Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Chair of the Education Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA  

20 March 2018

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter of 8 March regarding the vacancy of the Office for Students (OfS) board. In it, you make a formal proposal on behalf of the Committee that we increase the representation of further education institutions and apprenticeships amongst the members of the OfS.

The current OfS board satisfies the criteria set out by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. You will remember that Parliament debated these provisions during passage of the Bill and decided against a requirement for separate representation from all parts of the sector that might have an interest in the OfS. As is conventional with public bodies, it is not necessary for board members to have first-hand experience of all its areas of responsibility in order to carry out its role effectively, with due regard to the interests of all those affected by its regulatory activities.

While I understand your concerns, I would like to reassure you that while none of the OfS board members has a background solely in FE or apprenticeship provision, there is considerable relevant knowledge within the current membership. The Vice-Chancellor of UWE, for example, has a seat on the board; UWE is a university that delivers a wide range of degree apprenticeships and partners to provide higher education at three FE colleges. Another board member sits on the council at the University of Kent, which established a specialist Centre for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships. Other members include the Chair of Rose Bruford College, which partners with London South East Colleges to provide higher education, and the chair of a Multi Academy Trust that includes sixth form provision.

It is our intention to fill the remaining vacancy on the OfS this year. In doing so I will carefully consider your proposal as well as other considerations in terms of the skills and experience that could be most usefully added through that appointment.

Yours sincerely,

Damian Hinds  
Secretary of State for Education