Dear Dr Blackman-Woods,

In our discussion of Schedule 1 to the Higher Education and Research Bill, on Tuesday 13th September, Committee members asked about the interaction between the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). I offered to write to the Committee with further details.

The Government is fully committed to the continued integration of teaching and research, and these two organisations will work together on a range of issues across their respective remits.

Clause 103 of the Bill provides powers to enable joint working, through co-operation and the sharing of information between the OfS and UKRI. These provisions will support a number of OfS and UKRI functions, including our intention that both organisations work together to develop an integrated understanding of the stability, sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education sector and the research base. They will also enable the OfS and UKRI to take joint approaches on a number of cross-cutting issues.

Examples of cross-cutting issues would include but not be limited to the following: skills capability and progression; knowledge exchange; infrastructure and shared facilities; accountability and assurance; evidence gathering and system intelligence; skills development; and research degree awarding powers.

As means of illustration, it might be of interest to note how we see this working in practice on the area of postgraduate students. We see real advantage in creating clear accountability lines between OfS and UKRI for the various funding and functional responsibilities in this area and our organisational reforms achieve this. The OfS will be the regulator for all students and, where appropriate, will provide funding for masters courses (i.e. postgraduate taught students) in England. UKRI will oversee funding and policy for doctoral level courses (i.e. postgraduate research students) across the UK. The funding for HEFCE’s quality-related research funding, which currently recognises the supervision of research degrees in English universities, will be managed by UKRI through Research England. But, we would anticipate that the two organisations will work closely across this range of activity and our proposals provide that UKRI and OfS have the necessary scope and powers to ensure this approach works effectively.
Another important area of co-operation between the two bodies will be around sustainability. UKRI will provide strategic leadership for the UK's research base, driving excellence and sustainability. UKRI's Councils will be responsible for the leadership and health of specific research disciplines, with UKRI able to ensure that the UK can maintain its position supporting world-class research and innovation. In respect of English institutions, UKRI through Research England will provide quality-related research funding. As we said in the White Paper, the Government expects to ask the OfS to take a holistic view of the sector and institutions, and be responsible for monitoring the financial sustainability, efficiency and governance of English higher education. The OfS and UKRI will therefore need to work together and share information on these issues.

As these two new NDPBs are created, the Government will work with them to develop appropriate governance arrangements that embed joint working principles and practices. While we do not see it as necessary to be overly prescriptive in the Bill on constraining how this will work, we will reflect upon the suggestions raised in debate on how best to establish the governance for each of the two organisations to ensure there is overlap, including ideas such as enabling them to have observer status on each other's boards, and the benefit of having a joint committee to consider those areas highlighted above where there is a joint agenda.

Furthermore, each organisation will have a framework document with its partner department. These will be developed to ensure a consistent approach to joint working and will be reviewed over time to ensure that they keep pace with developments in higher education and research. The two organisations will also have a memorandum of understanding between them, which will set out the details of how they will work together, including formal structures for regular engagement, input into reporting and decision making arrangements and information sharing agreements.

I hope this information is useful for the committee and look forward to discussing these issues further as we progress through debate on the rest of the Bill, including providing further detail if that would be helpful.

[Signature]

JO JOHNSON MP