

The impact of COVID-19 on UK – Cyprus relations in education

UK universities remain committed towards quality education and ensuring the provision of pastoral care to students who choose Britain as their destination, Universities UK International (UUKI) Vivienne Stern underlines in the latest of our #DynamicUK webinars.

The webinar, hosted by the British High Commission and conducted by University of Nicosia's Associate Professor Dr. Christina Hajisoteriou, reveals how the UK will keep supporting Cypriot students following UK's exit from the EU as well as the benefits of studying in the UK as a freshman or as a researcher. Stern, who has over 20 years' experience of working in higher education policy and politics at national and international level, discussed four highly significant topics.

The topics cover everything from an overview of the UK – Cyprus relationship in education and research, coupled with the benefits of studying at a UK university to the Brexit transition and the COVID-19 effects to the academic community.

UK academics and Cypriot academics are working together, they're designing courses together, and they are making sure that Cypriot students have access to the best of both worlds. I think it's really important to try and foster and grow that. I think it tells a very strong story that UK universities are very serious about not only providing high quality education but also making sure that they provide excellent pastoral care to students that come to study with us.

Stern explains how the process of attending UK universities may have changed, but the opportunities and quality markets including rank position, have not. She notes that UK universities are committed in helping researchers and new students create strong bonds with their academic community and grow to their full potential.

Prior to her role in UUKI, Vivienne was Head of Political Affairs at Universities UK, and led the sector's response to several major pieces of legislation relating to universities. Before that she worked for the Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, and as policy specialist. Moreover, she's a member of several Boards and advisory committees.

Discover more and gain insights on the UK – Cyprus relationship in education and research, by watching the entire webinar in the video below.

[#DynamicUK – Vivienne Stern discusses education ties between the UK and Cyprus](#)

The British High Commission has opened up an invitation to six highly innovative British professionals from various industries to share their knowledge and expertise on how the current pandemic has affected their fields.

Check out our social media channels for more exciting upcoming discussions!

Education Secretary selects preferred candidate for new Office for Students Chair

The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has named Lord Wharton of Yarm as his preferred candidate to be the next Chair of the Office for Students, following approval by the Prime Minister.

Lord Wharton will now go on to attend a pre-appointment hearing before the Education Select Committee on a date to be confirmed by the Committee.

As the independent regulator of higher education in England, the Office for Students (OfS) aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling university experience that enriches their lives and careers.

Lord Wharton has been selected following a rigorous assessment process conducted in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

He will take over from Sir Michael Barber whose appointment ends on 31 March 2021.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I look forward to finalising the appointment of Lord Wharton as the next Chair of the OfS who will bring strategic direction to the role.

He will play a vital part in ensuring students from all backgrounds are at the heart of the higher education system, receiving a high quality education and value for money from our universities.

I am very thankful to Sir Michael for his work setting up and transforming the Office for Students and particularly for his work tackling unconditional offers, senior executive pay and grade

inflation.

The Chair leads the OfS at board level, working with Ministers and the Chief Executive to provide clear leadership and priorities for the next phase of the OfS' critical work.

Lord Wharton was the Chairman of Hume Brophy UK Communications up until November 2020. He served as the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development from July 2016 to June 2017 and served as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, with responsibility for Local Growth and the Northern Powerhouse from May 2015 until July 2016. Prior to that he worked as a solicitor. He was awarded a life peerage to the House of Lords in September 2020.

Following his pre-appointment hearing, the Education Select Committee will publish their recommendations, which the Education Secretary will consider before deciding whether to finalise the appointment.

Government publishes response to audit review

- Government publishes response to independent review by Sir Tony Redmond on council financial reporting
- Government commits to measures that will help councils improve transparency and accountability
- An additional £15 million for councils to help them deliver the recommendations

The government has published its [response](#) to the independent review into the effectiveness of local audit which was carried out by Sir Tony Redmond earlier this year.

The review, launched in July 2019, examined whether the reporting regimes are robust enough to spot early warning signs, such as risks from commercial investments, to protect public funds and better serve taxpayers.

The response sets out how we will implement many of the recommendations made by Sir Tony Redmond, including swift action to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the local audit system and improvements to make financial information more transparent.

In particular, councils will be required to produce an easily accessible statement of their accounts which will make it easier for taxpayers and service users to hold them to account.

An additional £15 million will be provided in 2021-22 to support councils fund the likely increase in audit fees and to produce these annual statements.

Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick said:

It is vital that there is a robust audit system in place across local government to deliver value for money, accountability and transparency for the taxpayer. We've seen in Croydon and Nottingham the consequences when that isn't the case.

I would like to thank Sir Tony Redmond for his thorough review. It is an important step towards strengthening the local audit regime, and I have announced additional funding today to ensure we can now begin implementing his recommendations.

The government response sets out a number of measures. These include:

- Temporarily extending the deadline to 30 September for the publication of local authorities' audited accounts to give them more time to address any issues
- Making it easier for PSAA, councils and audit firms to agree appropriate fee scales to meet the cost of additional audit work, and
- Working with partner organisations such as CIPFA, the ICAEW and the FRC to improve the long-term supply of well-trained local auditors
- Requiring councils to produce an easily accessible annual statement of their service costs.
- Requiring auditors to present their findings to a Full Council meeting every year, helping councillors and residents better hold councils to account.

A call for evidence was opened last year seeking views from practitioners who work in the local government sector, the audit community, representative bodies and other relevant or interested parties.

Councils in England are responsible for 22% of total UK public sector expenditure.

The responsibilities for local authority audits and how they are conducted is set out within the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

The 2014 Act gave effect to government manifesto commitments to abolish the Audit Commission and its centralised performance and inspection regimes and put in place a new localised audit regime, refocussing local accountability on improved transparency.

The abolition of the Commission centralised audit regime and its top down inspection was estimated to save taxpayers £1.2 billion over 10 years.

First ballot of the 2021 Youth Mobility Scheme for Taiwanese youth

There are a total of 1,000 places available to Taiwanese youth for 2021. 800 applicants will be selected in the first ballot in January, while the remainder of the places will be made available in a second ballot in July 2021. If your application is successful you will be able to live, work and study in the UK for up to 2 years.

How to apply

If you would like to apply for the scheme you should send one email per applicant to: Taiwan.YMS2021@FCD0.gov.uk between midday (12pm) on Monday 25 January 2021 to midday on Wednesday 27 January 2021 (Taiwan time).

The header or subject line of your email must contain your name, date of birth (DD/MM/YYYY) and passport number as shown in your passport.

This must be written in English only.

For example: WU Janice – 31/03/2000 – Passport123456789

The main body of your email should include the following information, written in English:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Passport number
- Mobile phone number

The email account will only be open for 48 hours and all emails received within this timeframe will be sent an automated reply confirming receipt.

Once the ballot closes 800 applicants will be chosen at random by UKVI. If you have been successful a second email will be sent to you from week commencing 8 February to confirm acceptance and provide further instructions on how to make an appointment, along with documentary evidence required to apply for your entry clearance.

Please note successful applicants must prepare online applications and online credit card payments no later than 8 March 2021. Failure to submit your payment online by this date will automatically remove your name from the list and your allocation will be retracted. After you have paid online you have 90 days to submit your paperwork for consideration.

If you are a Taiwanese youth living overseas you can also apply following the instructions above, and if you are chosen to apply you will be able to do so

in your country/territory of residence. Applications cannot be submitted for the Youth Mobility Scheme in the UK.

If you're unsuccessful you will receive an email by 12 February and no further action is required. Further information about the scheme [can be found on GOV.UK](#) and any enquiries relating to the application process, online application forms and questions in general should be directed to the [UKVI International Enquiry Line](#).

Thematic update on progress against the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations

These documents provide updates on the progress that has been made to implement the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report. They include updates from the relevant government departments and assurances received from relevant public authorities – including the London Fire Brigade (LFB), National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and other emergency services – on their progress to address and implement the Phase 1 recommendations directed to them.

These updates, and the government's commitment to update regularly, will bring considerable transparency to what is a vitally important area of work.

These documents do not reflect finalised government policy.