7 February 2018

Dear Mr Hinds

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Education. I hope you will be very successful in your post.

I have written to your predecessor, Justine Greening, on several occasions in the last two years, but I have not had a satisfactory response. In fact, I have been dismissed every time.

However, I have reason to hope that you may be more amenable to my approach, since I know that you are well aware of the problems of unpaid internships, and the enormous damage the practice is doing in the UK.

Having been at the front line of the campaign for fair internships for the last eight years – running the website Graduate Fog – I believe I am one of the UK's most knowledgeable experts on this issue.

During these years, I have come to the conclusion that the response to this problem must be led by the Department for Education. Your predecessor's team appeared to disagree with this, but please allow me to make my case.

After nearly eight years of trying to work with the Department for Business, it is clear to me that they are not the right people for the job. They are unable to see this as anything other than a straightforward (and fairly minor) employment law problem, and they simply do not have sufficient understanding of the issues around this problem to be open to solutions. (For example, the reporting system still rests far too heavily on the shoulders of former interns to come forward and complain about their employers, something most are reluctant and fearful to do, for obvious reasons).

Instead, at its heart, this is a social mobility issue. Please believe me: it will only be solved by a Department with a true and deep interest in improving opportunity for young people from all backgrounds. And that is yours.

Ms Greening’s team also pointed out that most unpaid internships happen after university, meaning the problem was outside her remit. Although that is true, an increasing number of unpaid internships now happen before graduation – in fact, in some cases universities are facilitating these (illegal) placements. As young people are repeatedly warned of the importance of gaining ‘experience’ as early as possible, this problem is affecting them at an earlier and earlier stage in their education.

But even those internships that *do* happen after graduation are still your Department’s problem. Put simply, all the work that you will do to help poorer children through school and into university will be for nothing if they cannot jump the final hurdle: working for free for months (sometimes years) with no guarantee they will ever be offered paid work in the future. Unpaid work is the barrier which blocks them from realising their dreams, and being rewarded for all their hard work and

their (and taxpayers') investment in their future.

My views have not changed since I first wrote to Ms Greening in July 2016. In fact, they have become even firmer. When I hear your colleagues (including the Prime Minister, Theresa May) talk about raising aspiration among young people, I am not inspired but instead feel desperately sad. Raising the hopes and dreams of poorer children from disadvantaged backgrounds is not helpful if the reality doesn't match up. In fact, it is downright cruel to do this unless this Government tackles unpaid internships. It is cruel because you are inspiring children towards jobs they won't be able to get. You are plunging them into debt for careers they will never be able to afford to have.

For these reasons, I am asking you to take a fresh look at this issue and accept that this *is* an issue that your Department must be involved in solving. Please allow me to present to your team a 10-point plan for improving the problem of unpaid internships within the UK. We need a co-ordinated

approach to creating a stronger and fairer bridge between university and the world of work. I hope you will be keen to help build that. Frankly, it is already long overdue.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With many thanks,

Tanya de Grunwald
Founder, Graduate Fog