



UK Government

Date: 21 May 2026

Dear Keiron, Debra, Colin, Simon

I am immensely grateful for your correspondence sent in relation to the ongoing disruption in the Middle East.

As the UK Government International Education Champion, you and colleagues will know that I have been asked by Government Ministers to work in partnership with government and the sector to deliver on the ambitions set out in the UK's International Education Strategy. The new strategy released this year reinforces the Government's commitment to supporting our world-class institutions to deliver excellence and opportunity wherever they operate. The interests of the British international school sector, and those that teach and learn within it, sit at the heart of this commitment.

The recent conflict in the Middle East has caused significant disruption to education institutions at home and overseas, with worrying and troublesome implications for the UK international school community in particular whose communities have been affected. I am personally aware of the incredible resilience, flexibility and urgency that have been displayed by school and learning communities – and through my engagements with government and the sector have been inspired by hearing the steps taken to respond to rapidly changing circumstances, ensuring that safety and wellbeing is at the centre of all decisions taken by educational leaders.

I am also aware of the regular and extensive dialogue between UK government and host governments overseas that grow and safeguard strong, established and deep partnerships and protect British interests.

UK education institutions are globally trusted for their quality and impact, with the UK recognised worldwide for diversity and excellence in education. Whilst there continues to be significant disruption to education – particularly assessment and examination provision – I am confident that the decisions made by leading and trusted UK providers remain rooted in quality assurance and a staunch commitment to uphold the highest safeguarding standards, ensuring that students are given all necessary and reasonable support required to meeting their full learning potential.

I am also confident that all efforts and considerations are being made to ensure that applications to higher and further education will not be adversely affected – and students who wish to attend higher and further education in the UK or at institutions around the world will be able to do so in the normal way.

In my role as International Education Champion, I would like to express my reassurance that UK Government stands shoulder to shoulder with the British international school sector and the communities across the Middle East that the sector nurtures. I remain fully committed to working with the sector to get a full picture of current and emerging impacts, to protect UK interests in what has been a fast-evolving situation – and welcome further dialogue with you and colleagues from across the sector.

I hope you will accept my thanks and deepest gratitude to you personally for your partnership and commitment to supporting the national interest through UK international education. I relay this



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appreciation on behalf of Ministers and colleagues across the UK Government – especially the Department for Business and Trade, Department for Education, and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office as co-owners of the UK Government International Education Strategy - a strategy that COBIS and sector associations have contributed towards with unswerving and relentless ambition – and even in the face of great adversity and challenge.

I am copying your letter and my response to the UK Government International Education Strategy ministerial team.

Yours Sincerely,

Steve Smith

Professor Sir Steve Smith
UK Government International Education Champion
UK Government Special Representative to Saudi Arabia for Education

cc Minister Bryant, DBT
Minister Smith, DfE
Minister Chapman, FCDO