

Political Affairs Digest

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4 – 8 November 2024

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

If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

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Parliamentary business

Higher Education reform – HoC ministerial statement

On Monday 4 November, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, made a ministerial statement on 'Higher Education Reform' in the House of Commons.

Following an intervention from the speaker, the Secretary of State clarified that it was with regret and frustration that this announcement was reported in the press before announced to the House. She confirmed that she would take whatever steps would be taken to investigate the leak.

In her opening remarks, the Secretary of State criticised the previous government's record, saying that they had undermined the opportunities and aspirations of young people and had spoken down the higher education sector. She noted the financial challenges that they had inherited in July 2024 and criticised the politicisation of the Office for Students.

The Secretary of State said the government had not hesitated to grip the challenges and take tough decisions to restore stability. She confirmed the acceptance of the Office for Students review and the new leadership of the regulator.

She outlined three short-term announcements:

- The maximum cap for tuition fees would go up in line with inflation to £9535. She made an effort to calm anxieties and misconceptions of how this would impact graduate repayments.
- Maximum maintenance loan would also increase in line with inflation, giving students up to an additional £414 a year in 2025-26.
- From the start of the academic year, a lower fee limit of £5760 would be introduced for foundation years in classroom-based subjects. She said the government recognised the importance of foundation years for promoting access to higher education.

Looking longer term, she confirmed the government would publish further plans in 'the months ahead'. She reiterated comments that 'investment could only come with the promise of major reform.' This would include universities doing more on opportunity, citing that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was at

their highest levels. She said that ‘universities could do more and must do more.’ On adult learning, she said the government were ‘pressing ahead with lifelong learning.’

The Secretary of State highlighted the importance of raising the bar on teaching standards and driving out poor practice. She said it was important that all students received strong value which ‘if we’re honest, hasn’t always been the case in the past.’

On raising impact ‘beyond their gates’ she said universities must work harder with businesses to develop skills and create jobs and embed themselves in local communities to become anchor institutions.

A renewed drive for efficiency was announced, and she said the government would not accept wasteful spending. She explicitly referenced vice-chancellor pay, saying ‘the pay of their top teams must be fair and justifiable.’

Concluding her remarks, she reiterated the Robbins principle which was ‘central to the government’s thinking today.’ She said she looked forward to working in partnership with the sector to deliver this change.

The Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Laura Trott MP, said students would suffer from the announced changes at a time when they could least afford it. She highlighted the Labour Party’s U-turn on this policy, citing the platform that Keir Starmer stood on for leadership as well as subsequent comments made by Ministers that there were no plans to raise tuition fees. This meant that students could not prepare for the rise.

She said the UK had some of the best universities in the world, and there were opportunities for reform to improve the sector for students, universities, and taxpayers. They would work constructively with government on this.

The Shadow Secretary of State put the following questions to the Secretary of State:

- How much of the announcement would be absorbed by the NI contribution increase?
- Was it her intention to increase fees every year?
- What impact does this have on public finances, and were OBR consulted?
- Why was the change not announced in the Budget?
- How much longer will it take for the average graduate to pay off their loan?

The Secretary of State said the opposition had not put forward any positive proposals and spent their time ‘talking down the sector’ and the aspirations of young people.

She said it was not a decision that she wanted to take but made the tough choice. On the impact assessment, she said this would be done as legislation was laid.

Helen Hayes MP (Labour), Chair of the Education Committee, asked what steps the government were taking to effectively communicate the change to current applicants who may be anxious about the change. The Secretary of State said communication was important and reiterated previous comments about the sector taking steps to increase participation and widen opportunity.

Ian Sollom MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for higher education, said it was clear the current system was 'broken' and deeply unfair in how it treated students. He highlighted the previous government's record on cutting maintenance grants and changing student loan plans. He proposed that the first priority needed to be on fixing the impact of those changes. On efficiency, he suggested universities could publish how tuition fees were spent. He also noted the importance of making the UK a welcoming place for international students. The Secretary of State said the spokesperson raised important questions and welcomed the opportunity to discuss further with him.

Rachael Maskell MP (Labour) highlighted the significant redundancy package that universities in her local constituency had conducted and the wider financial difficulties they faced. On student cost of living, she asked the Secretary of State to look at the issue of housing stock and cost. The Secretary of State said that student accommodation would be taken into consideration and that the sector should be doing more to work with local councils.

Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP (Conservative) asked how long the pause in the commencement of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 would be. The Secretary of State said robust discussions at universities were important, but reiterated the importance of ensuring legislation was 'workable.'

Darren Paffey MP (Labour) reflected on his time working at universities, and said there was now an opportunity to restore universities as machines of opportunity and economic growth. The Secretary of State agreed with the role that universities make, and also highlighted the importance of ensuring support for care experienced young people which the sector could take further steps on.

Christine Jardine MP (Liberal Democrat) asked if there could be a wider review on the 'broken system' before imposing higher fees. She also asked how the Secretary of State could square this announcement with the cancelling of funding for the Exascale project at University of Edinburgh. The Secretary of State said a one-year settlement was in line with the wider approach made at the Budget.

Matt Western MP (Labour) welcomed the 'bold and difficult decision' made by the government. On efficiency savings, he asked whether this meant changes to staff and

workload or overspend on wasteful capital projects. The Secretary of State said efficiency savings did not mean making staff do more with less or be employing fewer staff but tackling needless spend.

Adam Thompson MP (Labour), Chair of the APPG for Universities, said the previous government left the sector in a dire state and said the announcements today were needed to avoid university insolvencies. He asked what steps the government were taking to develop a new financial model that delivered excellence and stability. The Secretary of State said it was a two-way partnership with universities receiving more money from government while also driving better practice and doing more.

Richard Foord MP (Liberal Democrat) welcomed the announcement on maintenance. He also highlighted the importance of international students and asked if they would be removed from net migration figures. The Secretary of State welcomed the contribution of international students but said it was not her place to respond.

Gareth Snell MP (Labour) highlighted the thousands of people employed by universities and the need to make the model sustainable for this reason too. He also asked what steps would be taken to expand opportunity in the sector. The Secretary of State said the Department was looking at how universities could improve their civic role.

Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP (Independent) said many students were put off by the cost of university, warning that it would discourage students from attending. He suggested the tuition fee could be reduced or removed. The Secretary of State said the increase was needed to stabilise the finances in the sector, adding that there was no point encouraging young people to go to university if their institution was in financial peril.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP (Labour) noted the divergence in higher education policy over the past 30 years, highlighting that it did not 'sit easy' that some members of the House had received free tuition fees and grants. She asked if the Secretary of State would review the announcement if an equality impact assessment found negative impact for disadvantaged students. The Secretary of State said it was important to improve opportunity and access, and further highlighted that the sector must do more to improve progression.

Andrew Lewin MP (Labour) highlighted the risks of over reliance on international students to cross-subsidise university activity. The Secretary of State said international students play an important role to society and the economy. She also noted the pressures that this could have on housing stock, which the university sector should address.

Vikki Slade MP (Liberal Democrat) probed whether courses providing 8 hours of contact time represented good value for money. The Secretary of State said they

were working with the Office for Students to ensure value for money and high quality.

Shaun Davies MP (Labour) asked how university vice-chancellors would be held accountable for contact hours, helping vulnerable students, and playing a civic role in their communities. The Secretary of State said she had refocused the regulator on the issues he had described, and that the government would continue to look at this.

Josh Reynolds MP (Liberal Democrat) asked the Secretary of State to confirm the reintroduction of maintenance grants. The Secretary of State said this would be considered further.

Luke Myer MP (Labour) probed about the Designated Quality Body and asked whether the regulatory approach would be different from the previous government. The Secretary of State said it was important that the regulation was independent, which had become increasingly fixated on 'political whims' under the last government.

Dr Scott Arthur MP (Labour) said that any country that was serious about economic growth would need to value universities. He asked if the Secretary of State would look at attracting the best students and researchers to universities.

Anna Dixon MP (Labour) welcomed the announcement and importance of expanding access. She asked the Secretary of State to visit her constituency to see the university, and its leaders, to learn more about their approach to civic engagement.

Peter Swallow MP (Bracknell) highlighted that universities needed to do more to access and contribute to social mobility. The Secretary of State agreed and noted the importance of a diverse range of subjects for students to study at university.

Alice Macdonald MP (Labour) welcomed the announcement and asked that the extra funding would result in fewer job losses and more young people accessing higher education. The Secretary of State said there needed to be reining in of wasteful spending.

Jayne Kirkham MP (Labour) asked the Secretary of State to confirm the importance of arts degrees and support from the government. The Secretary of State said the chance to study was also a 'good in and of itself', and it was important to value a range of courses.

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

Renters Rights Bill – HoC committee stage

On Tuesday 5 November, the seventh and eighth sitting of the Renters' Rights Bill committee took place. Amendments relating to student tenancies were introduced by Shadow Housing Minister David Simmonds MP (Conservative), Carla Denyer MP (Green), and Claire Hazelgrove MP (Labour).

David Simmonds' amendment would require the publication of an economic impact assessment of the changes brought by the Bill on the student housing market. Another amendment would require an assessment of the operation of possession proceedings to be a prerequisite for commencing the provisions of the Bill. The Minister for Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook MP, stated that the government's approach builds on the Department's existing long-term housing sector monitoring work, and that it would conduct processes, impact and value-for-money evaluations in-line with the Department's published evaluation strategy. He stated that the government will publish evaluation findings in a timely manner that is consistent with its policy for the publication of research. He said the government is unlikely to tie implementation of the Bill to any additional requirements of the type that has been proposed in this amendment. David Simmonds withdrew both amendments.

Claire Hazelgrove spoke in support of a new clause tabled by Helen Hayes MP (Labour) which would provide protection for bereaved guarantors by prohibiting the application of a guarantor agreement in the event of the death of a tenant. She cited the example of a first-year university student who had signed a private tenancy for his second-year accommodation. The student died by suicide months before the tenancy was due to start. His parents had signed a guarantor agreement that applied in the event of their son's death. The letting agent pursued them for rent on the property in which he would never live.

Carla Denyer spoke in support of a new clause tabled by Alex Sobel (Labour). This would place restrictions on requirements for tenants to provide a guarantor. She described the practice of demanding that tenants provide a guarantor as 'discriminatory', especially against tenants who are from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds, who are estranged from their families, who have a background in care or who are coming to the UK, such as international students. She stated that the requirement for a guarantor can be a barrier to securing a home. She claimed that this practice can push those unable to find a suitable guarantor into unsustainable debt, because they are forced to pay either months of rent up front or for costly guarantor schemes run by private companies. She went on to cite evidence that 13% of students experience homelessness during their studies, and that figure rises to 29% for international students. She stated that this issue has a detrimental impact on the lives of student renters and their ability to focus on their studies. She pointed to

other means available to landlords to protect themselves against potential loss of income, include tenant referencing, rent guarantee insurance, and deposit protection schemes, all of which, she claimed makes guarantor schemes unnecessary. She encouraged the Minister to engage with Alex Sobel and the NUS, with a view to including the changes in the next version of the Bill.

Regarding the new clause tabled by Helen Hayes, the Minister agreed that it is unacceptable for bereaved guarantors to be held liable for unpaid rent. He noted that guarantor arrangements are not usually intended to protect landlords against the risk of financial loss caused by the death of their tenant; rather, they are used by landlords to reduce the financial risk of letting to a tenant who, for example, may have no previous residency in the UK and consequently no references from former landlords, or who might not successfully pass credit checks. He committed to addressing the issues raised by Helen Hayes' new clause and would provide an update during Report stage.

The Minister also agreed that obtaining a guarantor may be difficult for some prospective tenants which can prevent access to rental homes in the private sector. However, he also accepted that guarantors can give landlords confidence to provide tenancies to individuals who otherwise may struggle to gain accommodation. He expressed concerns that the wording of the clause tabled by Alex Sobel may inadvertently make it harder for those tenants to find a place to live. He committed to engaging with MPs and stakeholders on the issues. The clause was withdrawn.

Seventh sitting: [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#).

Eighth sitting: [read a transcript](#) and [watch the session](#).

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology – HoL Science and Technology Committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 5 November, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee heard from:

- Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, Secretary of State at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)
- Alexandra Jones, Director General for Science, Innovation and Growth at DSIT
- Emran Mian, Director General for Digital Technologies and Telecoms at DSIT

The Chair, Baroness Brown of Cambridge (Crossbench) began by requesting an opening statement on the Secretary of State's priorities and achievements. The Secretary of State said science and technology were fundamental to the government's focus across its Missions. He highlighted the record level of government spending in R&D delivered in the Autumn Budget as well as the £70 million for the new life sciences manufacturing fund.

On the Science and Technology Framework, the Chair asked whether this would be continued, and progress would still be reported against. The Secretary of State said the new government had increased their sense of ambition for science and research as it was now on a sustainable financial footing. He also said there would be increased expectation on how it delivers for priorities that the government has.

Baroness Neuberger (Crossbench) asked whether Horizon Europe costs had been shifted to DSIT's budgets and whether these costs were fully funded by the increase announced in the Budget. The Secretary of State clarified that the Horizon budget was ringfenced by HM Treasury.

On the upcoming spending review, Baroness Neuberger asked what ambitions he had for science and technology, including the 10-year R&D budgets. The Secretary of State said he would not go into detail before negotiations on the spending review had happened. He said that stakeholders that expressed anxiety in the run up to the Autumn Budget should now feel confident in his commitment to defending the best interests of R&D across government. On 10-year budgets he said DSIT were working on the principles for identifying where these were appropriate, and that HM Treasury were 'absolutely' with them on this.

Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones (Conservative) probed on the changes to the fiscal rules in the Budget and possibility for infrastructure funding. She asked when a plan for infrastructure could be announced. The Secretary of State highlighted the importance of increasing the resilience of infrastructure, including the cyber network, and legislation would be announced later in this session. Alex Jones said plans were being considered for wider infrastructure as part of phase 2 of the spending review.

Lord Borwick (Conservative) asked about the Industrial Strategy Green Paper, probing on DSIT's involvement. The Secretary of State confirmed his Department would be leading on the delivery of digital and technology and life sciences and supporting other sectors. He confirmed that they were working closely with the Department for Business and Trade. He emphasised the importance of getting the Industrial Strategy right and positioning the UK as a country with long-term thinking and stability.

Lord Berkeley (Labour) raised challenges of scaling up companies and asked how it would be different under the new government. The Secretary of State said general instability in the economy had been a barrier to investment, which he said had been

restored as evidenced by the recent investment summit. He also mentioned pension reform that the Chancellor was leading, which was 'well under way.'

In remarks about DSIT operating as a 'supporting Department across government', the Secretary of State said the £25 million for R&D Mission Fund would enable the power of R&D to tackle some of the singular 'knotty' challenges that other departments want addressing.

Lord Wei (Conservative) highlighted the cuts made to the Exascale project. The Secretary of State said he did not come in to cut the programme and emphasised that funding did not exist in the first place. He said it was an 'intense frustration', and he had limited viable options given it had not been funded. He said he was in the process of fully understanding the needs and capabilities of the UK to get digital infrastructure right.

On visa costs for top talent, the Secretary of State said the UK was the best place in the world to innovate and put high skills to good use. He noted the 'shared inheritance' that the new government and stakeholders had from the previous government. He said the new government were taking the 'very difficult first steps' to tackle issues, such as higher education sustainable funding.

Baroness Willis of Summertown (Crossbench) probed on university funding and any assessments DSIT had made to protect research and development capability in the scenario that a university went insolvent. The Secretary of State said issues with university funding was multi-faceted, explaining that it wasn't just the frozen tuition fees, R&D budgets, but also courses being 'talked down' by the previous Prime Minister. He said the 'war' on universities had ended on the first day of the Labour government. The Secretary of State highlighted the announcement made by the Department for Education (DfE) on tuition fees as well as the increase in R&D budgets that will benefit the higher education sector. He explained that DSIT was working closely with the DfE to ensure a good 'net', and the rebuilding of the sector captures the potential it can make for the economy and skills.

On international students, the Secretary of State said the UK was the best place in the world to study and was home to some of the best research and teaching universities. He criticised the previous government's rhetoric towards international students and the quality of a degree.

Lord Rees of Ludlow (Crossbench) asked on the balance between universities and standalone research institutes. The Secretary of State said it was his role to create flexibility and frameworks to nurture talent and success rather than decide a precise balance.

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

Higher education reform – HoL ministerial statement

On Tuesday 5 November, the Minister for Skills, Baroness Smith of Malvern, made a ministerial statement on ‘Higher Education Reform’ in the House of Lords. This was a repeat of the statement made by the Secretary of State a day earlier in the House of Commons.

In her opening remarks, the Minister criticised the previous government’s record, saying that they had undermined the opportunities and aspirations of young people and had spoken down the higher education sector. She noted the financial challenges that they had inherited in July 2024 and criticised the politicisation of the Office for Students.

The Minister said the government had not hesitated to grip the challenges and take tough decisions to restore stability. She confirmed the acceptance of the Office for Students review and the new leadership of the regulator.

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- From the start of the academic year, a lower fee limit of £5760 would be introduced for foundation years in classroom-based subjects. She said the government recognised the importance of foundation years for promoting access to higher education.

Looking longer term, she confirmed the government would publish further plans in ‘the months ahead’. She reiterated comments that ‘investment could only come with the promise of major reform.’ This would include universities doing more on opportunity, citing that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers was at their highest levels. She said that ‘universities could do more and must do more.’ On adult learning, she said the government were ‘pressing ahead with lifelong learning.’

The Minister highlighted the importance of raising the bar on teaching standards and driving out poor practice. She said it was important that all students received strong value which ‘if we’re honest, hasn’t always been the case in the past.’

On raising impact 'beyond their gates' she said universities must work harder with businesses to develop skills and create jobs and embed themselves in local communities to become anchor institutions.

A renewed drive for efficiency was announced, and she said the government would not accept wasteful spending. She explicitly referenced vice-chancellor pay, saying 'the pay of their top teams must be fair and justifiable.'

Concluding her remarks, she reiterated the Robbins principle which was 'central to the government's thinking today.' She said she looked forward to working in partnership with the sector to deliver this change.

Responding on behalf of the opposition, Baroness Barran, said that after 'relative silence' in the Budget on higher education, they 'very much welcomed' the statement.

On repayments for Graduates, she asked whether officials had calculated how much more the average student would repay under the increased fees. She expressed scepticism of whether the announcement, coupled with the increase in national insurance contributions, would make a 'material difference' to the financial sustainability of the sector. She highlighted estimates that the net benefit to universities would be around £18 million, representing just £45,000 per institution.

On access to higher education, she probed the Minister as to why free school meals was chosen as the definition of 'disadvantaged' rather than POLAR 4 quintiles. She suggested that opportunities for disadvantaged students had improved and hoped the Minister would acknowledge that.

Baroness Barran said she agreed in principle on the renewed drive for efficiency but asked the Minister to give a sense of where it sees waste in the sector and whether they had an estimate of what it amounted to.

She also asked a series of clarificatory questions regarding the specifics of whether it would impact current as well as new students, if it would impact postgraduate student fees and the disabled students' allowance, and what the plans were on sharia-compliant finance.

Lord Storey, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for education, said they welcomed the announcement with 'universities crying out for government to look at their funding.' He criticised decisions made by the previous government including the abolition of the maintenance grant and introduction of Plan 5 for student finance. He asked the Minister whether the government had considered how to support universities without raising fees. He also probed on how universities spent their allocation of funding to ensure students received good value for money and a positive experience.

In her reply, the Minister explained the rationale behind the inflationary uplift. She also said the government had made it clear that increase in investment also came with considerable reform. The Minister confirmed that an impact assessment would be published alongside the statutory instrument to increase fees. She clarified the intention was that tuition fees would apply to new and existing students but that it 'could depend on the contract and arrangements made between the university and the individual student.' Further announcements on the changes to postgraduate support and the disabled students' allowance would be made in due course.

On access for disadvantaged students, the Minister noted that the persistent gap between advantaged and disadvantaged and highlighted that it had widened in the last year. She explained this was 'the first element of the reform programme.'

The Minister said the government were 'absolutely clear' that providing additional funding brought responsibility for the sector to spend the money as efficiently as possible. This mean providing the quality of experience that students have the right to expect and in a transparent way.

The Minister set the expectation that universities would play a crucial role in the government's growth mission and work alongside Skills England. She acknowledged the crucial civic role they play and wanted to see these strengthened.

On the alternative financing mechanism, the Minister confirmed that they would build on the work of the previous Government by reconstituting the working group.

Responding to Lord Storey's remarks on considering other methods of funding universities, the Minister said that given the current financial situation, the announcement was the most appropriate way to provide additional income and certainty for HE.

Baroness Morris of Yardley (Labour) said she welcomed that the government had taken as much early action as they could to try to improve the situation. She also asked for clarification as to whether students already at university would be charged increased fees. On widening participation, she probed on continuation rates for disadvantaged students and asked for these to be part of the discussion.

In her reply, the Minister said 'it is the case that the increase in tuition fees will cover students who are already studying. In some ways it is not for the Government to clarify the position. Higher education institutions are autonomous and will need to be clear with their students about the impact on them of the increase in fees.' She confirmed that continuation rates were an area the government wanted to make progress with the sector.

Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie (Conservative) shared her concern that a consequence of the policy would be that 'the brightest and best Scottish students are

not able to take advantage of the wider opportunities that are offered within higher education across the whole of the UK.'

The Minister said that the government would be working alongside universities to broaden access and ensure that students have a successful experience would also benefit Scottish students, whether they are studying in Scotland or at an English university.

Baroness Hodge of Barking (Labour) said it was 'high time' the financial challenges facing the higher education sector were recognised but warned that raising fees could make it even more difficult for promoting access due to concerns of debt.

The Minister said there was a responsibility to continue pointing out that student loans are a very different type of debt to a credit card or another form of loan. She reiterated her commitment to broadening access to higher education.

Lord Lucas (Conservative) asked whether the government would encourage universities to give more transparent information to students about what courses lead to and what jobs and careers their students go on to from each course. He probed on the costs associated with a university undergraduate degree and asked why it cost 50% more than a sixth form college to educate a student. He also highlighted the British Council's Alumni UK initiative which would give international students a lifelong sense of belonging to the UK and would be of considerable benefit to the UK.

The Minister said it was right that universities should provide information on the course and potential progression, and she confirmed it was an area that they would be working with the sector to improve. On international students, she said she would strongly support anything that enables international students to maintain their contact with the university and with the country. She said that 'we need to have much better transparency within the sector about how money is being spent, how it is being allocated, for example, between research and teaching and how that then results in student experience.'

The Earl of Effingham (Conservative) asked how the Minister would guarantee appropriate freedom of speech, robust discussion, and rigorous challenges at universities.

The Minister said the government were 'absolutely committed to ensuring freedom of speech and academic freedom within our universities.' She said they would continue to consider the way forward and to ensure this could happen without some of the disproportionate burdens and impact on minority groups that the Act in its totality would have brought.

Baroness Pinnock (Liberal Democrat) asked the Minister how much difference ‘the relatively small amount of additional funding for universities’ would make to the higher education sector. The Minister explained that the decision on this year’s inflationary increase in tuition fees was a measure to stabilise the system at this point in time. They were committed to a reform package in due course.

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

Prime Minister’s Questions

On Wednesday 6 November, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP, answered oral questions in the House of Commons. During this session, he was asked about the financial sustainability of universities:

Clive Lewis MP (Labour): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will know that after 14 years of Tory ideological hostility and cuts, our universities are in financial meltdown. The University of East Anglia, in my constituency, is having to make redundancies, as are many others. Our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has started to address the problem, but we need a long-term solution that does not simply saddle our young people with more debt. Can my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister say how we can move to fix the foundations of higher education as we go forward?

Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise higher education. We inherited a sector facing severe financial challenges. Universities have suffered a real-terms decline in their income and the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is the highest on record. We have had to take tough decisions to put that on a secure footing, but we are also taking the step of easing living pressures by increasing maintenance loans, which is worth an extra £414 per year.

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

November recess

On Wednesday 6 November, the House of Lords and House of Commons will rise for November recess. Both Houses will return on Monday 11 November.

You can [find out more about recess dates](#).

Forthcoming business

Budget – HoC SIT committee oral evidence

On Tuesday 12 November from 9:30am, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee will hear oral evidence on the Budget.

Witnesses (9:30 am)

- **Professor Adrian Smith**, President, Royal Society
- **Professor Karen Holford**, Vice-Chancellor and Universities UK Board Member, Cranfield University
- **Professor Richard Jones**, Vice-President for Regional Innovation and Civic Engagement, University of Manchester

Witnesses (10:15 am)

- **Dr Alicia Greated**, Executive Director, Campaign for Science and Engineering
- **Stephen Phipson CBE**, Chief Executive Officer, Make UK
- **Dom Hallas**, Executive Director, Startup Coalition

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

Sharia-compliant student finance – HoL oral question

On Wednesday 13 November, there will be an oral question in the House of Lords on Sharia-compliant student finance. This question was tabled by Lord Sharkey (Liberal Democrats).

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

Tackling barriers to educational opportunities – Westminster Hall debate

On Wednesday 13 November from 2:30pm, there will be a Westminster Hall debate on tackling barriers to educational opportunities. This debate was tabled by Tony Vaughan MP (Labour).

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

Findings and recommendations in the Universities UK report, 'Opportunity, growth and partnership: a blueprint for change' – HoL debate

On Thursday 14 November, there will be a House of Lords debate on findings and recommendations in the Universities UK report, 'Opportunity, growth and partnership: a blueprint for change'. This debate was tabled by Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Labour).

Confirmed speakers include:

- Baroness Smith of Malvern (Labour)
- Baroness Barran (Conservative)

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

You can [read the House of Lords Library briefing](#).

Written questions and statements

Higher Education

David Williams MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to help support people to transition from level three qualifications to higher levels. [UIN 10908]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Skills are crucial to economic growth, with a third of productivity improvement over the last two decades explained by improvements to skills levels. However, between 2017 and 2022, skills shortages in England doubled to more than half a million and now account for 36% of job vacancies.

To address this, Skills England will bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions across all regions to meet the skills needs of the next decade to provide strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system that is aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.

The government will also bring forward a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce and drive economic growth through its Industrial Strategy.

The department will continue to support learners who wish to progress from Level 3 to a higher level, whether that is to study at university, a higher level or degree apprenticeship, or a Level 4 or 5 classroom-based qualification such as a Higher Technical Qualification, which have been approved as providing the skills that employers need.

Degrees and Higher National Diplomas

Josh Newbury MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department is taking to increase the provision of level (a) five and (b) six qualifications in areas that do not have a university. [UIN 11080]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The department continues to support access to higher level qualifications to break down barriers to opportunity and support economic growth.

The department continues to support learners who wish to progress from Level 3 to a higher level, whether that is to study at university, a higher level or degree apprenticeship, or a Level 4 or 5 classroom-based qualification, including Higher

Technical Qualifications (HTQs), which have been approved as providing the skills that employers need.

The introduction of HTQs at Level 5 is aimed at providing high quality, employer-led qualifications that meet the needs of local economies and improves the accessibility and flexibility of higher education. These qualifications are designed to be delivered by further education colleges and other providers and are flexible, offering full-time, part-time and online learning options. This allows breadth of access, meaning that individuals who do not live near a university may be able to access higher technical education through a college.

The department also continues to support the delivery of higher and degree apprenticeships, which allow individuals to earn while they learn and gain qualifications up to Level 6. This approach helps to ensure that training is closely aligned with industry needs.

Additionally, institutions like the Open University offer Validation Programmes enabling institutions without their own degree-awarding powers to offer validated higher education programmes. Such initiatives can help to ensure that high quality degrees are accessible to learners in areas that do not have a university.

The department is also setting up Skills England, a new body, to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to meet the skills needs of the next decade across all regions, providing strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.

The government will bring forward a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education to break down barriers to opportunity, support the development of a skilled workforce, and drive economic growth through our Industrial Strategy.

Overseas Students

Abtisam Mohamed MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will remove international students from net migration targets. [UIN 10876]

Minister for Migration and Citizenship, Seema Malhotra MP: Net migration statistics are produced by the independent Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Visas: Overseas Students

Abtisam Mohamed MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the report by

the Migration Advisory Committee entitled Graduate route: rapid review, published on 14 May 2024, on her Department's policies relating to international students. [UIN 10881]

Minister for Migration and Citizenship, Seema Malhotra MP: The Home Secretary set out in her written statement of the 30 July 2024, the Government will continue with the measures announced by the previous government on 23 May in response to the Migration Advisory Committee review of the Graduate route.

The Government values the economic and academic contribution that international students make to this country, including those here on the Graduate route, and that is why it is important to ensure that the system is effective and not open to abuse.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with reference to paragraph 3.19 of the Autumn Budget 2024, HC 295, published on 30 October 2024, if she will publish an allocation breakdown of the £20.4 billion spending on research and development for 2025-26. [UIN 11882; Grouped Question: 11881]

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Darren Jones MP: To fully harness the potential of the UK's excellent science base and to foster a dynamic investment economy, the Budget protects record levels of government research and development (R&D) investment with £20.4 billion allocated in 2025-26. This is allocated as per the table below.

Department	25-26 R&D*
DSIT	£13,936m
DHSC	£2,036m
MOD	£1,685m
DESNZ	£730m
DEFRA	£512m
SIA	£439m
FCDO	£335m
DBT	£329m
DfT	£154m
DCMS	£63m
DfE	£50m
HO	£45m
DWP	£39m
MHCLG	£9m
FSA	£8m
MOJ	£3m
HMRC	£2m
HMT	£1m

TOTAL	£20,376m
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STEM Subjects: Further Education and Employment

Jim Shannon MP (DUP): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she has taken to help ensure regional opportunities for young people in STEM (a) further education and (b) careers. [UIN 11305]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: Education is a devolved matter, and the response outlines the information for England only.

Developing the skills of young people, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is a critical enabler for the government's missions to break down barriers to opportunity and drive economic growth.

That is why the department is setting up Skills England, a new body, to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions, to help meet the skills needs of the next decade, aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy.

This will be underpinned by Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), that support our aim to make technical education and training more responsive to local labour market and employer needs. A £165 million Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) has been made available across all areas of the country to support providers to respond collaboratively to the skills needs identified in the LSIPs.

The department will continue to support learners who wish to have a career in STEM through our technical education offer with a range of high quality qualifications and apprenticeship opportunities at all levels.

Access to future employers should never be dependent on who you know, or where you live. Our ambition is to offer a guarantee of two weeks' worth of high quality work experience to all young people, irrespective of their background. This will open doors to a wider range of employers and businesses and give young people a greater insight into the labour market.

To support young people with careers information, advice and guidance, the Careers and Enterprise Company, back by £30 million of government funding in 2024/25, coordinates a national network of Careers Hubs which now includes 93% of secondary schools and colleges. The network includes 400 leading employers and around 4,000 business volunteers, including many representing STEM occupations. Our careers framework, the Gatsby Benchmarks, includes a clear expectation that all 11 to 18-year-olds should have at least one meaningful interaction with employers

per year. This should include an encounter with a STEM employer or workplace, or a careers event focused on STEM, before year 11.

Research: Finance

Chi Onwurah MP (Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what the evidential basis is for the calculation that the increase in his Department's R&D budget to £13.9 billion is a rise by 8.5% in real terms. [UIN 12053]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: DSIT's capital budget in 2024/25 was £13.3bn, with £12.5bn allocated for investment in R&D. As outlined in the Autumn Budget 2024, DSIT's R&D allocation has risen to £13.9bn in 2025/26, a £1.4bn cash-terms uplift.

Using the latest OBR GDP deflator estimate for 2025/26 of 2.4 per cent (Autumn Budget 2024), this equates to a real-terms increase of 8.5%.

Data Protection: Publishing

Jim Shannon MP (DUP): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether the Information Commissioner plans to review the data privacy practices of major academic publishers. [UIN 11590]

Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms, Chris Bryant MP: The ICO rigorously oversees and enforces compliance with UK data protection law across the whole economy where it relates to the processing of personal data. It does this in a range of ways, including by receiving complaints from members of the public, issuing guidance for organisations and where necessary investigating potential non-compliance. Whilst the ICO is not undertaking specific work to review academic publishers' privacy practices, this may change if evidence comes to light during the undertaking of its regulatory duties.

Springer Nature

Jim Shannon MP (DUP): To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the market dominance of (a) Springer Nature and (b) other major academic publishers on access to publicly funded research. [UIN 11591]

Minister for AI and Digital Government, Feryal Clark MP: The UK mandates open access to publicly funded research via funders such as UK Research and Innovation.

Negotiations between Higher Education and academic publishers, including Springer Nature, are supported by Jisc. They seek value for money and off-set read subscriptions and publishing charges, while enabling open access in accordance with UK funder policies.

Jisc is negotiating new agreements with publishers in 2025. These focus on pace of change to open access models, financial sustainability, and equity to benefit wider audiences. Also, funders and universities, encourage a diversity of outputs from research, beyond publication, including preprints.

Students: Loans

Rupert Lowe MP (Reform UK): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the value was of student loans that were written off in each of the last five years; and what this was as a proportion of all outstanding student loans. [UIN 11711]

Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby MP: The table below shows the amount that has been cancelled or written off during each financial year requested, the total amount outstanding at the start of the financial year including interest and loans not yet due for repayment (after adjustments) and the proportion that write offs or cancellations make out of the starting balance.

The reasons for cancelled or written off loans are the following: death of borrower, age of borrower, disability, trivial balances, losses through fraud (including phishing) and other.

Please note that write-offs do not include trivial balance write-offs. Trivial balance write-offs occur if there is a +/- balance on an account of £25 or less and no contact can be established with the borrower (customers can request for this to be reversed). In the context of these figures these borrowers are considered fully repaid and are therefore not included. Cancellations involve the clearance of the remaining debt in line with the terms of the loan, for example when reaching a specific age or becoming permanently disabled. Write-offs for bankruptcy, Individual Voluntary Arrangement or a trust deed, are no longer allowed against Student Loans balances. Any figures arise from retrospective clear up exercises.

These figures have been taken from Student Loans Company's Student loans in England publication that is updated in June each year. The publication, 'Student loans in England: 2023 to 2024' can be found

here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loans-in-england-2023-to-2024>, and the figures were taken from 'Table 1A'

here: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?c3JjPQ==https%3A%2F%2Fasset>

Sector news

Higher education reform to back opportunity and protect students – DfE press release

On Monday 4 November, the government announced that tuition fees and maintenance loans would rise with inflation. These changes will take effect at the start of the 2025 to 2026 academic year, with maximum fees rising by 3.1% to £9,535.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said:

“This government’s mission is to break down barriers to opportunity, which is why we are doing more to support students struggling with the cost of living despite the fiscal challenges our country faces.

“The situation we have inherited means this government must take the tough decisions needed to put universities on a firmer financial footing so they can deliver more opportunity for students and growth for our economy.

“Universities must deliver better value for money for students and taxpayers: that is why this investment must come with a major package of reforms so they can drive growth around the country and serve the communities they are rooted in.”

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

You can also read DfE’s [policy paper about the changes](#) and [blog explaining the changes](#).

Sector responses to the announcement tuition fees and maintenance loans will increase

UUK Chief Executive, Vivienne Stern MBE said:

“Today’s decision cannot have been easy for government, but it is the right thing to do. Thriving universities are essential to a thriving UK, delivering stronger growth, better public services and improving individual life chances. University leaders and government must work together to ensure that our universities are able to fire on all cylinders.

“A decade long freeze in England has seen inflation erode the real value of student fees and maintenance loans by around a third, which is completely unsustainable for both students and universities. Keeping pace with inflation stops the value of fees going down year after year. Importantly, this change will not see students paying more to study upfront; repayments are linked to earnings above a £25,000 threshold. The increase in maintenance loans is also very welcome and important. Maintenance loans in England are currently at their lowest level for nine years, so this increase was also urgently required to allow students to access the financial support they need while studying, especially given cost of living pressures.

“As set out in our recent Blueprint, universities also have to work to be as efficient and effective as possible, to serve the needs of the country. Some transformation can only be achieved through collaboration at a national level. We commit to working with university leaders and government to unlock this through our Efficiency and Transformation Taskforce.”

Professor Chris Day, Chair of the Russell Group and Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University, said:

“Today's announcement is a welcome sign that government is engaging seriously with the financial difficulties facing universities and students. Alongside the additional support that universities have been providing since the rise in the cost of living, uplifting the value of maintenance loans for students in England should mean they are better able to meet their day-to-day living costs and focus on their studies.

“We look forward to working with government on shared priorities, so universities can continue to increase opportunities for disadvantaged students and provide high-quality education and research. Ensuring a secure future for our sector will be crucial to supporting the pipeline of skills and new discoveries required to drive innovation, improve the UK's public services, and boost economic growth”.

GuildHE Chief Executive Officer, Dr Brooke Storer-Church said:

“GuildHE welcomes the government's commitment to the future sustainability of our world-leading sector.

“Our diverse and dynamic range of higher education members are ready to support and realise the government's ambitions for strong skills and economic growth, ensuring a distinctive, equitable, inclusive and internationally successful higher education sector.

“An approach that protects the UK's diverse range of mission-driven institutions and subjects is also crucial for authentic student choice, powerful civic engagement, and a robust research and innovation ecosystem that addresses 21st-century challenges.

“We look forward to working collaboratively to secure the long-term financial health and diversity of our higher education sector.”

Dr Joe Marshall, Chief Executive of the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB), said:

“Universities are critical to the UK's economic growth ambitions. The strength of our universities is a real UK advantage that is seriously threatened by the urgent funding sustainability challenge they are facing. We warmly welcome the inflationary increase in the undergraduate tuition fee cap for English higher education providers, announced today. The announcement details a fee rise from £9,250 to £9,535 from April 2025. This will go some way in helping to meet this challenge.

“However, we know that to effectively plug the financial hole our nation's universities are facing, more action is needed. Universities are the foundation of the UK's research and development system, performing and producing research, creating skills for the future, and facilitating knowledge exchange between academia, industry, and civil society. We are already very concerned about the prospect of increased employer National Insurance contributions announced in the Budget last week, which will significantly raise staffing costs for universities, by £372 million a year. Without proper funding, the whole system is facing crisis.

“While this increase may provide some immediate financial support, it's critical that we don't overlook the impact on students, especially those from lower socio-economic background, who are hugely impacted by cost-of-living pressures. These pressures could discourage students from pursuing higher education, which would limit the number of graduates with advanced qualifications – a risk to the future skills pipeline and to university income in the long term. To offset this risk, we welcome the Government's introduction of more generous maintenance loans to ensure that higher education remains accessible to all.”

Raj Jethwa, UCEA 's Chief Executive said:

“This announcement will be welcomed by HE institutions in England, helping to address some of their significant financial pressures. Any increase in income is helpful, but HE employers will continue to face very difficult cost challenges from the recent increase in employer National Insurance (NI) contributions, on top of eye-watering overlooked increases in TPS pension costs*. We urge Ministers to now prioritise a review of HEI participation in the TPS and to offer practical support moving forward.”

NUS Vice President Higher Education, Alex Stanley, said:

“Higher education is in crisis right now. Students are being asked to foot the bill to literally keep the lights and heating on in their uni buildings and prevent their courses

from closing down. This is - and can only ever be - a sticking plaster. Universities cannot continue to be funded by an ever-increasing burden of debt on students.

“We do welcome the increase in maintenance loans. This money will make a real difference to the poorest students, and is a testament to the hard work of student campaigners over the past three years: right now, students are left with 50p per week to live on after rent and bills.

“We do now need an urgent review and reform of the way that higher education and our students are funded.

“Clearly, the current system is not working. The last fourteen years of intense marketisation have systematically run down the UK's universities. Students need a review that considers maintenance grants, international student fees and tackling the funding crisis that students and universities have been pushed into.”

University and College Union (UCU) general secretary Jo Grady said:

“The proposed hike to tuition fees is both economically and morally wrong. Taking more money from debt ridden students and handing it to overpaid underperforming vice-chancellors is ill conceived and won't come close to addressing the sector's core issues.

“As Keir Starmer himself said last year, the current fees system doesn't work for students and doesn't work for universities. The model is broken; it has saddled students with decades of debt, turned universities from sites of learning into corporations obsessed with generating revenue, and continually degraded staff pay and working conditions.

“Labour accepts the issues facing higher education are systemic yet has only applied a sticking plaster. Its principles are vague and could be exploited by vice-chancellors, while higher fees mean even more graduates will fail to pay back their loans, ultimately costing the exchequer. The Chancellor says ‘invest, invest, invest’: it is time to do that in higher education, especially if Labour is serious about delivering a decade of national renewal.”

Carl Cullinane, Director of Research and Policy at the Sutton Trust, said:

“Today's announcements barely scratch the surface of what's needed to reform student finance and widen opportunity. While students will welcome any additional money in their pockets, a 3% increase in the maintenance loan will scarcely begin to restore levels which have fallen more than 11% in real terms since 2021. On top of this, raising tuition fees without also reintroducing maintenance grants will hurt students from the poorest households the most. Since the abolition of maintenance grants in England, students from lower income backgrounds have been leaving

university with the highest levels of debt. Many are struggling with the rising cost of living, with over a quarter of students skipping meals to save on food costs.

“If the government is serious about breaking down barriers to opportunity, it should be taking steps to ensure students from the poorest backgrounds can meet their basic needs without graduating with excessive debt. Our modelling shows that reintroducing grants can be achieved with little or no additional cost to the public purse, through reform of the repayments system to make it more equitable.”

Dani Payne, Senior Researcher at Social Market Foundation, said:

“The announcement this afternoon for a one-off inflationary rise to tuition fees and maintenance loans is a sensible and necessary step given the financial pressures facing institutions and students, but must come hand-in-hand with greater financial accountability from universities. With over a third of providers reporting deficits, and growing concerns about the potential of institutions collapsing entirely, it is right that the government has stepped in to stabilise the sector.

“The increase in maintenance loans is particularly welcome. The government has committed to supporting the aspiration of any person who is academically able to attend university. Unfortunately, for too long disadvantaged young people have either been priced out of higher education, or go to university but have a much thinner experience than their more affluent peers because they have to work hours incompatible with a full-time education. The university experience should be a broad and enriching one – that includes being able to afford transport to lectures, attend extra-curricular activities, and take part in student leadership roles. All of this requires students to have adequate maintenance support to meet their basic needs.

“But the government will need to take a firm hand with a sector that has been afforded more autonomy than its counterparts in other countries. Previous analysis by the SMF has shown that England has the most expensive system in Europe and one of the most expensive in the world. And the disparity across the sector in spending is huge: upcoming analysis from the SMF will show that many institutions are spending substantially less than they are charging in tuition fees. Unfortunately, the sector has failed to respond to calls to increase transparency around cost and spend. If universities want to retain the freedom they have previously enjoyed, they need to be more accountable and efficient with students and taxpayers' money.

“Otherwise, there is a risk that universities will just be back, cap in hand to the government again next year.”

Institute for Fiscal Studies Senior Research Economist Kate Ogden said:

“University Vice Chancellors will be breathing a sigh of relief that the government is not extending the tuition fee freeze, sparing universities a further real-terms cut to

resources of around £390 million next academic year. Of course, higher fees today mean higher student loan repayments in the long run – with graduates eventually repaying around three-quarters of the extra borrowing resulting from today's announcement.

Living cost support for students will also be protected in real terms. But crucially, the government has decided not to reverse the substantial real-terms cuts in the generosity of support seen in recent years. Even after the uplift, the poorest students will be entitled to borrow around 9% less next academic year than an equivalent student 5 years earlier."

Political responses to the announcement tuition fees and maintenance loans will increase

SNP MSP Evelyn Tweed, Deputy Convener of Holyrood's Education Committee, said:

"Whether in Scotland, England or Wales, history has shown that under Labour governments, tuition fees go up - Labour simply can not be trusted on tuition fees. This latest increase by the UK Government will burden a whole generation of students south of the border with even higher levels of debt.

"Throughout their time in office, even Rishi Sunak, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson didn't go as far as raising tuition fees - that Keir Starmer has done so after only months in Number 10 shows exactly where his priorities lie.

"Under the SNP, we have record numbers of Scottish students securing places at our universities, and recent figures showed a rise in students from our most disadvantaged communities.

"This progress has only been made possible because the SNP abolished Labour's tuition fees when we came to office - and we will never let them be re-imposed on Scotland's students."

Green Party MP for North Herefordshire Ellie Chowns said:

"Tuition fees have forced universities to prioritize profit over education and put many at risk of bankruptcy, while students face extortionate interest rates- except for those wealthy enough not to need a loan.

They have been a disaster and should be scrapped, not increased."

Around one-third of students worry their university could go bust and one-half expect the Government to take over if it does – HEPI polling

On Monday 4 November, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published the results of a survey it conducted with Savanta to ask students about the possibility of their own higher education institution failing – and what they think should happen if this were to occur.

Notable findings include:

- Almost one-third of students are worried their higher education institution could go bust, made up of 5% who are ‘very worried’ and 26% who are ‘quite worried’.
- Students at Russell Group universities are less worried than others: 46% of students at Russell Group universities are ‘not worried at all’ about their institution going bust, compared to 20% of students at post-1992 universities.
- When presented with a list of 10 options for what could happen if their own higher education institution were to fall over financially, the most popular response among students is a takeover ‘by public authorities, such as the Government’. This has the support of half of all students (49%).

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

New Shadow Cabinet announced

On Tuesday 5 November, the new Shadow Cabinet of the Conservative Party was announced following the election of Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP as leader.

Relevant appointments include:

- Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer: **Mel Stride MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs: **Dame Priti Patel MP**
- Shadow Home Secretary: **Chris Philp MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Education: **Laura Trott MP**
 - Shadow Minister of State for Education: **Neil O’Brien MP**
- Shadow Health and Social Care Secretary: **Ed Argar MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities: **Kevin Hollinrake MP**

- Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Trade: **Andrew Griffith MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and Shadow Minister for Equalities: **Claire Coutinho MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport: **Stuart Andrew MP**
- Shadow Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology: **Alan Mak MP**
- Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury: **Richard Fuller MP**

You can [see the full Shadow Cabinet](#).

Tuition fee rise: What does it mean? – UUK insights and analysis

On Wednesday 6 November, Universities UK published an insights and analysis piece providing an overview of the changes to tuition fees and maintenance loans and what it means for universities and students.

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

Advancing Translational Research – HEPI policy note

On Thursday 7 November, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published a policy note examining the role of translational research in bridging the gap between academic discovery and practical real-world applications across a variety of disciplines.

Key findings:

- **Definition and importance:** Translational research involves turning basic research knowledge into practical applications to improve human health and well-being or adopting a ‘goal-orientated’ approach from the initial research design stage to solve specific problems. It encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration and can significantly impact societal challenges.
- **Challenges:** The field faces numerous barriers, including scientific, regulatory, financial, infrastructural and cultural obstacles. These challenges require innovative solutions and collective efforts to overcome.
- **Role of publishers:** Publishers can support translational research by making scientific knowledge more accessible, fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration and promoting the translation of research findings into actionable insights.

You can [read the full policy note](#).

Digest of the Autumn Budget 2024 – NCUB report

On Thursday 7 November, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) published a report outlining the key Budget announcements impacting universities, businesses, and innovation.

Relevant insights include:

- Contrary to expectations, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) expenditure capabilities have increased slightly. NCUB estimates that this will translate to a 0.4% increase in core research funding. This is welcome recognition of the importance of publicly funded research and development (R&D) for UK growth.
- There were no interventions announced in the Budget to support the financial stability of the university sector. In fact, the sector did not receive much focus at all. The increased costs mentioned above for businesses will also increase the financial stresses on universities. The increased tuition fee cap announced in the week following the Budget will do little to alleviate these challenges. Important clarifications are needed on the Department for Education (DfE) Budget priorities and the resulting impact for higher education.
- On skills, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement was recommitted to, but delayed by one year. Further investments were announced in targeted apprenticeship provision and further education.

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

International students in the UK: Benefits, costs and numbers – KCL Policy Institute report

On Thursday 7 November, King's College London's Policy Institute published research that finds a large proportion of the public recognise that international students support domestic university places and that international students are not top-of-mind for people when thinking about immigration control.

Key findings include:

- Six in 10 (60%) people in the UK feel international students bring a significant benefit to the British economy, while only around one in 10 (12%) disagree with this view.
- A further four in 10 (41%) people say the benefits for Britain of international students outweigh the costs – nearly double the proportion who say the reverse (22%).
- Only a minority of 26% say they want fewer international students attending UK universities, while 58% say they want numbers to stay the same (43%) or increase (15%).

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