

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, Committee Stage

Adam Haxell, Head of Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement

6 July 2021

Committee Stage: Tuesday 6 July 2021

MillionPlus is the Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in the UK's world-leading university system. Modern universities make up 52% of all UK undergraduates and 37% of all postgraduates, with over one million students studying at modern institutions across the UK.

MillionPlus supports the government's commitment to boosting skills and investing in lifelong learning, and there is much within the Bill that can improve post-16 education. However, there remain some serious questions about the legislation as presented. MillionPlus believes effective and sensible modifications will ensure that this Bill is able to make the difference it intends and truly meet the skills needs of the country and widen access to education for everyone over the course of their lives.

MillionPlus is in support of the [tabled amendments](#) below in order to improve the Bill, and we urge all Peers to support them:

LIFELONG LEARNING ENTITLEMENT

92

After Clause 15

LORD JOHNSON OF MARYLEBONE and BARONESS GARDEN OF FROGNAL

Insert the following new Clause—

“Availability of lifelong learning entitlement

(1) The lifelong learning entitlement is available to any student regardless of—

(a) prior qualification,

(b) subject being studied,

(c) intensity of study, or

(d) restrictions on student numbers (excluding for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, and undergraduate teacher training).

(2) The Secretary of State may not, in exercising powers under this or any other Act in relation to the lifelong learning entitlement, restrict access to the scheme on the grounds set out in subsection (1).”

MillionPlus believes the success of any lifelong learning entitlement can only be fully realised if it is open to all. We therefore support this amendment to protect student choice and the ability to access education to all who need it.

94

After Clause 15

LORD WATSON OF INVERGOWRIE and BARONESS BENNETT OF MANOR CASTLE

Insert the following new Clause—

“Duration of lifelong loan entitlement

As soon as practicable after this Act is passed, the Secretary of State must consult on extending the duration of the lifelong loan entitlement to up to six years equivalent funding.

MillionPlus believes it is right to scope the effectiveness of the lifelong learning entitlement to encompass part-time learners and those who may need to pause their studies and require additional flexibility. We believe this fits into the very ethos of the Bill's stated intentions.

UK QUALITY CODE

70

Clause 17

BARONESS SHERLOCK

70 Page 20, line 37, at end insert –

“(8A) The OfS must work together with the devolved authorities to minimize the potential for different assessments of the quality of higher education with a view to protecting the United Kingdom’s higher education sectors’ international reputation.”

MillionPlus has seven members in Scotland, and we are fully aware of the importance of a coherent and unified UK higher education sector. It is incredibly important to ensure OfS and all devolved authorities are working together to protect the coherence of the UK sector.

QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

65

Clause 17

BARONESS SHERLOCK

65* Page 20, line 25, at end insert—

“(6A) The OfS must consult the higher education sector before determining a minimum level in relation to a measure of student outcomes.”

MillionPlus has previously stated its clear opposition to making absolute judgements on student outcomes without any reference to context or benchmarking. Such a move has the potential to undermine efforts to increase access and widen participation and it goes against wider government ambitions to ‘level up’ and improve outcomes for all parts of the country. There is also no clear evidence as to how moves to remove contextualisation will help improve outcomes, so a further consultation on this point should be put forward.

There are significant differences in students outcomes between young and mature learners. This is largely influenced by the different personal and social commitments that are faced by older learners and the challenges faced as a result. Removing any contextualisation based on the age of students will effectively increase barriers for mature students to higher education, by ignoring the differences in educational environment and support needs for these learners. Modern universities have been pioneers in delivering mature education for many years, with 74% of mature students in England studying at a modern university. MillionPlus has carried out its own research on the decline in part-time and mature learners over the past decade, and ignoring the differences between these types of learners will exacerbate this decline in participation. This will inhibit the government’s stated intentions to support lifelong learning as detailed elsewhere in the Bill, by potentially limiting the options for up-skilling and re-skilling later in life. It is also antithetical to the stated objective to level up opportunity through education.

68

Clause 17

Page 20, line 33, at end insert—

“(7A) When making decisions of a strategic nature in relation to a measure of student outcomes, the OfS must have regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to widen participation and reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.”

As above, MillionPlus believes in the importance of widening access and increasing participation from all communities. Indeed, it is the mission of modern universities to work with the most diverse student populations and improve outcomes. We support moves to ensure OfS remains cognisant of this point when making decisions of strategic significance.

69

LORD WILLETTS

Page 20, line 33, at end insert—

“(7A) The OfS must, at the same time that information is published under subsection (6), determine and publish an assessment of the effects of the factors in subsection (7)(a) to (d) on student outcomes.
(7B) Before the OfS can take any action under subsection (6), institutions must be given reasonable opportunities to account for any differences between the information that relates to that institution as published under subsection (6) and that relates to that same institution as published under subsection (7A).”

MillionPlus supports the intention of this amendment to make clear the consequences of removing any forms of contextualisation. OfS should work with institutions to ensure that any negative unintended consequences of this legislation are not allowed to develop.

67

Clause 17

BARONESS SHERLOCK

Page 20, line 32, leave out “or subject being studied”

MillionPlus supports the intention of this amendment to probe the proposed power of OfS intervention at subject level.

71

Clause 17

LORD WILLETTS

Page 20, line 37, at end insert—

“(8A) The Department for Education must share with the relevant institution any data gathered and used to measure institutions as specified in this section, including institution and subject-level Resource Accounting and Budgeting charge data.
(8B) In sharing data under subsection (8A), the OfS must ensure that—
(a) data is anonymised, and
(b) confidentiality is paramount.”

MillionPlus supports this amendment to ensure fairness and confidentiality when necessary.