



## **Student panel update**

### **Issue**

1. To update the board on the work of the student panel since the 26 September board meeting.

### **Recommendations**

2. The board is invited to note the updates in this paper.

### **Further information**

3. Available from Edward Davison ([edward.davison@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:edward.davison@officeforstudents.org.uk)).

## Updates

4. The panels' 4 July 2019 meeting was updated on verbally at the board's 26 September 2019 meeting and the approved minutes from this meeting are now attached in Annex A.
5. The panel met most recently on 24 October 2019. The meeting focused primarily on the TEF, Discover Uni and Student Engagement. The agenda had been set in response to panellists' request to include TEF in a student panel meeting, such that their views could inform future board discussions of TEF via the student experience representative on the board. The sessions on Discover Uni and Student Engagement were an opportunity for the panel to see how work has progressed since the panel's input in previous meetings.
6. During the panel's discussion of TEF, there were a mixture of views about the extent to which the TEF should influence student choice. It was highlighted that TEF can give confidence to prospective students, especially those studying at small and specialist providers where there can be less information available. Overall, the panel felt that the purpose of TEF should be to incentivise continuous improvement within providers rather than to guide student choice. The panel also emphasised the importance of aligning the TEF with the regulatory framework and questioned how OfS's regulatory interventions would kick in if a provider were to fail TEF. Panellists also commented on the names of the TEF awards and highlighted that a bronze award could be seen as negative, which had not been the intention. The panel recommended having an increased number of awards to identify providers with greater precision, including a descriptor for provision below the baseline requirements. Finally, the panel appreciated the level of student engagement included within subject-level pilot. The panel supported increasing the level of direct engagement and introducing more qualitative data to TEF. There was support for less reliance on NSS data as there was a feeling that it could be gamed and that low response rates can lead to unreliable data which then can't be used.
7. In reviewing the progress of the Discover Uni website panellists commented that they liked the simplicity of the design and urged this to go even further in terms of reducing the number of clicks needed to reach tailored information. Panellists felt the look and feel of the website and logo was quite corporate and made further suggestions that included:
  - a. Clearly flagging that the website is for undergraduate courses UK-wide only
  - b. Including information on gender splits at universities prominently
  - c. Linking to universities' student protection plans
  - d. Using the website to communicate the OfS's regulatory work

Panellists expressed a desire to see the results of further testing and continue to be involved in contributing to future developments.

8. The panel were updated on the student engagement consultation and the recommendations included within the draft student engagement strategy (that the board are discussing at their 27 November meeting). The panel emphasised the importance and need to increase awareness of the OfS among students and suggested drawing a link between various pieces of work such as NSS, TEF, Discover Uni and student protection plans to support this. The panel highlighted the importance of partnering and developing positive relationships with student

unions and supported the recommendation to increase the number of OfS-employed sandwich students in various teams and policy areas across the OfS. The student panel requested updates on how students are impacting work once the activity within the student engagement strategy begins to be implemented.

9. In addition to formal meetings, members of the panel have been engaged in a number of other ways. Alongside three panellists joining the board away day in September, these include:
  - a. Martha Longdon and Shraddha Chaudhary participated in interviews which explored experiences of international and postgraduate students and the particular issues that these students face. Their input will inform an internal review of how the OfS represents the interests of international and postgraduate students.
  - b. Samuel Dedman wrote a blog to encourage students to complete the student engagement strategy consultation survey.
  - c. Shraddha Chaudhary and Alice Richardson participated in interviews with a digital communications consultancy that will inform the OfS social media strategy which will aim to make OfS' social media channels more engaging.
  - d. Joshua Sanderson-Kirk attended the second Horizon scanning panel meeting.
  - e. Shakira Martin attended the OfS Insight Event: Improving Student Lives.
10. Many board members have expressed an interest in joining future panel meetings, which has been welcomed by panellists. The next meeting is on Thursday 23 January 2020, further details about the meeting will be sent to board members who have requested to join the meeting shortly.
11. The student engagement team intend to conduct a review of the panel's effectiveness in advance of the launch of the 2020 student panel. The review will involve gathering feedback from student panel members and staff who have been involved in the panel meetings. The student engagement team will share the recommendations from this review with the board in early 2020.

## **Paper publication date**

12. This report will be made available on the OfS website shortly after the 12 December election due to purdah restrictions.

# OfS student panel meeting – minutes

Date: 4 July 2019

Time: 1500-1800

Location: Finlaison House, London

## Attendees

Martha Longdon (Chair), Chad Allen, Georgia Bell, Rose Bennett, Sinead Brown, Shraddha Chaudhary, Zahra Choudhry, Samuel Dedman, Sabrina Mundtazir, Alice Richardson, Joshua Sanderson-Kirk

Office for Students (OfS): Cassie Agbehenu, Martin Coleman, Edward Davison, Gurpreet Dehal, Benjamin Hunt, Natasha Slade

## Apologies

Ruth Carlson, Nicola Dandridge, Shakira Martin, Lizzie Pace

## Item 1: Chair's update

1. The Chair welcomed panel members to the second panel meeting and welcomed two board members, Martin Coleman and Gurpreet Dehal to the meeting.
2. Apologies were noted as above.
3. The Chair summarised the previous meeting and highlighted the input that the student panel had within each session (market exit and student protection and student engagement).
4. The Chair provided an update of activity and thanked the panel members for their contribution outside of meetings:
  - Shakira Martin spoke at the OfS 'Catalyst for change: Protecting students from hate crime, sexual violence and online harassment in higher education' conference.
  - Lizzie Pace and Joshua Sanderson-Kirk attended an OfS horizon scanning meeting.
  - Rose Bennett will be involved in the review of the postgraduate survey.
  - Sabrina Mundtazir is going to record a video for the new information, advice and guidance website which will show Sabrina's journey into higher education and experience as a student.
5. The Chair reminded the student panel to review the register of interests and confirm or update interests if they have not yet done so.
6. The Chair updated the panel on the 15 May 2019 board meeting. The Chair had presented a paper to the board to update them on the student panel priorities and highlight the student

panel's interest in developing closer links with the board. The Chair advised that other board members are interested to attend the next meeting in October 2019 and that the student panel are invited to the board away day in September 2019.

7. The Chair advised that a document has been drafted which outlines the ways the panel can engage with the OfS. The Chair emphasised the importance of capturing the impact that the student panel have and encouraged the panel to each get involved in a project outside of the meetings.
8. The Chair advised that both the panel and the OfS can identify where the panel have impact and feedback as a collective at the end of the year.

## **Item 2: Approval of the minutes**

9. The minutes of the May 2019 panel meeting were approved.

## **Item 3: Board member update**

10. The student panel introduced themselves to the board members, Martin Coleman and Gurpreet Dehal.
11. Gurpreet Dehal introduced himself and his role within the OfS. Gurpreet emphasised the importance of the student panel and the impact that their contributions have on the board. Gurpreet highlighted the diversity of the student panel who each bring valued experiences and contributions to the work of the OfS.
12. Gurpreet gave an overview of the board meeting which happened on 3 July 2019 and summarised the items which included the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), the OfS Insight events, and a discussion regarding student outcomes.
13. Martin Coleman introduced himself and gave his insight into the 3 July 2019 board meeting. As Chair of the provider risk committee, Martin advised the panel that the OfS had refused to register the first provider as it had failed to meet the conditions of registration set out in the regulatory framework.
14. The Chair asked the panel how familiar they were with the regulatory framework and whether they need any additional support or materials.

## **Item 4: Access and participation – approaches to funding and sharing effective practice**

15. Jenny Ann and Nicola Turner from the Directorate for Fair Access and Participation joined the meeting. Jenny started with a session on ‘Approaches to access and participation funding.’ Jenny emphasised that this was an opportunity to get involved at an early stage of the work. Jenny introduced discussion points to the panel which were to explore why the OfS provides funding for access and participation and the principles that should underpin our approach.
16. The panel discussed the following questions which included; ‘Why does the OfS provide funding for access and participation? How can funding and regulation work together? How should we be framing the ambitions around access and participation?’
17. Jenny Ann thanked the panel for their insight into the discussion and advised that there would be further opportunities to engage in this area of work. She then handed over to Nicola Turner, whose session explored Section 35 and the risks and benefits to the regulator. Nicola advised that section 35 can support the sector to invest in and prioritise evidence-based measures that work to close gaps faster and more reliably.
18. Nicola introduced the discussion, explained what Section 35 is and encouraged the panel to think about how we can use it to share effective practice.
19. Nicola thanked the panel for their contributions and highlighted the opportunity to engage in the discussion further to:
  - make impact in the short term
  - develop themes and priorities
  - understand what works
  - engage the sector
  - balance the relationship between regulator and funder.

## **Item 5: Development of the student protection plans**

20. The chair welcomed Katherine Penry, Becky Brindle and Helen Haynes from the monitoring and intervention team to the meeting.
21. Katherine explained the purpose of a student protection plan which is a new requirement for registered providers. A student protection plan is to set out the arrangements that a provider has in place to support students should it have to make changes to the provision that it offers. For example, this might include changes to the delivery of courses, the closure of courses and campus closure.
22. The student panel were asked to reflect on the student protection plans that they read as part of the preparatory work. The student panel were encouraged to discuss positive and negative elements of the plans, whether the student protection plan is accessible and easy to understand, and whether it included things that students need to know.

23. Katherine thanked the student panel for their suggestions and advised that the team are keen to engage the student panel again during the summer to gather their input into the guidance document.

### **Item 6: Closed session**

24. The student panel held a closed session in which they gave feedback to the panel chair.

### **Session summary - Access and participation – approaches to funding**

Thank you to the student panel who participated in a workshop which explored the approaches to funding within access and participation. The access and participation team were really impressed by the way the panel engaged with the issue. The panel highlighted the following important considerations which have been taken away by the team:

- provider accountability for the use of the funding
- student engagement at provider level around the use of the funding
- focusing on success and progression and not just access
- not using funding to reward failure
- not losing innovation through too much focus on evidence-led approaches
- ensuring our metrics can capture students from non-traditional backgrounds
- a preference for bidding/competitive approaches over a formula approach
- Not losing sight of international students.

Your valuable comments will assist us as we commence the funding review.

### **Session summary - Access and participation - sharing effective practice**

Thank you to the student panel for your enthusiasm exploring how the Office for Students might use Section 35. You identified some tensions which are summarised below:

- There is a challenge in providers collaborating and sharing best practice for the benefit of the sector while being in competition.
- There is a tension as a regulator assessing performance on registration or access and participation plans (APPs) but simultaneously being a collaborator who is also offering funding and support to make progress.
- Some providers would find it hard to accept effective practice or evidence coming from parts of the sector that are different to them, for example Russell Group adopting practice arising from alternative providers or post 92s. They were in favour of us celebrating successes and showcasing outliers, but also strongly supportive of us stimulating innovation.
- The OfS should create a trusted source of evidence that the sector could draw on, and showcase emerging practice as well as established best practice.

The access and participation team look forward to consulting the panel again in future and to discuss setting up an access and participation sub group for student panel members to have the opportunity to engage further.

## Session summary - Development of the student protection plans

The Student Protection team thank the panel for your lively and wide ranging discussion about student protection plans (SPPs). Your feedback was very helpful and we would like to thank you for the time and effort that you put into preparing for the session. Some of the key themes we noted from the panel included:

- The Office for Students should develop student facing information about student protection plans to help raise awareness of their purpose (make clear that it is an OfS requirement to avoid deterring prospective students).
- The involvement of students in the development of SPPs is critical – engagement needs to be meaningful (e.g. not just student reps at the final stages of drafting) with a clear, ongoing commitment to involving students in evaluation and annual revision of the plan given that risks will change.
- Accessibility is a concern, some SPPs were hard to find, some panel members preferred hard copies.
- Mixed views on if/when the SPP should be issued to students.
- Links with consumer rights and other student facing documents should be clarified, a ‘Know Your Rights’ campaign for students suggested.
- The language, style and format of the plans vary, previous template unhelpful as many plans read as a checklist.
- Needs of different student groups should be more clearly reflected in the next iteration of SPPs.

We captured all of the comments, questions and ideas that were raised and will be using them to inform the revised guidance which we plan to publish in September 2019.

The team would be very grateful if some members of the panel would be willing to join a working group to help stress test the new guidance over the summer. We will be seeking views on the draft guidance as it develops and envisage doing most of the work by email and Skype rather than convening formal meetings.