



**The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP**

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

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Dear Jo,

I am writing to you with regards to the ongoing pay dispute between higher education providers and members of the University and College Union (UCU). I have also written to the University and College Employers Association (UCEA) 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 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.

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.

Final year students who have still not yet graduated will be understandably anxious about the status of job offers or progression to further study. It would be disappointing if future cohorts suffer similar disruption as a result of a marking and assessment boycott. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the current dispute, action that damages students' prospects is the wrong thing to do.

I urge you and your members to do everything within your powers to protect the interests of students during industrial action in higher education.

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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