

Dear all

**Higher Education and Research Bill** – the House of Lords committee stage has finished with no further amendments (other than non-controversial and welcome government amendments). Unlike in the House of Commons, where time was more limited and there was a great deal of focus on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), student loans, the impact of Brexit and limits on international students rather than the detailed content of the Bill, in the House of Lords there has been much more detailed analysis of the Bill and very lively debate about issues such as institutional autonomy, the role and governance of the research councils and the role of the Office for Students. The other issues were also discussed, but none of the many amendments proposed by a long list of peers were approved.

Assurances have been given by the government that the points made in the debates will be considered and so it is likely that further government amendments will be proposed at the report stage, which is likely to be in late February or early March. The Bill will then have to go back to the House of Commons, as it has been amended. [Research Professional have a helpful summary](#) of the position.

In related news, Mark Walport has been appointed as CEO of UKRI and has [written](#) for Times Higher Education. He notes:

*“We cannot sit on our laurels, or even our Nobel prizes. Research and innovation funding is still largely delivered by organisations siloed in traditional disciplines, allowing some imaginative proposals to fall between the cracks. Solving many of the most important fundamental research questions and tackling the challenges facing society requires an interdisciplinary approach.”*

**Brexit – the EU (Notification of Withdrawal) bill** – the (very short) Bill was passed on its second reading this week. The committee stage is next - unlike the HERB (dealt with in the Public Bill Committee), this will be a committee of the whole House of Commons, which is scheduled for 6-8 February. The current [142-page list of proposed amendments](#) is quite interesting and will probably grow. The Bill will then go to the Lords, where there may be further attempts to amend it.

After refusing to agree that the government would issue a white paper on Brexit, [one was rushed out on 2<sup>nd</sup> February](#) after the Bill was passed. BBC Newsnight reported that it was issued at 4 am and has typos in it, but at 77 pages, it attempts to cover a lot of ground. There has been grumbling from the sector about the things that it doesn't cover (e.g. Erasmus), and although there is no new news in it for us, there is some reassurance too.

- It refers to commitments already made on guaranteeing EU research funding.

5.7 The UK will always welcome genuine students and those with the skills and expertise to make our nation better still. We have already confirmed that existing EU students and those starting courses in 2016-17 and 2017-18 will continue to be eligible for student loans and home fee status for the duration of their course. We have also confirmed that research councils will continue to fund postgraduate students from the EU whose courses start in 2017-18.

5.8 The Government also recognises the important contribution made by students and academics from EU Member States to the UK's world class universities. A global UK must also be a country that looks to the future.

- In the migration section it refers to students as its third point – so very high up the agenda – in fact it is the ONLY group referred to specifically

But it goes on.....

5.9 We are considering very carefully the options that are open to us to gain control of the numbers of people coming to the UK from the EU. As part of that, it is important that we understand the impacts on the different sectors of the economy and the labour market. We will, therefore, ensure that businesses and communities have the opportunity to contribute their views. Equally, we will need to understand the potential impacts of any proposed changes in all the parts of the UK. So we will build a comprehensive picture of the needs and interests of all parts of the UK and look to develop a system that works for all.

5.10 Implementing any new immigration arrangements for EU nationals and the support they receive will be complex and Parliament will have an important role in considering these matters further. There may be a phased process of implementation to prepare for the new arrangements. This would give businesses and individuals enough time to plan and prepare for those new arrangements.

- In Science and Innovation, it says nice things about universities and refers to the Industrial Strategy. It includes lots of reassurances about continuing to apply for funding.

10.7 We are engaging widely with sector representatives to ensure a smooth transition to future arrangements. For example, the Government has established a High Level Stakeholder Working Group on EU Exit, Universities, Research and Innovation, which includes a number of senior representatives of UK research and innovation funders, Higher Education Institutions, national academies and learned societies and business. This group will work with the Government to ensure that the UK builds on its strong global position in research and innovation excellence.

- Explicitly, on collaboration, it says:

10.14 As we exit the EU, we would welcome agreement to continue to collaborate with our European partners on major science, research and technology initiatives.

The White Paper will no doubt be discussed alongside the Bill in the Committee Stage, and we will see what comes next.

**Bell Review** - The UUK review of sector agencies, chaired by Sir David Bell, [has published recommendations](#). In order to reduce costs to the sector and ensure focus and a strategic approach, the report recommends streamlining the current list of sector agencies from 9 to 7 by merging the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership foundation for Higher Education. In addition, the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) will become self-financing through its commercial activity and will no longer take subscriptions from providers. To ensure efficiency and a more strategic focus on data, the report recommends that HECSU, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Jisc and UCAS should form a strategic delivery partnership with a focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of data-related functions and services – [writing on Wonkhe](#) Sir David confirms that this group has already been formed. Link to the [main report here](#).

**UCAS applications data** - this has been released today and is widely covered in the academic press. [Wonkhe have a nice summary](#) and they pull out some key charts

Headlines:

- 30,000 fewer applications across the sector than a year ago (5% down)

- First decline in overall applications since 2012 and nearly wipes out increases since 2013
- Not spread evenly across the sector
- Drop in EU applications - a shame as some had predicted a surge of applications this year while home fees and student loans are still in place, and may be a sign of a permanent decline, (see the [last HEPI report](#) on this question)

Factors that are cited include:

- Brexit uncertainty for EU applications --around 6000 applications down
- Nursing - driven by financing changes - 5000 down. Also influenced by drop in mature applicants
- Mature student applications are down across the board - believed to be a result of more jobs and higher wages (so people not retraining), as well as nursing funding - 12000 applicants down
- Demographic dip in 18 year olds and a decline in students taking BTECs is apparently behind a 7000 drop in 18 year old applications.

The numbers are a bit of a guess as these categories overlap.

On Wonkhe, Fleur Nielsen from the Council of Deans of Health [says it's not time to panic \(yet\)](#). She comments on the difference between applications and admissions, and also notes that there is still a challenge of increasing numbers (as required by the government) when there are limits on placements (which is appoint that BU has consistently made in consultations on this topic).

*"The scale of the fall in application numbers is not the critical factor for universities or the health and social care sector. Courses that were previously heavily oversubscribed can survive a significant dip in application numbers as long as the quality of applicants is good, and our members report that this remains so."*

HESA has [published](#) its **Open Data Strategy 2017-2021 - following** the consultation last year. Importantly, the strategy says that HESA will migrate its current range of data publications to open data, free of charge to users, over the next 5 years, publish more data openly and establish a user group.

[Inclusive teaching and learning in HE](#) - the Department for Education have published a report by the Disabled Student Sector Leadership Group. This is an independent group made up of representatives of a number of relevant sector bodies and 6 UK universities. The report encourages higher education providers (HEPs) to look at how they can support and offer the best environment for disabled students.

- It considers the requirement to provide 'reasonable adjustments' under the Equality Act 2010, and suggests actions to mitigate risks associated with that, including how providers can adopt a strategic approach to reasonable adjustments.
- It sets out the benefits of inclusive practice to higher education providers
- It provides examples of simple actions to affect change

Widening Participation: HESA has [released](#) statistics on widening participation from the 2015/16 academic year. It shows that progress is slowing although there are range of different angles on the data (thanks to Wonkhe for these links):

- [Oxford University bucks national trend and accepts fewer state school students, figures show](#) - The Telegraph

- [Cambridge intake no longer most privately educated](#) – BBC
- [One in ten new undergraduates from poor background as inequality gap gets wider](#) - The Times

**Technology-Enhanced Learning:** The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) have published a report on the impact of technology on universities ([Rebooting learning for the digital age: What next for technology-enhanced higher education?](#)). The report reviews best practice around the world to show how technology is benefiting universities and students through better teaching and learning, improved retention rates and lower costs:

- in the US, curriculum redesign using technology-enhanced learning produced better student outcomes in 72 per cent of projects and average savings of 31 per cent;
- the University of New England in Australia reduced student drop-out rates from 18 per cent to 12 per cent via learning analytics; and
- at Nottingham Trent University, 81 per cent of first-year students increased their study time after seeing their own engagement data.

You can read about BU's [Technology Enhanced Learning Toolkit on the CEL website](#)

Regards  
Jane