

Westminster Higher Education Forum policy conference:

Next steps for the financial sustainability and long-term funding of higher education in England

Timing: Morning, Monday, 18th May 2026

Taking place online



Draft agenda subject to change

- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 9.05 **Assessing the current financial sustainability of the higher education sector**
Horia Teodorescu, Policy Adviser, Universities UK
Questions and comments from the floor
- 9.30 **Immediate priorities for improving HE finances**
assessing existing funding frameworks | balancing public and private contributions | managing demand and disparities across institutions | tuition fee and maintenance loan reform | inflation-linking, and repayment threshold considerations | supporting equity, access, and participation | targeted grants, indexation, and funding adjustments | international student income and strategy | impact of immigration reforms on compliance, diversification, and brand positioning | sustaining high-cost and strategic provision | identifying institutions at risk and planning for insolvency contingencies | managing operational pressures, administrative capacity, and teaching resources | institutional operating model reform and programme portfolio management | strategic trade-offs in resource allocation and long-term institutional planning
Chris Petts, Partner, Advisory, Grant Thornton
Ronke Akintan, President, Worcester Students' Union
Mark Jaynes, Partner, CIL Strategy Consultants
Senior representative, university
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.15 **Strategies for developing alternative funding models for longer-term financial sustainability**
Senior representative, sector body
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.40 **Chair's closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 10.45 Break
- 10.55 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 11.00 **Approaches to building resilience - income diversification and strategic adaptation**
options for commercial, transnational, and international revenue growth | enhancing governance and capability for effective expansion | alignment of initiatives with national priorities and Industrial Strategy goals | optimising alternative business models and partnerships | advancing research commercialisation, spin-outs, short courses, modular provision, and industry collaborations | learning from global approaches | overcoming barriers to scalable diversification amid regulatory and cost pressures | operational readiness for Lifelong Learning Entitlement delivery and flexible provision | maintaining teaching quality and student experience alongside diversification strategies
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, investment
Senior representative, spin-out
Senior representative, industry
Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.40 **Options for long-term collaboration and mergers between higher education institutions**
Senior representative, university
- 11.50 **Priorities for financial regulation, governance, and long-term sustainability of higher education**
expected impact of the international student levy | recruitment and market diversification strategies | supporting institutional resilience | balancing expansion with quality, retention, and long-term viability | regulatory oversight and evolving governance frameworks | supporting global competitiveness and access to international student markets | options for mergers and long-term collaboration strategies | role of the Office for Students in shaping institutional strategy | financial planning, stress testing, and risk management | alignment of institutional strategy with national priorities, Industrial Strategy goals, and lifelong learning objectives | sustaining strategically important teaching and research provision | scenario planning, financial forecasting, and liquidity assessment in institutional planning | interaction of regulatory frameworks with participation objectives and the rollout of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement
Rory O'Ceallaigh, Chair, Board of Trustees, and President, Lancaster University Students' Union
Senior representative, university
Senior commentator
- 12.05 Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.30 **Regulatory and policy considerations for supporting the long-term financial resilience of higher education**
Will Dent, Head, Financial Sustainability, Office for Students
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.55 **Chair's and Westminster Higher Education Forum closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
Sean Cudmore, Westminster Higher Education Forum