



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

Department for Education Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

1 June 2026

Dear Professor Mitchell,

Re: Higher Education Access and Participation Task and Finish Group

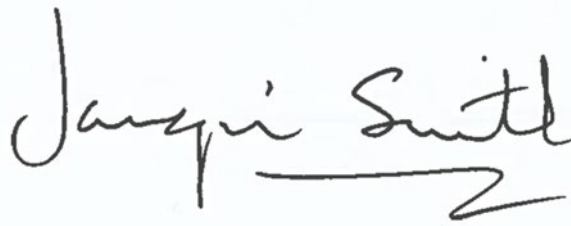
Thank you for your letter of 18 May with a further update on the work of the Access and Participation Task and Finish Group.

You have set out the problem starkly – those from disadvantaged backgrounds face entrenched barriers across each part of the journey into higher education. As you know, I am determined that we do all we can to ensure opportunity is spread further and faster. I am pleased to see the excellent progress that you have made in bringing together students, charities and different parts of the education sector to begin framing a strong emerging response to this challenge. I also know that the Group's members have dedicated themselves to this important task, with those leading workstrands giving so much of their time and energy to the work.

I recognise that you have worked closely with the Office for Students (OfS) on proposals around regional access partnerships. The Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper was clear about the virtues of effective collaboration - including with further education providers, employers and other regional actors. I was therefore encouraged to see you highlight the need to bring together national ambition and local delivery more effectively. My department will continue to work with the OfS on how we support these objectives and consider place in discussions on widening access and I welcome seeing further views from the Group on this. You also highlight the opportunity presented by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), with the greater flexibility it provides for individuals to study on terms that suit their needs. I would encourage you to explore this further with my officials, as I know you have already started positive engagement with the Department.

I am encouraged by the steps taken so far and support the vision of a progression and success focused higher education system, built around achieving the best outcomes for people of all backgrounds. I agree that we are at a unique moment and would welcome the opportunity to speak to you ahead of the summer, to hear how your thinking has progressed. I know my office are in touch with your team about a slot and I look forward to meeting soon.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Jacqui Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills