## Issue 2013 / 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGHLIGHTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL NEWS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culture and Sport Committee agreed to open public consultations on a preferred site for a replacement school for Kincorth and Torry Academies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL NEWS** |
| • Education, Learning and Leisure Committee: Plans to hold a mock independence referendum in schools, a youth-led approach to tackling bullying, an update on a review of the Aberdeenshire school estate and the future of Banff & Buchan College were among items discussed at the latest meeting of Aberdeenshire Council’s Education, Learning and Leisure Committee on 21 March. |

| **SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT NEWS** |
| Scottish Parliament in Recess: Friday 29 March - Monday 15 April. |
| • The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill was passed at Stage 1 on 27 March. |
| • National strategy on purposeful activity in prisons |
| • New ‘Stamp Duty’ Tax: The Finance Committee has registered its support for the general principles of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill. |
| • Ministerial leadership on Gypsy/Travellers: Ministerial leadership and a national public awareness campaign to deter discrimination against Gypsy/Travellers have been demanded by the Equal Opportunities Committee. |

### Scottish Parliament Publications
• SB 13-18 Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill - The background and provisions of the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill are outlined

| **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT NEWS** |
| • Dementia Care: The Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, Alex Neil, stated that people diagnosed with dementia will see a “significantly improvement” in the help and advice they receive as a new national commitment is implemented from April 1. |
| • Decrofting: Action is being taken to deal with the difficulties owner-occupier crofters are facing when decrofting their croft land. |
| • First Minister to attend Scotland Week: The First Minister, Alex Salmond, will attend Scotland Week in New York. He last attended Scotland Week in 2008 and is returning to promote Scotland on the world stage through business and tourism engagements, as well as fulfil invitations to undertake a number of high-level speaking engagements. |
| • Quality Meat Scotland board members appointed: The Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead has announced two new appointees to the board of Quality Meat Scotland - Louise Welsh and Ronnie Eunson. |
| • 2014 Year of Homecoming: The First Minister has officially unveiled the first phase of the year-long programme of events. |
| • Bòrd na Gàidhlig Cathrìche appointment: Dr Alasdair Allan, Scotland’s Languages Minister, has announced the appointment of Iain Campbell as the new Cathrìche (Chair) to Bòrd na Gàidhlig. |
| • Focus on attainment in schools: Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell, delivering a speech on attainment, included a number of announcements including an Improvement Partnership Programme to partner schools with similar demographic backgrounds but different results to help them learn from good practice. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UK PARLIAMENT NEWS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
## UK PARLIAMENT NEWS

The House of Commons is currently in recess. The House will next sit on Monday 15 April 2013.

The House of Lords is also in recess and will similarly next sit on Monday 15 April 2013.

### House of Commons

- The Budget
- Oral Answers to Questions – International Students (21/3/2013)
- Written Answers to Questions - Overseas Students: Entry Clearances (19/3/2013)
- Written Answers to Questions - Graduates: Languages (19/3/2013)

### House of Lords

- Lords Written Answers - Higher Education: Foreign Students

## GENERAL ROUND-UP

### Higher Education

- Event: International Higher Education Forum - Competing globally in a crowded market -17 April 2013 (organised by Universities UK and the International Unit in partnership with Hobsons)

### Learned & Professional Bodies

- **Institution of Mechanical Engineers**: In the first quarter of 2013, the Institution has been monitoring political developments and providing expertise to policy makers, to ensure that the voice of engineers is heard by Governments. The Institution’s policy statements cover a wide range of policy areas, specifically designed for the public affairs environment.

- **Royal Society of Edinburgh**: The Royal Society of Edinburgh has named its new Fellows for 2013, including two University of Aberdeen colleagues.

- **British Academy**: The British Academy has responded to the call by Research Councils UK (RCUK) for comments on its Open Access Policy and Supporting Guidance, published earlier this month. In its statement, the Academy criticises the limited response time allowed by RCUK for comments on such an important policy.

- **Institute of Physics**: Following the publication of the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) report, *Higher education in England, Impact of the 2012 reforms*, Professor Sir Peter Knight, President of the Institute of Physics (IOP), highlights the long-term growth in the number of students choosing to study physics at university.

- **The Royal Society of Chemistry**: The Budget - The UK risks slipping into the margin of world competitiveness without further investment in science, says the Royal Society of Chemistry.

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL NEWS

- **Site of proposed replacement school**: On 28 March the Education, Culture and Sport Committee agreed to open public consultations on a preferred site for a replacement school for Kincorth and Torry Academies. The report recommended that the committee instruct officers to carry out statutory consultation on proposals “to close Kincorth Academy and Torry Academy and to amalgamate the two schools in a new, purpose-built secondary school on the Bobby Calder Park site”. The Council has been allocated approximately £22 million as a contribution towards the cost of construction of a new secondary school from the Scottish Futures Trust. As part of the budget-setting
process a further £10 million was allocated as part of the Non Housing Capital Programme as the Council's contribution to the overall cost.

● **Developing a hydrogen economy:** On 28 March hydrogen industry experts gathered in Aberdeen to outline the opportunities for creating a hydrogen economy in North-east Scotland. Hosted by Aberdeen City Council, this scoping event was chaired by Dr Nigel Holmes, CEO of the Scottish Hydrogen & Fuel Cell Association. The main aims of the event were to: raise awareness of the opportunities offered to the region by hydrogen; generate interest in supply chain development; identify existing hydrogen activities and expertise; record any hydrogen project or partnership ideas; build a focus group of people willing to contribute towards a strategy for developing a hydrogen economy in the Aberdeen city region. With its oil and gas expertise, the North-east is well placed to seize opportunities to enhance the region’s economic competitiveness and be at the forefront of a hydrogen economy.

● **Approval for European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre:** Aberdeen City Council has welcomed the decision that plans for the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) at Aberdeen Bay have been approved. The development, consisting of 11 wind turbines and their connection cables, which will provide enough energy for more than 49,000 homes, will play a significant role in securing Aberdeen’s future as a stronghold for the renewables sector. Gordon McIntosh, ACC Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure director, congratulate AREG and Aberdeen Offshore Wind Farm Ltd in securing consent for the EOWDC. “The decision letter from Marine Scotland can be accessed here ✉

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Forthcoming ACC Meetings Noted:</th>
<th>Available References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/04/2013</td>
<td>Disability Advisory Group</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/04/2013</td>
<td>Audit and Risk Committee</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/04/2013</td>
<td>City of Culture 2017 Sub Committee</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/04/2013</td>
<td>Corporate Policy and Performance Committee</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/04/2013</td>
<td>Local Review Body of Aberdeen City Council</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/04/2013</td>
<td>Development Management Sub Committee</td>
<td>Further details ✉</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL NEWS**

● **Education, Learning and Leisure Committee:** Plans to hold a mock independence referendum in schools, a youth-led approach to tackling bullying, an update on a review of the Aberdeenshire school estate and the future of Banff & Buchan College were among items discussed at the latest meeting of Aberdeenshire Council’s Education, Learning and Leisure Committee on 21 March.

The Committee also agreed nominations to a number of outside bodies as follows: County of Banff Bursary Fund - Cllr Findlater; Dick Bequest Trust - Cllrs Buchan and Davidson; Robb’s Trust - Cllrs Buchan, Davidson and Hood; Robert Nicol Trust - Cllr McKay; Aberdeenshire Sports Council - Cllr McKay (sub: Cllr Pirie). A decision on nominations to the Scottish Lighthouse Museum was deferred for consideration by the full council.

A project to hold a mock referendum on independence for Scotland in Aberdeenshire’s secondary schools was warmly welcomed by the committee. Councillors heard Aberdeenshire Council has previously conducted successful mock elections in schools, and that the committee had previously given strong support for continuing the approach on an ongoing basis. Of pupils who took part in mock elections in 2011, an impressive 76% said they had a better understanding of the importance of voting as a result, with 60% supportive of similar events before each major election, and 47% saying the were more interested in politics and current affairs. The schools referendum on independence will take place this autumn, with future activities including school based elections for the European Parliament in 2014, the UK Parliament in 2015, and the Scottish Parliament in 2016.

Financial support for a range of ‘lifelong learning’ organisations in the north-east was agreed by the committee. It was agreed that £160,000 be offered to Historic Scotland for support of Duff House in Banff. Grampian Transport Museum in Alford is to be offered £20,000, the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses at Fraserburgh £90,000, and Aberdeen Foyer £82,250.
Consultation on a 2013-16 Education, Learning and Leisure service plan is to take place, following support by the committee. The updated document will take account of the Scottish Government’s strategic objectives, national outcomes, community planning priorities and reform priorities. It will also recognise the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership’s Single Outcome Agreement, the council’s strategic plan themes and priorities, and the council’s budget for the period. Consultation won the plan will take place with key stakeholders over the course of the coming month, with a view to the draft plan being considered by the committee in May.

An annual update on the next steps for pupils ending their school career in Aberdeenshire shows that the majority continue to achieve positive outcomes. The report, concerning pupils who left school during the academic year 2011/12, outlined figures for those who had gone on to higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work and activity agreements, as well as those who are unemployed. In 2011/12, 93.6% of school leavers achieved a positive destination, ahead of the Scottish average of 89.9%.

Proposals that would see Banff and Buchan Further Education College and Aberdeen College work together on a regional basis were also considered by the committee. The proposals stem from the Report of the Review of Further Education Governance in Scotland carried out by Professor Russel Griggs, which proposes 12 regional partnerships of colleges as opposed to 41 separate further education institutions. Committee members spoke of the importance of ensuring Banff and Buchan College doesn’t ‘lose out’ under the proposals, as well as local links that have been established in Aberdeenshire. A further report on the proposals will come back before the committee in October.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Forthcoming Aberdeenshire Council Meetings Noted</th>
<th>Available References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/04/2013</td>
<td>Banff And Buchan Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/04/2013</td>
<td>Marr Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/04/2013</td>
<td>Policy And Resources Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/04/2013</td>
<td>Buchan Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/04/2013</td>
<td>Garioch Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/04/2013</td>
<td>Aberdeenshire Council</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/04/2013</td>
<td>Kincardine And Mearns Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/04/2013</td>
<td>Formartine Area Committee</td>
<td>Further details</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT NEWS

● Scottish Parliament in Recess: Friday 29 March - Monday 15 April.

● Progress of Bills:
  The Regulatory Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced on 27 March; full details here  
  The Forth Road Bridge Bill was passed at Stage 1 on 26 March; full details here  
  The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill was passed at Stage 1 on 27 March; full details here  
  The Stage 1 debate in Parliament can be accessed here  
  The High Hedges (Scotland) Bill was passed at Stage 3 on 28 March; full details here ? Full details here
  http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/55315.aspx

● National strategy on purposeful activity in prisons: A strategy to ensure all prisoners in Scotland are offered equal access to purposeful activities such as work, education and rehabilitation programmes, has been urged by the Justice Committee in its report published on 28 March. Access detail here

● New ‘Stamp Duty’ Tax: The Finance Committee has registered its support for the general principles of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Scotland) Bill. The Bill, which introduces Scotland’s replacement on stamp duty tax, will provide the rules and structure which will impose a tax on anyone buying, leasing or taking other rights (such as options to buy) over land and property in Scotland. Access detail here
Ministerial leadership on Gypsy/Travellers: Ministerial leadership and a national public awareness campaign to deter discrimination against Gypsy/Travellers have been demanded by the Equal Opportunities Committee. The Where Gypsy/Travellers Live inquiry highlights the sheer frustration felt by both the community and the Committee that the same issues and recommendations raised by the Committee’s predecessor in 2001 remain unresolved. 

Scottish Parliament Publications & Briefings

Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) Briefings

Three new briefings available:

SB 13-16 High Hedges (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3 - The High Hedges (Scotland) Bill is a Members’ Bill and was introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 2 October 2012 by Mark McDonald MSP. With regard to the Bill, the Scottish Government stated that it would support Mr McDonald and government officials have been working with Mr McDonald on all aspects of the Bill as it has progressed through the Parliament. The Bill seeks to provide a solution to the problem of high hedges which interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of domestic property.

SB 13-17 Passported Benefits - Currently, if a claimant is entitled to a means tested benefit, certain tax credits, or disability-related benefits, they can also be automatically eligible for a range of other support, including free school lunches, ‘blue badge’ parking permits and health benefits such as free prescriptions. These are known as ‘passported’ benefits. Although social security is a reserved matter, the Scottish Government uses the receipt of various welfare benefits as a proxy measure for low-income or disability when assessing entitlement to Scottish-controlled passported benefits. The introduction of Universal Credit (UC) in October 2013 and the move from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in April 2013, will bring radical changes to the benefits system. As such, the eligibility criteria for passported benefits need to be reviewed.

SB 13-18 Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill - The background and provisions of the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill are outlined.

Scottish Government News

Dementia Care: The Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, Alex Neil, stated that people diagnosed with dementia will see a “significantly improvement” in the help and advice they receive as a new national commitment is implemented from April 1. The commitment will see a named support worker creating tailored care plans to help people with dementia and their families understand the illness, manage its symptoms and plan for future care. The commitment is based on advice from Alzheimer Scotland and was made possible following significant research and practical work by the charity to address this major public health issue.

Decrofting: Action is being taken to deal with the difficulties owner-occupier crofters are facing when decrofting their croft land. The Environment Minister Paul Wheelhouse announced that the Scottish Government will bring forward a Bill as soon as possible after the Easter recess to address this issue which will require amending crofting legislation.

First Minister to attend Scotland Week: The First Minister, Alex Salmond, will attend Scotland Week in New York. He last attended Scotland Week in 2008 and is returning to promote Scotland on the world stage through business and tourism engagements, as well as fulfil invitations to undertake a number of high-level speaking engagements. The first leg of the visit in New York will see the FM attend an SDI trade and industry reception, deliver speeches at the Carnegie Council and Princeton. He will also attend the launch of VisitScotland’s Homecoming 2014 tourism campaign focusing on the US market. Other events the First Minister will be attending include officially starting the 10th annual Scotland Run in Central Park and the opening of an exhibition being staged by former Barlinnie prison officer David Eustace turned international photographer which showcases landscapes as part of the Year of Natural Scotland. The FM will then move on to Washington DC where he will give a speech at the Brookings Institution. He will also be the guest of honour at the annual Tartan Day reception which is attended by politicians at the US Capitol.
and will also have a meeting with the US Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner. The First Minister’s programme will run alongside a Scottish parliament delegation being led by the Presiding Officer who will also be promoting Scotland in the US. Access more detail here

- **Quality Meat Scotland board members appointed:** The Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead has announced two new appointees to the board of Quality Meat Scotland - Louise Welsh and Ronnie Eunson. The appointments will be for four years and will run from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2017. (After a lengthy career in journalism, including 10 years at BBC Scotland, Louise Welsh was Head of Communications at QMS and helped establish its work in health and education. She is currently Agriculture Manager for Morrison’s, the supermarket chain and has over 10 years’ experience of working in the food industry. Ronnie Eunson is a sheep and beef farmer in Shetland and specialises in supplying mainland business with organic products. He is also Chair of Shetland Livestock Marketing Group which operates the auctions mart and abattoir.) Access more detail here

- **2014 Year of Homecoming:** The First Minister has officially unveiled the first phase of the year-long programme of events. Around 100 events were unveiled at the launch, with hundreds more expected to be unveiled over the next few months. This includes many new events, established events which will have a new homecoming element for 2014 and those that have joined through the partner programme to benefit from in-kind marketing. The five themes for Homecoming 2014 - active, food and drink, creative, natural and ancestry are all represented. Brand new events include the John Muir Festival in East Lothian to herald the opening of the John Muir coast to coast route, the Forth Bridges Festival to mark its 50th anniversary, a spectacular Ryder Cup Opening Concert, the Findhorn Bay Arts Festival in Moray, the World Sheepdog Trials in Tain and the European Festival of Brass based in Perthshire. Access Homecoming 2014 site

- **Bòrd na Gàidhlig Cathriache appointment:** Dr Alasdair Allan, Scotland’s Languages Minister, has announced the appointment of a new Cathriache (Chair) to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the national Gaelic language body. Iain Campbell becomes Cathriache of this statutory Non Departmental Public Body responsible for safeguarding the future of Gaelic in Scotland; for promoting the use and understanding of the Gaelic language and for developing and supporting Gaelic education and culture. This appointment will be for four years and will run from March 4, 2013 to March 3, 2017. (Iain Campbell is a native Gaelic speaker, originally from South Uist. He is currently the Senior Project Manager of Soillse, an inter-University partnership project involved in a range of research areas associated with Gaelic language maintenance and revitalisation. He is an experienced senior manager and researcher with Masters Degrees in Regional Economics, Business Administration and Rural Development. He also represents Bòrd na Gàidhlig on the Board of MG ALBA and is a member of the BBC Trust Audience Council for Scotland.) Access more detail here

- **Focus on attainment in schools:** Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell, delivering a speech on attainment at the University of Glasgow, included a number of announcements including an Improvement Partnership Programme to partner schools with similar demographic backgrounds but different results to help them learn from good practice. The speech, From good to great: building equity and success in Scottish education, can be accessed here

---

**UK PARLIAMENT NEWS**

### House of Commons

- The House of Commons is currently in recess. The House will next sit on Monday 15 April 2013.

- **The Budget:** The Chancellor, George Osborne, delivered his budget speech on Wednesday 20 March. The Government had previously announced that its acceptance of the Heseltine Review recommendation for a Single Local Growth Fund, open to competitive bids from Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). It was announced that Sir Andrew Witty, Chief Executive of Glaxo Smith Kline, will lead a review into the involvement of universities in LEPs and other drivers of local growth. There will also now be further consideration and consultation regarding Government plans to extend VAT exemption to for-profit providers of higher education. Full details of the Budget can be accesses here – Treasury report and – Chancellor’s speech
Oral Answers to Questions – **International Students** (21/3/2013)

Richard Fuller: What recent assessment he has made of the costs and benefits of international students to the UK economy.

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): International students provide enormous economic and cultural benefits to the UK. Education exports from further and higher education contribute some £9 billion to the economy. We therefore stated in January that we will place no cap on the number of genuine students coming from across the world to study in this country.

Richard Fuller: I thank the Minister for that answer. We all understand the importance of clearing up the chaotic mess of immigration left by the last Government and the attention that the public pay to reducing the total numbers, but many of us would like to see student numbers excluded from our migration statistics. The economic case has been made by Universities UK and the 1994 Group. Will the Minister reassure me that he is sensitive to these representations?

Mr Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. The first priority was to eliminate abuse so that people can have confidence that students are legitimate. We have now said that we will disaggregate the statistics so that students are separately identified. The next step is a positive education export strategy, which we will produce before the summer.

Mark Lazarowicz: The Royal Botanic Gardens in my constituency carries out world-leading research that benefits the UK in many ways. International students and interns are an important part of that work, but the gardens’ particular organisational status sometimes makes it difficult to obtain visas for them. If I write to the Minister with the details, will he, perhaps in conjunction with his colleagues in the Home Office, look at this issue to help support its important work?

Mr Willetts: I am always happy to work with the Minister for Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), to iron out such problems, but the general point is very simple: genuine, legitimate students are allowed into this country and there is no limit on the numbers.

Shabana Mahmood: The Minister tries to paint a rosy picture, but the facts are that the recent drop in net migration is due to 38,000 fewer international students coming to this country. His policy is choking growth in our seventh-largest export industry, worth billions of pounds, at a time when our economy is flatlining. It is clear that the Minister is too weak to make the case for our world-class universities around the world and too weak to lobby his Government colleagues to change course. Does he agree with me that the one genuine achievement of the net migration pledge has been a net decrease in his own credibility?

Mr Willetts: The hon. Lady should understand that we have a clear policy: there is no limit on the number of students. I went with the Prime Minister on his most recent trade mission to India, accompanied by leading vice-chancellors, to communicate clearly and directly to one of our most important markets for overseas students that they are welcome to come and study in the UK. [Source](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-exports-estimating-their-value-to-the-uk)

Written Answers to Questions – **Overseas Students: Entry Clearances** (19/3/2013)

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the number of visa-holding foreign undergraduate and graduate students with visas on (a) economic growth and (b) average university funding.

Mr Willetts: We have not made any specific assessment on the effect that visa holding overseas students have made on economic growth. However, the value of further and higher education exports (which includes economic value brought to the economy by overseas students) was valued at £9 billion in 2009/09 and we estimate this will double by 2025.

BIS recently released a report on HE Education Exports which can be found here: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-exports-estimating-their-value-to-the-uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-exports-estimating-their-value-to-the-uk)

No specific assessment of the effect of overseas visa holding students on average university funding has been made. However, in 2011/12, tuition fee income from non-EU students was worth around £3.2 billion in UK Higher Education Institutions, up from around £2.6 billion in 2009/10. This represents around 12% of total UK HEIs income or around 36% of all tuition fee income received by HEIs.

Written Answers to Questions – **Graduates: Languages** (19/3/2013)

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the supply of UK graduates with ASEAN language skills over the next decade. [148619]

Mr Willetts: Our higher education system is demand led and we do not forecast future student numbers in particular disciplines. Institutions make decisions on which courses to run informed by analysis of both student and employer demand. Information specifically referring to those recently qualifying in ASEAN language courses is not available.
House of Lords

● The House of Lords is currently in recess. The House will next sit on Monday 15 April 2013.

● Lords Debate on Higher Education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Science and Technology Committee Report (21/3/2013): The Motion to Take Note by Lord Willis of Knaresborough introduced the debate on the Committee's inquiry into higher education in STEM subjects and the Government's response. Key elements included: need for investment in postgraduate education; need to encourage school students to take up STEM subjects; lack of useful data on supply and demand for STEM subjects and graduates. 
Debate can be accessed here <

● Lords Written Answers - Higher Education: Foreign Students
Question Asked by Lord Laird: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Taylor of Holbeach on 4 March (WA 367), for how long non-European Union students sponsored by a licensed employer under tier 2 of the points-based system because of an offer of an approved graduate-level job paying at least £20,000 have leave to remain in the United Kingdom; whether such time qualifies toward obtaining United Kingdom nationality; why the figure of £20,000 was chosen; what checks are made to ascertain whether students take up the jobs offered; whether there is a cap on numbers in that category; and how many such applications have been made to date.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Taylor of Holbeach): The maximum period someone is permitted to stay in the United Kingdom under the tier two (general) category of the points-based system is six years. Such time can count towards obtaining British citizenship.

The £20,000 threshold is based on analysis by the Migration Advisory Committee in 2009, which found that £20,000 was roughly equivalent to the 30th percentile of the earnings distribution for full-time workers. They concluded that it is difficult to argue that a job paying less than this is sufficiently skilled to qualify for tier 2.

Tier 2 sponsors are required to report to the UK Border Agency if a migrant they intend to sponsor and to whom they have assigned a certificate of sponsorship does not take up the post offered to them. UK Border Agency compliance officers conduct visits to tier two sponsors to check that they are making these required reports. There is no cap on the numbers of non-European Economic Area students permitted to switch into tier two (general) from tier four or any of its predecessor student immigration categories.

It is not possible to say how many applications have been made by non-European Economic Area students because this would incur disproportionate costs.

GENERAL ROUND-UP

● Event: International Higher Education Forum - Competing globally in a crowded market -17 April 2013 (organised by Universities UK and the International Unit in partnership with Hobsons)
Overview: Higher education is one of our most valuable exports, and the UK is a preferred destination for hundreds of thousands of international students and world-leading academics. In recent times, we have seen a number of challenges to the UK's reputation from the impact of government immigration reforms to the changes to fees and funding in England. Despite these challenges, the ingredients that make UK higher education such an attractive prospect are still in place â€“ as a sector we just need to communicate them more coherently and effectively.

The International Higher Education Forum aims to help universities and other organisations overcome these challenges and find ways to work together. At the event you will hear from university professionals who have successfully weathered the storm, and learn how our international counterparts have responded to similar challenges to those we now face. Attendees will also have a chance to help shape plans to market UK higher education more effectively.

Keynote speaker: Rt Hon. David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science
Chair: Professor Colin Riordan, Chair of the UK Higher Education International Unit, Chair of the Universities UK International Policy Network and Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University
Confirmed speakers include:
Prof. Ella Ritchie OBE, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University
Hon. Phil Honeywood, Executive Director, International Education Association of Australia
Duncan Findlater, Director of Product and Client Services, Hobsons
James Richardson, Director of International Development, Sheffield Hallam University (Winner of the 2012 HEIST marketing Gold Award for Best International Student Recruitment Campaign)
Daniel Stevens, International Students' Officer, NUS
Prof. Andrew Coats, Joint Academic Vice-President, Monash-Warwick Alliance
Vincenzo Raimo, Director of the International Office, University of Nottingham
Mike Gibbons, Director, International Development, University of Manchester and Executive Member, British Universities International Liaison Association

Full details can be accessed here

Learned & Professional Bodies

● **Institution of Structural Engineers**; **Young Researchers’ Conference**: The next generation of structural engineers enthusiastically participated in the Institution’s Young Researchers' Conference (YRC) on 14 March 2013. [Young Researchers' Conference – constructive experience for up-and-coming structural engineers](#)

● **Institution of Mechanical Engineers**: In the first quarter of 2013, the Institution has been monitoring political developments and providing expertise to policy makers, to ensure that the voice of engineers is heard by Governments. The Institution’s policy statements cover a wide range of policy areas, specifically designed for the public affairs environment. They contain concise background information on the chosen subject and practical engineering recommendations and solutions. Policy statements are collated under the following themes: Energy; Environment; Transport; Education; Manufacturing. [The Institution provides expert leadership to Government](#)

● **British Science Association**: The Big Bang Fair was opened, this year, by the cheers and screams of hundreds of excited school children, as part of a science experiment coordinated by Greg Foot and Vince Cable MP. [MPs and Ministers galore at the National Science + Engineering Competition Finals](#)

● **Royal Society of Edinburgh**: The Royal Society of Edinburgh has named its new Fellows for 2013, including two University of Aberdeen colleagues. [New Fellows Elected](#)

● **British Academy**: The British Academy has responded to the call by Research Councils UK (RCUK) for comments on its Open Access Policy and Supporting Guidance, published earlier this month. In its statement, the Academy criticises the limited response time allowed by RCUK for comments on such an important policy. [British Academy says RCUK’s open access policy fails to consider its impact on humanities and social sciences](#)

● **IET**: The first Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering was awarded to five pioneers of the internet and worldwide web at a ceremony at the Royal Academy of Engineering. [New Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering seen as a ‘game-changer’](#)

● **Institute of Physics**: Claire Woollacott, 24, a PhD Postgraduate Research Student from the School of Physics in the College of Engineering, Mathematical and Physical Sciences at the University of Exeter, struck Gold at a competition in the House of Commons, for the excellence of her physics research, walking away with a £3,000 prize. [Exeter researcher strikes Gold with Physics display in Parliament](#)

The Institute of Physics (IOP) has also welcomed the report **Bridging the valley of death: improving the commercialisation of research**, published on 13 March by the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons. [Improving the commercialisation of research](#)

Following the publication of the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) report, **Higher education in England, Impact of the 2012 reforms**, Professor Sir Peter Knight, President of the Institute of Physics (IOP), highlights the long-term growth in the number of students choosing to study physics at university. [Response to Higher Education Impact Report](#)
● **The Royal Society:** Royal Society Research Professorships have been awarded to three world-class scientists whose research interests cover topics ranging from climate to cognition. [Top scientists receive Royal Society Research Professorships to fund long-term UK research](#)  

● **The Royal Society of Chemistry:** Chris Spicer, 25, a PhD student in the chemistry department at the University of Oxford, struck gold at a competition in the House of Commons, for the excellence of his chemistry research, walking away with a £3,000 prize. [Oxford researcher strikes gold with chemistry display in Parliament](#)  

**The Budget** - The UK risks slipping into the margin of world competitiveness without further investment in science, says the Royal Society of Chemistry. [RSC urges government to boost funding for science research ahead of Budget](#)  

● **Institution of Structural Engineers:** Young Researchers' Conference: The next generation of structural engineers enthusiastically participated in the Institution's Young Researchers' Conference (YRC) on 14 March 2013. [Young Researchers' Conference – constructive experience for up-and-coming structural engineers](#)  

ENDS