

Education Secretary backs review of university admissions

In a letter sent today to universities regulator, the Office for Students, Mr Williamson welcomes the review and urged the regulator to set as high a bar as possible on quality in the sector, so universities are focused on reducing drop-out rates and ensuring the best possible value for money.

The Education Secretary also made clear that he supported the OfS' intention to look seriously at the rise of unconditional offers and whether 'conditional unconditional' offers breach consumer law.

He outlines his support for the OfS' review of admissions to look into the benefits and challenges of a Post Qualification Applications system, where students would apply to university after receiving their A level results.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Higher education has the power to change lives and is vital to producing the skills our country needs. But this is only the case when students receive a high quality education and we can be confident of the value of the collective investment from students and taxpayers.

We have to fight to keep the public trust and respect in our world-leading universities and to me that means a relentless focus on quality. That's why I want the OfS to go even further on this, developing more rigorous and demanding quality requirements, and I give my full backing to boldly use its powers to ensure value for money.

I'm also concerned about how some universities are recruiting students, in particular a worrying rise in unconditional offers. So I welcome the OfS' focus on whether 'conditional unconditional' offers are harming students' interests and whether they breach their consumer rights.

I recognise that we need to review if the current system is working as well as it can, so I am glad the OfS is looking at whether it would be in students' interests to apply for their university place after they have their A level results.

The guidance comes after the publication of the OECD Education at a Glance report last week, which highlighted the wide-ranging outcomes and earnings for graduates, and Andreas Schleicher, Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, reiterated the importance of having quality assurances in higher education.

As the regulator for higher education in England, the OfS plays a vital part in ensuring students and taxpayers are getting value for money. The guidance letter sets out the Education Secretary's priorities for higher education and his expectations for the OfS' work, including:

- Review how students rights' as consumers can be strengthened, including looking at options for standardised contracts between higher education providers and students;
- To focus on part-time and flexible learning; reviewing how to promote greater student choice; and raise awareness of accelerated degrees;
- Develop the government's flagship Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework to enable it to be published at subject level in 2021; and
- Explore how international students can be better supported and integrated, in line with Global Britain's efforts to strengthen relationships around the world.