

Dear all

Higher Education and Research Bill

The Committee stage of the Bill in the House of Lords will start on 9th January. Amendments are added daily. As of [today, the list is 15 pages long](#) and includes proposals for changes:

- To ensure students are on the electoral register
- To require providers to provide mental health services to students
- To require the OfS to gather and publish information on international students (*also proposed in the House of Commons and dismissed there*), academic freedom, staff, offers etc.
- To require UKRI to publish information on international staff
- To require alternative providers to comply with the Freedom of Information Act (*dismissed by the government after the green paper consultation*)
- To require the government to justify the statistical validity of the NSS before using it in the TEF (*too late as the TEF doesn't need legislation and this is already happening – although another proposed amendment is to require parliamentary approval for the TEF*)
- To require arrangements for Sharia compliant student finance by 2018
- To provide additional support for Syrian refugees (also tabled in the HoC)
- Changes to student loan repayment arrangements (also tabled in the HoC)
- Preventing the government from introducing changes to the visa regime for staff and students
- Removing the Prevent duty from universities

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

In all the discussion about TEF in the Higher Education and Research Bill process, the point that the TEF is already live and in place is sometimes missed. HEFCE have published the year 1 ratings on their [new register of providers](#). 429 providers have been rated as “meets expectations” in the first year.

The Register includes:



Under the TEF framework, a “meets expectations” rating in year 1 allows universities to increase fees up to a new cap linked to inflation in 2017/18. The government is already able to increase fee caps by inflation – and this doesn’t need the HE and Research Bill either – but it does need regulations to be approved by Parliament. We have been waiting for this to happen because without it, despite all the announcements of intentions and Fair Access Agreement commitments, fees will not change in 2017/18. These regulations have now been “laid” in the House of Lords using the “negative procedure” – this means that they will automatically become law without debate unless there is an objection from either House and will come into force on 6th January 2017.

Alongside the fee regulations, the Department for Education have published their [equality analysis looking at student finance in 2017/18](#). It looks at changes to student finance arrangements with fees, loans and grants uplifted by forecast inflation (2.8%):

- increases in tuition fees by inflation and commensurate increases in tuition fee loans;
- increases in grants that act as a contribution towards the cost of living, dependants' grants and disabled students allowances, again by forecast inflation; and
- increases in loans for living costs by forecast inflation,

The report concludes that “these proposed changes will have a neutral impact for those with and without protected characteristics. Although student loan debt may rise, this will be in nominal terms only and will not affect participation decisions.” In relation to the loans that are replacing NHS bursaries, it concludes that this change could deter applicants from lower socio-economic groups but overall will increase opportunities – and will increase the actual up-front financial support available to students by 25% - although it is repayable. It also points to the mitigation for low earners – who may not repay in practice.

In 2015, the government announced plans for loans to PGR students and part-time maintenance loans and have just closed consultations on both of these:

- [Consultation on postgraduate doctoral loans](#) -you can [read our response here](#).
- [Part-time Maintenance Loans Consultation](#) – you can [read our response here](#).

League tables

And following on from TEF, our minds inevitably turn to league tables. The Higher Education and Policy Institute (HEPI) have published an [interesting and possibly controversial report](#) (at least for those who publish them) about the role of international league tables. Recommendations include:

- ranking bodies should audit and validate data provided by universities;
- league table criteria should move beyond research-related measures;
- surveys of reputation should be dropped, given their methodological flaws;
- league table results should be published in more complex ways than simple numerical rankings; and
- universities and governments should not exaggerate the importance of rankings when determining priorities

Graduate outcomes

And another metric that is highly relevant to the TEF is graduate outcomes – in their annual Intentions After Graduation Survey (IAGS), [HEFCE survey nearly 140,000 graduates](#) - they report that students from different backgrounds have very similar plans – but there are differences in how likely they are to fulfil their ambitions – another part of the wider story about disadvantaged and under-represented groups. The key findings are set out in the HEFCE notes:

- Black and Asian graduates were less likely than white graduates to fulfil their intentions to go on to postgraduate study.
- Fewer students from disadvantaged backgrounds who said they would do postgraduate study actually did.
- Over two-thirds of all respondents in 2016 said that they would be likely or very likely to study at postgraduate level if a postgraduate loan of around £10,000 was introduced. *[It now has been since the survey was conducted].*

- Overall, there are few differences in intentions between students of different gender, social background and disability status, although there are large differences between ethnic groups. White students are the least likely to intend to do postgraduate study, and students of Chinese background are the most likely.
- Graduates who had intended to go on to postgraduate study, but who got lower degree classifications, were more likely to revise their plans and go into work instead. Similarly, of those who had not intended to do postgraduate study, those getting firsts and upper seconds were most likely to change their minds. However, degree classification does not explain the differences between graduates of different ethnicities and social backgrounds.

Social Mobility

The outcomes data is part of a wider story this week about social mobility.

[UCAS data on admissions in 2016 has been released](#) – read more on [Wonkhe here](#). One of the many stories is about a slowdown in equalising access – read [Mary Curnock Cook’s blog here](#) – that will cause alarm – especially after the interesting debate hosted by Wonkhe this week when Alan Milburn repeated many of the arguments made in the recent Social Mobility Commission report (read the [Telegraph report here](#)).

The [House of Lords will debate](#) the [recent report from the Select Committee on Social Mobility](#) next week. This report focussed on 16-18s. but also reported on graduates doing non-graduate roles, the role of apprenticeships, and discusses concerns that the focus on access to universities has increased the inequality between vocational and academic routes for school-leavers. It calls for more funding for FE colleges and better careers education.

Student visas

The [Guardian reported](#) that the “UK considers plans to nearly halve international student visas” with reports of horrified reactions from VCs, and repeating the story about links to the TEF ratings. Alastair Jarvis from UUK tweeted that he didn’t think it was likely. Jo Johnson and others have recently suggested that stories of visa quotas being linked to TEF ratings are also not accurate – telling the House of Commons (and the sector) to “calm down” at the report stage for the HE Bill. UUK have proved to have a very good ear to the ground in the past, so we shouldn’t take the story at face value – and wait for the consultation.

Schools consultation

The Department for Education into “Schools that work for everyone” closed on Monday. Thank you very much to all those who contributed to the workshops, surveys and other discussions. UUK have blogged about [their response](#). All responses will be published by the Department for Education in due course.

BU’s response was based on internal feedback and feedback from a number of local head-teachers, and reflects the views described by UUK (you can read [our response](#) here). BU’s position is that

- We believe that universities can do a great deal to support the schools system, to contribute to school level attainment and to inspire and motivate pupils at all ages to engage with learning and achieve their potential.
- However, we flagged some challenges with the proposed policy, and in particular that we do not believe that a “one size fits all” approach is helpful or efficient and that we do not believe that mandating sponsorship of schools by universities or requiring

universities to set up new schools will provide the best solution to the challenges faced by individual schools, towns or regions or ensure that the strengths of individual universities are harnessed efficiently and effectively.

- BU believes that there can be a step change in engagement with schools. Universities should consult with schools, as they do now, on the strengths and capacity of the university and the types of support that are most useful to those schools at any particular time, which may include support not directly linked to curriculum or delivery to pupils. In particular, providing support to teachers, research and links with professional practice are highlighted in our response, alongside academic support.

Horizon 2020 research funding

The Government published [statistics detailing the UK's participation in Horizon 2020](#).

The release shows the number of times UK organisations participated in this programme, as well as the agreed financial contributions from the European Commission to UK organisations as a result of these participations. It contains UK totals, breakdowns by organisation type, funding pillar and regions of the UK, as well as listing the top UK participating organisations. This is based on data extracted from the Commission's database on the 30th September 2016.

This is our last policy update of 2016 – have a wonderful break and Happy New Year

Jane and Sarah