



**The Commissioner for
Public Appointments**

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
Via email

26 February 2018

Dear Robert

I am glad to say that my inquiry into the appointments to the Board of the Office for Students is now complete and I enclose the report, including an annex on issues of due diligence, plus a copy of a letter to Sam Gyimah, the Universities Minister, on the appointment of the student experience member of the Board.

The inquiry has taken much longer than I hoped because it took several weeks for my office to receive all the relevant papers. I reviewed all the evidence and I am satisfied that the Department for Education and Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students, sought to appoint a diverse and balanced board on the basis of a fair and open competition. I do, however, have serious concerns about two aspects of the appointments which were either in breach of, or compromised, the Government's own Governance Code for appointments.

My concerns are over the inadequate level of due diligence over the appointment of Mr Toby Young and over the way the student experience role was filled. There are lessons to be learnt both in the department and in Whitehall generally and, at the request of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Government, I have made some suggestions about how to improve due diligence in a realistic and proportionate way in the age of social media.

I am happy to discuss the report and these issues in more detail.

I will be publishing the report on my website and sending copies of this letter as well to the Chairs of the Liaison and Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committees.

All best wishes
J. Sweeney

Peter

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