

Office for Students (OfS) student panel: Terms of reference 2021-22

Values statement

1. The OfS student panel exists to challenge and improve OfS policy development and making by putting the student voice at the heart of the OfS. To achieve this, it will work in an open, transparent and inclusive way, respecting the diversity of perspectives among panel members and the student population.
2. This values statement is aligned with the OfS's values of:
 - a. Ambition
 - b. Openness
 - c. Learning
 - d. Diversity.

Purpose

3. Meaningful student engagement is a strategic priority for the OfS. The student panel ensures that students' and graduates views inform the OfS's policy development and implementation. The student panel also plays a critical role in advising and influencing the OfS's activity, enabling the OfS regulate higher education effectively.

Membership

4. The panel is selected through fair and open recruitment. The membership should include a broad and diverse range of future, current and former higher education students from different backgrounds, institutions and modes of study.
5. Panel members will initially be appointed for a period of one academic year. Subject to the agreement of the chair of the student panel and the relevant OfS director, members may be re-appointed for a second term of one year.
6. The panel is chaired by the student representative on the OfS's board for the duration of their term as a board member.

Responsibilities of the panel

7. The panel is an important source of advice to the OfS board. The panel chair regularly updates the board on the work of the panel, and highlights issues to the panel that are discussed at the board.
8. At its standing meetings, the panel regularly meets with members of the OfS executive and policy teams and shapes OfS priorities.
9. In order to fulfil its role, the panel's activity includes, but not be limited to, engagement in the following areas:

Student insight:

- 9.1. To help the OfS to understand, and take account of, the interests of students (short, medium, and long term) in its policy development and decisions.
- 9.2. To take a strategic view of the sector, in order to provide advice and perspectives beyond one's own experience of higher education.

Specific duties:

- 9.3. To receive updates of the OfS board's meetings from the student representative on the board.
- 9.4. To shape and respond to relevant consultations and policies that impact students as appropriate.
- 9.5. To advise the OfS in implementation and evaluation of its student engagement strategy.
- 9.6. To share students' views and experiences to challenge the OfS to develop policy and regulation in the interest of students.
- 9.7. To provide timely reports to the OfS board, following panel meetings.

Duties of the OfS

10. The OfS commits to:
 - 10.1. Providing appropriate support and resource to the panel, including through training, to facilitate meaningful discussion and informed decision making.
 - 10.2. Ensuring the panel has access to appropriate resource, policy teams and OfS staff to carrying out its duties.
 - 10.3. Demonstrating to the panel how it is responding to its advice and recommendations.
 - 10.4. Providing advice and guidance to the panel, where appropriate. For example, in communications and engagement with the media, panellists will have access to professional support.
 - 10.5. Give panel members a valuable experience relevant to their future employment.

Meetings

11. The panel meetings will be conducted as follows:
 - 11.1. The panel will meet at least four times a year.
 - 11.2. The panel will be chaired by the permanent student representative on the OfS board.
 - 11.3. The student representative on the OfS board will report decisions and activity of the panel to the OfS board.
 - 11.4. Panel members will declare any conflicts of interest whenever and wherever they arise.
 - 11.5. The panel requires the presence of six members, including the chair, to be quorate.
 - 11.6. Panel meetings will be flexible between being in person and online to ensure the panel is accessible.
 - 11.7. Panel agendas will be developed balancing the priorities of panel members with those of the OfS. Agendas will be approved by the chair.
 - 11.8. The panel can invite relevant guests to attend for the purposes of a discussion and/or a presentation on topics which are within the remit of the OfS.
 - 11.9. A formal minute will be taken of the four student panel meetings.
 - 11.10. The minutes of each panel meeting will be approved by the chair, before being shared with the panel and then passed to the OfS board. Panel minutes will go to the OfS board for noting and will be published as part of the OfS board papers.
 - 11.11. The chair has the authority to call an extraordinary meeting of the panel should circumstances require.
 - 11.12. The panel and the OfS shall review the panel's terms of reference annually.
 - 11.13. The panel may have observers at the discretion of the chair.
 - 11.14. The chief executive of the OfS may attend all panel meetings as an observer.
 - 11.15. If the chair cannot attend a standing panel meeting, another panel member will deputise for them and chair the meeting. The chair will select the panel member who will deputise at the start of each academic cycle.