

Happy New Year!

**HE and Research Bill - House of Lords Committee stage** – the HE and Research Bill starts its committee stage on Monday – with 85 pages of amendments, mostly this time being detailed changes to the content of the bill rather than speculative changes to things dealt with in separate legislation arising from concerns about student loans, Brexit and proposed changes to visa and immigration rules. Read more on the [BU research blog](#).

In TEF related news, a consultation is due “early in the New Year” on the DLHE replacement according to [a HESA blog](#). Professor Debbie Holley and Jane are running [a policy briefing](#) on the TEF on 1<sup>st</sup> February on Lansdowne if you would like to know more about the TEF.

And on 5 Jan HEPI published a new report [Alternative Providers of HE: Issues for Policy Makers](#). The HE bill aims to achieve a level regulatory playing field for new providers and so open up choice, innovation and flexibility for students. The report focuses on the volume of alternative providers who by 2018 will remain outside of the Office for Students’ (OfS) regulatory framework. In 2014 there were approximately 295,000 HE students at alternative providers, and its estimated there will be 760 alternative providers by 2018/19, of which 553 (73%) will remain outside the OfS remit. Further concerns raised in the report relate to the fast track approval system for degree-awarding powers (3 years with probationary powers from the outset), the cost of alternative providers’ students accessing publicly-funded student finance, and the risks to students from poor quality providers. Evidence is presented from similar systems in USA and Australia and the authors call UK policy makers to heed the lessons learnt abroad. On a positive note the report examines the student statistics at alternative providers and finds them in line with the HE Bill’s Social Mobility aspirations: 61% of students are non-white (compared to 19% in the publicly funded sector), and overall greater proportions of students are mature, part time, or have a disability.

There is media coverage in the [Guardian](#) focusing on the fast track approval risks, and a previous Guardian article: [Lords revolt over plans for ‘free-market’ universities](#). The Independent leads with [Government reforms to higher education leave ‘scam’ universities unregulated](#)

### **Brexit and HE.**

- On [Research Professional economist Angus Armstrong forecast](#) that the UK would stay in Horizon 2020 by making some on-going payments to the EU budget and giving preferential access to the UK labour market.
- In a very relevant precedent, the [Times Higher Education reported](#) that Switzerland was to be allowed to stay in Horizon 2020 after backing down on free movement of people.
- Following the Education Committee’s call for evidence, there will be a session on ‘The impact of exiting the European Union on higher education’ on Wednesday 11 January. The witnesses include Oxford and Cambridge, Kings, Coventry, Oxford Brookes, the Engineering Professors’ Council and the German Academic Exchange Service. This is likely to be one of a number of sessions before the committee reports, but we’ll keep you updated on interesting developments.

**Research and business collaboration post Brexit and HERB** The Government have [issued their response](#) to the [Dowling review of business-university research collaborations published in July 2015](#). The response concludes:

- “This response shows the breadth of activity underway to improve conditions for university-business collaboration. The Chancellor’s recent announcement of £100m to assist English universities in technology transfer and other collaboration with businesses will help maximise the social and economic benefits of our investment in science and research and sits alongside the Prime Minister’s announcement that we will invest an extra £2 billion a year in R&D by the end of this Parliament, a total of £4.7bn by 2021. At Autumn Statement, to consider further improvements to the overall environment for UK R&D, we also announced a review of the tax environment for Research and Development, a review into Patient Capital and a review into the Small Business Research Initiative.
- Subject to Parliament, the creation of UK Research and Investment (UKRI) will provide a strong and unified voice championing UK research and innovation, nationally and internationally. And it will help build collaborative partnerships and promote stronger commercialisation and business links with publicly funded research.
- The Dowling Review will continue to guide our ongoing work to reform and simplify public support for research and development and maximise the potential benefits of collaboration between business and our academic research base.”

**Selective Schools** – if you have been following the grammar school debate as part of the “Schools that work for everyone” consultation that closed in December, you may be interested in the [research published by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology](#) (POST). It notes that there is not much research but, amongst other things that that:

- Historic and current data show that children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) are less likely to attend a grammar school than children who are not eligible for FSM. This is the case even when comparing only those pupils who achieve similar high levels in English and Maths at the end of primary school. Research suggests that this is because children from poorer backgrounds have less access to economic, social, and cultural resources, such as high-quality primary school education and private tuition, which help children to perform well at school and prepare for entrance exams.
- Academic attainment at GCSE level is on average lower for pupils in selective areas who attend non-grammar schools than for pupils in nonselective areas. This finding is statistically significant but very modest. This may be due in part to the quality of teaching and peer effects (i.e., the impact of average peer ability on own ability).
- One study looked at social mobility and found that the selective education system as a whole does not improve social mobility for children who were born into any particular income bracket or social class.
- Available evidence from England and international comparisons using PISA data suggests that selective education systems widen educational inequality.

**Accelerated Courses and Switching Degrees** The Department for Education [published findings](#) from the Call for Evidence on Accelerated Courses and Switching Degrees on 20<sup>th</sup> December. This closed in July 2016 – read [BU’s response here](#). The high number of responses had been noted earlier, the report gives evidence of an interesting campaign: “we received responses from 44 higher education providers, 24 other bodies and 4,500 students. Of the responses from students, over 3,000 were from those studying at the Open University, and 150 were from students at Queen’s University Belfast.” As with other recent consultations, the low number of individual institutional responses is interesting – some of the 24 will be from sector representative bodies (read the [MillionPlus response](#), the [GuildHE response](#)). There is no indication of when we will receive the formal response or what will happen next. The report notes that:

- 91% of providers have a formal credit transfer system in place but only a few providers have significant numbers of systems transferring either internally or externally. Most students had a positive experience of transferring.
- Students noted that the main reason for transferring (university or degree – it doesn't distinguish) was change of subject (79%) with teaching quality highlighted in 38% of cases and location in 21%. Note the source of these responses – they may not be representative.
- “Student/provider perceptions – there is a perception that a degree is a one-off purchase and logistical, financial and social factors contribute to the decision not to switch. 22% of respondents believed it to be too difficult to switch provider. Large numbers of transfers are seen by some to threaten provider prestige and ability to recruit students”

On accelerated courses:

- “A large number of providers report that students on accelerated degree courses are more focused and motivated to complete their degrees than students on traditional undergraduate degree programmes” and “Subjects such as law, business and management are particularly suited to accelerated degrees.”
- “Staff research activity – research intensive universities in particular highlighted the need for staff to undertake research or scholarly activity during the summer period, restricting their ability to continue teaching. 30% of providers and other bodies who responded thought it would be difficult to secure staff outside term time”
- “Students’ use of summer vacations – some respondents noted that students value this time to undertake work experience, paid employment and/or other activities.”

**Bell report on review of sector agencies:** The recommendations of the UUK and Guild HE [Review of the HE sector agencies](#) led by Sir David Bell (VC of Reading University) will publish its recommendations at the end of Jan 2017. It's expected to propose a merger of the HEA, the ECU, and the Leadership Foundation for HE creating a new HE workforce development agency. [Wonkhe report](#) that work on the merger is already advancing behind the scenes and that the Bell review is expected to recommend that HESA undertakes close working but remains independent of UCAS.

**Social Mobility** - The [Ethnicity, Gender and Social Mobility](#) research report from the Social Mobility Commission released on 28<sup>th</sup> December speaks of broken social mobility promises. The research identifies the ways gender, ethnicity and socio economic status interact with education to affect social mobility. It reiterates familiar messages about white working class boys' attainment and access to HE, whilst revealing that young people from black and Asian Muslim communities are more likely to be unemployed and face social immobility than white working class boys despite success in education and attending university.

*“The British social mobility promise is that hard work will be rewarded. ...Achievements at school not being translated into labour market success is a broken social mobility promise. ...It is striking that many of the groups that are doing best at school or improving their results the most are losing out when it comes to jobs and opportunities later in life.”* (Rt Hon Alan Milburn, chair of the Social Mobility Commission.)

The report sets out a small number of recommendations relevant to universities:

- Schools, universities and employers should provide carefully targeted support to ensure Muslim women are able to achieve their career ambitions and progress in the workplace.

- Universities should ensure they provide the support that certain ethnic minority groups need, in particular Black Caribbean students, to reduce the rate at which those groups drop out and to increase their achievement at degree level.
- Universities should implement widening participation initiatives that are tailored to the issues faced by low SES White British students.

**REF consultation** - RKEO are launching a series of workshops on the REF consultation over the next month or so – more information will no doubt follow on the BU research blog.

**Parliamentary Committee calls for evidence** – you can check the latest list of open inquiries [here](#).

Regards  
Jane and Sarah