



Media, Communications &  
Cultural Studies Association

The Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson C.B.E.  
Secretary of State for Education  
20 Great Smith St.  
London SW1P 3BT

21<sup>st</sup> April 2021

Dear Mr. Williamson,

I am writing on behalf of the Executive Committee of MeCCSA, which is the subject association representing academics and students in UK higher education in the fields indicated by its title, as above.

We were puzzled and disturbed by comments reported as by you in telling the House of Commons that, while no final decisions have yet been made about future tuition fee levels in higher education, it is likely you would seek to provide “support for strategic subjects such as engineering and medicine, while slashing the taxpayer subsidy for such subjects as media studies”. While we entirely understand that funding is guided by assessments of need and priority, and we leave it to others to address the appropriate level of funding to meet such needs, we wish fundamentally to question the notion that ‘media studies’ is in any sense an appropriate example of non-strategic education.

As you are aware, of course, the term ‘media studies’ is rather an elastic short-hand for a variety of programmes, which run the gamut of content from technical, to humanities, and social science orientation, and which are equally varied in the amount of their directly vocational content. Many programmes combine these elements, ensuring their students have a keen appreciation of the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of communications and media, while acquiring an advanced understanding of the technologies, institutions, industries, and processes involved. They appear under a variety of labels in differing universities. What they have in common, however, is a very high level of demand from applicants, and an exceptional record of employment for their graduates (often much higher than for many science and technology programmes). It is widely recognised that cultural, communication and creative industries are among the fastest growing sectors of the economy, while the importance of communications and media in the lives of UK citizens has never been greater, making it inconceivable that their rigorous and substantial study should not be a major feature of academic provision. These last points are set out compellingly in the current OfS consultation on recurrent funding for 2021/22 (paras 22-23) reflecting an argument often made by yourself and other ministers. We shall, of course, be responding to that consultation and to the equivalent consultation on capital

funding. Further to those arguments, however, the excellence of UK teaching and research in these fields is internationally recognised, and its impact on similar fields elsewhere is profound.

For all these reasons, we hope you will appreciate our concerns about the reported comments cited earlier and we trust that, as government thinking on these matters develops, the positive contribution of media, cultural and communication studies to the UK's position as a world-class provider of higher education will be duly recognised and protected.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Einar Thorsen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Einar Thorsen  
Chair of MeCCSA  
Media, Communication & Cultural Studies Association