

OfS student panel meeting

26 January 2023

Time: 1400–1800

Location: London office, and online

Present members: Martha Longdon (Chair)

Nkechi Adeboye

Molly Edwards

Anita Hashmi

Thomas Freeston

Thibau Grumett

Oscar Minto

Misha Patel

Amy Stanning

Michael Steele

Caleb Stevens

Lila Tamea

Attending: Sandra Binns (Student Support Champion Project Manager – Nottingham Trent University) (Item 3)

Benjamin Hunt (Student Engagement Manager) (Items 1-7)

Christie Jones (Student Engagement Officer) (Items 1-7)

Alwyn Jones (Learning and Development Business Partner) (Item 6)

Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive) (Item 4)

Sarah Matthews (Leadership Development Officer) (Item 5)

Dayo Olukoshi (OfS Board member) (Item 2)

Professor Edward Peck (Student Support Champion and Vice-Chancellor – Nottingham Trent University) (Item 3)

Laura Radcliffe (Team Administrator) (Items 1-7)

Apologies: Rahul Mathasing

Ezra Rose

Item 1 – Chair’s welcome

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members, and introduced Caleb Stevens, the incoming student panel chair and student experience board member who was observing the meeting.
2. The chair thanked those who participated in recent activities, including:
 - a. Presenting at an association of university directors of estates (AUDE) conference in the autumn.
 - b. Filming video testimonials regarding panel member’s involvement in the blended learning review.
 - c. Sharing feedback on the initial proposals for the harassment and sexual misconduct consultation.
 - d. Sharing feedback about the proposed themes of the cost of living Insight brief.
 - e. Filming videos and writing a blog post to promote the harassment and sexual misconduct consultation.
 - f. Filming videos for the OfS staff conference on 7 February.

Item 2 – Board and student panel session

3. The chair invited Dayo Olukoshi, an OfS board member, to the meeting.
4. The board member shared some of the topics discussed at recent meetings, including:
 - a. Freedom of speech.
 - b. The possibility of visiting providers to speak to student groups.
 - c. Equality of standards, and students receiving value for money.
 - d. The blended learning review.
 - e. Access and participation reforms.
5. Panel members asked the following questions:
 - a. As someone with a background working in schools, had the board member seen any signs that students are choosing not to go into higher education due to the cost of living?
 - i. The board member responded that higher education is still seen as important to enhance social mobility, and that some students have been encouraged, or are choosing to study outside of London where cost of living is lower.
 - b. What has been the impact of the pandemic on children in secondary schools and how are providers adjusting to that?

- i. The board member responded that the impact on mental health has been significant. There are worries that this will could lead to higher dropout rates.
 - c. What were the board's view of the industrial action planned at universities?
 - i. The board members responded that the board would be discussing industrial action at an upcoming board meeting.
6. The board member thanked the panel for their questions and left the meeting.

Item 3 – Discussion session 1: How to design and deliver student support to best meet the core needs of students

7. The chair invited Professor Edward Peck, Student Support Champion and Vice-Chancellor at Nottingham Trent University, and Sandra Binns, Student Support Champion Project Manager to the meeting.
8. Professor Peck explained the mandate of his role and outlined the purpose of the session, which was to seek panel member's views regarding student support services.
9. The panel fed back that:
- a. The burden of offering student support is often on academic staff, and there can be long wait times to receive help from qualified professional services staff.
 - b. Students should be checked on during the waiting period to access support services.
 - c. There is a lack of strategy regarding how to support certain groups, like those who live in rural areas or who are distance learners.
 - d. Similarly, students from different cultural backgrounds and international students might have a different understanding of support. It is important to explain to students what support means.
 - e. Most providers host a 'welfare week', and it's important that those are not tick-box events. The most successful events are those used as an opportunity to raise awareness for support systems.
 - f. The culture at a provider can impact support. Providers need to have a supportive culture to be able to implement support structures.
 - g. Students should be supported to learn from failure as this can contribute to building resilience.
10. Professor Peck thanked the panel for their questions and left the meeting.

Item 4 – Chief executive's update

11. The chair welcomed the chief executive to the meeting to begin her update.
12. The update included:

- a. Changes in ministers since the last panel meeting.
- b. Cost of living.
- c. The deadline closing for the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and details regarding the number of submissions received.
- d. The consultation on equality of opportunity and access and participation plans has closed. The responses will be published in spring alongside the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.
- e. The harassment and sexual misconduct consultation is in the final stages of preparation before being published. The chief executive thanked the panel for their input into this work.
- f. The chief executive thanked the chair for her work with the board and student panel, and for extending their term to the end of January.

13. Panel members asked the following questions:

- a. What was the chief executive's view of the industrial action planned at universities?
 - i. The chief executive responded that the OfS's regulatory requirements are still in place and need to be met during industrial action. Students need to be protected and remain a priority.
- b. Whether it would be possible to organise a debrief with the providers and students who participated in the TEF, so the feedback can be incorporated into the next exercise.
 - i. The chief executive responded that this would be explored further.

14. The chief executive thanked the panel for their questions and left the meeting.

Item 5 – Discussion 2: Cost of living research update

15. The chair welcomed the Leadership Development Officer to the meeting.

16. She shared developments on the cost of living research that had progressed since speaking to the panel in October. The research mechanisms include:

- a. A student poll.
- b. Roundtable discussions with providers, student union representatives, and mission groups/representative bodies.

17. Other updates on cost of living include:

- a. There will be an Insight brief published in spring summarising the outcomes of their research.
- b. The Department for Education (DfE) has allocated £15 million in hardship funding that the OfS will distribute to providers in the coming weeks.

- c. Early indications show that the rising cost of living is impacting a wide range of students.

18. The panel fed back:

- a. Although evidence may not show yet that there have been an increase in drop-out rates, there might be students who are on the precipice of dropping out.
 - i. The Leadership Development Officer responded that in an ideal world, it would be valuable to be able to speak to the same research participants in two years' time.
- b. It would be useful to compare this issue with student perceptions during the pandemic. The pandemic forced long standing issues to be addressed, and there could be a similar outcome from the cost of living.

19. The Leadership Development Officer thanked the panel for their questions and left the meeting.

Item 6 – Training session: Regulatory practice learning programme

20. The chair invited the Student Engagement Manager and Learning and Development Business Partner to begin their presentation.

21. The Learning and Development Business Partner provided an overview of the regulatory practice learning programme that OfS staff are undertaking, and how it was developed. The structure of the programme includes:

- a. A pre-course questionnaire used to measure participants' current levels of regulatory theory knowledge.
- b. Two days of in-person training.
- c. Post training assignments.

22. Further learning materials from the programme have been made available to the student panel members.

23. The Student Engagement Manager presented on one aspect of the programme surrounding consumer engagement, and how different regulatory approaches apply to the OfS's context.

24. He asked the panel for feedback on how we can continue to strengthen our approach to student engagement, and communicate about the work the OfS is already doing in this area. The panel fed back:

- a. Publishing the impact the student panel has made on the OfS's cost of living research.
- b. Engaging on channels where there is student engagement, such as sector podcasts, blogs, and students' unions.
- c. Ensuring that student engagement impacts are included in the OfS annual report.

- d. The OfS is still a new organisation, and it will take more time to continue to build relationships with student stakeholders and providers.

25. The chair thanked Learning and Development Business Partner and Student Engagement Manager for their time.

Item 7 – Closed session

26. OfS staff shared final housekeeping items before exiting the meeting.