

HUBS Executive Committee Watching Briefs

Context:

The HUBS Executive Committee have agreed that members of the committee would take on "Watching Briefs". The aim of this initiative is to support Objective C2 in the HUBS Constitution:

"to enable input from the Heads and Subject Leads in the HE sector into policy formulation and responses for the Society and its Member Organisations"

The role of the brief holder is to:

- Take note of items of interest in the education policy update and science policy newsletter
- Subscribe to WonkHE, and keep up to date on developments
- Engage with relevant Royal Society of Biology staff member for their brief who will share relevant education policy updates, science policy newsletter and relevant consultation responses to inform the brief
- Consult with HUBS Executive Committee and wider HUBS members, if needed, to inform a HUBS viewpoint
- Engage with relevant consultation and inquiry responses, providing a HUBS view.

HUBS Executive Committee have identified the following briefs and current authors are:

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Consultation responses page for formal RSB positions and responses can be found at:

<https://www.rsb.org.uk/policy/consultations/consultation-responses>

HUBS members are encouraged to open dialogue directly with authors of briefs and copy all correspondence to consultation@rsb.org.uk

Briefs will be updated at regular intervals.

Watching Brief – Office for Students

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Higher Education has become something of a ‘hot potato’ in recent times, and faces challenges and on a variety of fronts, only some of them self-inflicted. Universities are fiercely independent yet receive large amounts of public money through student fees. Largely spared in the era of financial austerity resulting from the 2008 crash, universities have also benefitted from a governmental drive to increase the number of students receiving undergraduate education. No longer simply bastions of educational delivery, scholarly learning and research prowess; universities now appear to be viewed by government as drivers and enactors of social mobility and ultimately societal change. An emphasis has begun to be placed on the cost-benefit of tertiary education, and whether current funding for universities offers good value, both for the tax-payer and for individual students. There has also been a historical concern that university providers are homogeneous and failing to offer real distinctiveness both in terms of their provision and the student cohorts they attempt to recruit. Attempts at regulation via provision of variable fees have mostly failed to differentiate between university providers, with most league tables continuing to favour research intensive institutions over newer providers, despite the marginal benefits of research prowess to the undergraduate student experience.

Regulation of universities had until March 2018 been undertaken by HEFCE. HEFCE has reportedly been seen as a critical friend of universities rather than a regulator however, leading some to question whether HEFCE was really fit for purpose. Universities under HEFCE were viewed by some as coasting, failing to put education before research and using students and teaching cash as a prop for ambitious expansion plans including international campuses, and as a support for subsidised research. The sector has been viewed as non-competitive, with no clear distinction and certainly no institutions failing. This has variably been seen as a success for HEFCE or a failure, depending on which side of the fence one stands.

The advent of student fees paid by the student (albeit via a student loan that never touches the students bank account) and subsequent trebling of fees to over £9,000 in most instances has helped to focus student (and their parents) minds on whether university is value for money, and what is being received by students for their significant investment. Much has been made of both the student voice and the student vote, and politicians have been quick to recognise this significant voting block as a key demographic to target (or alienate – see the Lib Dems

coalition record). As a consequence, the interests of students in ascertaining 'value for money' has coincided with a political desire for the same; some would say coupled with an opportunity for government to rein in the sector as a beneficiary of public funds but without the governmental accountability such funding normally entails.

Enter the proposed new regulator – the Office for Students (OfS). Formally launched on April 1st 2018, the OfS has been proposed as a regulator that works directly for the students and has a much more hands-off approach to Higher Education institutions. Indeed, the key message from the OfS website states that:

'Our job is to make sure that every student, whatever, wherever and however they are studying, has a fulfilling experience of higher education which enriches their lives and careers.'

The new regulator clearly has a focus on regulation and the student experience. Arguments vary as to the level of political influence in the new regulator (which has been called the 'office for state control' by at least one VC publicly) but it is clear from the make-up of the OfS board that there is heavy political bias behind the scenes. Such a belief has only been enhanced by the direction of travel by the OfS since its inception. With an initial focus on quick-wins such a VC pay and freedom of speech, the OfS has more recently positioned itself as a 'Student Champion' on issues such as Mental Health and the value of degrees in terms of contribution to long terms gains including employability, graduate salary and social mobility via the promotion of traditionally under-represented groups accessing Higher Education.

The new political interest in the OfS has caused some interesting dilemmas, since politicians rarely sing with one voice. Talk of a potential reduction in student fees to £6,500; with an increase in fees for STEM subjects to £13,000; plays to employability and the need for STEM subjects in the future economy but runs the risk of pushing less affluent students into non-STEM subjects given the increase in debt such a strategy would entail. Such an approach would most certainly be to odds with a governmental desire for increased social mobility however, giving hope to those who feel differential fees are not the way to distinguish between institutions or courses. Officially the Post-18 Education and Funding Review will provide options for the future cost of Higher Education, but already there is a lack of clarity in the near future even before one considers the counting of EU and International students and the role of short term or long term Brexit outcomes. Most recently there have been mixed messages on whether Universities are to be allowed to fail or whether there will be government backed contingencies for any Institution that finds itself in difficulty. If that difficulty is as the result of a funding model based on £9,000 fees meeting a government policy of a fee reduction to £6,500 it is difficult to see how such an approach will benefit students.

The consequence of the increased scrutiny of Higher Education is that, like it or not, a University degree is now seen as a commodity which is to be measured, ranked, filed and costed – education for the sake of learning now seems to have rather fallen by the wayside as a rather old fashioned ideal.

Watching Brief – Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

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TEF, the Teaching Excellence Framework, has had something of a tumultuous trajectory since its inception. Originally proposed as a voluntary mark of teaching quality, linked to the ability of Institutions to increase student fees; the TEF continues to undergo a range of pilots, tweaks and iterations to better define the rather nebulous concept of ‘teaching excellence’. Along its formative journey to date the TEF has considered and dropped the idea of measuring contact time; picked up the concept of ‘Student Outcomes’ as part of its remit; placed an increasing emphasis on NSS data to capture the student voice; and still has no direct measure of teaching, excellent or otherwise, within it. Indeed, the latest proposal to include metrics beyond the remit of most Higher Education providers, such as LEO data relating to student earnings or continuation on to further study 3 years AFTER leaving undergraduate study, seems almost purposefully designed to reward those providers in the affluent South and penalise those in the regions and the North. To date no allowance appears to be proposed for the fact students are tending to study locally to home and that median salary will vary across the country for similar jobs.

A one-size-fits-all metric may make comparisons easier but will likely skew the underlying data to mirror the status-quo rather than challenge it. The TEF then may be argued to be a vehicle that has gathered so much momentum that it is difficult to stop but lacks the direction and focus that would make such a journey meaningful.

The latest guidance from the Office for Students (OfS) from their ‘Short Guide to the 2018 Awards’ suggests that:

“the TEF is designed to measure the things that students care about: excellent teaching and a supportive, stimulating academic environment which helps them to fulfil their potential and then secure a good job or progress to further study or training”

There can be few in Higher Education that do not want the best for their students or that do not aim for a supportive, stimulating academic environment. Graduate success in terms of degree outcomes is the focus of every Institution, with increasing scrutiny internally as to

continuation rates, good honours rates and student support. National metrics such as the TEF are not so much useful for improving student outcomes therefore, as for allowing a regulator to show it is on the side of students by forcing providers into a comparative framework. That Higher Education providers then lose the narrative in such debates is a major concern, with the very real risk that generalities drawn from flawed data become 'fact' and soundbites determine direction and emphasis.

The latest iteration of the TEF is to bring scrutiny down to the programme level. The recent TEF3 pilot provided a first pass of subject level TEF and has led to several tweaks and changes for a second pilot (TEF4) for 2018-19. The carrot for participation is the promise of detailed feedback on pilot submissions, prior to compulsory entry the year after. Like it or loath it, TEF is here to stay. The odd positioning of disparate subject areas into the same submission is currently under review and makes little logical sense to vastly different providers, while the targeted nature of the programmes being considered also runs the risk of identifying individual staff groups or staff as direct contributors to outcomes, both good and bad. Given the individual pressure staff feel from the Research Excellence Framework, adding a concomitant metric for Teaching Excellence is unlikely to be welcomed by hard-pressed academics.

That students should receive value for money from their programmes of study is a worthy notion. Competition through differential fees has failed to result in the outcomes originally envisaged and the TEF could be seen as the next attempt to enforce such competition through regulation. Any such framework should be built on sound data however, rather than opinion and artifice. The TEF is one way to rank Higher Education providers, but few would argue it is an accurate measure of Teaching Excellence.

Watching Brief – Research Excellence Framework, REF2021

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This brief summarises current information on two aspects of the REF: Outputs and the Impact Assessment.

All staff with a “significant responsibility for research” and being an independent researcher on the census date of 31st July 2020 are counted to calculate the total number of outputs to be submitted by a given institution to a given unit of assessment (UoA). A code of practice must be put in place by a given institution to identify which of its staff fall within or outside this category. This code of practice must be drafted, consulted upon and sent to the REF team by March 2019. It has been noted that there is potential for industrial action to delay this process, which will be more straight forward for some institutions over others, where it might pose a considerable burden.

The number of submitted outputs is defined as a minimum of 1 per staff member with a significant responsibility for research and a maximum of 5 with an average of 2.5 per FTE within the department. However, this can be reduced to 0 for an individual staff member if there has been a demonstrable impact of personal circumstances during the REF period that resulted in no REF returnable outputs being available for submission.

Outputs are not portable but if an eligible former member of staff generated an eligible output before they left the institution then this may be submitted in the pool of outputs for that institution. The REF guidance on outputs have added some flexibility to the open access requirements for a given output to be eligible for submission. This includes the ability of an institution to submit 5% of its outputs that do not comply with the open access restrictions. Outputs will be judged based on their rigour, significance and originality and given a score of 1* to 4*. Impact factors of journals will not be used but citation data may be used by the UoA. Main panel A has stated that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to UoAs 1-6 which fall under its remit. HUBS members may wish to note that this guidance differs to that of the other main panels.

Impact now more important- to 25% of the REF weighting. Number of impact case studies also changes. Minimum of 2 case studies for up to 15FTE submitted then 1 additional case study per 15FTE up to 105FTE then 1 additional case study for every 50FTE submitted (so a submission of 300FTE will require 12 impact case studies).

For Impact- the initial decisions document from September 2017 states:

“A key recommendation of the Stern review was to ensure the REF could better capture the multiple and diverse pathways and mechanisms through which impact arises from a body of work, and through which real benefits to the UK and wider world are delivered. This aim was widely supported by respondents to the consultation, and the funding bodies will seek to implement this in the exercise. Impacts will also be rated as 1* to 4* and the criteria for impact are of ‘reach and significance’.

- **Impact arising from public engagement.** This has been made more explicitly approved as an impact in and of its own and not just as a demonstration of impact of a wider impact case study.

The **guidance on submitting impacts on teaching are widened** to include impacts **within**, as well as beyond, the submitting institution. Guidance on demonstrating evidence against the criteria for this type of impact have been submitted. Main panel A states its expectation that evidence for impact will include quantitative data. Main panel B explicitly makes mention of both qualitative as well as quantitative measures to demonstrate impact.

- a. Impacts will remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the associated research has been conducted.
- b. Impacts should be underpinned by excellent research, with ‘excellent’ research continuing to mean the quality of the research is at least equivalent to two star.
- c. The excellent research underpinning impact case studies must have been produced during the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 across all UOAs. This will apply to all case studies, including examples continued or developed from REF 2014. The impacts described in case studies must have occurred within the period from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020”

Main panel A- which includes most UoAs of relevance to HUBS members have stated explicitly that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to their UoAs (1-6).

Watching Brief – The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

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The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) is intended to sit alongside REF and TEF as another set of metrics for universities. KEF is important because it will/may drive the level of HEIF funding. An additional £40m of HEIF funding will be available for high scorers. Similar to REF and TEF, KEF is likely to have a 5-year cycle.

'Knowledge exchange' is a very broad area, which can be considered to cover everything that is not REF or TEF, including a little of both. There is general lack of clarity about what metrics might be useful to measure it. Some bodies (probably including HM Treasury) consider it to be just about HEI-business collaborations and commercialisation of IP, and therefore to need only financial metrics. However, others want to include public outreach and local community activities, though the metrics for recording the impact of these are so far undefined. There is a need to record, analyse and report on these activities in a more nuanced and flexible way than HEBCIS data provide. There is a HEFCE/UKRI project under way to see whether metadata can be used to analyse such data sets for impact.

There is a KEF Steering Group, chaired by Trevor McMillan (VC Keele).

A Westminster Forum was held 10th Sept 2018-10-01, chaired by Trevor McMillan:

“Next Steps for Delivering the Knowledge Exchange framework”

A transcript of the meeting will be available.

Background

Despite the UK's world-leading research we are lagging in R&D intensity and productivity as measured by commercialisation. The government is seeking to increase our impact and collaborative activity by increasing HEIF spending, the 'Strength in Places' initiative (with a local focus) and by rolling out the KEF.

Knowledge exchange is not just about biotech spin-offs, but includes internal and external courses, best practice networks, science parks, mentoring for success, etc. KEF is not about increasing administrative burdens on HE and must take account of sector diversity. It is not meant to form the basis of a league table, but to be a tool to facilitate improvement.

Speakers' views

- There are two aspects to KEF: principles and metrics. These are meant to facilitate a KE concordat, a 'good practice' portal, public visibility, and performance measurement and improvement. The metrics are still obscure.
- A lot of scepticism: who wants KEF? Not business, HEIs, students. Exchange is a 2-way process, but competitors will never willingly collaborate without huge tax breaks and lots of negotiation.
- Academics currently do 40 million hours of voluntary KE - a value of £3.2 billion per year – 25,000 jobs. How can this be sustained?
- How can it work for Arts & Humanities? E.g. comparing Royal College of Arts (2000 students, 100 staff FTE, £3m R income) with Imperial (16,000 students, 1200 staff FTE, £350m R income) is meaningless. KPIs need to account for context, qualitative and quantitative balance, analytics etc. RCA engages with SMEs rather than big businesses: any increase in productivity makes a huge difference to them.
- There are often legal barriers to collaboration, especially around IP. Contracts shouldn't be over-engineered and should be flexible, but company lawyers don't like this approach.
- Businesses want to work with individuals to solve specific problems, but Universities often have an off-putting approach to discussions (see above).
- The government sees Catapults as brokers for KE collaborations. KEF needs KPIs that are designed to incentivise KE, not penalise conversations. But catapults are industry-specific and have different priorities (e.g. In Digital, people are encouraged to move out of academia and start their own companies, but in Cell and Molecular they are encouraged to stay in because of career structure, expensive equipment etc. So, one size doesn't fit all.
- A good example of successful working is the Midlands Universities Group, which leads on IP, patents, spin-offs (but not commercialisation in terms of income from patents). They have a single portal for patents & contracts.
- The UK is becoming less welcoming, less easy to operate in, and a less easy environment to capitalize on 'our' discoveries.
- KEF could help HEIs to demonstrate the value of what they're doing already (see figures above). It could provide better information for the public, but businesses don't care. The approach to developing metrics must be balanced (not all about commercialisation), offer a fair comparison between different types of HEI, and balance robustness of data against the burden of collecting it.
- When the metrics and plans are announced there will be an 8-12-week consultation on them. It's not envisaged that there will be a single score. HEIs will be clustered into 'Broad' and 'Specialist'. Initially HEBCIs data will be used, but HEIs can supply a narrative for context; this will have to incorporate the 'voice of the user' (i.e. business). There will be a direct link to HEIF funding, but this is England only and KEF will apply to all the nations so unclear how this will work.
- Ultimately, what is KEF for? Described as 'the latest government EF'.

Firm plans from Trevor McMillan, Chair of KEF working group

There will be 7 Guiding Principles:

1. Mission – what is the role of KE?
2. Values – will be clear and transparent policies
3. Capacity building – staff development to show how to deliver KE
4. Recognition and rewards – reward staff who do good KE
5. Engage with partners
6. Work with partners
7. Strive for improvement

This will demonstrate commitment by HEIs, give staff a clear mission and give potential partners a realistic picture of HEI capacity. It should also reduce tensions in negotiation.

Reassurances:

- It is wrong to use income as a proxy for impact.
- Economic geography is important.
- Efforts are being made to avoid bias for particular types of HEI.
- Strategic partnerships should not be driven by KEF.

Watching Brief – Brexit and HE and Research

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Brexit and HE and Research

The focus over the last 18 months on the withdrawal terms of the United Kingdom from the European Union has largely side-lined necessary detailed and related negotiations and planning on strategic and operational matters which will have a profound impact upon the economic, social and cultural development of the UK and its regions post-Brexit. Uncertainty about the future is the current prevailing attitude.

Apart from the obvious detrimental effects of any development which curtails international cooperation and collaboration in HE and research, and upon which the evolution of the sector has always depended, there are several identifiable issues which are of major concern. These include:

Immigration Rules for Staff and Students

Current proposals in the government's Brexit White Paper indicate that freedom of movement will end, and reference is made to a visa system with certain permissible exceptions, including the possible facilitation of temporary mobility of scientists and researchers. This is substantially different from the current arrangements and there is already evidence of a decline in applications from EU mainland citizens for academic and research posts in the UK.

Fee Status for EU Citizens

There is no reference to mutual EU student fee recognition in the Brexit White Paper. This could lead to EU Students paying full overseas student fees while studying in the UK. While a small select number of universities might benefit from this, the majority would probably experience a fall in student numbers and fee income.

Student Loan Access

EU students may lose the current access to UK student loans arrangements. There is a suggestion in the Brexit White Paper that loans may be linked to agreed trade arrangements. This implies an oversimplification of the role and purpose of HE and whilst it is recognised to be a major positive contributor to the UK's balance of payments and GDP, it is more than a simple tradeable commodity.

Framework Programmes and Erasmus+

Both Horizon Europe (9th EU Framework Programme) and the next phase of Erasmus begin in 2021. The government seeks to explore association (associate status) in Horizon Europe and the Euratom research and training programme, though would not be eligible for full membership, including the planning of priorities post-Brexit. There is less overt support for Erasmus where the UK has traditionally been a net importer of migrant students. Given the slow rate of progress on the withdrawal agreement and the government's preoccupation with it, the possibility of a time gap before, and if, the UK gets into a position to participate further in Horizon Europe and Erasmus programmes is real.

European Structural Investment Funds

It is assumed that a post-Brexit UK would not be eligible, except for certain long-term commitments and involvement by the EU (such as peace initiatives in Northern Ireland and support for its border region) to European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). Such funds have traditionally supported capacity building in disadvantaged regions through training programmes, and infrastructure (including research and knowledge transfer infrastructure) to enable eligible regions to 'catch up' with better endowed areas. This 'elevator effect' has had significant impact in building the research capacity in many of the more recently established UK universities and supporting associated innovation in their regions. It is imperative that the UK government puts in place a replacement support fund to support continued capacity building and reduction in geographical or regional disadvantage - a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been proposed by the government for these or relatively similar purposes.

UK Universities' Dependence on EU Funding

UK universities have been highly successful in winning EU funding from both the Framework Research Programmes and the European Structural Investment Funds. Their overall dependence upon such funding varies by university and the nature of the funding. The top 10 UK performers in winning Framework funding are established 'Russell Group' universities. This funding is however less than 10% of their total research funding from all sources. However, the nature of Framework funding, involving inter-institutional and trans-national collaboration, supports projects and advances which would be difficult to achieve otherwise.

There is evidence that despite the government agreeing to honour commitments and continued involvement in the current Framework Programme (Horizon 2020), there has been a decline in new projects being led by UK researchers. The newer universities receive much

less European funding overall, but it makes up a higher percentage of their total research income with the 10 most dependent receiving between 33% and 61% of their funding from the EU (including from ESIF).

Developing New UK-EU Partnerships

In the absence of any certainty or clear guidance from the UK government on future UK-EU relationships in HE and research, many leading universities have understandably been making contingency plans. This includes the proposed establishment of branch campuses within the EU and/or establishing institutional partnerships and alliances including joint appointments, PhD and master's programmes as well as shared intellectual property arrangements. This would allow the participating institutions to benefit from both EU and UK funding opportunities.

Whether the proposed inter-institutional 'top down' approach to European collaboration will outperform the more individually and research-group driven current EU research partnerships remains to be seen. It is however evident that whatever collaborative arrangements the UK's highest ranking universities may be able to organise and bring into effect, the vast majority of UK universities are likely to have less interaction than currently exists with their European peer institutions post- Brexit.

Watching Brief – Degree Apprenticeships

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A Background: General information on apprenticeships and apprenticeship standards can be found at: <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

The Government has a target for the creation of three million apprenticeships by 2020, and Degree Apprenticeships (DAs) will be part of the strategy for achieving this. DAs at Level 6 (undergraduate programmes) or Level 7 (postgraduate programmes) are co-created by employers and universities against an agreed set of standards.

Funding for DAs is mainly via the Apprenticeship Levy and organisations with payroll costs exceeding £3M pa set aside 0.5% of this amount which is then paid into an Apprenticeship Service Account by way of the Levy. Universities can draw down funding from an employer's Apprenticeship Service Account to cover the cost of providing taught programmes aligned to approved apprenticeship standards.

At present, there are 61 DA standards approved for delivery, with a further 65 in development. However, there are relatively few standards that are relevant for Biosciences and these include Lab Scientist (Level 6) and Environmental Health Practitioner (level 6). Other standards are in development and include: Ecology (Level 7), Environmental Manager (Level 7), Marine Surveyor (Level 6) and Research Scientist (Level 7).

Recently it has become clear that there is downward pressure on funding for all apprenticeships by the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) and it is expected that future DA standards may not be allocated the top-end £27k funding band. There is a risk that reductions in funding bands will impact the financial viability of Degree Apprenticeships for Universities.

B RSB responded (Jan 2018) to the Education Select Committee inquiry into the quality of apprenticeships and skills training. The main focus was on the quality of current provision; impact on learner outcomes and associated barriers; and comments on the interaction between current provision and life sciences trailblazer and T' Levels.

1. For success, there should be parity across academic and vocational pathways, with degree apprenticeships seen as equivalents, not limiting future career opportunities.

2. The involvement of professional bodies (PSRBs) has been limited, with current standards developed by employer groups as part of Trailblazers. There should be greater engagement with relevant communities through their representative professional bodies, to ensure consistency and rigour across standards; e.g., within the biosciences, areas such as the microbiology content and lab skills required as a Food Industry Technical Professional; scientific principles of investigation and technical skills used by Healthcare Science Practitioners; and an understanding of the functions of the human body, physical and mental health needs and pharmacology in a nursing degree apprenticeship. Input from PSRBs on the development of standards, including involvement in developing end-point assessments, is already underway in engineering.

3. Provision for apprenticeship and skills training in the biosciences is varied. Accreditation of bioscience programmes in the FE and training provider sectors would help to raise standards of provision. Technical and vocational routes at all levels would benefit from external accreditation review. Government funds for the accreditation of FE bioscience programmes would enable this to launch on a greater scale and have a wider impact.

4. There is a need to engage in ongoing training and upskilling of the current workforce. Employees at all levels should be encouraged to work towards professional registration, allowing them to demonstrate continuing professional development. The RSB, licensed by the Science Council, offers Registered Science Technician (RSciTech), Registered Scientist (RSci), Chartered Scientist (CSci), and the professional register Chartered Biologist (CBiol).

5. There is a lack of consistency in the processes, review and engagement across the range of Trailblazer groups. As the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education establishes itself, it should ensure current trailblazer groups are reviewed, identifying areas of best practice and eradicating dysfunctionality. Professional registration is a good marker for individual employees to point to their professional expertise and ongoing learning and development; where appropriate registers exist, all future standards should be mapped to relevant competency levels.

6. Links between employers and education and training providers must be supported to ensure work placements meet the needs of both students and employers, equipping students with the skills required for longer term employment in their chosen sector.

7. It is important that the interaction of the new 16 – 19 T level qualifications is considered during reviews of current apprenticeships and skills training provision.

C RSB have also responded to the Institute for Apprenticeships Consultation on draft occupational maps in Feb 2018. Responses to the questions asked were:

a) Are there any skilled occupations you would expect to see on the map which are not currently included? The RSB has representation on the Health and Science T' Level panel (Healthcare Science pathway) and hope to have the same on at least one Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care panel. However as this, and other, panels have not yet been recruited, we recommend that they carefully consider whether their pathway includes the

expected breadth of skilled occupations at all levels, and that students can consolidate the underpinning science knowledge required for their chosen occupation.

b) Should an existing occupation be assigned to a different route, or a different pathway or cluster within the route? Biologist and Biochemist appear as separate occupations in the science professional cluster. However other biological disciplines do not appear as standalone occupations; this does not reflect the variety of occupations in the biosciences. The RSB represents a wide range of bioscience disciplines, and the biology underpinning the professions within them. We would therefore expect to see, as with biochemist, other biology related science professional occupations listed at Level 7 and above.

Watching Brief – Scotland and Curriculum for Excellence

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1) Widening Access to Universities.

<https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/publications/working-to-widen-access/>

Scotland's universities have set out 15 actions they will take over the next few years that will create the potential for a big step forward in widening access. The Commission for Widening Access (CoWA) made 34 recommendations in its Blueprint for Fairness in 2016, of which 13 were directly or indirectly for universities to act on. We believe our 15 actions do this. Taken together, they hold the potential to make a significant contribution to the First Minister's goal that by 2030 students from the most deprived 20% of backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education.

Taken from Universities Scotland website.

2) Scotland implements widened access to medical education

<http://practicebusiness.co.uk/scotland-implements-widened-access-to-medical-education/>

The Scottish government's attempt to broaden access for medical education has proven successful, according to the BMA. A new medical education programme has proven successful in Scotland, ensuring that almost all students currently on the course have achieved their aim of qualifying to study medicine. 40 out of the 42 students on the one-year pre-entry medical school programme passed and will go on to study medicine. The course is aimed at those in disadvantaged and rural-based areas. Scotland's health secretary, Jeanne Freeman, said it is "an incredibly promising start".

"I want to see a more diverse workforce in the health service and we must make sure we have a level playing field and give everyone with the ability and desire to study medicine a fair chance," she said. "This course contributes to our commitment to widen access to higher education and enhances the range of medical education already available in Scotland's five world-leading medical schools." The universities of Dundee and Glasgow run the course and have welcomed the government's commitment to funding more places over the next four years.

Taken from Practice Business website.

3) Future of Tuition Fees in Scotland

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-46128066>

The health service will soon account for half of Scottish government spending, according to a new analysis of choices facing finance secretary Derek Mackay. The growing squeeze on many other services is set out today by economists at the Fraser of Allander Institute. It leads to their call for "an urgent debate on future priorities". One of the politically challenging suggestions they put forward is for the introduction of student tuition fees. To illustrate ways that ministers could address long-term spending pressures, the Strathclyde economists model a £7,000 annual tuition fee for Scottish students, backed by loans, saying that could eventually save the Scottish government £800m per year.

Taken from BBC News website

4) Huge rise in students in Scotland seeking mental health support

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-45990384>

The number of university students in Scotland seeking support for mental health issues has increased by two-thirds over five years, analysis shows. The BBC asked universities across Scotland for the numbers of students seeking some form of support. It found more than 11,700 students asked for help in 2016-17 compared with about 7,000 in 2012-13. The 68% increase among students in Scotland was higher than the 53% total for the UK over the same period. University counsellors and wellbeing staff told BBC Scotland that they deal with cases ranging from anxiety, depression, gender-based violence and body dysmorphia

Taken from BBC News website

5) Scotland would lose out” – Brexit warning.

<https://thepienews.com/news/scotland-he-sector-bracing-brexit-impact/>

The Scottish further and higher education sector is bracing for the impact that Brexit will have on student enrolment, staff recruitment and funding – and calls for a more student-friendly immigration bill in recognition to the contribution of international students and staff to universities and society as a whole. Speaking to the Scottish Affairs Committee of the UK parliament in London, Universities Scotland Convener Andrea Nolan said: “I’d like us to look at a new immigration system as a whole that supports the mobility of talented people and attracts talented students into Scotland. We value them hugely.” The committee heard from representatives of Scottish FE and HE on the impact of Brexit on the sector as part of its

inquiry into immigration in Scotland. Approximately 12% of international students and 11% of staff in Scottish universities are from the EU, Nolan said, “This is a significant issue for when we leave [the EU],” Nolan added. “They [EU students and staff] populate subject areas that are really important to Scotland, such as STEM.” Another problem would be fees. EU students would lose their ‘home’ status, which grants them the right to pay the same fees as Scottish students and would have to pay the much higher international fees. “In Europe there are many countries that don’t charge fees – for example Germany. If we charge fees, we would be in competition. I would imagine that’s where they would choose to study.”

Taken from the Pie News website.

6) Primary Schools.

MSPs defeat government to call for 'halt' to P1 assessments

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-45561715>

MSPs have defeated the Scottish government in a vote calling on ministers to "halt" national assessments for five-year-old pupils. The assessments were introduced across Scotland last year, but some teachers and parents have criticised them. Ministers insist they are not high-stakes tests, but help schools assess where pupils need help at an early age. Opposition parties say they are not in line with play-based early learning and could create league tables of schools. Members voted by 63 to 61 to pass a Conservative motion calling for a "halt" to the tests, with all the opposition parties uniting against the SNP. The largely symbolic motion does not bind the government to any action, but Education Secretary John Swinney said he would "reflect" on the defeat.

Taken from BBC News website

Watching Brief – International

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From the UK perspective the **International** brief remains dominated by Brexit as we head towards the deadline of 29th March 2019, but this briefing paper also highlights recent or ongoing international focused issues of interest to UK Universities:

- Brexit and UK Universities - update
- Migration Advisory Committee Report and UUK response
- UUKi 'Go International' - one year one report
- UKRI Launch of China office

1. Update on Brexit and UK Universities

Universities UK provide stakeholders with update on the latest developments with respect to the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European union and the effect on HEIs. Full details can be found on the UUK website and changes since **July 2018** are provided in summary below.

- [Statement of Intent on the EU Settlement Scheme](#). This confirms that EU/EEA students who are already in the UK or who arrive by 31.12.2020 will have no change to their immigration status. Also, EU nationals who already live in the UK, or who arrive by 31 December 2020, will be able to apply for '[settled status](#)'. This will enable them to live, work and study in the UK for as long as they like. The settlement scheme will open fully in March 2019 and the deadline for applications will be 30 June 2021.
- The government has also committed in its [Brexit White Paper](#) to 'facilitate mobility for students and young people, enabling them to continue to benefit from world leading universities' once the UK leaves the EU. UUK is lobbying for a reduction on 'unnecessary bureaucracy' during immigration and for clarity of the situation after 2020.
- There will be no change to the tuition fee status of current EU students attending UK universities or for those coming for courses starting in 2018–19 or in 2019-20. This means that EU students studying at UK universities will pay the same fees as 'home'

students for the full duration of their course, even if the course finishes after the UK has left the EU. The situation following exit is not yet known. Access to student finance organisations varies is more complex, please refer to UUK website.

- UK can participate in Erasmus+ until the end of the programme in 2020, providing there is a final exit deal agreed upon. Funding for staff/ student mobility will continue until end of 2020/21. UUK is urging the UK government to push for access onto the Erasmus+ successor programme, which will commence in 2021.
- The UK-EU phase one agreement envisions that the UK will remain in the Horizon 2020 research programme until end of 2020. This includes long-term projects that are to continue after Horizon 2020 has finished. In July 2018, it was [announced](#) that, even in a 'no deal' scenario, Horizon 2020 funding that is applied for after the UK leaves the EU would be guaranteed by the UK Treasury.
- UUK continues to lobby for full association for the next framework programme, Horizon Europe, which is due to start on 1 January 2021. The proposal for this programme was [published](#) by the European Commission in June 2018, and leaves open the possibility of full UK participation as an associated country.
- EU University staff working in the UK (c. 50,000) will be prioritised in the [next phase](#) of the [EU settlement scheme pilot](#).
- An effective post-Brexit settlement for universities is required to minimise risks of the following: to reputation and collaborative choices, loss of research support funding, falling behind on student mobility, losing academic talent from EU, steep decline in EU students, lack of ability to drive local growth and generate jobs.

2. The Migration Advisory Committee Report: Impact of International Students on the UK

- The [Migration Advisory Committee](#) (MAC) released a report on 11th **September 2018** on the impact of international students in the UK. UUK have responded to this report calling for new Immigration Bill to remove unnecessary bureaucracy from the immigration processes, among other things.
- With over 750,000 international students in the UK, we have seen a 30% rise over the last 9 years, being the second biggest destination, but with more recent fall in market share. Sharp decline in students from India.
- International students do not just study for UK degrees in the UK. Over 700,000 students now study for UK higher education qualifications outside of the UK. **Transnational Education (TNE)** is an increasingly significant and successful characteristic of UK universities' international activity and this trend looks set to continue.
- The report provides evidence for International students bringing an economic benefit to the UK with the Department for Education estimating their export value at £17.6 billion in 2015. In addition, it provides evidence for the impact on domestic students, local communities and local economies.

- International students can provide a vital source of income for the institutions where they study, cross-subsidising research and the education of domestic students.
- International students have a positive impact on public finances.
- The recommendations from the MAC report are to retain **no cap** on numbers of international students.
- To grow the numbers of international students at UK Universities.
- To keep the Rules of work while studying and dependant rights unchanged.
- To make it easier for students to stay after their studies by widening of the window in which applications for switches from Tier 4 to Tier 2 can be made and changing Post-study leave period to six months for Master's students. The 12 months leave to remain after PhD completion be incorporated into the original visa duration and this to replace the Doctoral Extension scheme that allows the same rights but must be applied for with associated visa costs.

3. Universities UK International – Go International campaign: One year on report

Here is a link to the [UUKi Go International Campaign report](#) – one year on. It is related to the UK Strategy for [Outward Student Mobility 2017-2021](#) available here.

4. Official Launch of UKRI China office – November 2018

[The official launch of UKRI's China office](#), which will build on a decade of research council-facilitated collaborations that is evidenced by a £275 million joint portfolio featuring partnerships in medical and rehabilitation robots, virtual and augmented reality, wireless sensors and the 3D modelling of drug-resistant bacteria. Further details can be found on [UKRO website](#) and including the other international offices in [India](#) and [the USA](#).