutions responding were considering future cuts to research as a result of financial pressures.

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

## **Education World Forum**

From 18 to 21 May 2025, the Education World Forum (EWF) convened in London, bringing together over 150 education and skills ministers and more than 1,300 policymakers from over 135 nations. The forum, themed "From Stability to Growth: Building stronger, bolder, better education together," focused on five key areas: stability, equity, quality, innovation, and growth.

Key Highlights:

- **Advancing Education Technology (EdTech):** UK Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson emphasized the transformative potential of EdTech in expanding access and improving learning outcomes globally. She highlighted initiatives like the Oak National Academy and AI-driven tools to improve attendance, noting a reduction of three million lost school days compared to the previous year. The UK also announced a partnership with the OECD to develop global guidelines for the safe and effective use of generative AI in education and plans to host an international summit on AI in education in 2026.
- **Global Education Challenges:** Leaders from more than 100 countries addressed the urgent need to tackle the global education gap, with 250 million children still out of school and 70% of learners in low- and middle-income countries struggling with basic literacy. The forum underscored the importance of technology as an enabler of educational reform, while affirming that skilled teachers remain central to student success.
- **International Collaboration:** The International Baccalaureate (IB) highlighted its commitment to supporting education systems worldwide by engaging with ministers and system-level leaders to build new partnerships and strengthen collaborations. The IB aims to drive meaningful, scalable change through its rigorous academic programmes and support for education leaders navigating evolving challenges.
- **Higher Education Focus:** Sessions addressed the role of tertiary education in driving sustainable, scalable, and equitable education systems. Discussions included the importance of aligning curricula with labour market needs, supporting the mobility of learners and skills, and developing green skills for the future.

The forum concluded with a policy dialogue on priorities for refugees and displaced learners, emphasizing the collective responsibility to ensure that education systems are inclusive, resilient, and equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

You can [read more about the forum](#).

## **OfS receives funding guidance for 2025-26**

On Monday 19 May, the Office for Students received guidance on [the government's funding priorities for the Strategic Priorities Grant \(SPG\) and Strategic Priorities Grant capital funding](#).

The SPG recurrent allocation for 2025–26 will be £1,347.7m, down from 1,456m in 2024–25, a reduction of 108.3m. Priorities for the year are: high-cost courses for

strategically important subjects (nursing, midwifery, allied health and high-cost STEM provision, but not media studies, journalism, publishing and information services); student access and success; world-leading specialist providers; and national facilities and regulatory initiatives. These priorities de facto remove the current funding streams for development of level 4 and 5 provision and degree apprenticeships.

Courses delivered through franchised provision will be excluded from receipt of student premium funding, except where the delivery provider is registered in the Approved (fee cap) category with OfS – and OfS is asked to explore whether the same conditions could apply to high-cost funding allocations. Following the spending review the SPG is to be reviewed so that from 2026–27 funding for high-cost subjects will be targeted to provision that supports future skills needs and the industrial strategy, and student access and success funding to disadvantaged and underrepresented students.

The majority of capital funding will continue to be allocated through a competitive process, aligned with government missions and priorities for growth, particularly those identified in Local Skills Improvement Plans and/or by Skills England. Where capital funding is allocated on a formula basis, the Secretary of State for Education asks OfS to consider whether to withhold funding from providers who have already received it via the competitive element.

**In response to the announcement of the latest Strategic Priorities Grant funding allocation, Vivienne Stern MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said:**

“The university system is one of the things this country can be genuinely proud of, but it is under extraordinary financial pressure. Funding per student has declined by about a third in the last decade. International student recruitment has fallen, National Insurance and pension contributions to the teachers’ pension scheme have gone up, and research grants cover less than 70% of the actual costs. Today’s announcement removes a further £100m from the English sector, making an already difficult situation worse. This follows proposals for a new tax – potentially costing £600m - on international student income announced just last week.

“Universities have been facing into this huge financial challenge and cutting costs fast on a scale I have not seen in 25 years working in the sector. We’re determined to ensure our universities deliver what this country needs – great research, high quality university education and economic growth. But we need government to work with us to stabilise the ship and put it back on an even keel. That is the opposite of what happened today.”

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

## Access to higher education cold spots in England

On Monday 19 May, NEON published a report titled the 'Coast and Country: Access to higher education cold spots in England'. The report shows that pupils from free school meal (FSM) backgrounds in rural areas are less likely to go on to higher education than their urban peers, while those from coastal communities are less likely to progress to university than young people living inland. Drawing on data released by the Department for Education, the report produced by the Ruskin Institute for Social Equity (RISE) also shows that:

There was a difference of 11 percentage points in the higher education participation rates for FSM learners in 2022/23 between coastal areas (at 21%) and inland areas (at 32%).

In predominantly urban areas the higher education participation rate in 2022/23 for learners from FSM backgrounds was 31%, while in predominantly rural areas the participation rate was 19%.

The higher education participation rate gap between predominantly urban areas and predominantly rural areas has increased from 9.64 percentage points in 2012/13 to 12.3 in 2022/23.

In England, the average higher education participation rate for learners from FSM backgrounds outside of London was only 23% in 2022/23, while the national rate that includes learners from London was 29%.

The report calls on the government to set regional targets for progression to higher education for those from FSM backgrounds as part of its devolution plans and to support new, collaborative initiatives to widen access to higher education focused on rural and coastal communities.

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

## UCEA's Final Pay Offer

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) announced its final pay offer for the 2025–26 New JNCHES round, proposing a 1.4% uplift effective from 1 August 2025. This offer, deemed the 'only prudent option', also includes the removal of the bottom two pay spine points from the national pay scale.

Approximately half of higher education staff may receive an additional pay increment of up to 3% on top of the base award. However, UCEA acknowledges that this is the

lowest pay uplift since 2020, attributing it to the sector's deteriorating finances and rising operational costs.

UCEA has committed to progressing work on reviewing the pay spine and addressing issues related to contract types, workloads, and pay gaps. This collaborative effort with trade unions is contingent upon the absence of industrial action ballots concerning the current offer.

You can [read the full press release](#).

## National review of student suicides

On Wednesday 21 May, the Department for Education (Dfe) published the largest-ever national review into student suicides in higher education, analysing over 160 cases of suspected suicide or serious self-harm among students during the 2023/24 academic year. The review was led by the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH) and aimed to assess how universities respond to students in crisis and identify areas needing urgent improvement.

Key findings:

- The majority of cases involved undergraduate students, with first-year and international students identified as being particularly at risk
- Transition periods - such as starting university or moving to the UK - were highlighted as times of heightened vulnerability due to isolation, adjustment difficulties, and academic pressures
- In many cases, the students were already known to university support services but had experienced unresolved mental health challenges, academic stress, or social disconnection
- In 75% of cases, bereaved families were not involved in post-incident reviews, raising concerns about transparency and accountability in institutional responses

Recommendations for universities:

- Provide improved mental health and suicide prevention training to staff
- Strengthen communication and information-sharing between academic and pastoral teams

- Review accommodation policies to better protect vulnerable students
- Proactively and compassionately engage with families following suspected suicides

Government response:

- The Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce will be extended beyond summer 2025
- The National Union of Students (NUS) will be added to the taskforce membership
- A new Higher Education Student Support Champion will be appointed later this year

**Responding to the findings of the National Review of Higher Education Student Suicides, Vivienne Stern said:**

“Universities are joined in their commitment to prevent student suicides and the findings of the national review will play a key role in supporting the sector’s learning in both the prevention of future tragedies, and how to respond when a tragedy occurs.

“The principles of openness and transparency are essential, and Universities UK will now work with Papyrus and Samaritans to update our Postvention guidance in line with the recommendations.

“We are pleased to see the Government’s continued commitment to the Mental Health Taskforce given the increase in the number of young adults experiencing mental health difficulties, and look forward to working with the new HE Student Support Champion when appointed.

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

## **Letter from Secretary of State on Higher Education**

The Secretary of State, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, issued a written response to the House of Commons Education Committee, following its April evidence session with university leaders and stakeholders. The letter sets out the Department for Education’s (DfE) recent actions and future plans to support England’s higher education sector in light of growing financial and structural challenges.

The letter outlines the government's recognition of pressures on university finances, including rising costs and a frozen tuition fee cap in real terms. In response, the DfE confirmed:

- An uplift to the maximum tuition fee cap to £9,535 for the 2025/26 academic year, in line with inflation.
- A strengthened role for the Office for Students (OfS) in monitoring financial sustainability, with Professor Edward Peck now confirmed as Chair.

The government supports the Committee of University Chairs' review of the Higher Education Code of Governance and is consulting on reforms to bring subcontracted (franchised) provision under direct OfS regulation. There is also an emphasis on improving institutional risk management and decision-making frameworks.

The letter also touches on proposed immigration reforms affecting international students. The Secretary of State confirmed:

- The graduate visa route will be retained but shortened to 18 months for most graduates, with a three-year allowance for PhD holders
- The government is exploring a potential levy on income from international student tuition fees, with the aim of reinvesting in domestic education provision
- Visa compliance requirements for institutions will be tightened to ensure responsible recruitment and avoid system abuse

Finally, the letter sets the stage for the government's forthcoming Post-16 Skills White Paper, expected in summer 2025. This will include a full package of higher education reforms aimed at:

- Improving access and outcomes for disadvantaged students
- Strengthening the civic and economic contributions of universities
- Raising teaching standards and eliminating poor-quality provision
- Supporting greater efficiency and sustainability across the sector

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

## Economic Impact of the N8 Research Partnership

On Wednesday 21 May, a new report by London Economics found that the eight Northern research-intensive universities that comprise the N8 Research Partnership generated £18.8 billion in economic impact for the UK in the 2021-22 academic year.

The report evaluates the economic value of N8 universities' research, knowledge exchange activities, and institutional expenditures. The report confirms that the N8 universities – Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and York – play a critical role in supporting economic growth through both innovation and institutional investment.

From healthtech and ageing research, to materials science, biotech and advanced manufacturing, N8 universities work with partners to solve real-world challenges. They support local industries, accelerate the growth of start-ups, and create high-value jobs – all while contributing to the UK's global competitiveness in science and innovation

Key findings from the report include:

- £8.6 billion (46%) of the total economic impact stemmed from N8 universities' research activities
- £1.7 billion (9%) was generated through knowledge exchange and commercialisation, such as collaboration with industry and the public sector
- £8.5 billion (45%) arose from the universities' institutional expenditures, including operations, staffing, and capital investments

The report also highlights the regional impact of the N8 universities, with approximately £12.2 billion of the total economic benefit geographically attributable. Of this, a significant £9 billion (74%) was concentrated in the North of England, reinforcing the N8's pivotal role in the Northern economy. The remaining £3.2 billion was distributed across the rest of the UK.

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

## **Who leads our universities? Inside the recruitment of vice-chancellors - HEPI policy note**

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published Policy Note 63 titled *Who leads our universities? Inside the recruitment of vice-chancellors*. Authored by Tessa Harrison and Josh Freeman, the report examines the backgrounds, recruitment patterns, and performance of 153 UK university vice-chancellors, providing insights into leadership trends across the higher education sector.

The report reveals significant turnover in university leadership, with nearly half (66 out of 153) of current vice-chancellors appointed since 2022. The average tenure stands at approximately 5.3 years, slightly less than the average tenure of FTSE100 CEOs.

A substantial majority (115 of 153) of vice-chancellors were already in senior leadership roles within higher education prior to their current appointments, most commonly as deputy vice-chancellors. Notably, a third of Russell Group vice-chancellors had previously held the vice-chancellor position at another institution, the highest proportion among mission groups.

Internal recruitment accounts for approximately one-quarter (38 of 153) of vice-chancellor appointments. The University of Birmingham emerges as a significant contributor to leadership talent, with five current vice-chancellors having previously served there. However, there is minimal movement of vice-chancellors between different mission groups, indicating a tendency for institutions to recruit leaders from similar types of universities.

Gender diversity among vice-chancellors shows that around one-third (49 of 153) are women, with most female vice-chancellors appointed within the last five years. This suggests a positive trend towards greater gender balance in university leadership.

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

## **ONS long-term international migration provision release**

New figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), published on Thursday 22 May, show net migration fell by 50% to 431,000 in the year to December 2024, with the decline driven in part by tighter visa rule. A key policy change restricting dependants of international students - has resulted in an 86% (105,000) fall in study-

related dependants, contributing to the decline in overseas learners choosing the UK as their study destination.

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