



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Sir Michael Barber
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23rd June 2020

Dear Sir Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 22 June 2020. I am very sorry to hear that you will not be seeking reappointment as Chair of the Office for Students at the end of your term. I have hugely valued your leadership, insight and advice during your time as Chair and enjoyed our close working relationship.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all of your work leading the OfS Board since 2017: you have led the set up and organisational transformation of the OfS and overseen the enormous task of registering providers for the first time. I have also appreciated your work to tackle unconditional offers, excessive senior pay and unexplained increases in first class degrees and have valued the stance you have taken on freedom of speech. You are right to recognise the challenge facing the sector and the OfS in tackling low quality provision, and I look forward to working with you and your successor to deliver changes that will have significant impact in this area.

Despite those challenges, the higher education sector in this country is indeed inspiring and crucial; and we have seen that in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 3 months. We have seen the sector mobilising to support the NHS and medical research, to help sustain the economy, and of course to ensure students are given as much support as possible. We have seen a rapid shift to online and blended learning, and I have been impressed by how much has been achieved in such short timescales. I think there is an opportunity to learn from this, to look forward to longer term improvements and innovations in learning and teaching.

Therefore, before your term ends, I would be very grateful if you would carry out a piece of work in your capacity as Chair of the OfS that I believe is critical for the future of the sector. I would like you to consider how providers could continue to enhance the quality of their online delivery for the approaching

academic year, so claims of quality can be made with confidence, and also consider what longer term opportunities there might be for the Higher Education sector to develop and innovate in relation to the provision of digital and online teaching and learning. I will ask officials to speak with you in more detail about this.

I look forward to continuing to work with you over the next 9 months to help the sector emerge strong from this pandemic, and to ensure a smooth handover to the next Chair of the OfS.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large 'G' followed by 'W' and a stylized flourish.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education