



Reports of Government and Parliamentary Activity on  
Vocational, Further, Higher and Adult Education, including  
Training and Skills, from the Government and Parliamentary  
Institutions of the United Kingdom

Monthly Edition  
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# Education & Training Parliamentary Monitor

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The monthly edition of *Education & Training Parliamentary Monitor* reports on a range of government and parliamentary activity in education and training from throughout the United Kingdom and from some European and other international institutions. It reports on the work of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the equivalent departments in the devolved institutions. Its focus is therefore on further, higher and continuing education and the training and skills sector.

This monthly edition is divided into two parts. Part one includes a list of policy and governmental announcements and events that occurred during the month. Part two contains reports of all relevant debates from the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, together with reviews of select committee reports.

Much of this information is taken from the weekly edition of *Education & Training Parliamentary Monitor*. The sections of part one are indexed together, while the debates and select committee reports of section two are indexed separately. Cumulative indexes for part one and for part two are on our website at [www.educationpublishing.com](http://www.educationpublishing.com). Click on the 'Parliament' section.

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## Synopsis of Parliamentary and Government Activity in December

**I**t was a quiet month at Westminster with only the uncontroversial Sale of Student Debt Bill receiving attention. That situation will change in January, when the Education and Skills Bill gets its Second Reading debate in the Commons and the Children and Young Persons Bill goes into committee in the Lords. While the Sale of Student Debt Bill may be uncontroversial at Westminster, the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill is the opposite in Edinburgh. The minority SNP administration came a cropper over the Bill in committee and had a rough ride during the Stage 1 debate in the Scottish Parliament.

### **Further education**

The National Audit Office is the latest to sound a warning over 14-19 reform (*page 514*). It warned that there were wide variations in the local partnerships between schools, further education colleges and local authorities that are essential to the success of the policy.

### **Higher education**

The Sale of Student Loans Bill completed its committee stage in the House of Commons in one sitting (*page 521*).

The Government announced in September that it was switching £100 million from higher education students who were studying for a second equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) to those who were studying for a first degree. This has caused a growing wave of opposition, which was reflected in a debate in the House of Lords (*page 529*).

### **Adult and continuing education**

Crossbench peer Lord Quirk introduced a short debate in the Lords by asking the Government whether it would increase support for adults to pursue part-time higher education (*page 527*). This provided another opportunity for critics of the Government's policy of withdrawing support from ELQs.

### **General policy and politics**

The main policy announcement in December was the Children Plan, which falls outside the scope of this publication.

The Government announced that it was to split the QCA in two, with an independent Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator and a development agency for curriculum, assessment and qualifications (*page 515*).

### **Scotland**

There was major embarrassment for the SNP over the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill which failed in committee. On the casting vote of the Labour convener, the committee voted to reject the principles of the Bill (*page 519*). When it came to the Stage 1 debate in plenary, the SNP got the Bill through only by a compromise with the Liberal Democrats, who then joined the Greens in supporting an amended SNP motion agreeing to the principles of the Bill. This allowed the Bill to proceed to its next stage (*page 531*).

### **Wales**

There is serious and growing concern in Wales over the funding gap in schools, colleges and higher education between England and Wales. The Conservatives chose education funding for an opposition debate (*page 534*).

### **Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland Assembly considered a prayer of annulment of the Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (*page 535*).

### **International**

Dr Lewis Perinbam, the chairman of the board of the pioneering distance learning organisation the Commonwealth of Learning, died in December (*page 520*).

## Events in December

### Pupils 'shun science A-levels'

Comprehensive school pupils are shunning science A-levels, according to exam board Cambridge Assessment. Its research showed that pupils from independent and grammar schools were far more likely to study chemistry, physics and biology. It found that 33.3% of grammar pupils and 27.7% of private pupils were studying chemistry A-level, with 14.8% at comprehensive schools. Just over 21% of grammar pupils and 18.9% of private pupils had chosen physics, but in comprehensives the figure was 9.8 per cent.

3 December 2007, Cambridge Assessment

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### PISA proves Government wrong

The OECD's PISA survey of 15-year-olds in 57 countries shows the choice and diversity policies that lie at the heart of the Government's plans have a negative impact on education systems. The latest survey focused mainly on science. The two previous PISA reports focused on literacy and maths. Within science, the UK results were above OECD and international averages. The OECD divided scientific performance into six levels of proficiency, with level six the highest. In the OECD only 1% of the sample reached level six, while in the UK it was 3%. At level 5 the figures were 8% for the OECD as a whole, but 11% for the UK. At level 4 it was 20% for the OECD and 22% for the UK.

4 December 2007, PISA

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### Govt. helps HE reach employers

The DIUS has announced new funding to support innovative ways for higher education work with employers to meet their skills needs. The funding, which will rise to at least £50m a year by 2010-11, is intended to help the Government meet targets set out in the Leitch review of skills. The review made clear that 70% of the 2020 workforce has already left school, which means that the nation needs at least 40% of adults to be qualified to Level 4 or above by 2020. Higher education minister Bill Rammell said that, to achieve this, higher

education institutions will need to develop new ways of teaching the workforce tailored to company needs.

4 December 2007, DIUS

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### Inquiry into plan to scrap funding

The DIUS has announced an inquiry into the decision to phase out support for students taking second qualifications equivalent to or below their first qualifications. The Government had previously announced that £100m would be withdrawn.

6 December 2007, DIUS

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### Concern over 14-19 reforms

The Government reform programme for 14 to 19 education has wide support, but there are "substantial risks" that the DCSF must address, according to a new report from the National Audit Office. *Partnering for success: preparing to deliver the 14-19 education reforms in England* says that partnerships are central to the reforms, but warns that it found wide variations in the preparedness of the local partnerships at this early stage in the programme.

11 December 2007, National Audit Office

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### Widening HE participation

The next step in widening HE participation will be to build stronger links through the development of HE-backed trusts and academies, John Denham has said. Addressing the Action on Access conference, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills praised those involved in widening participation for "genuinely changing peoples' lives". But he said evidence suggested that both schools and higher education institutions needed to be better at spotting and nurturing talent amongst students who may turn their backs on HE as young as 12 or 13.

12 December 2007, DIUS

## Forging stronger links contradicts the competition culture

Efforts by the Government to encourage institutions, such as schools, colleges and providers of work-based learning to work more together contradicts existing government policy where institutions have to compete with each other for pupils, funds and resources, according to the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training. Ken Spours, from the Institute of Education, said: "Despite recent progress, 14-19 Partnerships are still very fragile because the forces urging competition remain stronger than those supporting collaboration. The balance has to change."

*12 December 2007, Nuffield Review*

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## Scotland won't scrap HE fees

The Bill to scrap the graduate endowment fee in Scotland has been thrown into uncertainty, after MSPs voted to reject it. The education committee had recommended that the principles of the legislation to abolish graduate endowment should not be agreed when the proposal came before the entire parliament next week. Labour and Conservative members voted against the proposal and Nationalists and Liberal Democrats backed the Bill, but it was rejected on the convener's casting vote.

*13 December 2007, Scottish Parliament*

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## The cost of RPA

The cost of raising the education and training participation age (RPA) to 18 to over 90 per cent participation will be around £774 million "in present value terms (in 2016/17 prices)" Lord Adonis announced. The greatest part of this was the direct participation costs of more young people being in education and training, which are estimated to be around £583 million in a steady state.

*17 December 2007, Lords PQ*

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## Diploma worth 3½ A-levels

Diplomas will be worth a maximum of three-and-a-half A-levels when they are launched in 2008, the Government has announced. Schools Minister Jim Knight accepted the QCA's recommendation that diplomas should be equivalent to five GCSEs at foundation level, seven GCSEs at higher level and 3.5 A-Levels at advanced level. UCAS has confirmed that the "Progression" diploma will attract a maximum 300 UCAS tariff points, with 120 points available for the top grade in the "Additional and Specialist Learning". When combined, these enable candidates to be awarded the advanced diploma, worth 420 points.

*18 December 2007, DCSF*

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## Fifth of academics earn over 50k

Nearly one in five academics in England earns more than £50,000, according to figures from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Its latest survey showed that the number of high-earning academics had risen from 4% in 1995-96 to 18% in 2005-06. Overall numbers of staff had risen by 6% since 2004/5, and there had been a rise in black, minority ethnic, female and disabled employees. HEFCE said that the previously feared staff shortages caused by staff retiring had not happened.

*20 December 2007, HEFCE*

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## Fewer adults attending classes

Nearly 700,000 fewer adults than last year attended evening classes in England, equating to 21.7%, according to official figures. Over the same period, the number of adults on catch-up courses increased by 42% to 470,400. And the number of adults on Skills for Life programmes grew by 16% to 350,900. Meanwhile a further 220,000 adults enrolled on in workplace learning under the Train to Gain programme and an extra 10,000 apprenticeships began during the year. The LSC said the change mirrored the shift in funding towards younger learners and adults wanting to boost their skills.

*20 December 2007, BBC*

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## Publications

### ASCL

*Next Steps: The future of inspection of schools and colleges*, December 2007, Association of School and College Leaders, 130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG. Tel: 0116 299 1122. £6

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### DIUS

*Innovation: Share your ideas with us*, December 2007, download free from [www.dius.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations). Deadline: 31/01/08.

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### DCSF

*Confidence in Standards: Regulating and developing qualifications and assessment*, Cm 7281, December 2007, £13.90. ISBN: 9780101728126. Consultation paper, visit [www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations). Deadline: 10 March 2008.

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### NAO

*Partnering for success: preparing to deliver the 14-19 education reforms in England*, HC 99, House of Commons paper, December 2007, £13.90, download free from [www.nao.org.uk/publications](http://www.nao.org.uk/publications). ISBN: 9780102951585.

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### DCLG

*Indices of Deprivation 2007*, December 2007, download free from [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

*REACH: An independent report to Government on raising the aspirations and attainment of Black boys and young Black men - Government response*, December 2007, free from [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/reachresponse](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/reachresponse)

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### Ofsted

*Race Equality Scheme*, HMI 20070021, December 2007, download free from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

*The Young Apprenticeships Programme 2004-07: An evaluation*, HMI 070032, December 2007, download free from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
*Youth Work: A framework for inspection*, HMI 2307, download free from [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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### World Bank

*Raising Student Learning in Latin America: the challenge for the 21st century*, Emiliana Vegas and Jenny Petrow, December 2008, £14.75. ISBN: 9780821370827.

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## Research Journals Published in December

In this section we list of academic journals published in December. These are mainly journals covering general and policy issues rather than those covering specific areas of the curriculum.

*Active Learning in Higher Education* (Sage) Vol.8 No.3  
*British Educational Research Journal* (Routledge) Vol.33 No.6  
*Cambridge Journal of Education* (Routledge) Vol.39 No.3  
*Compare* (Routledge) Vol.37 No.5  
*Curriculum Journal* (Routledge) Vol.18 No.4  
*Educational Psychology in Practice* (Routledge) Vol.23 No.4  
*Educational Research* (Routledge) Vol.59 No.4  
*Educational Studies* (Routledge) Vol.33 No.4  
*European Journal of Teacher Education* (Routledge) Vol.30 No.4  
*Gender and Education* (Routledge) Vol.19 No.6  
*High Ability Study* (Routledge) Vol.18 No.2  
*International Studies in Sociology of Education* (Routledge) Vol.17 No.4  
*Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* (Routledge) Vol.7 No.2  
*Journal of Educational Administration and History* (Routledge) Vol.39 No.3  
*Journal of In-service Education* (Routledge) Vol.33 No.4  
*Journal of Research in International Education* (Sage) Vol.6 No.3  
*Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (Routledge) Vol.59 No.4  
*Learning, Media and Technology* (Routledge) Vol.32 No.4  
*Paedagogica Historica* (Routledge) Vol.43 No.6

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## Answers to Written Parliamentary Questions

This section lists answers to written parliamentary and Assembly questions where data is given by LEA/EA, constituency, local LSC or university. The table below gives the subject of the question asked, the country concerned, the date the question was answered and the issue of *Education and Training Parliamentary Monitor* Weekly Edition that the full answer is given in. Questions concerning England, Great Britain and the United Kingdom tabled in the House of Commons and the House of Lords are published in *ETPM Weekly PQs – Westminster*, those concerning Scotland and answered in the Scottish Parliament are published in *ETPM Weekly PQs – Scotland* and those concerning Wales and published by the Welsh Assembly are published in *ETPM Weekly PQs – Wales/Cymru*.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>ETPM</u>
18 to 22 year olds studying at university, by London LA	England	3.12.07	344

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## Early Day Motions

### **EDM 517**

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD BLACK BOYS CAN PROGRAMME

Proposer: Evan Harris (LDP, Oxford West and Abingdon) Tabled: 10 December ETPM 345

### **EDM 524**

STUDENT ARRESTS IN IRAN

Proposer: John McDonnell (Lab, Hayes and Harlington) Tabled: 10 December ETPM 345

### **EDM 562**

OUTDOOR LEARNING AND INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING

Proposer: Brian Iddon (Lab, Bolton South East) Tabled: 12 December ETPM 345

## Written Ministerial Statements

This section lists all written statements from ministers in H M Government on education, children's services and training published in *Hansard* during the last month. The list gives the date of the statement, the department of state issuing the statement, the minister in whose name the statement was issued, what the statement was about and the issue number of *ETPM Weekly Statements – Westminster* in which the full text of the statement can be found. *ETPM Weekly Statements – Westminster* is part of the Weekly Edition of *Education Parliamentary Monitor*.

Date	Dept.	Minister	Subject	ETPM
11.12.07	DIUS	John Denham	<b>Research and the science budget</b>	345
17.12.07	DCSF	Ed Balls	<b>Qualifications and assessment: regulation and development</b>	346
18.12.07	DIUS	John Denham	<b>Skills Pledge: management information</b>	346

DCSF      Department for Children, Schools and Families  
DIUS      Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

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## Statutory Instruments

The following is a list of all statutory instruments from throughout the UK concerning education, children's services and training listed by date of issue. Commencement orders are identified by the letter C followed by a number in the title line. The letter W followed by a number indicates a Welsh statutory instrument. Fuller details of each statutory instrument are given in *ETPM Weekly Statutory Instruments*, which is part of the Weekly Edition of *Education Parliamentary Monitor*.

**2007/3230 (W.282)** **Wales**  
**The Assembly Learning Grants and Loans (Higher Education) (Wales) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations 2007**

Issued: 04.12.2007. Made: 09.11.2007. Laid before the National Assembly for Wales: 13.11.2007.

**2007/3344** **England**  
**The Education (Student Support) (European Institutions) (Amendment) Regulations 2007**  
Issued: 10.12.2007. Made: 26.11.2007. Laid: 10.12.2007. Coming into force: 01.01.2008 except for

**2007/3473** **England**  
**The Salisbury College (Dissolution) Order 2007**  
Issued: 17.12.2007. Made: 03.12.2007. Laid: 10.12.2007. Coming into force: 01.01.2008.

**2007/557** **Scotland**  
**The Education (Recognised Bodies) (Scotland) Order 2007**  
Issued: 18.12.2007. Made: 12.12.2007. Laid before the Scottish Parliament: -. Coming into force: 01.01.2008.

**2007/558** **Scotland**  
**The Education (Listed Bodies) (Scotland) Order 2007**  
Issued: 19.12.2007. Made: 12.12.2007. Laid before the Scottish Parliament: -. Coming into force: 31.12.2007.

**2007/3505 (C.151)** **United Kingdom**  
**The Further Education and Training Act 2007 (Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions) Order 2007**  
Issued: 20.12.2007. Made: 12.12.2007. Laid: -. Coming into force: -.

## Committees

### **House of Commons Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families**

On Wednesday 12 December the Committee took evidence for its inquiry on the work of Ofsted from Christine Gilbert CBE, HMCI and colleagues.

On Monday 17 December motions were laid before the House of Commons to change membership of the select committees on Children, Schools and Families and Innovation, Universities and Skills. Mrs Maria Miller (Con, Basingstoke) left the Children, Schools and Families Committee. She was replaced by Adam Afriyie (Con, Windsor), who moved from membership of the Innovations, Universities and Skills Committee.

On Monday 17 December the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee took evidence for its inquiry into testing and assessment from Ken Boston, chief executive of the QCA.

### **House of Commons Select Committee on Innovation, Universities and Skills**

On Wednesday 5 December the Committee was scheduled to take evidence on the formation of the DIUS from Rt Hon John Denham MP, Secretary of State and Ian Watmore, Permanent Secretary, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. This meeting was rescheduled to Wednesday 16 January 2007. Instead, on 5 December the Committee took evidence from Professor Sir David King, the Chief Scientific Adviser.

On Thursday 6 December the Committee announced that it was to undertake an inquiry into the Government's decision to phase out support given to institutions for students taking second qualifications of an equivalent or lower level (ELQs) to their first qualifications.

On Thursday 6 December the Committee announced that it was to undertake an inquiry into biosecurity in UK research laboratories.

On Wednesday 12 December the Committee held an introductory meeting with the Government Chief Scientific Adviser designate.

On Monday 17 December motions were laid before the House of Commons to change membership of the select committees on Children, Schools and Families and Innovation, Universities and Skills. Mrs Maria Miller (Con, Basingstoke) left the Children, Schools and Families Committee. She was replaced by Adam Afriyie (Con, Windsor), who moved from membership of the Innovations, Universities and Skills Committee where his place was taken by Tim Boswell (Con, Daventry).

On Monday 17 December the Committee took evidence on the proposed UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation.

### **Scottish Parliament Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee**

On Wednesday 5 December the Committee met and took evidence on the draft budget 2008/09 (Stage 2) from Cllr Isabel Hutton, Education, Children and Young People spokesman; Jon Harris, Strategic Director; and Robert Nicol, Policy Manager, COSLA. The Committee, meeting in private, considered a draft Stage 1 report on the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill.

On Wednesday 12 December the Committee met and considered a draft report to the Finance Committee on the Budget process 2008/09 (Stage 2) and a draft Stage 1 report on the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill. On the casting vote of the convener, the Committee rejected the principles of the SNP Bill. The Committee was unconvinced that abolishing the graduate endowment went far enough in removing barriers to access to higher education. The vote is an embarrassment to the minority SNP government.

### **Welsh Assembly Enterprise and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

On Wednesday 5 December the Committee met and took evidence for its inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education from Professor Philip Gummatt, Chief Executive, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and Roger Carter, Head of Economic Development, HEFCW.

On Wednesday 12 December the Committee met and took evidence for its inquiry into the economic contribution of higher education from David Rosser, Director, CBI Wales, and Non Rhys, Wales Policy Officer, and Russell Lawson – Press and Parliamentary Officer, Federation of Small Businesses. The Committee also considered an interim report and recommendations from the Dyslexia Rapporteur group on Dyslexia support in Wales.

### **Northern Ireland Assembly Employment and Learning Committee**

On Wednesday 5 December the Committee visited Ulster Supported Employment Ltd, Belfast.

On Tuesday 11 and Wednesday 12 December members of the Committee attended the Department of Employment and Learning's corporate planning event.

## **International**

### **Commonwealth**

#### **Commonwealth of Learning's chairman dies**

Dr Lewis Perinbam, chairman of the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) board of governors, died on 12 December 2007. Born in 1925 in Johor Baharu, Malaysia, Dr Perinbam was educated in Scotland and later emigrated to Canada, where he worked for the Canadian government in international development, working with the World Bank and UNESCO. He was the founding Executive Director of Canadian University Service Overseas, Executive Director of World University Service of Canada and Vice-President of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). After retiring from CIDA he dedicated himself to helping the COL, serving first as a special adviser to COL's first two presidents, Dr James Maraj and Dato' Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, before being elected chairman of the board of governors in April 2003.

#### **Third Commonwealth Teacher Research Symposium**

In December the Commonwealth Secretariat announced that the third Commonwealth Teacher Research Symposium would be held between 19 and 21 February in Maputo, Mozambique. The symposium will focus on qualitative and quantitative research on Commonwealth teachers.

### **European Union – Commission**

No Commission initiatives or events concerning education took place in December.

### **European Union – European Parliament**

The Committee on Culture and Education met on 17 December. Most of the agenda concerned cultural matters, though there were sessions on the outcomes of the Portuguese presidency of the EU with the Portuguese Minister for Education and the Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education.

### **European Union – Council of Ministers**

The Education, Youth and Culture Committee of the EU Council of Ministers did not meet in December.

### **OECD**

The OECD published its third Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey of 400,000 15-year-olds from 57 countries. The two volume report contained some uncomfortable evidence for the Government, questioning its policies of choice and diversity. This survey, conducted in 2006, focused on science. Previous PISA reports have focused on maths and literacy.

### **UNESCO**

#### **Children in the Islamic world**

UNESCO published a report in December on the future of children in Islamic countries. The report, *Investing in the Children of the Islamic World*, (UN sales number E.06.XX.4) is available through the Stationery Office for £6.50. ISBN: 9789280638981.

### **World Bank**

#### **Student learning in Latin America**

In December the World Bank published a study of student learning in South and Central America. *Raising Student Learning in Latin America: the challenge for the 21st century*, by Emiliana Vegas and Jenny Petrow, is available through the Stationery Office at £14.75. ISBN: 9780821370827.

## Debates in the House of Commons

# Sale of Student Loans Bill

House of Commons • Committee Stage • 4 December 2007

**T**he Sale of Student Loans Bill was one of the first Bills to go through a new procedure for its Committee Stage in the House of Commons. As usual a group of Members had been selected to scrutinise the Bill in a Public Bill Committee (which replaced standing committees at the beginning of the last Session) but they were also empowered to take evidence on the Bill – in the manner of a Select Committee – and their first sitting began with oral questions to the Minister and an official from DIUS.

### Evidence session

The Minister for Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP (Lab, Harlow) was accompanied at the oral question session by Michael Hipkins, Director of Student Finance Strategy at the DIUS.

The first batch of questions was about the valuation of the student loan book and how robust the procedure was for this exercise. Robert Ffello (Lab, Stoke-on-Trent South) wanted an assurance that the process was robust because he did not want the loan book to be sold on later at a substantial profit to the private sector. Mr Rammell argued that the Government had “a good track record getting the estimates correct,” based on the previous experience of selling part of the student loan debt. He told Members that the Government aimed to make £6.3 billion from the sales but they would not go ahead if market conditions were such that they could not get value for money.

That point was reiterated by the Minister after Sarah Teather (LDP, Brent East) raised the same issue of valuation and Mr Rammell told the MPs about the procedures being followed to ensure that the estimates were calculated correctly. There would be an external sales advisor to help the Department and the National Audit Office would review the first tranche of sales. Value for money, Mr Hipkins added later, was a complex calculation about the benefit of retaining the debt on the Government’s balance sheet or selling it and gaining a lump-sum sooner. “Those are estimates rather than complete answers,” he said.

The value of the loan debt was now at £18.1 billion and would rise further to reach £25 billion on 1 April 2009, Mr Hipkin said. The Government were planning a series of sales which would realise about £6.3 billion over the next three years; there would be further sales beyond 2011.

There was considerable concern amongst MPs at the possibility that the debt once sold could be sold on again. Mr Hipkins and Mr Rammell sought to persuade MPs that that was unlikely but that if it did happen there would be safeguards to ensure the interests of students and the taxpayer were protected. Rob Marris (Lab, Wolverhampton South West) implied that these sales could be like the PFI refinancing deals which he argued had been bad for the taxpayer; Mr Rammell did not think that a valid comparison. Mr Marris was unconvinced, fearing that windfall profits would be made by people selling on the loans. Mr Rammell told John Hayes (Con, South Holland & the Deepings) that he thought it unlikely the debt would be sold on.

The question of the disclosure of information to any purchaser also bothered Members. Gordon Marsden (Lab, Blackpool South) asked if the Student Loans Company was still not sharing data with HMRC following the recent loss of child benefit data. Mr Rammell confirmed that the ban was still in place but there was no evidence of the loss of student loan data. The suspension of data sharing was part of a Government-wide review of data security.

Mr Rammell added in a later answer that there would be no need for loan account data to be transferred to purchasers of date “for day-to-day purposes”. If they needed access to the data for some other purpose, such as auditing, “the method of data transfer would be secure and encrypted”. Mr Hipkins said that the Student Loans Company already had a policy of restricting access to data.

Rob Wilson (Con, Reading East) wondered how the part of the loan book to be sold would be selected. He asked if low-risk debt would be sold first. Mr Hipkin explained that they would not pick some debtors out; the selection would be random. They would however probably exclude very small debts and probably look at the track record of repayment over time as the current loan system was different from the previous mortgage-style approach.

A different point and one not previously discussed was the question of non-UK debtors, following the commencement of loans to students from other EU countries. Mr Rammell explained that debtors

elsewhere in the EU would be able to be pursued under EU law and that the repayment rates had been adjusted to reflect salary levels in other countries. A salary of £15,000 as a threshold before repayments began, would be too high in some countries and so had been set at a lower level in those countries.

### **Clause 1: Sale of student loans**

After lunch, the Committee began considering the Bill line by line. The Minister moved an amendment to Clause 1, explaining that whilst the Government had believed that the intent of the Bill was entirely clear in the clause, it was necessary to make a technical amendment to the drafting so as to ensure that “potential purchasers in the commercial sector should be in no doubt as to what it enables the Secretary of State to do”.

Opposition spokesman John Hayes (Con, South Holland and the Deepings), when he spoke in the clause stand part debate, repeated a claim he had made in the Second Reading debate – namely, that there was a doubt about whether the purpose of the Bill was to transfer risk from the public to the private sector or whether it was to raise money for the Treasury. “I am not sure that it can be reasonably argued that the motive is to do both, because if this is to be an attractive product” it had to be advertised to prospective buyers as a safe product but if it was, it could not be something risky for the state to own. He thought it perfectly legitimate to sell the loan book in order to raise revenue but if that was the purpose, Ministers should be frank about it.

Mr Hayes was still concerned about the possibility of the resale of the debt. He said that it was normal for large debts to be parcelled up and sold on. He acknowledged that the Government were going to create a special purpose vehicle (SPV) for the sale of the loans and it was very unlikely as a result that the debt would be sold on, but it would not be prohibited by the Bill.

Liberal Democrat spokesman, Sarah Teather, wanted a clear statement from the Minister of what risks were being transferred from the public to the private sector in the sale.

The Minister said that the purpose of the sale was to achieve both objectives – the transfer of risk and the generation of income. The disposal of surplus assets was Government policy following the Lyons review, he added. He reiterated the fact that Ministers had been strongly advised that it was unlikely that the loan book or the SPV would be sold on – indeed, that had not happened since the first sale of student debt in 1997. The Government believed it was right to sell the debt without any clawback rights.

The amended Clause 1 was accepted without a vote.

### **Clause 2: Sales Supplemental**

After a brief debate this Clause was also accepted without division.

### **Clause 3: Onward Sales**

During the debate on this Clause, members of the Committee explored the question as to why the Bill gave the Secretary of State a permissive power to limit the circumstances in which a transfer of debt took place but did not require him to do so. This point was raised by both Mr Hayes and Miss Teather. Mr Hayes also speculated about the ability of purchasers of the debt to sell it offshore, which he was concerned about. Sarah Teather wanted to know what Ministers would use the powers of intervention in this Clause for.

Rob Marris said that this was really a Treasury Bill and that Members should be aware of the difficulties that had arisen in the past with the sale of Government assets. He reminded MPs that the purchaser of HMRC buildings had turned out to be a Bermudian company that did not pay tax in the UK. He wanted an assurance that the debt would not be able to be sold offshore.

Mr Rammell said that the debt would not be able to be sold on without Ministers knowing because the Government would under the terms of the Clause be a party to any onward sale. He did not believe that any further safeguards were needed in respect of offshore sales other than the requirements in the Bill, including that the loans remained governed by English law.

Following further discussion, the Minister agreed to look at whether the Clause could be clarified, with perhaps parts of it laying a requirement on the Secretary of State, but he did not think it was necessary.

The Clause was agreed.

### **Clause 4: Loan regulations**

The Minister also agreed to look at a possible amendment based on one tabled by Rob Marris to clarify what costs of purchasers would be refunded by the Government. This Clause was agreed to without further debate.

**Clause 5: Repayment**

Mr Hayes wanted the Student Loans Company included in the legislation as the vehicle for the management of student loan debts and was unhappy that the Minister rejected this as unnecessarily inflexible. Mr Rammell said that the arrangements for graduates would not change whether the debt was owned by the public or private sectors.

The Clause was agreed to.

**Clauses 6 & 7:** were agreed to without debate.

**Clause 8: Wales**

There had been some concerns expressed at Second Reading about the transfer of powers to sell debt to the Welsh Assembly. Mr Hayes thought that the Welsh Assembly Government could choose to sell its loan book at a different time and in a different way and that might produce “incompatibilities” with the situation in England. Sarah Teather could not understand why the Assembly would want to sell the debate because the proceeds of the sale would go to the Treasury and not the Assembly.

Mr Rammell was clear that the provisions should apply equally to Wales as responsibility for student loans in Wales was transferred to Welsh Ministers last year. The powers to sell the loan book were being transferred but not the power to legislate on the matter. The Minister pointed out that the Welsh student loan debt was far smaller, at £1.1 billion, and he admitted that there was no incentive for them to sell because the proceeds of the sales would go to the Consolidated Fund and not into the Welsh block grant.

The Clause was agreed to.

**Clauses 9 to 13:** agreed to without debate.

The Committee having completed its consideration of this short Bill, it now passes back to the full House for the Report Stage debate.

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

*Chairman:* Miss Anne Begg (Lab, Aberdeen South)

Anderson, Mr. David (Lab, Blaydon)

Boswell, Mr. Tim (Con, Daventry)

Cawsey, Mr. Ian (Lab, Brigg and Goole)

Dorries, Mrs. Nadine (Con, Mid-Bedfordshire)

Flelo, Mr. Robert (Lab, Stoke-on-Trent, South)

Foster, Mr. Michael (Lab, Worcester)

Hayes, Mr. John (Con, South Holland and The Deepings)

Iranca-Davies, Huw (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales*) (Lab, Ogmore)

Linton, Martin (Lab, Battersea)

Marris, Rob (Lab, Wolverhampton, South-West)

Marsden, Mr. Gordon (Lab, Blackpool, South)

Moran, Margaret (Lab, Luton, South)

Rammell, Bill (*Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education*) (Lab, Harlow)

Teather, Sarah (LDP, Brent, East)

Watkinson, Angela (Con, Upminster)

Williams, Mark (LDP, Ceredigion)

Wilson, Mr. Rob (Con, Reading, East)

HC 2007/0444

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# Education Questions

House of Commons • Oral Questions, Prime Minister • 5  
December 2007

**Mr Brown came under attack during Prime Minister's Questions from a Conservative MP concerned about school spending in Shropshire, but he received support on education from two Labour MPs.**

Philip Dunne (Con, Ludlow) claimed that school spending had been fixed for the next three years "to favour Labour areas" and this meant school closures in Shropshire and other rural counties.

Gordon Marsden (Lab, Blackpool South) welcomed the expansion of apprenticeships and claimed that the Conservative Party had not funded them when in Government. Mr Brown claimed that "the apprenticeships was dying under the Conservatives" and that there were now 250,000 young people on apprenticeships.

HC 2007/0447

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# Education Questions

House of Commons • Oral Questions, Prime Minister • 12 December 2007

**It was young people and not schools that featured in Prime Minister's Questions as Mr Brown (Lab, Kirkcaldy & Cowdenbeath) found his own party keen to talk about this issue. The fact that they did so at both Cabinet Office questions immediately before those to the Prime Minister perhaps indicated a certain level of advance preparation.**

Mr David Clelland (Lab, Tyne Bridge) said that one of the barriers to young people receiving training or education was the cost of transport; he wanted to know if the Prime Minister had any plans to address that problem. Mr Brown agreed that it was a possible barrier and that adults were already going to be helped with transport costs. He agreed to look at the matter.

HC 2007/0463

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# Children, Schools & Families

House of Commons • Oral Questions, Children, Schools & Families •  
17 December 2007

**December's oral question time for Ministers at the Department of Children, Schools & Families was full of lively exchanges and contained an interesting debate about international comparisons of educational standards.**

## Education leaving age

Sarah McCarthy-Fry (Lab, Portsmouth) believed that raising the education leaving age would help those young people who had been in care but Sir Patrick Cormack (Con, South Staffordshire) could see no point in compelling young people to stay in education "unless there is adequate tuition and guidance in the crafts". The Secretary of State for Children, Schools & Families, Ed Balls (Lab, Normanton) agreed with Ms McCarthy-Fry on improving outcomes for children in care and told Sir Patrick that the point of the Education & Skills Bill was to give every 16 and 17 year-old a right to an apprenticeship.

Children, Schools & Families Select Committee chairman Barry Sheerman (Lab, Huddersfield) said that the Education Bill was not "a staying on in schools" Bill but he urged that something be done for young people before the leaving age was raised in 2013. Mr Balls told him that things were being done

before then – such as the extension of education maintenance allowances and help to enable children to get on to an apprenticeship.

Alan Beith (LDP, Berwick-upon-Tweed) pointed out that 16 year-olds in his area “compelled to attend courses” would have to go to an FE college 50 miles away when they were charged £360 a year for transport by the Government. Mr Balls said that there would be an obligation on local authorities to make provision available but he accepted that transport costs would have to be considered.

### **International comparisons**

Asked about international comparisons of education standards by Mark Harper (Con, Forest of Dean) and Philip Hollobone (Con, Kettering), the Minister for Schools & Learners, Jim Knight (Lab, South Dorset) said that England had participated in two recent international studies, the PIRLS study of reading attainment at 10 years old and the PISA study of science performance at 15. Mr Knight explained the fall in the UK position in these tables when he told MPs that both surveys “enjoyed much higher levels of participation by other countries than previous studies” and independent analysis showed that “we have moved from below average to above average”.

Mr Harper wanted to know why the UK had fallen from eighth to 24<sup>th</sup> in the OECD maths league table; the OECD had itself said that the sample was too small to use for comparative purposes, Mr Knight replied, but in science England was “found to be among the best in the world”.

Mr Hollobone thought the evidence showed that Britain was falling down the international league tables in literacy and suggested that it was “a source of national shame”. Mr Knight said that the Government was taking steps to improve literacy but he said the sample for one of the studies had been too small and that in the other study the fall was due to “the fact that higher attaining readers are not spending enough time reading, and are being too distracted by computer games”.

Sally Keeble (Lab, Northampton North) asked what help was available to help underperforming local authorities improve; there were resources as part of the national strategies to help authorities, Mr Knight told MPs, and to promote the findings of the Rose review of teaching reading.

Rob Marris (Lab, Wolverhampton South West) was a sceptic about the international comparisons because he said that UNICEF had been caught making up data about levels of poverty in Canada. The Minister said that the Government proceeded “with a certain amount of caution” with these kinds of projects but it did want to participate in them. The studies did show that there was, for example, a “very large gap in performance between the lower achieving and the highest achieving pupils in this country”.

### **Topical Questions**

Sarah MacCarthy-Fry felt that too often vocational skills were not given the same respect as academic skills and wondered what could be done to tackle that problem. Mr Balls said that the Government had been working with business and universities to make sure that diplomas would bridge the academic and vocational divide; the CBI had welcomed them for that reason.

HC 2007/0480

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# Select Committee Membership

House of Commons • Motions • 17 December 2007

**T**wo motions to change the membership of education select committees were moved and agreed without debate or division. They concern changes in membership of the Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families and the Select Committee for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Mrs Maria Miller (Con, Basingstoke) was discharged from the Children, Schools and Families Committee. She was replaced by Adam Afriyie (Con, Windsor), who moved from membership of the Innovations, Universities and Skills Committee where his place was taken by Tim Boswell (Con, Daventry), a former Conservative minister responsible for further education.

HC 2007/0481

# Christmas Adjournment

House of Commons • Adjournment Debate • 18 December 2007

**A**s usual the end of term adjournment debate, where MPs can raise any topic they like, produced a variety of speeches that referred to education and skills topics. They included an attack on academies, the funding problems of the Open University and the need for a school in Havering to have its own postcode.

Mark Lancaster (Con, Milton Keynes North East) spoke about the needs of the town in its fortieth anniversary year. He said that the Government still wanted the town to expand but had cut their basic needs allocation for building new schools. Fifteen new primary schools would be needed over the next few years to accommodate the growing population and five new secondary schools. The cut the Government had made amounted to £64.5 million.

Mr Lancaster described the many successes of the Open University since its foundation 38 years ago and the way that it was involved in the community of Milton Keynes. He said that the effect of the Government's decision to cut funding for students with equivalent or lower level qualifications would hit hard people seeking to retrain through the OU. He said that "instead of part-time study being favoured because of its economic benefits, it is always the poor cousin". Mr Lancaster hoped that his early day motion signed by 204 MPs would make the Government think again.

Angela Watkinson (Con, Upminster) talked about the funding problems faced by her authority as a result of its increase in budget being held at two per cent. This had resulted in cuts to the youth service.

Ms Watkinson finished her remarks with a description of the bizarre difficulty a school in her constituency has had in getting its own postcode; having the same name as a convent school next door their post was often muddled up and sometimes inaccessible for weeks during the holidays.

HC 2007/0482

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## Debates in the House of Lords

# Adult Learners

House of Lords • Short Debate • 3 December 2007

**The Government announced in September that it was directing the Higher Education Funding Council for England to transfer £100 million a year away from students who were studying for an equivalent or lower level qualification (ELQ) in higher education. This proposal has met with near universal condemnation in higher education. Baroness Sharp of Guildford (LDP, Life) had tabled a motion for debate, asking Her Majesty's Government, "why at a time when they are encouraging people to upgrade skills and continue working later in life, adult learners taking a second qualification at an equivalent or lower level to that already held must pay full-cost fees?"**

Baroness Sharp set out the proposals of the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities & Skills, John Denham MP (Lab, Southampton Itchen), and in particular highlighted Mr Denham's argument that resources needed to be redirected to those who had had no higher education qualification. By releasing £100 million this way, 10,000 extra full-time student places could be created. The argument was that giving resources to ELQ students denied places to those who had never been to a higher education institution. The logic sounded irrefutable, Lady Sharp said, but it was not obvious that "there are many knocking on the door of higher education and being denied entry" and falling school rolls would mean that places would be freed up for adults over the next few years. She questioned whether it was right to make these cuts now when adults were not coming forward for these places.

Lady Sharp said that the proposal would have significant financial consequences for a number of institutions. In the case of the Open University it estimated that it would lose 29,000 of its 120,000 students – the equivalent of three medium-sized universities. Many universities had part-time courses with many ELQ students and they would be vulnerable to closure if the ELQ students were unable or unwilling to finance the whole cost of their course. Lady Sharp said that the proposals hit disproportionately those who the Government was trying to attract in to higher education, namely part-timers. About 20 per cent of part-time students would be affected as opposed to two per cent of full-time students. Many of these students were older and were training for new careers.

The institutions worst affected by this change would be those reaching out to their communities and bringing people into higher education, such as London South Bank University, Anglia Ruskin University, Barking College and Lewisham College, Lady Sharp told peers.

The baroness did acknowledge that the Government had compromised in some ways: not all subjects would be hit, with specific exemptions for medicine, architecture, nursing and all the science and technology subjects. But she could not understand why pharmacy had not been exempted and she called on Ministers to consider delaying implementing the changes.

Lady Sharp suggested that the resources to fund ELQ students could be found from the Train to Gain budget, which was being doubled despite doubts as to whether employers had "the will or the capacity to absorb this money and expand that fast". Studies showed that no less than 85 per cent of Train to Gain programmes were paying employers for training they would have provided anyway.

No one in the House spoke in support of the Government in the debate that followed. Some were firmer in their criticism than others. Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab, Life), the chief executive of Universities UK, said that students in certain sectors frequently retrained for a change in career, including psychology, education and the performing arts.

Lord Dearing (CB, Life) suggested that while he supported the change in emphasis to ensure that the target of getting a further two million people up to level 4 by 2020, he did not believe that that target would be reached "if we now take action that will damage the institutions that can deliver on that". He suggested ring-fencing the ELQ money provided institutions changed their overall approach to fit in with the Government's objective.

Lord Watson of Richmond (LDP, Life) claimed that the Open University would lose as much as 12 per cent of its operational budget.

Baroness Blackstone (Lab, Life), a former Higher Education Minister in the Blair Government and now vice chancellor of Greenwich University, asked some tough questions of today's Ministers. She wanted various courses, including HNDs and HNCs, exempt from the change. She could not

understand why teacher training courses for FE colleges were included in courses for which students would have to pay the full cost because, she said, that broke a promise made when she was Minister and she called for a delay in the policy's implementation.

Lord Plant of Highfield (Lab, Life) told the chamber that 54 per cent of ELQ students were in London; this reflected the fact that London was a hub for the cultural and creative industries. This was also true of pharmacy; he said that the "London School of Pharmacy will be seriously destabilised by the loss of income". Music schools would also be adversely affected.

While Lord Quirk (CB, Life) called on the Government to "recognise the storm of reasoned objections and back off", Lord Morgan (Lab, Life) called the proposal "philistine" and "deeply damaging to English universities". He pointed out that institutions such as Oxford University would lose income – £4 million in the case of Oxford – and he called it a "terrible blow for the Open University, of which Labour is deeply proud".

Lord Haskins (CB, Life) said that loss to the Open University would amount to £31 million after three years. He was sceptical about how it would be possible to ensure that a student did not already have a degree or other qualification, especially those who came from overseas.

Lord Griffiths of Barry Port (Lab, Life) reminded peers that almost all trainee clergy were doing a second degree and would therefore be affected by the proposal. He urged Ministers to reconsider the change. Another Labour peer, Lord Puttnam (Lab, Life) said that there was "an overwhelming case for significant and constructive change within this sector" but he asked whether the Government understood that "continuing to batter the sector and pulling stunts such as this only allows the universities themselves to retreat into a bunker from it is almost impossible to create change".

Baroness Walmsley (LDP, Life), for the Liberal Democrats, urged retreat, saying that because foundation degrees were exempt but other courses were not, some students might be pushed into taking the wrong course for financial reasons.

For the Opposition, Baroness Verma (Con, Life), said that those in work needed the opportunity to retrain and she said that this "retrograde step" was at odds with the Government's own commitment to the skills agenda. Lady Verma said that the Shadow Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities & Skills (David Willetts MP) had said that the idea had "all the hallmarks of a rushed and potentially damaging proposal".

### **The Government's response**

Responding for the Government, Lord Triesman (Lab, Life), the junior Minister at the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, recognised the scale of his task when he said that he had "not detected an outpouring of warm support for the proposals". He put the changes to ELQ student funding in the context of the Government having to make decisions about priorities. The Government had increased funding for higher education by 25 per cent in real terms since 1997 but there was a finite sum of public spending and it was necessary to choose between competing priorities. The Minister set out the Government's priorities in further and higher education and explained that the cut to ELQ funding would be far less than the £100 million referred to at first. It would be about £25 million next year and £60 million the year after. It was also not the case that all ELQ student funding was being cut; in fact, they were removing less than one-third of the £327 million spent on that group. No institution would lose cash on its 2007-08 baselines for three years and no decision had been taken about additional savings in the next comprehensive spending review period. Lord Triesman argued that the Government's approach was fairer because "it helps more qualified people to get into higher education". Lord Triesman sought to persuade the House that the proposed changes were not incompatible with ambitions for improving skills in the Leitch Report. The central message of that report had been that we needed to increase the number of people with higher level qualifications; the Minister argued that we would not achieve that goal "if we continue to prioritise those who already have such qualifications over those who do not".

The Minister disputed the claims about the high level of income that would be lost to the Open University as a result of the change. Of the £100 million to be redistributed, Lord Triesman said that the Government believed about £12 million would come from the OU by 2011. The OU would benefit from the extra students going into higher education as a result of the reallocation. Lord Triesman agreed to consider the suggestion of Lord Dearing that the universities most affected by the ELQ funding change be put at the top of the list for expansion using the redirected resources. The Minister was firm on the absence of consultation: the Government had been clear about its priorities and that was "not a matter for consultation" but they were now consulting about how to implement the changes.

HL 2007/0448

# Higher Education: Adults

House of Lords • Oral Question • 4 December 2007

**C**rossbench peer Lord Quirk (Life) asked Her Majesty's Government: "Whether they will increase the amount of support and encouragement for adults to pursue part-time higher education?" Lord Quirk's question enabled peers to resume their criticism of the Government over the planned redirection of resources in higher education.

Lord Triesman replied that the Government had introduced in 2006-07, "the most generous package of financial support that has ever been offered to part-time students". It included increases in the maximum grant of 27 per cent above inflation.

Lord Quirk referred back to the debate the previous night and the "nigh unanimous support" across the House for the Government to change its stand on ELQ students. Lord Triesman said that consultation was taking place and he fully intended that the many serious points made in the debate should be fed into the consultation process but he could not give undertakings about the outcome of that process.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern (Con, Life) used the opportunity of an education question to congratulate Lord Ahmed (Lab, Life) and Baroness Warsi (Con, Life) on the safe return of British teacher Gillian Gibbons from the Sudan.

Lord Morgan was another peer to refer to the previous day's debate about ELQ students and to ask the Minister what proposals he had to mitigate the effects for the Open University. The Minister urged the House to "look with caution at all figures produced about the likely consequences for the Open University" but he accepted the need to work with the OU on "a sustainable business model".

Baroness Carnegy of Lour (Con, Life) wanted to know how a proposal that she claimed was "so clearly damaging to the Open University" came to be made. Lord Triesman did not accept that the policy was unwise. The aim was to increase the resources for those who had never been able to go to university. The choice was made to reallocate resources from those who had a first degree or equivalent to those who did not.

Baroness Howe of Idlicote (CB, Life) said that she had been unable to be at the debate but strongly supported the OU. She wanted to know how the Minister answered the point that women returning to education would be particularly hard hit. Lord Triesman said that 57 per cent of ELQ students were women – the same proportion as the non-ELQ group. About 10 million women in the workforce did not have a higher level qualification "and they are among those whom we have sought to prioritise by this policy move".

HL 2007/0449

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## Debates in the Scottish Parliament

# School and University Funding

Scottish Parliament • Oral Questions, General • 6 December 2007

**F**rank McAveety (Lab, Glasgow Shettleston) asked the Scottish Executive what funding had been allocated for schools in the recent spending review statement. The Minister for Schools and Skills, Maureen Watt (SNP, North East Scotland) said that details were given in chapters 22 and 27 of the *Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007*. She said that direct investment by the Government in schools policy would be £409 million in total from 2008-09 to 2010-11 and most public sector expenditure on school education was channelled through local authorities.

Frank McAveety (Lab/Co-op, Glasgow Shettleston) asked what additional resources would be made available to Glasgow City Council to improve the level and range of sports activity in schools. Maureen Watt said that in taking forward the concordat with local government, the Scottish Government would engage with every local authority on single-outcome agreements.

Elizabeth Smith (Con, Mid Scotland and Fife) asked what plans the Scottish Government had within its share of the education budget to improve pupils' reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Maureen Watt said that the matter would continue to be discussed with local authorities.

Jeremy Purvis (LDP, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) said that on 13 September the Minister for Schools and Skills said that education ministers had made a funding bid to the Cabinet Secretary for finance and sustainable growth to implement in full the promise to reduce class sizes in primary 1 to primary 3 to a maximum of 18. He called on the minister to place a copy of that request and a statement of how much she had received in the Scottish Parliament information centre. Maureen Watt said that matters had moved on since September. There was now a concordat with local government and ring fencing had been removed from many areas.

Ken Macintosh (Lab, Eastwood) asked when an announcement would be made on the Scottish futures trust. In particular, he wanted to know if the Government was still committed to continuing Labour's school building programme. Mrs Watt said that an increase of £40 million had already been allocated in the current year for school capital programmes. There was also £115 million of extra capital in the first year for local government, which could be invested in schools. Ms Watt said that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth would make an announcement on the work of the Scottish futures trust when the information was available.

### Universities

Marlyn Glen (Lab, North East Scotland) ask the Scottish Executive when it would next meet representatives of universities to discuss funding. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop (SNP, Lothians) said that she would meet Universities Scotland for the first meeting of the joint future thinking taskforce on 20 December.

Ms Glen said that following her meeting with university principals in November, the Cabinet Secretary had said that the Cabinet was sympathetic to universities' needs and that extra funding might be available to them at the end of the current financial year. Ms Glen wanted to know how much the universities would now receive, and when they would receive it.

Fiona Hyslop (SNP, Lothians) said the joint statement that was issued by the Scottish Government and Universities Scotland had indicated that Universities Scotland was committed to providing more detailed information to the Scottish Government on the issue.

SP 2007/0453

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# Funding

Scottish Parliament • Oral Questions, First Minister • 6 December 2007

**D**uring First Minister's questions Wendy Alexander (Lab, Paisley North), the embattled Leader of the Opposition, said that in October, the United Kingdom Government had allocated an extra £340 million to provide after-school and respite care for families whose children had disabilities. Scotland's share of that money was £34 million, which was to fund a step change in respite care and accessible child care, and to help young disabled people leaving school.

But in November when the Minister for Children and Early Years was asked how the £34 million would be spent in Scotland, he said that the money would become part of the total funding available to the Scottish Government. Mrs Alexander said that parents of children with special needs were now concerned that the money would not be spent on their children.

The First Minister, Alex Salmond (SNP, Gordon) said that the matter was part of the discussions that were taking place with every local authority in Scotland as part of the new relationship between central and local government in Scotland.

Mrs Alexander said that the review had been in May, and the Government had received the cash in October. She said that the Scottish government had promised an answer by mid-November, but there was still no clear indication of how the £34 million would be used. The First Minister said that the concordat and outcomes were quite specific about increasing respite hours.

Nicol Stephen (LDP, Aberdeen South) said that students had been protesting about the Scottish government's real-terms cut in higher education spending next year. Alex Salmond claimed that the vast majority of Scottish students approved of the abolition of the student endowment and the restoration of free education in Scotland.

Malcolm Chisholm (Lab, Edinburgh North and Leith) asked the First Minister why his government was forcing the Scottish Arts Council to end the highly regarded cultural co-ordinators scheme, which had ensured wider access to the arts for a large number of young people. Mr Salmond said that there was substantial support for arts and culture, including the youth music initiative.

Hugh O'Donnell (LDP, Central Scotland) asked the First Minister to arrange to meet East Ayrshire Council to talk about the closure of rural schools. The First Minister said that the deployment of schools policy in relation to individual schools was a matter for individual councils. The commitment to class size reductions was enshrined in the agreement between the Scottish government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and it would be reinforced by individual outcome agreements with every local authority across Scotland.

SP 2007/0454

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# Graduate Endowment Bill

Scottish Parliament • Legislation, Stage 1 • 20 December 2007

**T**he SNP administration in Edinburgh is a minority government heartily disliked by all the other major parties (though with an understanding with the Greens). Labour never loses an opportunity to attack the nationalists for having the temerity to usurp them from what Labour has always regarded as its rightful place as the natural governing party in Scotland, yet the electorate has rather taken to Alex Salmond as First Minister. He had some popular policies in May's Scottish election, though implementing them without a majority or enough money is proving difficult.

One of those popular promises was to wipe out student debt. The SNP Executive therefore introduced the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill. Its Stage 1 debate started with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop (SNP, Lothians) attacking the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee for letting down 50,000 Scottish students and their hard-working families. The committee, on the casting vote of the convener, had rejected the

general principles of the Bill and had voted to keep the graduate endowment fee. This was a recipe for a great deal of politics in the Stage 1 debate on the floor of the Parliament.

Mrs Hyslop argued that two thirds of students could not afford the graduate endowment fee and so simply added it to their student debt, and added that despite the fact that debt, and the fear of debt, was known to be a barrier that prevented people from going to university, the Labour and Conservative members of the committee had failed to see the obvious link.

Murdo Fraser (Con, Mid Scotland and Fife) said that the Scottish National Party had promised in its manifesto to wipe out student debt, but the Government had not fulfilled its obligations. Mrs Hyslop retorted that the committee had suggested that there was no evidence that abolition of the graduate endowment fee would, in itself, widen access, but she argued that the policy memorandum had stated that the measure was a “first step”, and that it would contribute to the aim of widening access. The SNP would reduce debt through abolishing the graduate endowment fee and would then reintroduce student grants to replace loans, starting with the £500 grant for part-time students.

Rhona Brankin (Lab, Midlothian) pointed out that in 1996 the Irish Government had abolished student tuition fees. But Professor Patrick Clancy of University College Dublin had said that there had subsequently been no improvement in working-class participation in higher education and that in some deprived areas of Dublin participation rates had fallen. She added that Irish heads of universities and the funding council had met during the week to consider some form of graduate contribution.

Mrs Hyslop said that between 2002 and 2006, entrants to higher education from Scotland's most deprived areas had increased by just one per cent. Richard Baker (Lab, North East Scotland) said that increasing student bursaries would address student hardship far better. The Minister replied that the endowment fee had proved to be an extremely inefficient way of providing funds. It had not raised the predicted levels of income and, as much of the graduate endowment fee was added to student loans, the taxpayer had lost about a third of the income. She challenged any of those who opposed the Bill to defend the graduate endowment fee, which she claimed had been flawed since its introduction and urged Parliament to agree to the general principles of the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill.

### **Tuition should be free**

Jeremy Purvis (LDP, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) said that Liberal Democrats had always argued that tuition should be free. They understood that living costs were a major factor in students' accumulation of debt by the time they graduated. They had argued for the provision of financial support to students from the poorest backgrounds. An illustration of their approach was the package that was brought in six years ago when the devolved Government reintroduced student grants of £2,000 per year. The Cubie committee had argued for changes in how students were supported and the graduate endowment, as it became known, was established to provide support for students from poorer backgrounds. The payment was not connected with university funding and had never been linked with the cost of student tuition. Mr Purvis said that the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee's recommendations, which were decided on a Labour vote, had included a statement that the Labour Party and Conservatives wanted to use some of the money that was raised through the graduate endowment to fund universities. Although it was prohibited under the law, he said that the proposal was for a graduate poll tax. He then proposed an amendment to the motion seeking to place a statutory duty on Scottish Ministers to provide student support.

Karen Whitefield (Lab, Airdrie and Shotts) said that although the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee fully supported the intention of the Bill and its objective of removing barriers to higher education, it did not agree that the abolition of the graduate endowment was the best way to do that. The committee believed that the government's policy initiative was based more on ensuring that it could tick off an ill-conceived manifesto commitment than on sound research and evidence. She said the Scottish government's officials had told the committee that no alternatives had been considered prior to the introduction of the legislation. The committee had received 25 written submissions in response to its call for evidence and it had taken oral evidence on the Bill over three meetings. Although the majority of those who made submissions said that they had no objection to the abolition of the graduate endowment, many also said that they had serious concerns about what the Bill failed to do.

Ms Whitefield said that the Bill failed to do anything to support part-time students; it failed to support students financially while at university; and it failed to address the issue of widening access and getting more students, particularly those from deprived communities, into education. In the stage 1 report on the Bill the committee concluded that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the abolition of the graduate endowment would contribute to the aspiration of widening access. She said that there was no hard evidence that the graduate endowment had had a significant impact on

participation in higher education. Ms Whitefield concluded that the Bill did nothing to support students while they were at university; instead, it helped people in employment who were earning money. She said that financial concerns were not always the main barrier to students from Scotland's most deprived communities going to university. Therefore a serious review of the barriers that continued to restrict access was needed. She asked Parliament not to support the Bill's general principles.

Murdo Fraser (Con, Mid Scotland and Fife) said that the Scottish Government's budget was finite and, given a choice of extra funding for universities and more student support or abolishing the graduate endowment and making graduates even better off than their English counterparts, the priority was to increase university funding and improve student support. He said that the Conservatives would vote against the Bill.

The Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram (SNP, South of Scotland) said that the proposal to abolish the endowment was the first step towards a truly free higher education system. He urged MSPs to support the Bill.

The procedure in the Scottish Parliament is that voting takes place at the end of the day, during decision time, rather than at the end of the debate. The SNP motion was "that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Bill". The first vote was on the Liberal Democrat amendment, which proposed adding the following text to the SNP motion: "and, in so doing, calls for a statutory duty on Scottish Ministers to provide student support and provision made thereunder to be improved for existing and future students and further calls for more research into the barriers to accessing further and higher education to be undertaken." The SNP, Liberal Democrats and Greens voted for this, while the Tories voted against and Labour abstained. This ensured that the amendment was carried, by 65 votes to 16 with 45 abstentions. The amended motion was carried by 65 votes to 60, with the SNP, Liberal Democrats and Greens joined by the previously abstaining independent and former SNP luminary Margo MacDonald (Ind, Lothians) while Labour joined the Tories in voting against.

SP 2007/0483

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# Alcohol Consumption

Scottish Parliament • Oral Questions, General • 20 December 2007

**B**ill Kidd (SNP, Glasgow) asked the Scottish government how it intended to target resources and services for raising awareness of the effects of alcohol consumption among young people and for providing rehabilitation services for them.

The Minister for Public Health, Shona Robison (SNP, Dundee East) said that the Scottish Government provided resources to alcohol and drug action teams, which made decisions on allocations to services, including rehabilitation services, based on local circumstances and identified need. The minister said that the Scottish government had run alcohol awareness-raising campaigns, including the alcohol awareness week in October 2007, which was aimed at increasing understanding of units and the promotion of responsible drinking.

Mr Kidd asked the minister if she would consider supporting an alcohol awareness week that was specifically targeted at young people. Shona Robison replied that although she would consider targeting future campaigns at young people, a culture change in the relationship with alcohol in Scotland was needed. Therefore the government would bring forward a draft strategy for consultation in spring 2008, which would be supported by an £85 million boost in the budget over three years to help tackle alcohol misuse.

Dr Richard Simpson (Lab, Mid Scotland and Fife) said that since the advertising arrangements were changed to prohibit the advertising of alcohol, the number of young people who were not drinking had risen by 12 per cent. He suggested that the minister should follow up on the motion that Bill Wilson had lodged which called for further pilots and work in universities and colleges on the establishment of normative data, and for the promotion of that data, which encouraged people to recognise that the majority of people did not abuse alcohol, rather than using the punitive approach. Ms Robison said that it was important to recognise that Scotland had a particularly unhealthy relationship with alcohol, which filtered through to the behaviour of young people.

SP 2007/0484

## Debates in the Welsh Assembly

# Education Funding

Welsh Assembly • Opposition Debate • 5 December 2007

**A**lun Cairns (Con, South Wales West) opened a Conservative Party opposition debate on education funding, calling on the Welsh Assembly Government “to bring forward a timetable for closing the gap in education funding that exists between England and Wales”.

He said that the existing gap at schools level was £355 per pupil (or £202 if the higher level of spending in London was excluded), spoke of the poor performance of Wales compared to the other home nations according to the OECD’s PISA report and drew attention to the quality and age of school buildings and resources compared with England. Mr Cairns claimed that the draft budget would lead to a wider funding gap, given the 2.2 per cent increase in the local government settlement, and an accepted 2.7 per cent rate of inflation.

Peter Black (LDP, South Wales West) listed three main trends which characterised education in Wales; “continuing confusion” regarding the amount and distribution of money to schools; underinvestment in further education in terms of capital investment or non-statutory services; and a funding gap between higher education institutions in England and Wales of £41 million according to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. He spoke of the “wide variation” in school funding across Wales with “fourteen out of 22 local education authorities ... failing to spend up to the indicative budget allocation”, and noted that the Committee on School Funding had made “27 recommendations to try to address some of these issues”.

Jonathan Morgan (Con, Cardiff North), the Shadow Minister for Health and Social Services, welcomed the debate, stating “pupils in Wales are at a distinct disadvantage compared with pupils in England” and noting the “huge disparities in local authorities’ performance in Wales”.

As a former president of the National Union of Students Wales, Alun Davies (Lab, Mid & West Wales) focused on the funding gap in higher education. He voiced his support for increasing access, and the widening of access but conceded this would necessitate looking again at how higher education in Wales was funded. He called for proactive assessment of options “to ensure that we can sustain and invest in higher education while ensuring that access is not restricted... on financial grounds”.

Angela Burns (Con, Carmarthen West & South Pembrokeshire) noted the funding gap was higher than quoted, when taking into account the £307 million that was spent in Wales on special educational needs.

Michael German (LDP, South Wales East), the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly, agreed that if the funding gap was allowed to remain, this would cause “great trouble in building the skills agenda for the future”. He cited the £41 million gap between Wales and England and the £93 million gap between Wales and Scotland and warned of the future migration of staff which would put pressure on student fees.

John Griffiths (Lab, Newport East), the Deputy Minister for Skills, called for members to reject the motion, arguing “it is not possible to make the rather simplistic comparisons that many have sought to make on education spending in England and Wales”. He pointed out that since devolution “we have seen impressive increases in the education budget in Wales” and further noted the improvement, year on year, of results at GCSE, A-Level and vocational levels. He pointed out that England and Wales used different systems, arguing that if the south-east of England were taken out of the equation that would give a different result. Mr Griffiths spoke of the reasons behind the development of the school fora and cited the role of the Bramley review in examining distribution methodology, from which complex issues were emerging. He agreed on the need to “improve transparency” and confirmed that the Assembly Government statisticians had worked with local government to ensure greater consistency.

Professor Nick Bourne (Con, Mid & West Wales), the Leader of the Opposition in the Welsh Assembly, concluding the debate, stated that closing the funding gap “remains at the top of our agenda on education”. The Liberal Democrats proposed amendments that were defeated, as was the original Conservative motion.

WA 2007/0458

## Debates in the Northern Ireland Assembly

# Student Fees

Ulster Assembly • Delegated Legislation, Prayer of Annulment •  
10 December 2007

**T**he Northern Ireland Assembly considered a prayer of annulment of the Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. The chairman of the Committee for Employment and Learning, Sue Ramsey (SF, Belfast West) said that the statutory rule was made under the powers conferred by articles 4(8) and 14(4) of the Higher Education Order 2005.

The Order had capped fees at £3,000, subject only to inflationary increases. The effect of the statutory rule was the application of an annual inflationary increase to the basic and higher fees that were charged by higher education institutions for qualifying courses in the academic year 2008-09. The statutory rule would increase the higher amount from £3,070 to £3,145, and the basic rate would increase from £1,225 to £1,255. Other rates for other specific prescribed courses would increase on a pro rata basis at around 2.5 per cent. She said that under article 4 of the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, increases to basic and higher fee rates were subject to rises linked to inflation until 2010. Ms Ramsey reminded members that the motion was to annul proposed fee increases, but it did not address the principle of variable student fees. If the statutory rule was annulled, the current higher rate fee of £3,070 would be payable by students in 2008, and other fees would remain at their present levels.

She said that the Department had proposed to conduct a review of student finance, including fees, some time during the academic year 2008-09. The review had been presented as a reason why fee increases should go ahead, in line with the primary legislation, in advance of the research and review findings being made available. But, she argued that fee increases could not be justified without knowing what impact they would have on take-up or drop-out rates on prospective, or existing, university students. Ms Ramsey said that there was concern that disadvantaged students were being put off by fees, particularly when they saw increases coming forward in the absence of due consideration of their impact. She said that the members of her Committee had agreed that the need for research and review was paramount, and she called on the Department to bring the work programme forward at the earliest opportunity.

Jimmy Spratt (DUP, Belfast South) believed strongly that the best way forward, in the interests of both the universities and the students, was to await the impending review. By proposing to annul rises in line with inflation for the next three years, he said that those parties in favour of such a proposal were engaging in headline-grabbing opportunism without thinking through the consequences of their actions.

Basil McCrea (UUP, Lagan Valley) asked members to reject the prayer of annulment. He said that although everyone was keen to encourage people from socially deprived areas into further and higher education, the accepted wisdom in such areas argued against taking risks. He said that the real challenge for the Assembly was to confront lack of ambition and find ways to break the cycle of deprivation and enable all the people of Northern Ireland to unlock their potential.

Alex Attwood (SDLP, Belfast West) said that the draft Budget had stated that there would be 300 more PhDs by 2011, yet there was no funding in it to fund those PhDs. Although the Irish Government had offered the Assembly £34 million of their money to enable Queen's University and the University of Ulster to participate in an all-Ireland science foundation, there is no money in the draft Budget for that either. He said that regardless of the motion, there should be agreement throughout the Chamber that if the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was to be the driver of the economy, the Department for Employment and Learning, and FE and HE colleges must be its partners. Mr Attwood said that regardless of the loss that might be incurred by Queen's University and the University of Ulster if the prayer of annulment was agreed to, it was not as significant as the funds that FE and HE colleges needed from this year's Budget to ensure that they were at the heart of the economy. He accepted that if the annulment motion was passed, there would be a loss of funds to universities in the North. He had told Queen's University that it should fund that loss from its reserves as a way of informing students, pupils and parents that those institutions had acknowledged that student debt and loans were a major concern. The public would then have to accept that, for a period of time, there

would be a shortfall in University budgets. He said that Queen's University would avail itself of any opportunity to increase student fees when the cap was removed, or even before that because it had joined the Russell Group, so fee increases were bound follow.

Mr Attwood said that another reason why the Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 should be annulled was that there was no evidence as to how access to universities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was being affected. He said that the evidence from England was that intervention was necessary to mitigate the impact of student fees and although that would come in part through the Minister's review, other measures could be taken now, such as stopping the student-fee increase on the basis of inflation. He urged the Assembly to vote to annul fee increases as outlined in the motion.

### **New Labour's bankrupt social policies**

Anna Lo (All, Belfast South) said that the Alliance Party supported the prayer of annulment. She said that tuition fees were not a product of Northern Ireland's political system; they were a product of New Labour's bankrupt social policies, one of the hallmarks of which had been to be more Thatcherite than Thatcher herself would have ever dared to be. She pointed out that tuition fees had trebled in the past few years, and there was a danger of moving to the American model whereby universities were for the rich, and where social mobility was frozen. Ms Lo said that Northern Ireland had been vastly more successful than England in ensuring that young people from low-income backgrounds went to university. Therefore it would be necessary to develop a Northern Ireland solution that reflected its unique circumstances, perhaps by look towards the Scottish system for a working model. That system did not encumber students with upfront debt, and would free those who had received higher education but who chose to go into poorly-paid but socially worthwhile occupations such as social work, the clergy and the voluntary sector from carrying debt for the span of their adult life.

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey (UUP, Belfast East) was opposed to the motion. He argued that Northern Ireland had an excellent record in attracting people from less-favoured backgrounds to higher education. In the universities, 41 per cent of students came from such a background, compared with 29 per cent in Great Britain. Through the CSR, he had secured an additional £500 for the grant, which was unique to Northern Ireland. The Department worked with the universities, and its access agreements with them meant that students had access to bursaries that had been set at £300. Those agreements included a legal liability on the universities to pay those £300 bursaries and both universities currently paid bursaries of £1,000. The minister said that if the motion was agreed, £2.5 million would be taken out of the universities' pockets on top of, unfortunately, the £3 million that they would not receive next year as a result of the CSR. At this stage, it appeared that in year 1 of the CSR, the funding for higher education would decrease by 5.2 per cent in real terms, which was a substantial reduction, although he said that it would pick up in subsequent years.

The second area in which the motion would create an anomaly related to students from Northern Ireland who studied in England and Wales. He said that they paid more towards the upkeep and success of the universities there than they would if they studied in Northern Ireland. He believed that the value of those students' loans would be based on levels that had been set in Northern Ireland and that they could face a shortfall as a result. He claimed that the motion was part of a haphazard approach that may preempt the review that had been announced. The minister said that because the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 had set out the level of tuition fees until 2010, fees would be the Assembly's responsibility, and the universities will not be able to set fees unilaterally. He pointed out that Northern Ireland universities had no reserves to meet revenue deficits and he was keen to defend the £500 differential in the maintenance grant that had been secured. As regards to the announcement by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the minister said that he was reviewing all questions and would bring suggestions to Members in due course. Until the comprehensive spending review was complete, he was not in a position to determine the Department's internal priorities. With respect to PhD's, he was consulting with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and his Department because there were funding issues that were outside the CSR process.

The question was put to the Assembly, and the motion was opposed.

UA 2007/0477

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