



Student panel review

Issue

1. To update the board on the review undertaken of the OfS Student Panel and recruitment to the panel for the 2020/21 academic year.

Recommendations

2. The student engagement team has completed a review of the student panel and confirmed a set of recommendations which the team intends to introduce. The board is invited to provide its strategic steer in relation to these recommendations to inform the further development of the student panel.
3. The board is also invited to note the update in Annex A on the recent recruitment campaign for the new student panel members.

Further information

4. Available from Cassie Agbehenu, Student Engagement Manager
(cassie.agbehenu@officeforstudents.org.uk)

Recommendations

The board is invited to offer views on the below set of recommendations:

Communication	Link between the student panel and the board
<p>Communicate a clear definition of the role and purpose of the panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate the role clearly during recruitment and panel training, and ensure that a shared understanding of the role has been reached in advance of the first meeting. • ensure the panel's activity and objectives are aligned to the role and purpose • set out clear expectations of the panel in terms of the way it advises the board. <p>Review the terms of reference and circulate with board members once it has been updated to reflect the new panel.</p> <p>Communicate the impact that the panel has had on pieces of work clearly through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing with the regular student panel chair's update • a panel impact report 	<p>Continue to invite board members to panel meetings</p> <p>Invite student panel members to lead facilitated sessions with the board</p> <p>Introduce a chair's update report after each board meeting</p> <p>Arrange mentoring between board members and student panel members who are in their second year on the panel.</p> <p>Facilitate a connection on pieces of work between the panel and the board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the board to ask the panel or the panel to ask the board to discuss a specific topic to gather views • have an agreed theme or piece of work that the board and panel can both work on together to support deeper engagement
Format and frequency of the meetings	Support for the panel members
<p>To retain a similar meeting structure in the upcoming cycle, extending the start and finish time of meetings and retaining the closed session.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement additional methods of communication in-between meetings • Introduce virtual collaborative utilising existing systems 	<p>Introduce mentoring for panel members to support them in their role (mentoring of panel members in their first year with student panel alumni).</p> <p>Include an introduction to committees and panels, and broader sector knowledge in the ongoing panel training.</p> <p>The student engagement team to support the panel to set clear objectives each year.</p>

Additional opportunities	
<p>The student engagement team to arrange a mix of face to face and virtual opportunities for students, including student panel members, to engage in the work of the OfS.</p>	
<p>The student engagement team to arrange virtual and networking opportunities for panel members.</p>	
<p>The student engagement team to facilitate a conference or discussion meetup for different student panels or committees in related organisations, to enhance continuity and understanding across the sector.</p>	

Background

5. The student engagement team has completed a review of the student panel; this was a commitment made by OfS in the student engagement strategy.
6. The student panel was established in January 2018. The first two years of its existence were framed as a pilot project to be reviewed and evaluated as part of the process of establishing a full student engagement strategy. The panel was initially set up to ensure that the OfS's work is informed by student perspectives.
7. During the second year of the panel (2019-20), the format of the panel meetings evolved, with sessions moving towards a workshop style and the panel being involved in policy development at an earlier stage. Responsibility for the support to and administration of the student panel was also transferred to the new student engagement team, and now sits within the External Relations directorate.
8. The January 2020 student panel meeting was the final meeting for the panel members who had been on the panel for the initial pilot years and, as set out in the student engagement strategy, a review of the panel was initiated to:
 - understand the effectiveness of the panel
 - establish whether the panel is structured appropriately
 - explore what the OfS could do to increase the panel's impact further
9. This paper summarises the themes that emerged from the review and identifies the recommendations that the student engagement team have put forward.

10. The following methods were used to review the panel's effectiveness:

11. Survey and telephone interviews with the panel members

- a survey was sent to all panellists to gather views and experiences over the past year and give an opportunity to offer ideas on how the panel could be improved. Nine panel members completed the survey.
- in addition to the survey, all student panel members were invited to an informal telephone interview with Martha Longdon (Chair of the Student Panel) to reflect on their time as a panellist and provide feedback and suggestions. Ten student panel members were interviewed (6 having completed their second year on the panel, and 4 eligible to return for a second term).

12. Survey and telephone interviews with members of the OfS board

- Engagement with members of the board was arranged to understand the effectiveness of the panel from the board's perspective, the connection between the panel and the board, and whether there is anything additional that could be done to strengthen the links between the two.
- Board members were invited to complete a survey or join a telephone interview with the student engagement team. There were seven responses to the survey and two telephone interviews.

13. Staff survey open to all OfS staff

- The student engagement team ran an all staff survey to collect staff views and experiences of engaging with students and the student panel. 39% of responders had engaged with the student panel.

Summary of themes

14. Below is a summary of the main themes found within the review.

Communication of the role of the student panel

15. Feedback from the panel members highlighted how there was an increased level of understanding of the role from panel members after a period of being on the panel. It was noted that the role differed to what some panellists had expected. One panellist commented that they expected a formal meeting style where panellists make decisions, when the role was advisory, and sessions were more discursive.

16. The review highlighted how further clarity of the role would be beneficial.

Suggestions included:

- having a single, clear definition of the role of the panel to ensure the panel's activity and objectives are aligned.
- articulating the role of panel members clearly during recruitment and training and ensure that a shared understanding of the role has been reached in advance of the first meeting.
- circulating the terms of reference with the board once updated to reflect the new 2020-21 student panel.
- communicate the impact that the panel have had on pieces of work for example through a regular chair's update and/or through a panel impact report.

Link between the panel and the board

17. In the second year of the meetings, board members were invited to join the panel meetings which was welcomed by both the panel and the board.
18. Board members noted the importance of investing time in building effective and worthwhile relationships with student panellists and that further interaction would support this.
19. Board members highlighted how the power dynamic between the student panel, the board and OfS staff must always be acknowledged. It was clear that staff and students have worked hard to ensure that the power imbalance is diffused as much as possible and this should be an ongoing part of the work of the student engagement team in supporting both the panel and OfS staff who are engaging with students.
20. Within the review, the panel and the board made some suggestions on how to further strengthen the link between the two.

Panel members suggested:

- Exploring some mechanisms for the panel to interact formally with the board through papers and presentations.
- Offering additional informal opportunities for panel members to interact with the board where available, and designing these opportunities to add value to both the panel and the board.
- having clear expectations of the role of the panel in how it advises the board and communicating and reflecting these in the terms of reference.

Board members suggested:

- an increased overlap on pieces of work for the board and the panel

- triangulating the priorities between the board, panel, and directors
 - for the board to ask the panel or the panel to ask the board to discuss a specific topic
 - having an agreed theme or piece of work that the board and panel can both work on together to support deeper engagement and for the panel views to be integrated into the heart of our decision making
21. The review highlighted how the board members are aware of the panel's views through; the chair of the student panel, Martha Longdon communicating the views of the panel at board meetings, update papers and minutes from the panel meetings. The below suggestions were made which could further raise awareness of the panels' views with the board:
- the views of the panel could be elevated by providing an opportunity for panel members to raise any questions, or concerns at board meetings.
 - a summary report on how the panel has informed policy development to be sent to the board.
 - directors to share the views of the panel to individual teams in their directorate.
22. Increased interaction between the panel and the board was supported, the below suggestions were made:
- board members to continue to attend panel meetings.
 - student panel members to lead facilitated sessions with the board.
 - mentoring between the board members and student panel members who are in their second year on the panel.

Format and frequency of the meetings

23. Panellists have welcomed the new workshop format of the sessions which was introduced in the second year of the panel. There is a sense that discussions are more structured.
24. It was found that engaging the student panel in early stages of work is positive, but considerations should be given to each individual piece of work around when best to engage the panel. If the panel engages early on, it is important that it can re-engage throughout.
25. Some panellists feel that the current format and frequency of meetings does not necessarily afford them enough time to discuss the full range of areas that they would want to be influencing. Some suggestions were:

- to have additional meetings during the year, although it was noted that some panellists take annual leave to attend meetings and so additional meetings would impact this.
- have longer meetings.
- having phone calls and/or email updates in between meetings.
- prioritising panel priorities when setting the agenda for panel sessions and putting enough structure, guidance and framing in place to make sure output is useful.

Support for the panel members

26. Feedback indicated that running of the panel has been smooth and the support from the student engagement team has been welcome.
27. Briefing papers have generally supported panellists to prepare and contribute to meetings effectively.
28. Some additional suggestions were made to increase the level of support for the panel members:
 - training should be expanded to include an introduction to committees and panels, and broader sector knowledge and competencies delivered on an ongoing basis over the course of the year.
 - it was suggested that there could be an increased onboarding induction process to accelerate the learning process and a new focus on mentoring and development.
 - when sharing information with the panel, additional clarity could be given to panel members to confirm which information is provided in strict confidence and which can be discussed with individuals beyond panel colleagues and OfS staff.
 - the panel could with the support of the student engagement team, set clear objectives for the year.

Additional opportunities

29. Some panellists expressed that they would like to have greater involvement in specific areas of work outside of panel meetings. Some suggestions:
 - where possible, there should be an appropriate mix of face to face and virtual opportunities for students, including student panel members, to engage in the work of the OfS.
 - additional virtual and networking opportunities should be provided where appropriate.

- a conference or a meetup for different student panels or committees in related organisations, to enhance continuity and understanding across the sector.

30. The team will begin to implement these recommendations during this student panel year and continually review the effectiveness of the new introductions.

Paper publication date

31. This report will be made available on the OfS website.

Annex A: Student Panel Recruitment

1. Additional to the student panel review, the student engagement team have completed the recruitment for the new student panel members. This year, we recruited 10 new panellists, making a panel of 16 in total.
2. We ran a 3-stage process:
 - application via personal statement and CV (890 applications, sifted by 30 OfS colleagues. Personal information of applicants was removed for the sifting stage)
 - group interviews via Teams (40 applicants across 6 sessions)
 - individual interviews via Teams (19 interviewees)
3. We captured equality monitoring information for applicants. Of the 890 applications;
 - 49% of applications were from BAME students
 - 29% mature students
 - 23% LGBTQ+ students
 - 20% disabled students
 - 60 applications were received from students under the age of 18
 - we also saw good representation of those with caring responsibilities, students who are estranged from their families or care experienced and those from small and specialist providers.
4. Of the 890 applicants, it was found that:
 - applicants heard about the vacancy most through a teacher, lecturer or member of staff at their university, college or school (355 out of 868 who answered this question)
 - 150 applicants heard about the role through their Student Union
 - 70 applicants found out about the role on social media
5. There were 65,000 impressions for tweets during the recruitment campaign and over 200 people clicked through to the website from the initial tweet which had over 100 retweets
6. Tweets throughout the campaign were shared by a wide variety of providers, Students' Unions, schools, charities and third sector organisations including some who work with some of the groups we were targeting (e.g. disabled, international and traveller students)

7. We posted a sponsored job advert on LinkedIn and received 87 applications directly through LinkedIn. There were over 3,500 impressions on LinkedIn posts and nearly 1,500 video views through this platform
8. 2,095 people read the news item on our website during the recruitment campaign (almost 500 more unique visitors than the next most popular page in the press and media section in the same timeframe), 1,053 read Kate Lander's blog and 7,317 visited the application page.
9. During the interview stage we found that a high number of applicants had heard about the Office for Students through the recruitment campaign. We have encouraged all applicants to sign up to our student newsletter, Student Spotlight and to check our Get Involved pages for other opportunities. This aligns with our objective to raise awareness of the Office for Students among students in the student engagement strategy and supports us to increase our outreach.



Annex B: Survey questions for the student panel members

1. When were you appointed to the OfS student panel?
2. To what extent would you have agreed with the following statement, based on when you were first appointed as a panellist: 'I understand my role as a student panel member'
3. To what extent would you agree with the following statement, based on how you feel currently: 'I understand my role as a student panel member'
4. I know how the panel has had an impact on the OfS
5. If you agreed/strongly agreed, what areas of work have you impacted?
6. I feel confident to share my views in the panel meetings
7. I feel that my views are listened to by OfS staff
8. I feel that my views are listened to by other student panel members
9. I feel that the briefing papers received before panel meetings have supported me to contribute effectively
10. I feel that four meetings a year is appropriate
11. If you have disagreed or strongly disagreed, how many meetings per year do you think the panel should have?
12. I feel that the meetings are an appropriate length of time
13. If you have disagreed or strongly disagreed, how long do you think student panel meetings should be?
14. I feel confident that the panel's views are considered by the board
15. I feel supported by the Student Engagement Team to be able to carry out my role effectively
16. What do you feel, if anything, could have been improved in the way that you have been supported
17. What do you feel has gone well over the last year?
18. Do you have any other comments?

Annex C: Interview questions with the student panel members

1. What do you think the role of the student panel is?
2. Were you clear about your role and expectations as a panel member?
3. In your view, how well is the panel carrying out its role and functions? Could any improvements benefit the panel and in what way?
4. What did you think of the length and frequency of the panel meetings?
5. In your view, to what extent did the panel meetings facilitate full and open discussions?
Do you feel confident to share your thoughts honestly and openly in meetings to staff and other panellists?
6. In your experience, how useful is the panel's operation proving to the OfS, and in what way? What could help the panel achieve its objectives?
7. In your view, how did you find the link between the panel and the board? Is there anything additional which would have supported the connection between the two?
8. How did you find the support of the panel? For example, in terms of clarity, length and comprehensiveness of the briefing papers?
9. In your view, did the panel have the appropriate mix of expertise and skills? Could any further expertise or skills benefit the panel and in what way?
10. In your experience, did you feel that there were sufficient additional opportunities for you to get involved in? What could be done differently to support panellists to have opportunities available which are of interest?
11. What do you think would help the OfS involve more students in the work that it does, including enabling panellists to do more?

Annex D: Survey and interview questions with members of the board

1. What do you think the role of the student panel is? How much do you know about why it exists and what it does?
2. To what extent are you aware of the views of the student panel? Is there anything that could be done additionally to communicate the views of the panel?
3. In your view, how useful is the panel's operation for the OfS, and in what way?
4. Do you have any views on how the role of the student panel could be strengthened within the OfS?
5. In your view, how do you find the link between the panel and the board? Is there anything additional which would have supported the connection between the two?
6. Within the current format, panellists are involved in projects and policy development at an early stage of the work. In your view, do you feel that this is the most appropriate time for panellists to be engaged in work?
7. (for those who have attended the student panel) How did you find your experience of coming along to a panel meeting? What did you enjoy about it? Do you have any thoughts about how it went?

Annex E: Student engagement staff survey

1. Which Directorate do you work in?
 - competition and registration
 - external relations
 - data, foresight and analysis
 - fair access and participation
 - resources, finance and transformation

2. Have you engaged directly (e.g. face to face, through focus groups or workshops) with students to inform your work?
 - yes
 - no
 - unsure

3. What activities have you undertaken to engage with students? (Select all that apply)
 - focus groups/workshops
 - have a student project advisor
 - have a student intern
 - worked with student representatives
 - worked with the student panel
 - student survey
 - other (please specify)

4. What activities have you undertaken to engage with students? (Select all that apply)
 - focus groups/workshops
 - have a student project advisor
 - have a student intern
 - worked with student representatives
 - worked with the student panel
 - student survey
 - other (please specify)

5. Have you engaged indirectly (e.g. through OfS using research about student views or external data about students) to inform your work?
 - yes
 - no
 - unsure

6. What would you say about how students have impacted your work?