

The Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

By email only

Westward House
Lime Kiln Close
Stoke Gifford
BRISTOL
BS34 8SR
0117 931 7317

www.officeforstudents.org.uk

2 May 2025

Dear Secretary of State

Academic freedom in universities and colleges

Thank you for your letter of 1 May 2025 confirming that you have signed commencement regulations in relation to provisions in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.

We agree about the importance of academic freedom in higher education, and we share your view that free speech and academic freedom are essential pillars supporting the international strength of our sector. We will continue our work to prepare for the commencement of the legislation on 1 August 2025. Beyond that, we look forward to working with the sector to develop approaches that encourage a robust and open attitude to discussion, teaching and research in our universities and colleges.

In your letter you set out your view about the continuing importance of the OfS's public interest governance principle relating to academic freedom. I can reassure you that we do not intend to weaken this principle, or to remove it from our regulatory framework, until we are in a position to secure academic freedom through a strengthened free speech condition of registration. We expect to consult in the normal way on proposals for achieving this and look forward to briefing you on our plans in due course.

In the meantime, we will continue our work to secure and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom in English universities and colleges.

Yours sincerely

Susan Lapworth
Chief Executive