



**The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP**

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

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11 August 2023

Dear Raj,

I am writing to you with regard to the ongoing pay dispute between higher education providers and members of the University and College Union (UCU). I have also written to UCU on this matter.

Although the government plays no formal role in resolving such disputes, I am deeply concerned about the impact of the ongoing marking and assessment boycott on students. It is unacceptable that students, many of whom have already suffered significant disruption to their studies over recent years, face further disruption and uncertainty. This disruption is particularly damaging to those students who are due to graduate and looking to enter the jobs market or progress to further study.

I am aware that the recent negotiations between UCU and the University and College Employers Association (UCEA) have broken down, and so the marking and assessment boycott continues, with the potential for further industrial action into the forthcoming academic year. The government's priority during any industrial action in higher education is the protection of students' interests. For this reason, I strongly urge both UCU and UCEA to resume negotiations which I hope, if successful, will bring an end to the boycott and further industrial action.

In the meantime, it is imperative that higher education providers and their staff continue to do all they can to minimise disruption and provide clarity to their students. This means that all students who are eligible should be able to graduate as soon as possible, enabling them to continue to enter planned graduate employment or postgraduate study. Wherever possible, I would encourage higher education providers to award degrees when they have enough evidence of a student's prior attainment to do so.

This government believes students should be at the heart of the higher education system. This is why we set up the Office for Students (OfS) to regulate the higher education sector in England, protect student rights and ensure the sector is delivering real value for money. I am aware that the OfS wrote to institutions affected by the boycott on 12 June to reiterate its expectations in relation to its conditions of registration. The OfS have also published guidance to students on their rights during

industrial action and are continuing to monitor this ongoing situation through their normal regulatory mechanisms.

I urge you and your members to do everything within your powers to protect the interests of students during industrial action in higher education. My officials and I will continue to engage with the higher education sector over the coming weeks to help better understand how students' interests can be protected during this time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert Halfon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

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