OfS student panel meeting

Wednesday 28 October 2020
Time: 1400 – 1800   Microsoft Teams

Attendees
Martha Longdon (Chair), Ramy Badrie, Jo Barlow, Georgia Bell, Rose Bennett, Samuel Dedman, Erk Gunce, Miranda Harmer, Maisha Islam, Molly Lawson, Francesco Masala, Nikhita Nachiappan, Bryony Toon, Aimear Wolstenholme **OfS**: Cassie Agbehenu, Nicola Dandridge, Natasha Slade

Apologies
Sabrina Mundtazir, Joshua Sanderson-Kirk

Item 1: Chair's welcome and update

1. The chair of the student panel, Martha Longdon (ML) welcomed the student panel to the first panel meeting of the cycle.

2. The chair noted apologies from Sabrina Mundtazir and Joshua Sanderson-Kirk.

3. ML thanked the student panel for all of their work recently on the development of the statement of expectations for students who are asked to self-isolate, the social media activity to support students during this time, meeting with the Minister Michelle Donelan to highlight experiences of students returning to campus, involvement in the HE taskforce on mental health and wellbeing, the Horizon scanning Panel and the National Student Survey (NSS) review.

4. ML highlighted that the Student Information team have been holding workshops with students and students' unions on the review of the NSS. It was noted that the team is going to arrange a meeting with the student panel to discuss the findings from the review which will happen in early December. The launch publication for NSS 2021 has been published.

5. ML updated the panel on the recommendations included within the student panel review board paper and the work which is ongoing to implement the recommendations. The Student Engagement team are taking this work forward.

6. The chair advised the panel that there is an opportunity to feed into the TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes) research priorities via a survey and a roundtable event in November 2020 and advised the panel that the Student Engagement team would send an email about this opportunity shortly.

Item 2: Chief executive's update

7. ML invited the OfS chief executive to give her update to the panel.

8. Nicola Dandridge acknowledged the incredible amount of work that the panel has completed already and reflected on the positive feedback received from the Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan, following her recent meeting with the student panel.

9. Nicola covered the new OfS business plan which has been revised for 2020-21 in response to COVID-19, the development of the new OfS strategy for 2021-23, regulation around quality and standards and spoke about the equality, diversity and inclusion work happening internally at the OfS.

Item 3: Discussion session: access and participation – student submissions

10. Elizabeth Garnham (Access and Participation Plan Manager), Anya Green (Senior Officer) and Laura Cooke (Access and Participation Officer) joined the meeting and introduced themselves.

11. Elizabeth Garnham gave an overview of the work. Elizabeth noted that the impact report is an opportunity for universities and colleges to reflect on progress made towards their access and participation targets. The student submission will be an optional report which students/students' unions can complete. The aim is to encourage a conversation between students and their provider around access and participation and for students to share whether they can see progress against commitments made. Elizabeth explained that both reports are currently in development and will be reviewed in the session.

12. Anya Green showed the student panel an example of a provider impact report which was in draft form and welcomed feedback on the accessibility of the document.

13. Anya asked whether the form supports students to understand whether a provider is making progress on their targets and whether students will be able to use this document in their conversations with providers effectively. Feedback from the student panel included; additional context around what the document would be helpful for, support to help students to understand the data, to request information from the provider about how students have been engaged in the process, if and how student feedback has been taken onboard, to have digital accessibility checks and to consider using graphs and tables to support greater accessibility to the information.

14. Laura Cooke demonstrated the student submission and welcomed any questions or comments from the student panel. Themes included:

    i.   To encourage students to complete a submission even if the provider has met their targets – to demonstrate how they have achieved this as an opportunity to share best practice.
    ii. To offer support for students who are completing the submission, being conscious of a power imbalance between student and provider.
    iii. Whether there would be a degree of anonymity for the student completing the submission, although it was noted that this could alter the student's viewpoint or approach to completing the submission.
    iv. To encourage providers to pay students for the time spent in completing the documents so students are compensated for their time.

15. The student panel then went into two different breakout groups. Group 1 discussed the accessibility of the student submission and the draft conversation guide and group 2 discussed the development of the guidance document for students. Themes across both discussions included:

    i.   Language – to define terms and phrases, include a key word list and consider the language used (not using the word 'provider', defining terms like 'underrepresented groups').
    ii. Context – give additional context, define what an access and participation plan is and why it exists.
    iii. Clarity – being clear on the role of the student in this process and who should be involved.

    iv.   Engagement – outlining how students can remain engaged in this work following the submission.

    v.   Support – a suggestion for the OfS to provide access and participation workshops for students/students' unions, set up a support network for students and provide examples of methods to develop the submission.

    vi.   Consider alternative formats for the student submission.

16. The panel discussed the guidance documents and outlined how it should be comprehensive, including advice on working collaboratively with your provider, encouraging providers to support students' unions to be involved and encouraging students to seek support from their students' union or representative body if they have one. If there is not a students' union, students should be able to access support from their provider.

17. The conversation guide should also support students to facilitate an open discussion with their university or college.

18. ML thanked Elizabeth, Anya and Laura for attending and facilitating the discussion.

Item 4: Discussion session: digital teaching and learning review

19. ML handed over to Xenia Levantis (Access, Inclusion and Skills Officer) and Lara Bird (Strategic Policy Advisor**)** for their session on the digital teaching and learning review being led by Michael Barber, the OfS Chair.

20. Xenia Levantis gave an overview of the work.

21. The student panel members split into two breakout groups to share their experiences and experiences of students more widely on how online learning and teaching has been delivered throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Themes from both discussions highlighted:

    i.   Content has been added online and in some cases, this has meant that the content has increased.

    ii.   Having lectures added online is positive – students can study at their own pace and re-watch if needed however pre-recorded material means that the content is not interactive. This can be isolating and can be difficult to connect to tutors and other students on the course.

iii. Live lectures and Q&As have been appreciated as this provides more interactivity and communication between staff and students. Maintaining this in the future and not just during the coronavirus pandemic would be positive.

iv. Acknowledgement that practical, arts-based and vocational courses have not worked as well online. The practical elements, being in the lab or studio, cannot be replicated online and this is very challenging for those students.

v. Some students may need additional support, either in person or online.

vi. Some students might need support to improve digital literacy skills, for example how to find reliable information on internet, how to conduct an online journal search if physical university libraries are not open, providing skills development training for students.

vii. Practical arrangements such as breakout groups need to be facilitated. If not, the connection to lecturers and other students is lost.

viii. There is an opportunity to vary lecture materials by appealing to different learning styles and personalising learning for students.

ix. Training needs to be given to staff on how to utilise the latest software. Access to the right equipment needs to be a consideration for staff as well as students. If lecturers are struggling with older laptops or poor WiFi connection, they won't be able to deliver high quality lectures.

x. Teaching staff should consider how they can connect with students through lectures. To consider the forms of media which students enjoy (e.g. watching vloggers, YouTube and listening to podcasts) and consider using different formats which students engage with.

xi. Support around mental health, social support and loneliness needs improving for all. But extra consideration needs to be given to underrepresented and marginalised students and those without family support.

xii. Discussions of digital teaching and learning to also include discussions of digital assessment, for example consideration to what equity concerns are being caused by the move to online assessment and whether disabled students are able to access the same reasonable adjustments as they would on campus (for example a scribe or specialised software).

22. The student panel discussed the concept of 'digital poverty' and acknowledged how this links to a student's cultural, social and financial capital.

23. The panel spoke about how digital poverty is not only a lack of access to technology, but having access to a quiet space to study, having up-to-date hardware and software, your own equipment, having the skills to support students to study at home and search for wider opportunities such as conferences and events online which support wider learning.

24. Accessibility of up-to-date equipment and software is also needed for teaching staff so they can deliver high quality teaching online.

25. Accessibility of the materials needs to be considered, for example auto captions are critical.

26. The term 'digital poverty' was discussed, and alternative terms were considered such as 'digital access.'

27. The student panel then talked about what they want in the future in terms of teaching and how they would like to be engaged in the development of this within their university or college.

Item 5: Closed session

28. For the OfS student panel members only.

29. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 18 February 2021.