UCU

University and College Union

Sally Hunt *General secretary*

Carlow Street
London NW1 7LH

Telephone 020 7756 2500
Fax 020 7756 2501
Email shunt@ucu.org.uk

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David Willetts MP
Minister of State for universities and science
Department of Business Innovation and Skills
1 Victoria Street
LONDON
SW1H 0ET

Dear David

When we met and discussed the issue of for-profit private providers in UK higher education, we had, I think, a difference of opinion on the role they should play.

Since then, BPP College, our specific discussion point, has been granted University College status by your department and there have been reports that BPP and other companies are lobbying for easier access to government subsidised student loans and funding.

As you know, we are deeply concerned about any moves to make it easier for for-profit providers to access either university title, or student loans and government funding.

Our concerns about for-profit providers are widely shared in the United States. As you are aware, both the US Congress and the Obama administration are currently discussing how to better regulate the for-profit sector in the wake of a series of high-profile public scandals involving companies like Kaplan and Apollo, which owns BPP University College, alleging malpractice in recruiting and the sale of poor products to lower income students. In the light of these developments in the USA, I thought we should lay out our concerns for you now, before the issue moves on much further. I enclose a copy of a new report we are publishing that details some of these scandals in the for-profit sector.

I would ask that no further moves are made by this government, either now or in the wake of the Browne review's report, to make it easier for the for-profit sector to access public funds or the brand reputation of UK higher education. Such moves would, we believe, create conditions very similar to those that have generated the current controversy in the United States. I look forward to your reply.

Best wishes

Sally Hunt
General Secretary

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