



**Department for Education**

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**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith  
Minister for Skills**

Adam Thompson MP

By email: [adam.thompson.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:adam.thompson.mp@parliament.uk)

13 January 2025

Dear Adam,

Thank you for your correspondence of 25 November, on behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Universities, regarding universities in the skills agenda. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in replying to you.

Universities are a vital part of the skills ecosystem, contributing significantly to innovation, economic growth, and regional development. Skills England is committed to working collaboratively with universities, further education (FE) colleges, and other stakeholders to address current and future skills needs, ensuring that higher education (HE) is fully integrated into national and regional strategies.

Skills England is still setting up and operating in shadow form, but it has already started to build strong links across the skills system. For example, it has held an engagement session with representatives from key education provider organisations, including the Association of Colleges, Sixth Form College Association, Association of School and College Leaders, Association of Learning and Employment Providers, Hoxex (Adult and Community Education and Learning), the Russell Group, Universities UK, GuildHE, Independent HE, the Universities Vocational Awards Council, London Higher, University Alliance, and MillionPlus. This session underscored the need for collaboration to ensure alignment between policy reforms and the diverse needs of learners and employers, and the important role that HE has in achieving this. Insights from this engagement are directly informing Skills England's approach to addressing skills gaps and designing effective solutions.

As Skills England becomes an arms-length body and assumes its full remit, we look forward to actively engaging with universities across its work, building on their expertise to shape a high-skill, high-productivity future aligned with the nation's industrial and economic priorities.

Additionally, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will deliver a transformational change to the student finance system in England, by broadening access to high-quality, flexible education and learning, enabling employers to get the skills they need and contributing to growth across the country. We continue to work with Skills England to ensure that the LLE best supports the government's industrial strategy and delivers its ambitious vision for the future of the UK skills landscape.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) will also provide important intelligence for Skills England, as well as Local Growth Plans and Work, Health and Skills Plans, and will continue to be a valuable source of information for local skills deliverers, employers, and stakeholders.

The first Skills England report, published in September 2024, emphasised the importance of HE providers in meeting our skills needs. Our HE providers are world-leading and already provide a significant pipeline for meeting the UK's current and future skills needs. Much of our businesses and economy is dependent on skills gained in three-year degree courses, and future job projections suggest that professional occupations, which typically require a degree, are expanding.

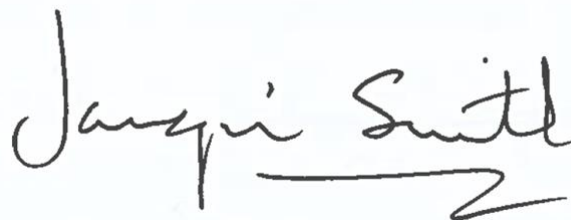
Skills England will bring HE and FE systems closer together to help grow local skills ecosystems. Part of Skills England's role is to harness HE's role in tackling skills shortages.

HE providers are central to the government's missions, acting as vital engines of economic growth. They provide high-quality graduates, are large local employers and sources of innovation, and both domestic and international students contribute considerably to local economies. There are especially strong benefits to be realised by ensuring that HE institutions are even more engaged with local skills needs, as well as those that are strategically important for our country, such as medicine and science.

Thank you for your kind invitations to address the evening reception to celebrate the APPG for Universities' 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 17 December. I was sorry not to be able to attend, but I hope the evening was a success. However, I would be delighted to attend a future meeting, and my diary manager will be in touch to confirm the details.

Thank you again for writing to me. I hope that this response has helped to outline our ambitions in this area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith  
Minister for Skills**