

News story: Two-year university courses come a step closer

The government has today, Friday 24 February, tabled amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill to encourage more flexible learning and increased choice for students.

These include a key amendment to enable universities to offer more accelerated courses, including 2-year courses, where content is condensed into a shorter period.

This amendment would enable a higher annual fee limit to be set for accelerated courses, subject to Parliamentary approval. This amendment responds to evidence which shows that inflexible fee structures are seen as a major barrier to the availability of accelerated courses, with many universities unable to deliver their traditional 3-year courses in two years because of the existing limit on annual fees.

This delivers on a manifesto commitment to encourage universities to offer more 2-year courses and extends the opportunity to study at England's world-class universities to even more people.

The government intends to consult on the detail of how to deliver higher annual fee limits for accelerated courses ahead of tabling secondary legislation. The proposals will include clear measures to ensure the limit would only apply to accelerated courses.

Other important amendments to the bill tabled today include:

- an amendment which will help students to store up academic credits and to switch institution more easily
- an amendment which will place a requirement on the new sector regulator – the Office for Students – to have regard to institutional autonomy in everything that it does
- amendments that will guarantee that the standards against which providers are assessed are determined by the higher education sector
- an amendment that enshrines in law for the first time the Haldane Principle, which dictates that decisions on individual proposals should be reviewed and made by experts in their fields; this means with that all governments will, in the future, need to have regard to the Haldane Principle when making a grant or giving directions to UK Research and Innovation – the government's single strategic research and innovation funding body

Speaking at the Universities UK conference in London, Jo Johnson, the Minister for Universities and Science, said:

Change is long overdue and this bill gives us the chance to introduce new ways of learning. Students are crying out for more

flexible courses that enable them to get into and back into work more quickly, and courses that equip them with the skills that the modern workplace needs.

I absolutely recognise that for many students the classic 3-year model will remain the preferred option but that cannot be the only option. That is why we have tabled amendments that give real flexibility in learning.

These changes will not mean any compromise in quality, or an increase in overall degree costs for students. The tuition fees for a student taking an accelerated degree will never be more, in total, than those for the same degree over a longer time period. It is also likely that students will end up paying less overall because they will have fewer years of maintenance costs and a real chance of entering the workforce more quickly.

Read the [entire speech](#).

News story: Current outage of online applications

We are currently experiencing an outage to a number of our online systems.

This includes the Insolvency Register, ISCIS Online, Find an Insolvency Practitioner, Find an Official Receiver, the Debt Relief Order web app, CHAMP and IP Upload.

Technicians are investigating the issue and are working to resolve the outage as quickly as possible.

We apologise for any inconvenience caused by this temporary disruption to our services.

Avian Influenza – Next Steps

The current Prevention Zone, which expires on 28 February, requires all keepers of poultry and other captive birds in Wales to keep their birds indoors or take all appropriate steps to keep them separate from wild birds,

and to enhance biosecurity.

The new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone, which will be in place from 28 February to 30 April, requires all keepers in Wales to put in place mandatory biosecurity measures and complete a [self assessment of biosecurity measures](#) on their premises. Following this, keepers should then adopt one or more of the following: (i) house their birds, (ii) keep them totally separate from wild birds, by use of netting etc or (iii) allow controlled access to outside areas, subject to applying [additional risk mitigation measures](#).

Dr Christianne Glossop said:

“The Cabinet Secretary’s decision to put in place a new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone, covering the whole of Wales, until 30 April is based on sound expert and industry advice.

“The risk of infection from wild birds will not decrease in the coming weeks. The changes to the new Prevention Zone are proportionate and place the onus on the keeper to select the best option for their circumstances to protect their birds. They must, however, ensure compliance with the additional risk mitigation measures.”

The Chief Veterinary Officer also spoke of the importance of keepers remaining vigilant for signs for the disease and to continue to practice the very highest levels of biosecurity:

“Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease, and any suspicion should be reported immediately to the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Keepers should practice the highest levels of biosecurity if they are to minimise the risk of infection.

“I continue to strongly encourage all poultry keepers, even those with fewer than 50 birds, to provide their details to the Poultry Register. This will ensure they can be contacted immediately, via email or text update, in an avian disease outbreak enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity.”

Dr Gavin Watkins, a senior veterinary officer within the Welsh Government has recorded a [video message](#) with information and advice on the requirements of the new Avian Influenza Prevention Zone.

Further guidance, contact details, latest developments and a copy of the new Declaration are available on the [Welsh Government website](#).

[Press release: Planned roadworks in Kent and Sussex: weekly summary for Monday 27 February to Sunday 5 March 2017](#)

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of 24 February but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

M2 junctions 2 to 3, Kent: structure inspections

Work to improve safety begin this week on the M2. There will lane closures in both directions between junction 2 and 3 on Monday 27 February for 5 nights between 8pm and 6am. Inspections are expected to be complete by mid March.

M20 junctions 3 to 5, Kent: smart motorway surveys

Work to improve journeys continue this week on the M20 between junctions 3 and 5. There will be various lane closures in both directions on Monday 27 February for 5 nights, between 8pm and 6am. Surveys are scheduled to be complete in April 2017.

M20 junctions 9 to 13, Kent: litter clearance

Work to improve journeys take place this week on the M20 by undertaking litter clearance. There will be various slip road closures each night from Monday 27 February for 5 nights between 8pm and 6am. Traffic will be diverted via the next junction of the motorway.

M23 junctions 8 to 10a, South Nutfield to Crawley: smart motorway surveys

Work to improve journeys continue this week on the M23 between junctions 8 and 10a. There will be various lane closures in place in both directions overnight on Monday 27 February for 5 nights, between 8pm and 6am. Surveys are scheduled to be complete in April 2017.

A2 Darenth to Bean, Kent: carriageway resurfacing

Work to improve journeys continue this week on the A2. There will be a full closure between the Darenth A282 junction and the Bean B255 junction on Monday 27 February for 5 nights between 10pm and 6am. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the M25 Junction 1a, A206 and B255. Works are scheduled to be complete in early March 2017.

A2 Canterbury, Kent: resurfacing

Work to improve journeys take place this week on the A2 between Wincheap and Brenley. There will be a full closure in place on the westbound carriageway between Whitfield A256 junction and the Brenley junction A299 on Monday 27 February for 4 nights between 8pm and 6am. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A256, and the A299.

A21 Battle, Sussex: tree works

Work to improve safety commence this week on the A21 between Robertsbridge and Hastings. There will be a full closure in place between Johns Cross and Westfield on Monday 27 February for 4 nights between 8pm and 6am. A clearly signed diversion will be in place via the A2100.

A21 Tonbridge to Pembury, Kent: major improvement

Work to improve journeys on the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury continues this week. A 40mph speed limit remains in place 24/7 between the Vauxhall interchange and the A228. Two way traffic lights will be in place on the A21 overnight between 8pm and 6am from Monday 27 February for five nights.

Tonbridge Road will remain closed after Pembury Hospital up to and including Longfield Road roundabout until Spring 2017. A clearly signed diversion route will be in place via the A228 and the A21.

The scheme is due to be completed in Summer 2017. For further information, [visit the scheme website](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Press release: Highways England awards new South West design contract worth up to £40 million](#)

This is the first of a number of Asset Delivery contracts in the South West

which sees Highways England changing its way of working and delivering the Government's record £15 billion investment to improve and maintain the country's motorways and major A roads.

Highways England will now take direct responsibility for managing both routine maintenance and the delivery of capital renewal and improvement schemes.

The new arrangements will bring a number of key decision-making functions in-house and see Highways England taking greater control over the future of the network, ultimately ensuring the smooth functioning of its South West major roads.

The award of this and future contracts allows Highways England to directly engage with our supply chain, to drive down cost and waste, whilst providing the best possible value for money for tax payers, and service for our customers.

The contract will run for up to five years and focusses on design – it will see Kier taking design briefs and turning them into well-defined packages of work.

Duties will include preparing technical designs and undertaking supporting work for capital renewal projects and improvements to produce a solution that is ready for construction, and to design briefs to repair major roads and get them back running as normal after incidents will also form part of the work.

David Poole, Executive Director for commercial and procurement at Highways England, said:

We are delighted that Kier Highways Limited will be part of our new Asset Delivery supply chain community across the South West.

This contract not only builds on the new way of working already taking place in the East Midlands and North of England but also demonstrates our ongoing commitment to increasing Highways England's capability and control over the whole road network.

Andrew Page-Dove, Regional Director for the South West, said:

Kier Highways currently operates a number of key support contracts and we are confident that this award will build upon our existing successful relationship and deliver a high quality service throughout the South West. We look forward to working with them.

Future awards will include a range of suppliers being appointed in April to the new framework for delivering construction works and a contract will be awarded in March for the maintenance and response contract, both of which will help to deliver the designs provided by Kier Highways.

Highways England will now begin working with Kier Highways to ensure that they are ready to begin delivering key design services from 1 July 2017.

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