



OfS student panel meeting

29 June 2023

Time: 1400–1800

Location: Holiday Inn, Bloomsbury

Present members: Caleb Stevens (Chair)

Amy Stanning

Lila Tamea

Michael Steele

Misha Patel

Molly Edwards

Nkechi Adeboye

Oscar Minto

Rahul Mathasing

Thibau Grumett

Thomas Freeston

Attending: Jack Thompson (TEF Manager) (Item 2)

Susan Lapworth (chief executive) (Item 3)

John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation) (Item 4)

Hilary Jones (Head of Freedom of Speech) (Item 5)

Julia Moss (Student Surveys Manager) (Item 6)

Charlotte Finlay (Student Surveys Senior Officer) (Item 5)

Hazelle Mendel (Student Engagement Intern)

Sarah Walters (Team Administrator)

Apologies: Anita Hashmi

Emma Maskell (Head of Student Engagement and Information)

Item 1 – Chair's welcome

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members to the meeting and introduced the OfS members of staff.

2. The chair thanked those who participated in recent activities, including:
 - a. Taking part in a workshop about the harassment and sexual misconduct consultation.
 - b. Providing feedback on the sexual misconduct and prevalence survey.
 - c. Taking part in a focus group about student panel recruitment communications.
 - d. Writing a blog promoting the harassment and sexual misconduct consultation
 - e. Attending the Parliamentary Reception to launch the Office for Students' new strategy for 2022-25.

Item 2 – Discussion Session 1: The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) student submissions

3. The chair welcomed Jack Thompson, the TEF Manager, to the meeting to begin his update.
4. The update included:
 - a. Summary of student participation in TEF 2023.
 - b. Summary of survey results which was sent to TEF student contacts which covered analysis of:
 - i. The OfS's guidance and support
 - ii. Experience of preparing the TEF student submission
 - iii. The influence of the student submission on the TEF assessment
 - iv. Other impacts of student participation
 - v. How can the OfS improve student participation in future TEF exercises.
5. The panel gave the following feedback:
 - a. Guidance around other forms of submission which were acceptable could have been elaborated on and encouraged further.
 - b. Panel asked what percentage of submissions were not in written form.
 - c. The TEF Manager answered that out of around 200 submissions, approximately 30 were in alternative formats such as videos, podcasts and slides.
 - d. Timelines for student submission was too short, guidance came out too late.
6. The chair opened the floor to questions:

Question	Response
a. Will future TEF student submissions be along same lines, so that student contacts and providers have opportunity to prepare for future exercises?	The TEF Manager answered that the OfS hopes to make the student submission an ongoing part of TEF. Small tweaks may be needed, but the general format of the student submission part should remain the same.
b. How much support does the OfS envision the student contact should receive?	The TEF Manager explained that as this was the first year, the OfS was unsure which forms of support were most valuable and what universities and colleges should be expected to do as a minimum. In future years they hope to be able to provide better guidance to institutions based on feedback which they receive.
c. The chair opened a question to the panel to ask whether in their respective institutions, they were aware or involved in the student submission.	<p>Majority of panel members were not invited to engage with their providers' student submission. They questioned whether the student submission format is too niche and if the OfS is failing to engage and hear from a wider pool of the student population.</p> <p>The TEF Manager responded that they set rules about who the student contact should be and it should have been someone with a responsibility for student representation. He responded that the OfS has more work to do to ensure that word around student submission spreads more widely.</p>
d. Is the student submission only relevant for undergraduates?	The TEF Manager confirmed this to be correct.
e. One panel member questioned whether the survey took into consideration that many students do not have the capacity to create 10-page documents in response to the questions asked.	The TEF Manager responded that the breadth of formats in which students were encouraged to present their information was meant to address this issue.
f. The TEF Manager asked the panel how much should the OfS aim to encourage student engagement in TEF given that the next exercise will be in four years' time?	<p>One panel member responded that student unions should be encouraged to reflect on the data which they gathered.</p> <p>One panel member, who acted as student contact, fed back that the exercise took up half of the academic year. Anything that the OfS can do to encourage student contacts to continue to collect data which they will be asked to provide in four years' time would be beneficial.</p>

Question	Response
	<p>One panel member suggested that providers could be encouraged to undergo a yearly 'mini-TEF' to ensure that learnings are not lost.</p> <p>One panel member suggested that the OfS could organise a TEF summit for provider staff and student representatives. The event would aim to encourage best practice between institutions which they believed would be particularly well received by smaller organisations.</p> <p>Another panel member suggested that the OfS could encourage institutions to employ part time student leads who are responsible for collecting relevant data on a yearly basis.</p>
<p>g. The TEF Manager asked panel members to suggest the best ways to promote future participation.</p>	<p>One panel member suggested that the student impact within TEF needs to be clearly identified.</p> <p>Another panel member suggested that constant communication with students is beneficial.</p> <p>Another panel member suggested that some thinking needs to be done around how the OfS can demonstrate that being involved in TEF is worth the students' time.</p>

Item 3 – Chief executive's update

7. The chair welcomed the chief executive, Susan Lapworth, to the meeting to begin her update.
8. The update included:
 - a. The TEF exercise
 - b. Quality investigations relating to business and management and computing courses. The chief executive highlighted that the OfS would normally expect to publish the outcomes of investigations.
 - c. Internal work within the OfS to ensure infrastructure is in place to take on work of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).
 - d. The financial sustainability of providers.
 - i. Market exit case studies recently published to highlight the Office for Students' involvement and intervention.
 - ii. Annual report on the financial sustainability of higher education sector recently published.

- e. The Office for Students' work around consumer protection. This included an insight event where the OfS talked more publicly about the importance of consumer law and student rights.
- f. Parliamentary activities including:
 - i. Higher Education Freedom of Speech Act 2023 which gives the OfS new powers and duties.
 - ii. The House of Lords select committee inquiry into work the work the OfS. The final report is expected to be published in July.
- g. Internal changes within the OfS including:
 - i. The recent appointment of three directors.
 - ii. Internal restructuring of departments and teams.
- h. As it was the last meeting of the academic year, the chief executive thanked the panel members for their contributions over the year.

9. The chief executive invited questions from the panel:

Questions	Responses
a. Where does the chief executive think that the panel has had impact on the work of the OfS?	<p>The chief executive highlighted how conversation with panel over live issues has always been useful and has value.</p> <p>This year the panel was instrumental in ensuring that students are properly integrated into the TEF process. This led to wider learnings for the OfS about how to integrate student perspectives into regulatory judgements.</p> <p>Conversations with the panel about the OfS's work around harassment and sexual misconduct have highlighted how important the issue is.</p>
b. When will we be recruiting new members for the student panel?	The chief executive said that this would be addressed later in the meeting.
c. Chair closed the conversation by asking if the chief executive believes we evidence the student impact in the work of the OfS enough.	The chief executive responded that lots of student engagement happens, but it is not necessarily always visible. She added that a suggestion from the House of Lords inquiry is that the OfS produce an annual report which summarises their student engagement work. She agrees that something like this would help to raise the profile the student

Questions	Responses
	engagement activities that already take place in the organisation.

10. The chief executive thanked the panel for their work, in particular the members who will be stepping down in the summer.

Item 4 – Discussion 2: Insight from students

11. The chair invited John Blake, Director for Fair Access and Participation, to begin his update.

12. The director began by outlining the internal changes within the OfS which have presented a good opportunity for staff to rethink their approach to student engagement and the panel specifically. This includes:

- a. Student engagement team moving into a new directorate
- b. Current vacancies in the student engagement team
- c. New chair of the student panel.

13. The director highlighted that the House of Lords inquiry into work of the OfS raised some interesting questions and confirmed that some aspects of student panel are not working for panel members, as well as for the OfS. This includes:

- a. Panel being incorrectly perceived as a representative panel for all students, instead of a panel for the OfS specifically.
- b. Panel members wishing to and sometimes being asked to speak about things beyond what the OfS can do.
- c. The OfS wishing to hear from students beyond the panel.
- d. Confusion about the specific role and remit of the student panel.

14. The director invited questions from panel members:

Questions	Responses
a. How effective is the panel and what are the problems which the OfS sees with it?	<p>The director responded that engaging with the panel in the right way remains highly insightful however there are times when the panel is not able to provide the OfS with insight into a particular experience because it is not a representative body.</p> <p>The director added that there needs to be a space where students can raise issues with their regulator which are important to them, but the</p>

	current set up of the panel does not always allow this.
b. Is the framework for the student panel correct and is there is scope in the future to work with other more representative student groups?	<p>The director answered that the panel has the freedom to change in small or more substantive ways.</p> <p>One panel member raised that there is some confusion amongst students in the scope of the OfS, and this can lead to confusion over the role of the panel.</p> <p>The director added that the OfS perhaps needs to be more transparent with the panel and wider students about the things they can't do anything about.</p>
c. Does politics come into it at all?	<p>The director responded that all arm's length bodies need to negotiate the complex balance of liberal democratic politics, of which parties play a part.</p> <p>The panel should be set up in a way which enables students to raise issues which are important to them, regardless of whether or not the OfS has the ability to support them in that way.</p>
d. One panel member asked if there will be scope in the future for panel members to be able to represent their own views, without having to be mindful of representing the OfS. They explained that with the current set up they have felt nervous in situations where they have been asked to publicly share their opinion something.	<p>The director responded that this scenario highlights the current shortcomings of the student panel model. More thinking needs to be given into how the OfS can get students' insight into live matters.</p>

15. The chair ended the discussion by pointing out that many of the panel have similar insights. He highlighted that there will be student viewpoints which aren't currently being heard on the panel.

16. The chair thanked the director and he left the meeting.

17. The chair invited Charlotte Finlay, Student Surveys Senior Officer, to the meeting.

18. The Student Surveys Senior Officer asked the panel to reflect on the following:

- a. What is working about the Office for Students' current approach to student engagement, and what limitations and difficulties have you experienced whilst being part of the panel?
- b. What new ways of working will enable the OfS to evolve and reach a more representative range of students?

19. The Student Surveys Senior Officer addressed a query about recruitment for the future panel. She explained that the OfS is making a decision on what the panel will look like in the future. The student panel will continue next year, but the recruitment process and format will differ.

Item 5 – Introduction to Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

20. The chair welcomed Hilary Jones, Head of Freedom of Speech, to the meeting.

21. The Head of Freedom of Speech began her update of The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The presentation included:

- a. Background information to the Act and its journey through Parliament
- b. New duties for providers, student unions and the OfS
- c. Appointment of the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom
- d. New regulatory requirements around free speech for providers and students' unions
- e. Complaints scheme for free speech complaints
- f. How the OfS will implement the act.

22. The chair thanked the Head of Freedom of Speech for the presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Questions	Responses
a. The panel had questions around how the OfS will manage some of the specific duties as outlined in the Act, and how they will ensure providers also act accordingly.	<p>The Act sets out the legal framework; it is now the Office for Student's responsibility to bring the act to life.</p> <p>The next step is to consult with stakeholders (including students) to ensure that the OfS implements the Act in the best way.</p>
b. The panel asked when changes brought about by the Act will be implemented.	<p>Specific time frames are still being discussed; however one of the OfS's first priorities is likely to be to set up the complaints scheme.</p> <p>Implementation is likely to be phased; the OfS recognises that there will be lots for providers and students' unions to get to grips with.</p>
c. Some panel members expressed concern that the Act may protect some groups of students and not others.	<p>Discussion was had over how free speech is for everyone, not just particular groups.</p> <p>Free speech will be just one part of a variety of things which providers will have to consider and juggle. Pre-existing regulatory requirements, including requirements of equalities law, still come into play.</p>

Questions	Responses
<p>d. Discussion around what is lawful speech and how the OfS will draw this distinction.</p>	<p>The OfS will consult on implementation of key parts of the Act as we develop our policy.</p> <p>The OfS is thinking more widely about how to engage with students, in addition to formal consultation process.</p> <p>As the OfS considers real cases, under the complaints scheme and their new regulatory powers, they will develop a sector understanding of free speech issues.</p> <p>The Act combined with HERA gives the OfS certain powers. If an individual is unhappy with a decision which the OfS has made, the decision can be challenged through the courts.</p>

Item 6 – Panel engagement with ministers

23. The chair welcomed Julia Moss, Student Surveys Manager, to the meeting, who clarified the scope of appropriate student panel engagement with ministers.
24. The chair thanked the final year members of the student panel for their contributions and closed the session.