



All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Weekly update

7 – 11 April 2025

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

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Parliamentary business

Higher Education and Funding oral evidence

On Tuesday 8 April, the Commons Education Select Committee heard oral evidence on higher education and funding from:

First panel

- Professor Dame Jessica Corner: Executive Chair, Research England at UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)
- Sir Philip Augar: Chair of the 2019 Independent Panel at Post-18 Education and Funding Review
- Professor Malcolm Press CBE: Vice President (England and Northern Ireland) at Universities UK

Causes of the financial challenges facing universities

Helen Hayes MP (Labour) began the session by asking about the key factors which have led to the financial challenges facing universities. Sir Philip Augar cited errors in policy making by government and errors in the governance of universities. With regards to policy making, he referred to the trebling of the tuition fee cap in 2012 which made teaching home students profitable combined with the lifting of the student number cap which allowed universities to vastly increase student numbers. This led to some overinvestment in central student amenities or 'vanity projects' which he claimed were not well managed. This created a situation where universities were unable to absorb external shocks such as the pandemic, economic shocks and geopolitical instability. He also cited the fact that tuitions fees have been frozen for a number of years. Professor Corner highlighted the problem of universities not being able to cover the full costs of research. Professor Press pointed to universities doing 'more with less' given tuition fees have not risen in line with inflation. This is coupled with pressures on international student numbers due to government policy on student visas, and the fact that numbers of home undergraduate students have not grown.

Amanda Martin MP (Labour) asked witnesses to reflect on data from the OfS which shows 25 institutions have requested a delay in publishing their 2023-24 accounts. She said the former Chair of the British Universities Finance Directors Group said this indicated a large and worrying scale of issues facing the sector. Professor Press said

the sector is working hard to drive efficiencies and to work together to tackle these challenges so they can deliver value for students. He said that higher education in the UK offers students much more than many OECD countries and questioned if this is sustainable or if universities need to start thinking differently about how they operate given the considerable financial challenges they are facing.

Financial sustainability of research

Mark Swards MP (Labour) asked whether long term reductions to research funding has had implications for universities and how could this be made more sustainable. Professor Corner said universities conduct research on behalf of many actors, including the government, businesses and charities, most of which does not cover the full cost of the research. UKRI's work on the factors driving cost recovery on grants has found multiple factors including how grant programmes are organised and some issues around funding policies and how universities are putting costs together to apply for grants. She said UKRI are beginning to address some of these challenges. Professor Press said research funding must be directed at a mix of blue skies and thematic projects that have clear translation and impact. He said the Higher Education Innovation Fund and QR would benefit from inflationary uplifts.

Manuela Perteghella MP (Liberal Democrat) cited UUK's 2025 Spending Review submission and asked what is driving poor cost recovery of UKRI funded projects and what changes are being made to improve the rate of recovery. Professor Corner cited the increasing costs of research and how funders are considering costs within grants. She said large research-intensive universities tend to have higher cost recovery while other universities tend to rely more on QR funding. She said UKRI have announced measures it is taking to improve recovery rates on its own grants. They have also announced an increase in stipends for post graduate researchers. Professor Press highlighted the cross subsidies between teaching and research and said that in order to reduce that cross subsidy we must achieve economic growth, which will drive more research.

Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative) asked if the financial challenges facing universities will impact the quality of research. Professor Corner said universities will have to make difficult choices about the research they fund alongside maintaining the quality of teaching. The overall amount of research could contract but we do not know if this will impact on quality. She said disciplines such as arts and humanities are being reduced in many universities. Professor Press said that quality of research is paramount and that is a challenge facing all universities, for example when allocating research time, resources and QR. Universities are on a journey to do this but there is still some distance to travel.

Quality and value of UK higher education

Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative) asked if it is reasonable to suggest that some universities offer low quality degrees and poor value for money for students, some of whom might be better off doing something else. Professor Press noted the breadth and diversity of courses offered at universities across the country and accepted that there will be some instances of low-quality provision. However, the UK's higher education offer compares very favourably to many countries around the world. Universities are committed to driving up quality. He cited universities' civic and place-based functions and the implications for local economies as well as for widening access and participation if a university were to cease operating. Sir Philip Augar said universities need to be honest with students and parents about the outcomes of courses.

Legacy of the Augar Review

Darren Paffey MP (Labour) asked about the impact of the Augar Review and if Sir Philip would make any different recommendations. He said the direction of travel has been in line with the recommendations: he welcomed the government's focus on skills and said that the Lifelong Learning Entitlement is an important building block for the country's future. The review also started an important debate about who should bear the cost of higher education. However, governments have been too slow to reform further education. He said he was disappointed that the government did not introduce means tested maintenance grants. Much more also needs to be done on tackling low quality provision. Although the review panel recommended a freeze on tuition fees until 2023, it did not anticipate several external shocks which have created considerable financial challenges for universities. He said something substantial needs to happen to prevent a failing university. He welcomed UUK's transformation and efficiency taskforce but warned that its recommendations must be robust. Professor Press said that we have a high-quality system that carries cost, for example in terms of high staff to student ratios, wrap around services such as IT, libraries, mental health services, and careers guidance. He highlighted the trade-offs that would need to be made with a more stripped back system and what this would mean for the future prosperity of the country.

Government bailouts for universities

Kirsteen Sullivan MP (Labour) asked if the UK government should be offering English universities the same financial support as the Scottish government has to universities facing financial difficulties in Scotland and if the government does not step in to support universities, what alternative legislative and regulatory measures should be taken. Sir Philip said we cannot allow a university in England to fail because of the consequences for students, staff and the UK's international reputation. There has to be a support package to ensure this does not happen. However, universities must tackle poor governance so the focus must be on vice chancellors and senior

managers. He questioned whether vice chancellors' compensation package could be held back and paid on a deferred basis once the university has gone through without 'falling over'. Professor Press called for a transformation fund for English universities so they can operate at high quality and even more efficiently. On the OfS' role, Professor Press said that it needs to operate in a more risk-based way and that regulatory costs are significant.

Skills pathways and addressing high levels of economic inactivity among young people

Marie Tidball MP (Labour) asked about how universities can continue to contribute to economic growth and close the gap around economic inactivity among young people. Professor Press said universities across Greater Manchester are partnering with FE institutions to map products which exist and pathways between them and peoples' ability to access these, asking if there is sufficient information and advice for young learners, their parents and teachers. He pointed to UUK's Blueprint and the ROI of higher education. Professor Corner spoke about the significant work universities are doing with businesses to use intellectual property to develop spinouts and supporting students to start their own businesses. These are delivering great economic outcomes for local areas across the country.

Second panel

- Raj Jethwa: Chief Executive at Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)
- Dr Hollie Chandler: Director of Policy at The Russell Group
- Rachel Hewitt: Chief Executive at MillionPlus, The Association for Modern Universities

Financial challenges across sector

Helen Hayes MP (Labour) asked how financial challenges varied across the sector. Dr Hollie Chandler noted that OfS analysis indicated financial pressures were faced by institutions of all shapes and sizes. She highlighted the efficiency measures that Russell Group members were taking such as shared research facilities and shared mental health support. However, she cautioned that given the scale of the deficits, efficiency savings would not solve the problem alone. Rachel Hewitt agreed on the challenges across the sector and proceeded to highlight challenges facing modern universities including (1) the requirement for certain institutions to be members of the Teacher Pension Scheme (TPS); (2) the disproportionate impact from immigration policies on modern universities; and (3) the additional support modern universities provide for disadvantaged students. Raj Jethwa highlighted the cost of National Insurance Contributions and echoed remarks on TPS and immigration policies.

Actions taken by universities to tackle financial challenges

Helen Hayes MP outlined the actions that some universities were taking in response to financial pressures, including redundancies and the closure of departments and courses. She asked the panel what their advice is to universities to balance this. In response, Raj Jethwa stressed the desire to avoid compulsory redundancies and manage it sensitively. Rachel Hewitt highlighted the transformative work that universities were pursuing. Dr Hollie Chandler said the priority was to support staff and protect the quality of provision. She warned of the risk that there may be lost capabilities and expertise due to such closures.

Caroline Voaden MP (Liberal Democrat) asked how realistic increased tuition fees and increased government spending into the higher education sector were. Dr Hollie Chandler said the challenging economic context was understood but that a sustainable settlement was needed for universities to contribute to economic growth. This settlement included both tuition fees and Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG). Rachel Hewitt outlined that MillionPlus members were pragmatic, were undertaking efficiency savings themselves, but stressed that moderate policy changes were needed to secure sustainability. On a potential employer contribution Rachel Hewitt warned that it could be complicated to implement but that all options should be on the table.

Higher education reform

Darren Paffey MP (Labour) outlined the five priorities that the Secretary of State for Education set out as part of her higher education reform package, and probed the panel on what conversations they had with the Secretary of State and Department to deliver this. Dr Hollie Chandler said they recognised the five priorities to be important but called for greater clarity and detail. She stressed that the change needed to be positive and not just for the sake of change. Rachel Hewitt said they welcomed the priorities which overlapped with the mission of their members. She cautioned that the pursuit of efficiency savings could come at the detriment to the important civic role. Raj Jethwa stressed the importance of having greater clarity and having an engaged workforce to deliver the objectives.

Franchise provision

Manuela Perteghella MP (Liberal Democrat) shared concerns about franchise provision, asking panellists what assessment they had made of the concerns raised in the Sunday Times investigation and the Public Accounts Committee. Rachel Hewitt said concerns of fraudulent activity needed to be addressed. She said there was a place for this provision as it could be helpful in accessing cold spots and supporting

mature learners. Both Dr Hollie Chandler and Rachel Hewitt shared their support for DfE's proposal for franchise providers to be registered with the Office for Students.

International students

Mark Swards MP (Labour) probed to what extent universities were reliant on international student fees to run core activities and whether they shared concerns that universities had unrealistic projections of international student recruitment. Dr Hollie Chandler said international student income was important which was cross-subsidising research and domestic teaching. She said the challenge with projections stemmed from migration policy change and called for greater stability such as protection of the Graduate Route. Rachel Hewitt outlined the cross-subsidy model of universities and stressed the financial and cultural impact of international students. Dr Caroline Johnson MP (Conservative) said the last government had concerns that international students were coming over primarily for migration rather than education and asked a series of questions on this policy and the impact on the sector.

Raj Jethwa expressed concern about the volatile nature of immigration policy and noted that the freeze in domestic tuition fees resulted in greater cross-subsidies. Dr Hollie Chandler emphasised the economic, social, and cultural impact of international students.

Kirsteen Sullivan MP (Labour) asked whether there was an overreliance on international student income by Scottish universities particularly given the cap on Scottish students. Rachel Hewitt said there were some parallels in the challenges facing Scottish and English universities with declining recruitment numbers. Probed on whether poor governance had contributed to some of the difficulties facing universities, Rachel Hewitt said the scale of challenges was impacting a large number of members and governance is playing a more prominent role. Dr Hollie Chandler noted the robust governance arrangements that were in place and highlighted the role of sharing best practice.

Insolvency

Manuela Perteghella MP raised the process of insolvency and asked what considerations would be taken. Dr Hollie Chandler said the impacts would be felt across students, staff, and the local economy. She stressed that the response should extend beyond the Office for Students and required multi-agency coordination. Rachel Hewitt noted that many MillionPlus members were the only university in their localities and expressed concern for the impact of an insolvency on the opportunity mission, skills pipeline, and as major employers.

Barriers to collaboration

Amanda Martin MP (Labour) asked whether the sector was restricted from collaborating due to competition laws. Raj Jethwa said there was a concern that when universities were considering collaboration, they had to be mindful of competition law, which the sector required clarity on. Rachel Hewitt highlighted VAT shared services cost, guidance on competition laws, and the regulatory environment which were potential barriers to collaboration. Dr Hollie Chandler repeated calls for greater clarity on how to navigate competitive laws.

Third panel

- Alex Stanley: Vice-President of Higher Education at National Union of Students
- Jo Grady: General Secretary at University College Union (UCU)
- Andrew Bird: Chair at British Universities' International Liaison Association

Financial challenges

Helen Hayes MP asked the witnesses what they would attribute to the financial challenges facing the HE sector. Jo Grady said the situation in universities was dire, stemming from a tuition fees funding model that is unfit for purpose. The current system had caused a boom-and-bust cycle. She agreed with Philip Augar that institutions have been over-recruiting students to the detriment of competitors, leading to exploding workloads for staff. Governments in Scotland and Wales were releasing additional money, but this was insufficient to address the underlying issues. There had been a hollowing out of governance mechanisms in institutions, with specific reference to the University of Dundee and financial losses incurred there which she claimed have not been accounted for. The sector faced potential job losses, and the lack of proper accountability, regulation and governance was a major contributing factor to the crisis.

Alex Stanley said the current financial crisis in the sector was due to a decline in international student recruitment, which had been relied upon for too long. This was a result of previous Government policies, including restrictions on dependants, housing access issues, and concerns about the Immigration White Paper, as well as far-right riots and xenophobic incidents. This gap would not be easily filled without policy changes. The situation was unsustainable, with public investment per student at only 1 – this needs to be rebalanced. There was a need to highlight the impact on students. Food bank usage among students had doubled since 2022, 69% are working alongside full time study, and 62% of those were living pay check to pay check.

Andrew Bird said the lack of long-term immigration policy making and its overlap with student recruitment had significantly impacted international students' desire to study in the UK. This instability made it difficult for universities to predict potential student numbers annually. He suggested implementing policies that aligned with Government

terms to provide stability and enable institutions to plan more effectively over the long term.

Navigating challenges

Helen Hayes said if there was not more money forthcoming from the Government to support universities, what should individual institutions prioritise and not prioritise as they sought to navigate the way forward. Jo Grady said she did not recognise the claim that universities were controlling their capital expenditure. For example, Cardiff University is opening a campus in Kazakhstan despite making substantial redundancies. The Government and OfS should investigate ways to rein in senior remuneration packages, especially at institutions facing financial crises. Alex Stanley said the fundamental point in conversations about prioritisation was trying to escape a race to the bottom, rather than discussing excellence in institutions. Universities and student unions were already focusing on expanding bursary support and providing food banks on campus. Without intervention, this would continue to be the reality. The sector might need to consider if some institutions should only focus on specialised areas and if provision for various subjects would be available across the country, potentially making it more difficult for less privileged students to access HE.

International students

Mark Sowards said the number of student visas increased dramatically in the two years following the pandemic and then dropped in 2023/24. He asked what impact that has had on university finances. Andrew Bird said international income generated over 40% of overall university income. A drop in this income affected the wider workings of universities, impacting programme development and course offerings. This reduction also limited choices for domestic students, as the course portfolio decreased. The decline in income not only affected the internationalisation of universities but also had consequences for domestic students.

Mark Sowards said the Lords Science and Technology Committee described the Government's visa policy is an act of national self-harm. He asked if the witnesses agreed with that assessment. Andrew Bird said the Government could maintain a robust immigration policy while supporting a strong university culture and international student numbers. The current instability regarding policies like the graduate route deterred potential students from choosing UK universities, as they had alternative options for their significant investments of time and money. He hoped for alignment between immigration policies and the International Education Strategy to ensure cross-departmental support for universities and continued attraction of quality international students to the UK. Alex Stanley said the funding support mechanism for universities based on international student fees was illogical, especially when making the offer less attractive. He believed this was due to either

incompetence or an intentional decision to complicate matters for universities. There was now an opportunity to address this issue with the White Paper, and he hoped for a positive change in the right direction. Jo Grady said there was a significant decrease in EU student numbers from 147,950 in 2019/20 to 75,490 in 2023/24, before full restrictions for non-EU students took effect. She claimed the Tory era restrictions on dependents were fundamentally wrong as international students had a right to family life. These restrictions were self-defeating and detrimental, not only financially but also in creating a hostile environment that damaged the UK's reputation and global influence in HE.

Caroline Voaden MP asked if going back into Erasmus Plus, or a similar scheme, would help the situation being faced with regards to international students. Jo Grady said the figures she had quoted demonstrated that it would have a beneficial impact, not just in terms of student recruitment, but also regarding the erosion of the international community that had happened post-Brexit and occurred since the increased visa restrictions. This was really detrimental for university life in general. Alex Stanley said there was something to be said about the civic role that schemes like Erasmus Plus played in internationalism, particularly during difficult geopolitical times. Strengthening ties, especially with young people who would be in those spaces in the future, was incredibly important. There was a real appetite amongst young people and students for such schemes. Andrew Bird said the Turing Scheme, introduced for English students to study overseas, was welcomed but had significantly increased universities' administrative workload. It restricted the number of partnerships universities could maintain and contradicted the essence of exchange programmes, which should involve reciprocal movement. He believed that reciprocity, as seen in Erasmus Plus or similar programmes, was crucial as it embodied the fundamental nature of education.

Amanda Martin asked if events in other countries provided an opportunity for the UK to attract more international students. Andrew Bird said the UK had an opportunity to be seen as the stable country to support international student mobility among the 'Big Four' (United States, Australia, Canada and the UK). There was a chance for the UK to take that space as the stable, welcoming country if we got Government policy correct, especially considering the latest research showing interest in postgraduate study within the USA was down 40%. Alex Stanley said the opportunity existed, but only if a genuinely welcoming environment and matching policies were created. He agreed with Andrew Bird but cautioned against endlessly increasing fees, noting that American students had concerns about high fees in the UK. He pointed out that the relatively lower international student fees in the UK compared to America were somewhat appealing on a global scale. Jo Grady said UK HE had experienced extensive industrial action over the past six years, signalling significant issues. This included a workload crisis due to institutions recruiting large numbers of students to ensure sufficient revenue. She cautioned against rushing to recruit more international

students when existing problems remained unresolved. A member had reported that job cuts led to less personalised student experiences, with marking becoming generalised rather than individualised.

Impacts on staff

Manuela Perteghella asked what the current impacts were on the working environment of staff in HE right now. Jo Grady said there were three key points she wanted to emphasise: the scale of job losses, the viciousness of the cuts, and the opportunism behind some of them. This academic year, employers had already announced plans to slash 5,400 jobs, with UCU calculating an estimated 5,000 more at risk, totalling approximately 10,000 jobs. The attacks were needlessly cruel, affecting many staff who might end up in that pool. Some cuts seemed gratuitous, such as at Coventry University, where more than 100 staff faced redundancy and hundreds more were threatened with fire and rehire to be re-employed by a subsidiary company on an inferior pension scheme. While some institutions were genuinely struggling financially, many rich universities were exploiting the sense of crisis to push through restructures without a valid pretext. Examples included Edinburgh, which announced a £40 million cut despite having an operational surplus of 6 – she said Cardiff is also in a similar position. The impact was significant, affecting the livelihoods of dedicated researchers and teachers who had trained for years to obtain doctorates and might leave the sector. It also had detrimental consequences for students whose courses disappeared, compounded by the uncertainty caused by staff on fixed-term contracts. The impacts were huge.

Impacts on students

Darren Paffey asked what the impacts were on students. Alex Stanley said the situation was challenging for all students, with many issues faced by staff inextricably connected to those faced by students. There was a fundamental problem with insufficient maintenance support for students. While the 3.1% increase to the loan for the following year was welcomed, it would be negated by an average 6% increase in student accommodation costs. The number of students receiving maximum loan support was restricted due to outdated family income thresholds. This was keeping a significant proportion of the population in poverty, leading to high levels of part-time work among students simply to stay afloat. For groups like SEND or care-experienced students, accessing university was already more challenging. In 2021/22, only 14% of 19-year-olds from care-experienced backgrounds were in HE, compared to 47% of non-care-experienced students. There was a need for a conversation about ring-fenced funds to support students with additional learning needs throughout their time at university. The fundamental conversation had to be about more maintenance support. Housing issues were also significant. Work had been done on the Renters Rights Bill, with concerns raised by care-experienced, estranged, and international

students about their inability to access guarantors, often forcing them to pay rent upfront for the entire year. An amendment had been tabled to ban upfront rent payments for up to one month, which would be a positive step if passed. Early signing of rental agreements and the potential for landlords to exploit students early in their university experience was also being examined. While there were some positive steps, barriers such as financial costs, lack of ring-fenced support, and guarantor issues remained.

Darren Paffey asked if there were any particular challenges that care-experienced students were facing that had not already been covered. Alex Stanley said care-experienced students faced significant challenges in accessing accommodation and HE. Ring-fenced support was crucial, but it needed to extend across the entire year. He highlighted a recommendation from the Unite Foundation's recent report, which called for maintenance support for care-experienced students throughout the year, recognising that their care-experience did not cease during university breaks. It was essential to be acutely aware of care-experienced students' unique circumstances in this context.

Insolvency

Manuela Perteghella asked the witnesses what should happen if an HE provider became insolvent and whether the OfS' new registration requirements are enough to protect students. Jo Grady said the Labour Government in Westminster needed to follow Wales and Scotland's lead by making emergency funds available to stabilise at-risk institutions. HM Treasury appeared to be refusing to consider such measures. Labour had promised to end sticking plaster politics, but resolving the issue sustainably required massively increased direct public funding. Without better regulation of student numbers and improved funding to replace the detrimental fee-based model, the boom-and-bust cycle would continue. This was not special pleading for higher education, but a test case for Labour's commitment to national renewal. The alternative was more student debt and further decline for Britain and its universities. Alex Stanley said the emergency funds were crucial for struggling institutions and were vital to local growth and jobs. Student course closures had significant cost, travel, and quality of life impacts. Student Protection Plans were inconsistent, particularly during industrial action, with students often unaware of their rights. The OfS's strategy to protect student interests through a formalised contract raised questions about implementation, especially regarding how to hold insolvent institutions accountable.

UK's market position

Amanda Martin asked if the financial uncertainty was impacting UK's market position internationally as a world-class HE provider and asked what could be done. Andrew

Bird said the numbers showed it was making an impact. The UK's attractiveness had decreased, with international student numbers down by about 20% compared to 2022/23, and projections for September were roughly flat. The impact would continue while uncertainty persisted regarding policies such as graduate immigration routes and other Government policies affecting international student recruitment and university financing. There had been a decline, with further decline expected. It was a shame, as the UK held a strong global position, with over 25% of world leaders educated at UK universities. If the situation was not managed correctly, the decrease would continue. Jo Grady said the global reputation of UK HE could be improved through cost-neutral measures such as lifting restrictions and reintroducing student number caps. A governance review of UK HE is essential and she supported examining vice chancellor and senior pay, including whether it should be partially withheld to prevent rewarding failure as they moved between institutions. Alex Stanley said the UK needed to treat international students fairly to restore its global reputation. Reversing dependent policies, easing access to housing, and reconsidering visa directions were necessary. The Government should address the hostile environment affecting migrants for decades. Universities should view international students as humans, not just as financial assets. Celebrating their presence and contributions was important rather than merely using them to fill funding gaps.

You can watch a recording of the session is available [here](#) and a transcript will be available [here](#) in due course.

Forthcoming business

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.

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](#).

Written questions and statements

Doctors: Training

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrats) (St Albans): (42657) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 12 February 2025 to Question 28599 on Doctors: Training, if he will conduct a review of the selection process for medical specialty training places with a view to giving priority to UK medical graduates, in the context of that being the case in Canada, the US and Australia.

Karin Smyth (Labour) (Bristol South): Working with NHS England, we continue to keep the selection process for all applicants to medical speciality training under review.

NHS England launched an extensive engagement and listening exercise to help shape the future of postgraduate medical training in February 2025. This engagement exercise will run through to June, with findings evaluated and reported in the summer.

Arts: Higher Education

The Earl of Clancarty (C/B): (HL5449) To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to support universities and other higher education institutions offering foundation courses in creative subjects, including fine art.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): The government is committed to supporting creative subjects such as fine art in higher education.

In the 2024/25 academic year, more than two thirds of the £1,402 million Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) recurrent funding to higher education providers is allocated to support the provision of high-cost subjects within price group A to C1.2, including various creative arts courses. This funding is in recognition of the higher costs of teaching those subjects.

For this academic year (2024/25), funding from the SPG for world-leading small and specialist providers was maintained at £58 million. Of the 20 providers recognised in this way, 12 are creative and performing arts providers.

Higher Education: Standards

Neil O'Brien (Conservative) (Harborough, Oadby and Wigston): (39962) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which higher education institutions have been made subject by the Office for Students to (a) enhanced monitoring, (b) investigation, (c) a quality assessment report and (d) other quality related interventions; and when these interventions took place.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The Office for Students (OfS) is the non-departmental public body responsible for higher education in England. It is independent of government.

In 2022/23, the OfS opened investigations into the quality of business and management courses at eight providers and of computing courses at three providers. It also opened investigations into grade inflation concerns at three providers and opened a further 12 investigations into potential non-compliance with condition B3, which sets minimum thresholds for student outcomes. Quality assessments are conducted as part of the quality investigations.

The OfS began publishing the subject-based investigation case reports in September 2023. Details of these, including decisions about any regulatory action, can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/how-we-are-run/key-performance-measures/kpm-11-efficient-regulation/>.

The OfS also publishes information about enhanced monitoring of providers. The OfS does not tell the department which providers are subject to enhanced monitoring, but where that enhanced monitoring follows an investigation, it is included in the case reports. The published case reports show that the OfS has decided to conduct enhanced monitoring of the University of Bolton (the OfS has since approved a change of name for the University of Bolton to the University of Greater Manchester) and the University of Bedfordshire, until such a point at which it judges the risk of non-compliance with its quality conditions to have been acceptably minimised.

The OfS began publishing the B3 investigation case reports in July 2023. Details of these can be found here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-student-outcomes/assessment-reports/>.

The case reports for the investigations into grade inflation concerns have not yet been published.

The OfS does not share details about open ongoing investigations with the department.

Universities: Finance

Vikki Slade (Liberal Democrats) (Mid Dorset and North Poole): (40087) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to take steps to identify alternative sources of funding for the university sector.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The higher education (HE) sector needs a secure financial footing to face the challenges of the next decade and ensure that all students can be confident they will receive the world-class HE experience they deserve.

The government is also determined to work with the sector to transition to sustainable research funding models, including by increasing research grant cost recovery, as announced by UK Research and Innovation last week. However, universities will also need to take their own steps to ensure they are working as efficiently as possible and, where necessary, make difficult choices.

Ultimately, HE providers are independent from government and as such must continue to make the necessary and appropriate financial decisions to ensure their long-term sustainability.

The department has set out five priorities for reform of the HE system, which relate to access and outcomes for disadvantaged students, economic growth, the civic role of HE providers, teaching standards and efficiency, transparency and reform.

The department will publish our plan for HE reform this summer, and work with the sector and the Office for Students to ensure the system delivers these priorities.

Overseas Students

Afzal Khan (Labour) (Manchester Rusholme): (39959) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of the graduate route in promoting the UK as an international study destination.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The UK has a world-class higher education sector, with four universities in the world university rankings top 10 and 15 in the top 100, alongside a wide array of leading institutions which can offer a fulfilling and enjoyable experience to international students from around the world.

There are many factors that influence international students when they choose to study abroad. These include the range and quality of available courses, the visa rules that apply in countries they are considering, and the appeal of living and studying in those countries.

The graduate route enables international students who have successfully completed an eligible qualification to stay in the UK for two years, or three years for doctoral students. Former students who are on the graduate route may switch to another route, for example the skilled worker route, if the relevant requirements are met.

This government has made clear its approach to international students. We welcome international students who enrich our university campuses, forge lifelong friendships with our domestic students and become global ambassadors for the UK.

Apprentices: Research

Phil Brickell (Labour) (Bolton West): (40316) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has commissioned research into the satisfaction rates of (a) private companies and (b) students participating in apprenticeship levy programmes.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The apprenticeship evaluation surveys commissioned by the department provide insights into the satisfaction rates of employers and apprentices.

For employers, overall satisfaction rates were 83% for all commercial employers and 89% for all employers who reported a wage bill of over £3 million. Employers with wage bills of over £3 million were eligible for the Apprenticeship Levy. These figures are published on sheet 55 of the 'Apprenticeship evaluation 2023: employer survey data tables (overall)', which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-evaluation-2023-learner-non-completer-and-employer-surveys>.

In the 2023 apprenticeship evaluation survey, 86% of all apprentices were satisfied with their apprenticeship overall. Satisfaction rates are not broken down according to whether their employer paid the Apprenticeship Levy. Further details can be found on page 113 of the 'Apprenticeship evaluation 2023: learner and non-completer surveys research report', which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-evaluation-2023-learner-non-completer-and-employer-surveys>.

Apprentices and Higher Education

Phil Brickell (Labour) (Bolton West): (40314) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment her Department has made of (a) trends in the level of completion rates of people undertaking apprenticeships funded by the apprenticeship levy and (b) the quality of monitoring of Higher Education institutions via the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): Qualification achievement rates for apprenticeships are published annually at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships/2024-25>. Data for the 2023/24 academic year is available at this link.

The department holds all apprenticeship training providers to account for quality delivery through its Apprenticeship Accountability Framework, which encompasses a wide range of quality indicators, including retention rates, employer and apprentice feedback, as well as achievement rates. Further detail about the framework can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-training-provider-accountability-framework/apprenticeship-training-provider-accountability-framework-and-specification--2>.

Ofsted routinely inspects the quality of training delivery in all apprenticeship providers, including higher education (HE) providers, and will ensure that all apprenticeship training providers are inspected by September 2025. A summary of Ofsted's inspection findings up to 31 August 2024 is published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2024/main-findings-further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2024#data-4>.

The Office for Students is the independent regulator of English HE providers and works with other organisations to make sure degree apprenticeships meet the right quality and standards. This includes considering the inspections that Ofsted carries out to decide whether a provider is complying with its conditions of registration in this area. Its regulatory framework can be found at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/>.

Doctors: Recruitment

Lee Anderson (Reform UK) (Ashfield): (41986) To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure the provision of healthcare jobs for British born medical graduates.

Karin Smyth (Labour) (Bristol South): The Government is committed to growing homegrown talent and giving opportunities to more people across the country to join our National Health Service.

Decisions about recruitment are matters for individual NHS employers. NHS trusts manage their recruitment at a local level, ensuring they have the right number of staff in place, with the right skill mix, to deliver safe and effective care.

Internationally educated staff remain an important part of the workforce, and our Code of Practice for International Recruitment ensures stringent ethical standards when recruiting health and social care staff from overseas.

Home Office: Visas: Scientists

The Rt Hon. the Lord Hain (Labour): (HL6048) To ask His Majesty's Government what is the average cost of a visa for a scientist from overseas to work in the UK, and whether they have benchmarked this against costs for similar visas provided by other countries.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Hanson of Flint (Labour): The cost of a visa for a scientist to work in the UK will vary depending on the visa route they enter the UK through. Visa fees are published on gov.uk and can be viewed through the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visa-fees-transparency-data>.

Should an applicant wishing to work in the UK as a scientist apply for a skilled worker from overseas the current cost is £719 (up to three-years) or £1,420 (over three-years). Alternatively, should they enter the UK via the Global Talent route the current fee is £716. They could also apply for a 12-month Standard Visitor visa for academics which currently costs £200.

Visa products are difficult to compare because visa offers, including benefits and entitlements gained and duration of stay, vary significantly between countries. However, UK visa fees are broadly competitive when compared with the fees charged by comparative countries globally.

Overseas Students: Ukraine

Will Forster (Liberal Democrats) (Woking): (42205) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the fee status is of Ukrainian refugees when applying for university; which fee level they fall under; and what financial support they are provided with.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): Those who have been granted leave under one of the Ukraine schemes generally qualify for home fee status and higher education student support in England, without being required to meet the normal 3 year ordinary residence test.

Higher education providers set their own fees in line with the relevant legislation.

Lifelong Education

Danny Beales (Labour) (Uxbridge and South Ruislip): (42148) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 28 February to Question 31745 on Universities: Industry, whether her Department has made an estimate of the number of adults who are likely to take up the opportunity for Life Long Learning across (a) the UK, (b) Greater London and c) West London.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The department is due to announce outstanding policy details related to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement later this year. These details will inform our demand projections for this specific programme, and we will share further information about this in due course.

This government recognises the importance and value of investing and creating a culture of lifelong learning in our country to support our industrial strategy and economic growth. This starts with activity already underway, such as the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, establishing Skills England, utilising local skills improvement plans, further supporting skills bootcamps and apprenticeships and devolving the adult skills fund to support learning and development in all stages of life.

University of Sussex: Disciplinary Proceedings

Siân Berry (Green) (Brighton Pavilion): (42191) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the Office for Students' regulatory case report for the University of Sussex, published on 26 March 2025, whether the Office for Students plans to issue guidance to higher education institutions following the report.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): This government is committed to free speech as a non-negotiable, and expects universities to take their responsibilities to upholding it seriously.

The Office for Students (OfS) is an independent regulator responsible for ensuring that higher education (HE) in England delivers positive outcomes for students. While the OfS operates within the broader policy framework set by the department, it maintains operational independence in its regulatory decisions and activities.

Their core regulatory activity is funded primarily through fees paid by registered providers, rather than the public purse. The OfS may also require a provider in relation to which a sanction has been imposed, to pay the costs incurred by the OfS in relation to imposing the sanction.

Investigations on breaches to conditions of registration forms the core regulatory purpose of the OfS, it is therefore not possible to calculate the specific costs for individual investigations.

The OfS's published policy on monetary penalties, 'Regulatory advice 19', makes provision for a reduced penalty where a settlement is reached at an early stage of an investigation. This is intended to avoid the OfS and a provider needing to expend resources to complete the detailed work necessary to draft and respond to provisional and final decisions.

Whether the OfS sought external legal advice on any matter, including the investigation into Sussex, is a matter for the OfS, and it is strictly confidential.

The OfS plans to publish further guidance on providers' duties to take steps to secure free speech shortly, ahead of new duties on HE providers under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 coming into force. This is currently planned for 1 August.

Nurses: Higher Education

The Baroness Hoey (Non-affiliated): (HL6115) To ask His Majesty's Government whether they plan to abolish university tuition fees for nursing.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): Currently, there are no plans to abolish tuition fees for nursing courses for the 2025/26 academic year. Students undertaking nursing, midwifery and allied health profession courses qualify for non-repayable grant support through the NHS Learning Support Fund. In addition, for the 2025/26 academic year, we will be increasing loans for living costs by 3.1%. This ensures that the most support is targeted at students from the lowest income families, while keeping the student finance system financially sustainable.

The higher education (HE) sector needs a secure financial footing to face the challenges of the next decade, and to ensure that all students can be confident they will receive the world-class HE experience they deserve. This is why, after seven years of frozen fee caps under the previous government, the department has taken 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.

In recognition of the increased investment students are being asked to make, the department expects the sector to deliver the very best outcomes, both for those students and for the country. We will publish our plan for HE reform in the summer, and work with the sector and the Office for Students to deliver the change that the country needs.

Universities: Music

Manuela Perteghella (Liberal Democrats) (Stratford-on-Avon): (43766) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of providing targeted support to universities at risk of closing their music departments.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The government is committed to supporting higher education arts courses. We recognise the vital role these institutions play in nurturing talent and contributing to the UK's cultural and economic landscape.

For the 2024/25 academic year, the department has allocated around £12.9 million to creative and performing arts courses. Additionally, we have allocated £58 million in Strategic Priorities Grant funding to world-leading small and specialist providers, including 12 creative and performing arts institutions. This funding supports the provision of these courses and promotes opportunities for students.

Overseas Students: Hong Kong

Adam Thompson (Labour) (Erewash): (42828) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help ensure that Hong Kong students do not experience Chinese (a) interference, (b) influence, (c) harassment and (d) repression whilst studying on UK campuses.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The UK welcomes international students, including from China, who make a very positive impact on the UK's higher education (HE) sector, our economy and society as a whole. We will always protect our national security, human rights and values.

The first duty of the government is to keep the country safe, and we are committed to responding to foreign interference, including those actions which amount to transnational repression. Any attempt by any foreign power to intimidate, harass or harm individuals or communities in the UK, will not be tolerated. Anyone who thinks they might be a victim should report incidents or suspicious activity to the Police via 101, a local police station or 999 in emergencies. As autonomous institutions, the department also expects universities to have robust processes in place to prevent and tackle incidents of harassment and abuse on campus.

The department is taking specific steps to ensure our world-leading universities remain free from foreign interference. This includes the implementation of the new complaints scheme in the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act 2023, which will offer a focussed route for concerns, including relating to foreign interference in academic freedom and free speech, to be escalated.

The department is continuing to work closely with the sector to increase their understanding of the risks and their ability to respond. We are conducting an internal review, informed by engagement with the regulator, sector, academics impacted by foreign interference and international partners, to assess existing approaches to managing the risk of foreign interference and what more support they might need.

Apprentices and Higher Education: Disadvantaged

Andrew Ranger (Labour) (Wrexham): (43529) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to help improve access to (a) higher education opportunities and (b) apprenticeships to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): Too many people across our country do not get the chance to succeed. This government is committed to supporting the aspiration of every person who meets the requirements and wants to go to university or pursue an apprenticeship, regardless of their background, where they live and their personal circumstances.

All English higher education (HE) providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) that intend to charge higher level tuition fees are required to have an Access and Participation Plan approved by the OfS. These plans articulate how providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. In creating their plans, providers should consider the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register which details 12 key sector risks across the student lifecycle and the student groups most likely to experience these, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Whilst many HE providers have demonstrated positive examples of widening access, including targeted outreach and bursaries, we want to see the sector go further.

In the summer the department will set out our plan for HE reform and we expect providers to play an even stronger role in improving access and outcomes for all disadvantaged students.

The department also wants to ensure that more young people can undertake apprenticeships. We are introducing foundation apprenticeships for young people, a work-based offer providing high-quality progression pathways into further work-based training and employment, including occupationally specific apprenticeships. The department is continuing to provide employers and providers with additional funding to support more apprenticeship opportunities for young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We provide £1,000 to both employers and training providers when they take on apprentices aged 16 to 18, and up to age 24 for apprentices with an education, health and care plan or who have been in local

authority care. These payments can be used to support costs such as work equipment, uniforms or travel.

Higher Education: Fees and Charges

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

The government has published an equality impact assessment of changes to fees on students with protected characteristics and students from disadvantaged groups for the 2025/26 academic year. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/263/impacts/2025/41>.

The department needs to put our world-leading higher education (HE) sector on a secure footing, in order to face the challenges of the next decade, and to ensure that all students have confidence that they will receive the world-class HE experiences they deserve.

This is why, after seven years of frozen fee caps under the previous government, this government took the difficult decision to increase maximum tuition fees for the 2025/26 academic year by 3.1%, in line with the forecast rate of inflation based on the Retail Prices Index excluding mortgage interest payments inflation index. Eligible students will continue to be able to apply for up-front fee loans to meet the full cost of their tuition in 2025/26.

This government will set out its plan for HE reform this summer.

Universities: Admissions

Jim Shannon (Democratic Unionist Party) (Strangford): (42449) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of trends in the number of university applications in the last five years.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): There has been a 5.9% increase in the number of main scheme UCAS applications between 2020 and 2024.

Main scheme applications for UK students are up 7.7% but down 0.7% for international students.

Universities: Economic Growth

Adam Thompson (Labour) (Erewash): (42781) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions she has had with (a) local authorities and (b) universities on ensuring universities are included in local growth plans.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education has announced five priorities to reform higher education (HE), with stronger contribution to economic growth as one of these priorities. As part of the work to develop a plan for HE reform, the department has been engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including mayoral strategic authorities. We are also engaging with HE mission groups and representative bodies on local growth plans and HE reform more broadly.

The department sees HE playing a key role in the government's emerging vision for the wider skills system. HE is critical to the delivery of the industrial strategy and the government's missions on opportunity and growth. Local Growth Plans will be locally owned, long-term strategic plans for how mayors will use devolved levers and powers to support the national growth mission and help deliver the Industrial Strategy. As the local leaders who know their areas best, they will be engaging relevant stakeholders as they develop and deliver their plans.

HE will also play a critical role in the wider vision for national renewal training our future workforce, including doctors, nurses, and teachers and playing a stronger civic role in local communities.

Apprentices: Social Mobility

Blake Stephenson (Conservative) (Mid Bedfordshire): (43275) To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of Level 7 Apprenticeships on social mobility.

Janet Daby (Labour) (Lewisham East): The government is committed to spreading opportunities and economic growth supported by a strong skills system.

This government has an extremely challenging fiscal inheritance. There are tough choices that need to be taken on how funding should be prioritised in order to generate opportunities for young people that enable them to make a start in good, fulfilling careers, and the department will therefore be asking more employers to step forward and fund a significant number of level 7 apprenticeships themselves outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer.

Higher Education: Franchises

The Rt Rev. the Lord Bishop of St Albans (Bishops): (HL6194) To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the future viability of franchised higher education.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): The government is deeply concerned about the abuse of public money in the franchised higher education system. Franchising grew significantly under the previous government against a backdrop of growing financial instability within higher education.

In 2023 and 2024, the Government Internal Audit Agency, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee all raised concerns about abuse, unethical behaviour and fraud. Recent media reports have highlighted these issues further, focusing on taxpayer money being misspent on loans for students who do not engage with or complete their studies, and those who intentionally exploit the system.

This government, along with the Office for Students (OfS) and the Student Loans Company, has already taken measures to clamp down on abuse of the student finance system. My right hon. Friend, The Secretary of State for Education set out these, and further steps, on 25 March in a ministerial statement, which can be found here: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-03-25/hcws547>.

This statement makes clear that when done well, franchising can be an important driver of inclusion and can break down barriers to students who may otherwise not be able to study higher education. Our package of plans aims to protect the best franchised provision but eliminate poor quality provision and put an end to abuse and fraud.

The department is currently consulting on proposals to bring the larger franchised providers under the OfS' direct regulatory oversight. This consultation and the impact assessment which was published alongside it are attached can also be found here: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/higher-education-quality-and-regulation/franchising-in-higher-education/>.

It would not be appropriate for us to pre-empt the outcomes of that consultation by making judgements about what the future of franchising will be. However, the government is clear that if we do not see changes that address the issues of concern, further action will be taken.

Religion: Higher Education

The Lord Storey CBE (Liberal Democrats): (HL6374) To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of Office for Students-registered theological colleges' compliance with academic freedom and freedom of speech.

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour): As the independent regulator, it is the role of the Office for Students to monitor and assess registered providers' compliance with all of its conditions of registration, including those relating to

freedom of speech and academic freedom, and to take regulatory action where they have been breached. This includes theological colleges.

All higher education (HE) providers have longstanding duties to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law which they must comply with. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education will shortly be making regulations to commence the expanded duties on HE providers in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. This will include new duties to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom, to put in place a free speech code of practice and a ban on non-disclosure agreements.

Sector news

International students with disabilities experiences – British Council

On Wednesday 9 April, the British Council published a report including findings of a pilot survey of international students with disabilities experiences of UK higher education.

Some of the key findings include:

- Overall, ISwD were very positive about their experiences of UK higher education.
- There were significant differences in ISwD's UK higher education experiences depending on type of disability. Those with hidden disabilities identified greater difficulties in accessing academic support. Wheelchair users and those with visual and hearing impairments noted greater difficulties in accessing supports, and especially had concerns about lack of access to wider social supports.
- The importance of effective and early communication with ISwD by higher education providers is highlighted. Lack of awareness of what support was available and how disability inclusion worked in UK higher education made it difficult for ISwD to access support when they first arrived in the UK.

You can read more [here](#).

Marking and assessment boycotts – Office for Students

On Thursday 10 April, the OfS published a report exploring the impact of the marking and assessment boycott carried out in 2023 and the steps taken by universities and colleges to mitigate disruption. The report is based on engagements with students and other sources. The OfS commissioned YouGov to run an online text-based focus group in July 2024 and the commissioned a quantitative survey, using YouGov's online panel. The OfS also wrote to universities setting out their expectations on how they should support students before, during and after industrial action.

Summary of findings related to the impact on students:

- 53 per cent of survey respondents whose course had been affected by the boycott reported that their coursework was either not marked or marks were delayed; 46 per cent stated their exams were not marked or marks were delayed.

- 41 per cent of survey respondents reported that the boycott had negatively affected their stress levels.
- 30 per cent of those survey respondents whose course was affected by the boycott were aware of their right to request financial compensation.
- Of those affected by the boycott, 46 per cent reported that they were offered some kind of alternative or compensation; 43 per cent stated they weren't offered anything.

You can read more on the survey [here](#) and the letter [here](#).