



Robert Halfon MP

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

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Dear Colleague

I hope you enjoyed a restful Christmas break; Happy New Year for 2023.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for supporting students during the Covid-19 pandemic over the last three academic years. The student success stories of this summer were testament to their extraordinary hard work, and to the support, encouragement and dedication of those around them. Thank you for the extraordinary efforts of Higher Education staff over this undergraduate degree cycle.

Universities play a vital role in our society. Inspiring institutions continuously contribute to our community, the economy, employment, skills, and the sum of human knowledge. Having emerged from the social upheaval of the pandemic, we must now look ahead to do everything possible to support the class of 2023's next steps - whether in university, other types of study, training or employment.

I have been Universities Minister for only a couple of months, but you may already be familiar with my three areas of focus – that universities meet the skills needs of the economy, provide quality qualifications that lead to well-paid jobs, and advance social justice by helping disadvantaged applicants onto the first rung of the ladder of opportunity. In line with these priorities, I have framed my messages to you accordingly below.

Skills – T Levels admissions

We need to bridge the gaping technical skills gap in this country, so that students leave higher and further education job-ready and able to meet employers' requirements. High level technical skills equip graduates to find good employment and, in turn, contribute to economic growth.

T Levels were introduced in September 2020 to provide a world-class technical option for post-16 students. They are an important element of our skills reforms, sitting alongside enhanced apprenticeships and the new Institutes of Technology. The first T Level cohort saw over 400 students secure a place at university last summer. The second cohort, who are currently applying to university, are studying an expanded range of 10 T Level courses.

As with any recognised qualification, it is important that those studying T Levels have a clear picture of the opportunities available to them in Higher Education, and any offer to them is fair and transparent. We know that many Higher Education institutions have already assimilated T Levels into their admissions process, and provided a public statement on their entry requirements. However, there remain many instances where students are unsure if they can apply to a course at a university they are interested in, because the entry requirements for T Levels are unclear. This places such students in a difficult and uncertain position, as their UCAS choices naturally hold long-term implications for their future.

Students must be able to access clear and transparent information on the course entry requirements that relate to their qualifications. I am therefore asking you to make a clear statement on your institution's website, setting out your approach to entry requirements for students with T Levels for 2022 and beyond. This should include details of the entry requirements for relevant courses, so students can easily access correct and transparent admissions information for this UCAS cycle.

If your institution requires further information or support on T Levels, please contact officials in the department at routesreadiness.te@education.gov.uk.

Wider admissions considerations

You will already be aware of Ofqual's [announcement](#) of 29 September last year, confirming a return to pre-pandemic grading in 2023. This applies to GCSE, AS and A levels, and the vocational and technical qualifications taken in schools and colleges alongside these qualifications. I know you will already have reflected on this announcement when considering your approach to admissions this year.

As Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications for England, its grading decisions only relate to qualifications in that part of the UK. Regulators in other parts of the UK have taken separate decisions on their approach in 2023 to grading the GCSEs, AS and A levels they regulate.

Universities are of course used to considering applicants from around the UK, and around the world, with qualifications that are designed and graded in different ways. With regard to the particular nuances of this current academic year, I trust that you will reflect the different approaches taken by regulators across the UK nations in your admissions decisions. This should ensure that students applying from all parts of the country are treated fairly.

Jobs - Medicine and Dentistry Intakes

As you know, I believe that Higher Education should lead to good jobs for graduates, with great career prospects and high earning potential. Applications to courses that have always clearly led to prestigious professions, such as medicine and dentistry, are always highly competitive.

If your university runs undergraduate medicine and dentistry courses, you will have noted the recent announcements from Ofqual and the Devolved Administrations' exams regulators. These set out how examinations will work this year and the 2022/23 approach to grading.

Following these announcements, I want to ask you once again to consider and adjust your offer-making strategies accordingly, to ensure there is no risk of your medical and/or dentistry schools being oversubscribed in 2023-24 and beyond. I understand that institutions will take different approaches to admissions decisions. However, I would encourage you to utilise methods used successfully in 2022, such as taking a staggered approach to offer-making.

The intake target for medicine and dentistry for 2023-24 will be confirmed by the Office for Students in due course. In the meantime, I am drawing your attention to this matter as a reminder to remain within your 5-year rolling target during this year's admissions cycle.

Social Justice - Degree Apprenticeships

Higher Education must meet the needs of the young people who pay to access it, who rely on it for their future employability and prosperity. It is important that a return on their considerable investment is considered when designing the courses you offer. Courses that offer specific technical skills, such as degree apprenticeships, meet this need by responding to employers' skills demands and equipping students to join the workforce.

My enthusiasm for degree apprenticeships arises from their key role in both meeting the skills needs of the economy and facilitating social justice. Degree apprenticeships offer all students a route to career progress and allow those from disadvantaged backgrounds to earn, learn and gain a degree without having to pay tuition fees. They offer these students a route up the ladder of opportunity, to good employment and career prospects.

I want to see many more degree apprenticeships, delivered by a wider range of universities. Our most prestigious universities should lead by example, building parity of esteem between high-quality technical courses and academic degrees. If your university is serious about social justice, I ask you to seriously consider offering degree apprenticeships alongside other courses. I look forward to working with HE mission groups and their members on this.

To support the continued growth of higher and degree apprenticeships, up to £8 million is available in this financial year to Higher Education providers who want to grow their degree apprenticeships offer. At the same time, our ASK programme is raising awareness in schools and colleges of the benefits of these apprenticeships, so that more pupils consider them as part of their post-18 options.

There are over 150 occupational standards at Level 6 and above approved for delivery, and 100 of these have a degree element. Some of these standards are new, with small numbers of providers delivering them. There is space here for Higher Education Institutions to use their expertise and work with employers to create new opportunities. We have recently published our higher and degree apprenticeship vacancy listing, which holds over 300 vacancies that young people can apply for now whilst still at school:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-and-degree-apprenticeships>.

This will give you some idea of the breadth of degree apprenticeships in 2023, and the wide variety of Higher Education institutions that already offer them.

Thank you for noting the points I have raised above. I would be grateful if you could share this letter with your Deans of Admissions.

I look forward to working with all of you to support students over the coming year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education