



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

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University APPG weekly update

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

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Parliamentary Business

Urgent question on sanctions imposed by the Chinese Government on UK Citizens

On Tuesday 13 April, Tim Loughton MP asked an urgent question to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development on recent sanctions imposed by the Chinese Government on UK citizens. He went on to ask the Minister if the adding of an academic from Newcastle University to the Chinese Government's sanctions list represented an attack on academic freedom and whether, given the growing concern about the influence of the Chinese Government on research projects in UK universities, the government will commit to an audit of Chinese influence on the UK education system.

The Minister responded that academic freedom and freedom of speech were fundamental UK values and a cornerstone of the UK higher education system. He concluded that the attempt to silence those highlighting human rights violations in Xinjiang in academia was absolutely unwarranted and unacceptable.

You can find a transcript of the debate [here](#).

Urgent question on student returns and financial support

On Thursday 15 April, Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson Daisy Cooper MP secured an urgent question on the return date given to university students and his Department's plans to provide financial compensation to university students for lost teaching and rent during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan MP, responded reiterating that the government had to adopt a cautious approach and the final tranche of students will be able to return on 17 May subject to step 3 of the roadmap. The Minister was repeatedly asked why university students have been treated differently to further education and school students, to which the Minister responded that key to the decision was the movement of students across the country and the formation of new households.

The Minister recognised the financial pressures the pandemic has placed on students, which is why Government had this week announced a further £15m in hardship funding. She also stated that an exemption still applied for those who need to return to university due to mental health issues, or if they have inadequate study space.

Daisy Cooper MP followed up her question by calling on the Minister to undertake a rapid review on the impact of the pandemic on university students and give it the powers to make recommendations on how students should be reimbursed by the government in financial and learning terms and double funds available to students for financial hardship to £700million. She noted that the higher education sector is facing huge financial insecurity and they cannot alone be expected to compensate students and the government must step in.

You can read a transcript of the urgent question [here](#).

Lords Science and Technology Committee on R&D funding in 2021

On Thursday 15 April, the Lords Science and Technology Committee held a meeting on government R&D funding in 2021. The witnesses for this session were Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Holly Yates, R&D strategy and investment, science research and innovation, BEIS.

Lord Mitchell (Lab) asked how the government was going to fund Horizon Europe post-2022. In response, the Secretary of State said government remain committed to the 2.4% target and stated that in order to reach that target there will need to be an increase in the government contribution to R&D.

The Secretary of State said that Horizon funding going forward is fairly secure and that he had already had success securing funding this year. The department would have to do this again ahead of the 2021 spending review. He said that BEIS realised the need of long-term certainty on R&D funding, were conscious of the problem but were dealing with it. This also had to be seen in the context of the development of ARIA.

Lord Winston (Lab) asked if the government had a detailed strategy for its annual R&D spending, particularly given it was set to rise. In response, the Secretary of State said this was why he had started the creation of a new innovation strategy which would be published at the end of June. He said this would be much more focused than the previous industrial strategy.

Baroness Blackwood (Con) asked if any impact assessment had been done on the impacts of recent problems on the university sector and whether anything might be done to address long-term funding. In response, the Secretary of State said it was clear Covid had affected the revenue of universities, and BEIS should 'look at' this. He added there was a debate between the relative balance of UKRI versus QR-based funding. the Secretary of State said revenue from foreign students would likely pick up post-Covid. He said there had not been time to do any impact assessment as too much bandwidth had been taken up by tackling the crisis, but that research would begin on the long-term impacts of Covid on the university sector at some point.

Holly Yates noted the impact of Covid on levels of foreign students had been less than had been feared. She said the full impact of Covid was not known but UKRI was already looking at the issue.

You can watch the committee [here](#).

Westminster Hall debate on the Third Report of the Education Committee

On Thursday 15 April, Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Committee, led a Westminster Hall debate on the third report of the Education Committee, 'A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution'.

Robert Halfon MP began by outlining the benefits of lifelong learning and providing an overview of the skills gap. On part-time higher education, he stated student numbers had collapsed by 53% between 2008-2009 and 2017-2018. He went on to outline a strategy for adult education and lifelong which included funding adult community learning in every town, introducing tax credits for employers who invest in training, introducing individual learning accounts, funded through the skills fund, offering free grants to part-time higher education learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and champion degree apprenticeships, he proposed allocating the £800million for access and participation to grow degree apprenticeship numbers. The Minister, Gillian Keegan MP, welcomed the Committee's report.

Peter Aldous MP (Con) said the gulf between further education and higher education funding should be addressed at the forthcoming spending review. Rachael Maskell (Lab) noted that to have more modular learning and flexibility in part time learning, higher education funding structures need to change. Education Committee member Johnathon Gullis (Con) put a challenge to the higher education sector to develop shorter qualifications. He felt that, in many cases, a three-year degree could be done in two years.

You can read a transcript of the debate [here](#).

National Security and Investment Bill

On Thursday 15 April, the House of Lords debated the National Security and Investment Bill in the Report stage.

Lord Rooker (Lab) moved Amendment 35, which was tabled by Lord Grantchester and signed by Lord Lansley and Lord Clement-Jones, which would require the government to “publish guidance for the higher education and research sector”, including “a clear explanation of asset transactions” indicating how “research, consultancy work, and collaborative research and development” will be affected and how the provisions apply to “strategic security partnerships and domestic partners.”. The amendment would also require the Government to “consult the higher education and research sector” in a meaningful way in advance of the guidance.

Lord Rooker went on to ask the Minister to confirm when the guidance will be published, how higher education and research institutions will be involved in the drafting of the guidance and whether the guidance will include hypothetical scenarios. Lord Lansley and Lord Clement Jones both welcomed the government’s commitment to provide guidance but also called for the guidance to be specific and include scenarios.

The Minister, Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, made a commitment that the government will provide guidance to the higher education sector within three months of Royal Assent and reassured the House that the government were working with an expert panel, that includes the sector, on the guidance and that that will engage with representatives from the research sector.

The Minister outlined that Clause 3 sets out core areas and core activities to which the Secretary of State is likely to pay closer attention, and the majority of research, consultancy work and collaborative research will fall outside these areas. Finally, the Minister confirmed that the guidance will provide higher education and research establishments with hypothetical scenarios of where acquisitions in the research sector could fall in scope of the regime.

You can a transcript of the debate [here](#).

Forthcoming business

Westminster Hall debate on the scope of proposed Turing scheme

On Tuesday 20 April 4:05pm, Tonia Antoniazzi MP will lead a Westminster hall debate on the ‘Scope of proposed Turing scheme’.

You can watch the debate [here](#).

ARIA Public Bill Committee

On Tuesday 20 April at 9:25am and 2pm and Thursday 22 April at 11:30am and 2pm, the Public Bills Committee will further consider the Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill.

On Tuesday you can watch the 9:25am session [here](#) and the 2pm session [here](#)

On Thursday you can watch the 11:30am session [here](#) and the 2pm session [here](#).

Health and Social Care Committee session on mental health

On Tuesday 20 April at 9:30am, the Health and Social Care Committee will hold a session on children and young people's mental health.

Witnesses for this session include:

- Lucas, Activist at Young Minds
- Professor Pat McGorry, Professor of Youth and Mental Health at University of Melbourne, and Director of Orygen Youth Health at Orygen Youth Health Research Centre in Victoria, Australia, Cassandra Harrison, Chief Executive Officer at Youth Access
- Professor Peter Fonagy, Head of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at University College London
- Dr Aleisha Clarke, Head of Child Mental Health and Wellbeing at Early Intervention Foundation
- Tim Bowen, Head at Maple Primary School, St Albans
- Shanti Johnson, Deputy Head at Maple Primary School, St Albans

You can watch the committee [here](#).

Science and Technology Committee session on the role of technology, science and innovation

On Wednesday 21 April at 9:30am, the Commons Science and Technology Committee on 'the role of technology, research and innovation in the COVID-19 recovery'

Witnesses for this session will include:

- Hetan Shah, Chief Executive at British Academy
- Sir Adrian Smith, President at Royal Society
- Naomi Weir, Head of Innovation at CBI

You can watch the committee [here](#).

International Relations and Defence Committee on the UK's security and trade relationship with China

On Wednesday 21 April at 10:00am, the International Relations and Defence Committee will hold a session on the UK's security and trade relationship with China

Witnesses for this session will include:

- Dr Tanvi Madan, Director of the India Project, Senior Fellow on Foreign Policy at Brookings Institution
- Dr Garima Mohan, Fellow, Asia Program at The German Marshall Fund of the United States
- Professor Akio Takahara, Professor of Contemporary Chinese Politics at University of Tokyo
- Professor Katherine Morton, Professor of Global Affairs at Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University, and Associate, China Centre at University of Oxford
- Professor Yongjin Zhang, Professor of International Politics at University of Bristol
- Professor Shaun Breslin, Professor of Politics and International Studies at University of Warwick

You can watch the committee [here](#).

Lords question on reductions in Overseas Development Assistance

On Thursday 22 April at 12:00, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale will ask Her Majesty's Government when they will publish a list of the reductions in Overseas Development Assistance budgets and awards for (1) 2019/20, and (2) 2020/21.

You can watch the question [here](#).

Written Questions

Covid testing for university students and staff

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to (a) increase covid-19 testing capacity and (b) reduce waiting times for results for (i) students and (ii) staff at universities. [105371]

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent): NHS Test and Trace has capacity to respond to increases in demand. As of 26 March over 8.5 million lateral flow device (LFD) and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests have been conducted. We also have the capacity to conduct over 750,000 PCR tests every day in over 1,100 test sites.

Since November 2020 we have assisted universities in setting up asymptomatic test sites (ATS) and the majority have one or multiple test sites and engaged in the regular testing of their staff and students with LFDs. For those who have been unable to set up their own ATS, we are working with the Department for Education to ensure there is a solution, either through partnering with a larger higher education institution or making use of community test sites. Between 2 January and 6 April, the overall average turnaround time at ATS across the United Kingdom is 36 minutes.

Student loans

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government what amount of student debt has been sold in each of the past five years; and at what value. [HL14582]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: The government has carried out 2 sales of student loans in the past 5 years. The first sale, completed in December 2017, achieved £1.7 billion from a cohort of loans with a face value of £3.5 billion. The second sale, completed in December 2018, achieved £1.9 billion from a cohort of loans with a face value of £3.9 billion.

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their estimate of the value of student loan debt for each of the past five years. [HL14581]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: It is not possible to provide the complete information requested within the body of the answer as this would exceed the word limit for responses. Please see the below links to the relevant reports. A copy of these reports will also be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

The valuation of the loan book is listed in the annual reports on GOV.UK, at the following link [here](#). The note on loans under the 'Notes to Accounts' section lists both the carrying and face value of the loan book.

For the 2019-20 annual accounts, the details for the carrying value are on page 195 and the details for the face value of the loan book are on page 202 [here](#).

For the 2018-19 annual accounts, the details for the carrying value are on page 159 and the details for the face value of the loan book are on page 161 [here](#).

For the 2017-18 annual accounts, the details for the carrying value are on page 147 and the details for the face value of the loan book are on page 148 [here](#).

For the 2016-17 annual accounts, the details for the carrying value are on page 154 and the details for the face value of the loan book are on page 155 [here](#).

For the 2015-16 annual accounts, the details for the carrying value are on page 177 and the details for the face value of the loan book are on page 178 [here](#).

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is the write off value of the sale of student loan debt in each of the last five years. [HL14583]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: A total of £8.1 million has been written off from the sold loan cohorts in the financial years 2016/17 to 2020/21.

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the UK's departure from the EU, what assessment they have made of the ability of (1) UK citizens to work in the EU, and (2) the earnings potential of graduates, in calculating the write off of student loan debt. [HL14586]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: The Withdrawal Agreement protects the rights of UK nationals who were lawfully resident in the EU before the end of the transition period, meaning they can continue to live, work, study, and access benefits and services broadly as they did before the UK left the EU . Member states may require a visa and/or work permit from British citizens intending to work or provide a service there. British citizens should check with the embassy of the country where they plan to travel for work or to provide a service for what type of visa or permit, if any, they will need.

Regardless of the UK's departure from the EU, the assessment of the earnings of student loan borrowers continues to take into account the latest Student Loan Company and Longitudinal Education Outcomes data, plus survey data from the Labour Force Survey and British Household Panel Survey, mortality statistics from the Office for National Statistics and macro-economic forecasts of earnings growth from the Office for Budget Responsibility. The assessment can be accessed [here](#), in the document 'July 2020 Fiscal sustainability report - charts and tables: Chapter 2'. Detailed information on the assessment of graduate earnings is published in the Earnings forecasts section of the Student Loans methodology, which can be found [here](#), in the document ' Student loan forecasts, England 2019 to 2020: quality and methodology information'. The next update to the student loan forecasts publication is announced for June 2021.

Lord Jones Of Cheltenham: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay on 22 March (HL14145), what plans they have to assess the annual cost of removing interest payments from the student loans of (1) health, and (2) social care, workers. [HL14576]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: There are no current plans to assess the annual cost of removing interest payments from the student loans of health or social care workers.

The student loans system is designed to protect borrowers, including those who are employed in health and social care. Repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed. Only those who earn above the repayment threshold are required to make repayments. The repayment threshold is £27,295 per year from April 2021, or its

monthly or weekly equivalent. Any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, is written off after 30 years with no detriment to the borrower.

The vast majority of students who do not fully pay back their loans (an estimated 75% of Plan 2 loans given out in the 2019/20 academic year) would see no reduction in their lifetime repayments, because this part of their borrowing is already written off [here](#).

Our income-based repayment system means that those who benefit the most from their education repay their fair share. The repayment system also helps to ensure that costs are split fairly between borrowers and the taxpayer. In total, the government subsidises around 50% of the overall cost of higher education, making a conscious investment in the skills and people of this country.

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government what calculation they use to decide the level of write off of student loan debt. [HL14584]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: The government publishes its loan write-off rules, available [here](#). We estimate the proportion of loan outlay issued in each financial year that we do not expect to be repaid through a metric called the Resource And Budgeting (RAB) charge.

The RAB charge is calculated by taking repayment forecasts for income contingent repayment loans and discounting them back to the period that the loan is issued using the discount rate provided by HM Treasury (currently RPI+0.7%). This gives us a net present value (NPV) of the future repayments and the charge is the relative difference between the loan issued and the NPV of the repayments. Further details of the RAB charge calculation are provided in the annual student loan forecast publication methodology document, available [here](#).

The RAB charge estimate is determined by earnings and repayment projections over the next 30-40 years, and therefore is inherently uncertain. Forecasts for the RAB charge are published each year, and are available [here](#).

Lord Mendelsohn: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of graduate earnings in their calculation of the write off of student loan debt. [HL14585]

Lord Parkinson Of Whitley Bay: The department's assessment of the earnings of student loan borrowers takes into account the latest Student Loan Company and Longitudinal Education Outcomes data, plus survey data from the Labour Force Survey and British Household Panel Survey, mortality statistics from the Office for National Statistics and macro-economic forecasts of earnings growth from the Office for Budget Responsibility. The assessment can be accessed [here](#), in the document 'July 2020 Fiscal sustainability report - charts and tables: Chapter 2'. Detailed information on the assessment of graduate earnings is published in the Earnings forecasts section of the Student Loans methodology, which can be found [here](#), in the document 'Student loan forecasts, England 2019 to 2020: quality and methodology information'. The next update to the student loan forecasts publication is announced for June 2021.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of using calculated grades to award Access to Higher Education qualifications in line with those calculated grades being used for the award of other qualifications as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [178722]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): We want all students to progress to the next stage of their lives, including students taking the Access to Higher Education qualification. Calculated grades are not being used for awarding any qualifications this year and given the wide range and diverse nature of qualifications, one approach to awarding cannot be taken for all qualifications.

Assessments for Access to Higher Education qualifications are continuing where possible and will continue to be marked and graded by tutors. However, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education recognises that in some exceptional circumstances the assessments may need to be adapted to meet the needs of students and are allowing the diploma to be awarded using alternative evidence.

Sector News

Government confirms no further student returns in England until 17 May at earliest

On Tuesday 13 April, the Department for Education published a written ministerial [statement](#) by Universities Minister Michelle Donelan and a updated guidance on student returns in England.

The statement confirms that there will be no further student returns to in-person teaching until Step 3 of the roadmap (17 May at the earliest). Students and higher education providers will be given a week's notice of any further easing of restrictions. There is also confirmation of some additional hardship funding for this term (£15 million) to supplement the previously announced £70 million.

You can read the statement [here](#) and the guidance [here](#).

Office for Students insight on care experience students

On Friday 9 April, the Office for Students published an insight paper on care experienced students and higher education.

This Insight brief follows the higher education lifecycle of a care experienced student from before application through to graduation and employment, showcases examples of good practice from universities and colleges and aims to show the barriers care experienced students face and how they might be removed, overcome and mitigated.

The insight brief outlined that Office for students data shows significant equality gaps for students who have spent time in care compared to their peers. It also considers the impact of COVID-19 in exacerbating these inequalities for care experienced students and others who are without family support.

Finally, the insight brief confirms the OfS is proposing to expand of the future data collected to capture a broader group of applicants with experience of care, as well as working with the Centre for Transforming Access and Outcomes in higher education (TASO) to improve the sharing of effective practice.

You can read the full briefing [here](#).

Universities UK briefing on degree classification in 2019-2020

On Wednesday 14 April, Universities UK published a briefing on degree classification in 2019-2020.

The briefing considers the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to the higher education sector in the 2019-2020 academic year and how universities successfully shifted to digital delivery and implemented significant changes to teaching, learning and assessment.

Data released in January 2021 showed that across the UK, there had been an increase of upper awards in 2019–20. The briefing examines the various factors that may have contributed to the increase of upper awards in 2019-20.

You can read the briefing [here](#).