

# Students - Experts in their own experience

Our strategy for engaging students  
from 2020 to 2023

Office for  
Students

ofs

## Our objectives

The Office for Students will:



Learn about the experiences  
of students



Work in partnership with  
students



Communicate with students  
in an accessible way

And throughout our work,  
we will seek the  
perspectives of students  
whose voices go  
unheard.

“ Our vision:  
This strategy ensures  
that past, present and  
future students shape  
the regulation of higher  
education in England. ”

# Why do we want to engage with students?

**The Office for Students (OfS) aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.**

We're the regulator of higher education in England, which means we work with universities and colleges to make sure students receive a high-quality experience, have the right information to make choices about their future, and are supported to succeed.

Students are experts in their own experience, so if we're going to regulate in their interest, we think it's important for them to influence our work and the decisions we take.

Our ambition is to take the perspectives of past, present and future students into account in all our work.

This strategy has been developed to make sure we realise that ambition. The strategy sets out a new approach for the OfS. It commits us to:



continuously **learning** about students and their experiences



collaborating and working in **partnership** with students



**communicating** our work with students in a way that is plain speaking and accessible.

We also commit to amplifying the voices of those who often go unheard throughout all of this work.

**At the OfS, we define student engagement as:**

'The strategic and impactful involvement of students or students' perspectives in the OfS's work.'

# How do we want the OfS to change?

This is the start of a journey for the OfS.

We recognise that engaging students in the way we regulate higher education is critical to our success, but this is new territory for us.

At the end of the next three years, we want to make sure that the OfS:

- **understands the experiences of students**
- **works proactively in partnership with students**
- **produces communications that are engaging and accessible to students**
- **engages with a diverse range of students, amplifying the voices of those who go unheard**
- **tracks and demonstrates how students have an impact on its work.**



“ The OfS as a regulator in the student interest should have a good understanding of collective views and ensure that their regulation is shaped by this. ”

Survey respondent

# How can students get involved?

**If we're going to put students at the heart of everything we do, we need you to work with us and share your experiences.**

There are a few ways you can get involved with our work:

- To hear about all our student opportunities and news, sign up to our Student spotlight mailing list: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/alerts](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/alerts).
- Look out for opportunities to come along to workshops and focus groups on our get involved webpage: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/get-involved).
- Apply to be on our Student Panel.
- Make a vlog or short video about your experience at university or college. We sometimes use these at events or on our social media. For example, students have made videos about mental health, their journey into higher education and their plans for the future.

Over the next three years, there will be many projects where we will want to work alongside students or seek their views on an area of our work. We'll also be interested in sharing your views to help universities and colleges develop their own work.

To get an idea about the kind of areas in which we work, in the rest of this document we have set out:

- our priorities for the next year
- the different ways we want to learn about the experiences of students.

**You can connect with us through social media:**



**Twitter: @officestudents**



**Facebook: facebook.com/officeforstudents**

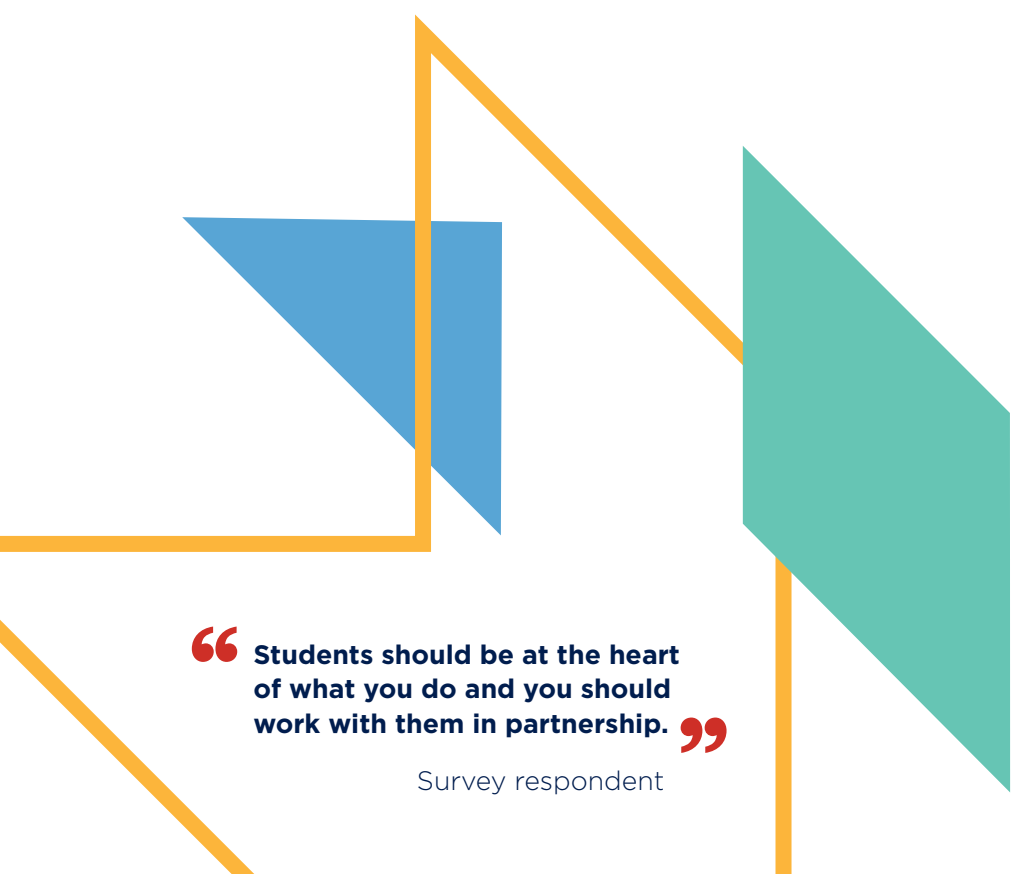


**Instagram: @officeforstudents**

# Year one of our strategy

This strategy spans three years, but we will deliver some key pilot activities in year one. We want to test our approach to student engagement, and we want to take into account the experiences of students in the way we regulate higher education.

We will be evaluating our work as we go, and at the end of the first year we will review our approach.



**“ Students should be at the heart of what you do and you should work with them in partnership. ”**

Survey respondent

In the first twelve months of our strategy we will:



## **OfS Student Panel**

Review and re-develop our panel of students who challenge and advise the OfS.



## **Equality in higher education**

Empower students to help us promote fairness in higher education.



## **Concerns and notifications**

Help students to understand and use our system for dealing with issues at universities and colleges.



## **Reviewing admissions**

Engage students and applicants in our review of the admissions system.



## **Tackling harassment**

Work with students to ensure universities and colleges give effective support when dealing with issues of harassment and sexual misconduct.



## **Raise our profile**

Help students to know more about who we are and what we do.

## The OfS will learn about the experiences of students

To achieve this objective, we will:

- Continue to collect student views through the National Student Survey and consult with them on its extension.
- Analyse comments shared in the National Student Survey.
- Keep developing our survey for postgraduate taught students.
- Listen directly to the views and concerns of students through regular polling, workshops and focus groups.
- Continue with our approach to user testing and user research.
- Bring people together, including universities and colleges, students' unions and sector bodies.

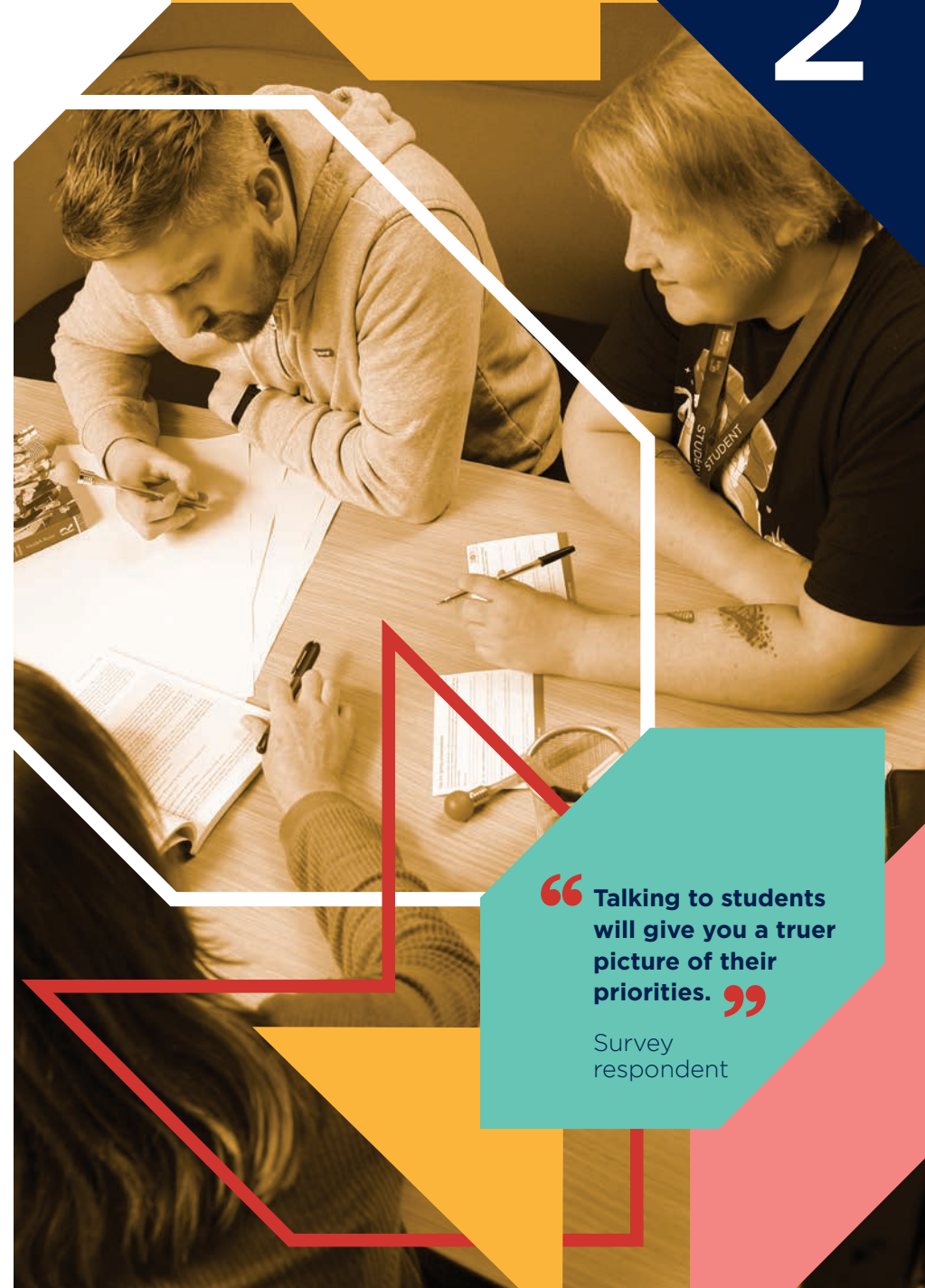
**“It is important to know what issues are affecting students and to keep updating this knowledge.”**

Survey respondent

# The OfS will work in partnership with students

## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Review the OfS Student Panel to make sure students have an impact on all of our work.
- Empower students to promote equal opportunities and make a difference at their university or college.
- Ensure students and their views are embedded in our approach to policy and project development, through research and student membership on our steering groups.
- Communicate and work in direct partnership with students' unions and other representatives, to enable students to influence us.
- Continue our open communication and strategic relationship with the National Union of Students (NUS).
- Provide opportunities for students to work with us as interns, researchers or on placement schemes.
- Increase opportunities for our staff to be mentored by, and to mentor, students.



“Talking to students will give you a truer picture of their priorities.”

Survey respondent



**“ Students should be involved in influencing policy that directly affects them. ”**

Survey respondent

## The OfS will communicate with students in an accessible way

To achieve this objective, we will:

- Publish an annual student impact report to demonstrate how students have shaped our work.
- Run a campaign to raise awareness of the OfS so that students understand who we are, what we do and how they can get in touch with us.
- Ask each university or college to supply us with a student engagement contact.
- Help OfS staff to proactively consider student audiences in any relevant communications.
- Develop a range of student-focused communication and engagement channels, to include a student mailing list, social media channels, and guidance and tools on our website.
- Review the accessibility of the OfS’s main guidance and regulatory framework for a student audience.
- Produce accessible policy briefings, information and guidance for students and student representatives.



# Throughout our work we will seek the perspectives of students whose voices go unheard

To achieve this objective, we will work in the interests of **all** students, regardless of their background, identity, what or where they study. We know that we can't do this well unless the students that we work with represent the full diversity of higher education in England.

When we enable students to influence us, we must proactively reach out to those who are often underrepresented or who sometimes go unheard.

## What do we mean by 'unheard'?

We know that students have a lot of expertise to share and we want to ensure that we hear from a wide range of students with a variety of experiences. 'Unheard' refers to those whose experiences and perspectives are sometimes missed or 'under the radar'. Sometimes they will be students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in higher education, but not always.

## Who do we mean?

Underrepresented groups:

- Students from black and minority ethnic groups
- LGBT+ students
- Disabled students
- Mature students

Students who sometimes go unheard:

- International students
- Commuting students
- Distance learners
- Students at universities or colleges without students' unions
- Student parents/carers
- Students who have been in care

We will also take into account students with one or more of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality and Human Rights Act 2010.