



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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Helen Hayes MP
Chair of the Education Select Committee
Via email: educom@parliament.uk

24 June 2026

Dear Helen,

I am writing to update you on how we are working to strengthen quality across the higher education system and ensure that all students receive good outcomes from their studies. I have also written to higher education providers today in similar terms, as their engagement will be critical to delivering these reforms.

The higher education sector has a world-leading reputation and, in the main, provides a high-quality experience for students and equips them to thrive in the working world. The evidence shows that most graduates are significantly better off as a result of undertaking higher education, but we are determined to ensure that everyone can be confident of a good experience and strong outcomes for their investment in higher education

We came into government with a manifesto commitment to raise teaching standards in higher education. The Post-16 Education and Skills White paper last autumn placed quality at the heart of our vision for the sector.

I am proud of the progress we have already made to ensure every student has a positive experience of higher education. We acted quickly to support financial sustainability for providers through the tuition fee increase. We are improving support for access and participation, introducing maintenance grants and supporting better pathways through the system.

We have strengthened expectations of providers sub-contracting delivery of courses and improved regulation of franchised providers by requiring those with 300 or more students to register with the Office for Students. The publication of outcomes data for franchised courses means that students will know what they are getting when they sign up for a franchised course.

However, there is more work to be done to ensure consistent high quality across the sector. Too many courses are not delivering the outcomes students deserve.

On 11 June, the Office for Students published a response to its consultation on the future of quality regulation. The changes will create a more robust system that rewards high-quality provision and incentivises improvement where quality is lower. *Every provider will have clear quality ratings in the future.*

Students' interests are at the heart of government policy. Our plans to link future inflationary fee uplifts to providers' quality ratings reflect our belief that students should only pay more where the quality is good. We are also working with the Office for Students to ensure that the Strategic Priorities Grant supports the best quality provision. Where quality is lower, providers should focus on improving quality for existing students before expanding. This is why we are working to ensure that the Office for Students can impose recruitment limits on providers with bronze or lower quality ratings.

Every student deserves the best possible outcomes from their investment in higher education. However, new analysis published today by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that 25% of students do not see a positive return from their studies, with negative returns concentrated in certain subjects.

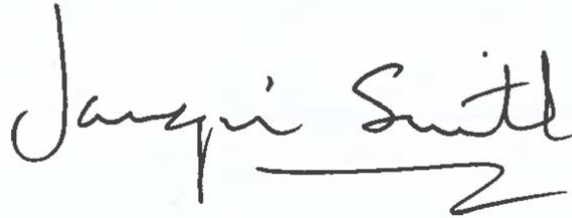
That is why on Monday, the Secretary of State announced that we will legislate to limit the growth of some courses that lead to poor earnings returns at some providers, when parliamentary time allows. This will not be a blanket cap on student numbers, but a focused measure to support the sector to prioritise provision where it delivers good value for students and the taxpayer. We will engage a wide range of stakeholders to inform the development of these options.

Monday's announcement also set our expectation that providers should include clear information about destinations and outcomes on their websites so that students can make choices that work for them. We are working with the Office for Students, UCAS and sector partners to make it easier for students to access the information available on Discover Uni. Our Pathways to Priority Occupations report, published today, will also support students to make informed choices about their courses. We are exploring how AI can further strengthen the information available to them.

Lastly, students must not be mis-sold courses they are not equipped to undertake. There must be robust standards to protect students and taxpayers from abuse. We intend to consult in the autumn on new minimum English language requirements for student finance, to provide greater confidence that recipients are able to benefit from their course. We will, of course, want to design this carefully, in collaboration with the sector.

We want a higher education system that is resilient, delivers consistently high-quality outcomes, and continues to support both economic growth and social mobility. I would be happy to keep the Committee updated as this work progresses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

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