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Dear Accountable Officer

Protecting the interests of students during industrial action

I'm writing to share information about our expectations for how universities and colleges should support students before, during and after industrial action. These are set out in the annex to this letter.

It's not the OfS's role to intervene in industrial disputes between higher education providers and their staff. But we've taken the step to write to you because we are concerned about the impact of industrial action, such as strikes and marking and assessment boycotts, on students.

This impact is evidenced in research we've published today, which shows that industrial action can significantly disrupt students' academic experience, progression through their course, and ability to achieve their qualifications. The research also shows that students' experiences during recent industrial action have varied significantly and, in some cases, they did not receive the education or support they had expected. By sharing these insights, and being clear about our position, we hope to promote greater consistency across the higher education sector in how institutions respond to disruption, so that all students are treated fairly, regardless of what or where they study.

We recognise the challenges for institutions in these circumstances and know that colleagues across the sector have continued to work hard to avoid disruption for students. We also appreciate that many institutions took positive and proactive steps to support students during recent periods of industrial action.

In developing our statement we've engaged a broad range of stakeholders across the sector to ensure we have considered a range of perspectives and concerns. We have taken particular care in expressing expectations in relation to financial compensation. We want to be clear that we don't see compensation as a substitute for the holistic experience of intellectual, professional and personal development that a student should expect from their higher education. Institutions should

continue to focus their efforts during industrial action on delivering the education that students expect. The inclusion of an expectation in relation to compensation does, though, reflect the rights students have under the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

I hope you find our statement and the related research helpful. We are planning a follow-up briefing webinar next month, offering an opportunity for you or your colleagues to ask questions or seek clarification about the information we've shared today. Please look out for further details, including how to participate. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact the team at regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

John Blake
Director for Fair Access and Participation