



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

26 March 2024

Dear Robert,

I was very sorry to hear of your decision to step down from Government, as well as your intention to stand down at the next election. I appreciate that your decision will not have been an easy one to make, but I respect your reasons for doing so.

You have made an important contribution to our public life, spanning almost 25 years, starting from your selection as the parliamentary candidate for Harlow in 1999. Since that time, you have had a wide and varied career in Parliament, ranging from Chair of the Education Select Committee, Deputy Chairman of the Party, a Cabinet Minister and most recently as the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education. Your unwavering support to our party, consecutive Conservative administrations and of course the people of Harlow is admirable.

I wanted to pay tribute to your greatest legacy in Parliament, which is of course your passion for promoting apprenticeships. You have been a stalwart champion for this remarkable and life changing programme, which is underpinned by our conservative principles to empower people to climb the ladder of opportunity. Throughout your time as a Minister, you have been a firm believer in ensuring that the opportunities for apprenticeships are available for all, no matter who you are, or where you come from.

On your watch, thousands more young people have started an apprenticeship, whilst supporting SMEs along the way through funding the cost of their training. This is a huge achievement for our Government, which you should be very proud of leading.

Last year you took the Lifelong Loan Entitlement Bill through Parliament. This was a landmark piece of legislation brought through under your guidance, which will help to revolutionise the skills landscape and help people progress in their careers. Thanks to your efforts, from next year, students will be able to apply for a loan worth the equivalent of four years of post-18 education, which will allow adults to retrain and upskill later in life in a way that suits them whilst meeting the required demands.

Your understanding of the wide potential of apprenticeships is exceptional. You have rightly identified the importance of raising the skills level of the nation, as a crucial mechanism to boost economic growth. In doing so, you have promoted the Government's skills revolution with T Levels and higher technical qualifications, which has helped skilled workers, empowering people to climb the ladder of opportunity to progress in their careers.

You have also been an outstanding champion for promoting social mobility – advocating that there should be no barrier to anyone accessing the same opportunities as others. This can be seen through the launch of the disabled apprentice network in partnership with Disability Rights UK to build a platform to attract and retain disabled candidates.

You have always led by example and I am aware that you were the first MP to employ an apprentice in your parliamentary office in 2010. Since then, many MPs have followed in your footsteps to realise the true scope of apprentices, employing them not just in Parliament, but advocating them to local businesses up and down the country.

Over the years, you have been a leading campaigner on a number of key issues – particularly fuel duty. No other Conservative has campaigned harder to freeze fuel duty. This is something you should be proud of - it has helped millions of motorists. I am proud that the Government I lead has not only frozen fuel duty, but cut it by 5 pence.

I know that the people of Harlow will be saddened to lose you as their MP, after years of loyal and selfless service. You have made an outstanding impact on bettering the lives of thousands of your constituents. Some of your key local achievements will be remembered for many years to come, including securing record investment to regenerate Harlow town centre, championing the local economy by creating thousands of jobs and supporting the community during the pandemic.

Thank you again for your service to our party and for everything you have done to deliver meaningful change. I wish you all the very best.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a Happy Easter.

Yours sincerely,  
Rishi