



Baroness Berridge of the Vale of Catmose

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
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Lord Taylor of Warwick
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

29 September 2020

Dear Lord Taylor,

I am writing to you in response to a question that you raised in the House of Lords on 15 September regarding the government's action to address racial disparities for students being accepted into higher education.

The government is committed to levelling up the nation and maximising opportunity for all. That is why, on 16 July, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.

The Commission will set out a new, positive agenda for change – balancing the needs of individuals, communities and society, maximising opportunities and ensuring fairness for all. In order to understand why disparities exist, what works and what does not, the Commission will consider detailed quantitative data and qualitative evidence, commissioning new research and inviting submissions where necessary. Its work will improve the quality of data and evidence about the types of barriers faced by people from different backgrounds, to help inform actions and drive effective and lasting change.

The Commission will aim to report its findings on the priority areas of health, education, criminal justice and employment by the end of this year. Further information regarding can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/terms-of-reference-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/terms-of-reference-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities

With respect to higher education, we must make sure that places are available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so. Universities need to do more to ensure that all students - and particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, are recruited on to courses that will deliver good outcomes.

The independent regulator, the Office for Students (OfS) was asked to secure greater, faster progress, particularly at the most selective institutions, in ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups can access and succeed in higher education. Universities and other higher education providers charging higher level fees have agreed 5-year Access and Participation Plans with the OfS for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25 aimed at addressing long standing inequalities in access and successful participation in higher education. The OfS has made clear that it is vital that universities turn their ambitions in this area into results and will monitor each university's progress against the targets set out in their plans.

It is encouraging that UCAS data for the 2020 cycle published on 4 September shows there has been an increase in English 18 year old entrants across all ethnic groups compared to the same point in the 2019 applications cycle. The latest data published by UCAS on entry to high tariff higher education showed, relating to the 2019 cycle, also shows record entry rates for English 18-year old full-time undergraduate entrants across all ethnic groups.

I will place a copy of this letter in the House Libraries. Thank you for raising this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ER Berridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

ELIZABETH BERRIDGE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE