



Student panel update

Issue

1. To update the board on the work of the student panel since the 28 January 2020 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).

Updates

4. The panels' 23 January 2020 meeting was updated on verbally at the board meeting on Tuesday 28 January and the approved minutes from this panel meeting and the October meeting are now attached at Annex A (January meeting) and Annex B (October meeting).
5. The panel met most recently on 23 January 2020. This was the final meeting for eight of the student panel members who had been on the panel for two years.
6. In addition to formal meetings, members of the panel have been engaged in a number of other ways. These include:
 - a. Lizzie participated an OfS event run by the OfS Health Policy team.
 - b. Shakira attended the OfS Improving Student Lives Insight Event.
 - c. Lizzie, Ruth and Sinead are currently writing blogs which will be published on the OfS website and featured on the new student email subscription service, Student Spotlight.
7. As noted in the chief executive's report, on 13 February 2020 the [student engagement strategy](#) was published. The student panel worked closely with OfS colleagues to shape this work and their contribution was acknowledged within the January student panel meeting. The student engagement strategy was launched by Martha Longdon in a piece which was [published by Wonkhe](#). The launch of the strategy was also communicated across Twitter and new OfS social media platforms.
8. The student panel meetings are moving to an academic cycle so the meetings will resume from September. Dates for the meetings will be circulated once they have been confirmed.
9. A review of the student panel has started. The review aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the panel, understand how the panel is currently having impact and consider improvements which could be made. As part of the review, the student engagement team would like to hold a telephone call with members of the board, involving members who have attended a student panel meeting and some who have not. If this is of interest, please contact [Paula McLeod](#).
10. The student engagement team will share the recommendations from this review with the board in May 2020.

Paper publication date

11. This report will be made available on the OfS website.

Annex A: OfS student panel meeting

Thursday 23 January 2020

Time: 13:00 – 18:30

Location: Finlaison House, London

Attendees

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

OfS: Cassie Agbehenu, Nicola Dandridge, Edward Davison, Benjamin Hunt, Natasha Slade

Board: Michael Barber, Kate Lander

Apologies

N/A

Item 1: Chair's Update

1. The chair welcomed the panel members and two board members, Michael Barber and Kate Lander.
2. The chair acknowledged that the meeting would be the final one of this cycle and the final meeting for eight panelists who had been on the panel for two years.
3. The chair expressed how much she has valued working with the departing panelists and the collective wish to keep in touch with outgoing members.
4. The chair advised that for those panel members staying on for a second year on the panel, there would be lots of opportunities to get involved over the spring and summer and the student engagement team would be in touch with these opportunities soon.
5. The chair thanked the panel for recent involvement in OfS's work, which had included:
 - Lizzie, Ruth and Sinead who have volunteered to write a blog.
 - Lizzie who had attended an OfS event run by the OfS Health Policy team. Lizzie noted that it was interesting to see the agendas of several stakeholders come together on this topic and that she had enjoyed attending.
 - Shakira who had attended the OfS Improving Student Lives Insight Event.

6. The chair noted a range of opportunities available to the student panel members over the coming weeks.
7. A question was raised about the extent to which panelists could get involved in opportunities once they were no longer panel members. The chair stated that the OfS would seek views on how those stepping down would like to be contacted and involved. The chair noted that although the meeting marked the final one for some panelists, there may still be opportunities available and that we would review this on a case by case basis. The chair confirmed that panel alumni would always be encouraged to stay in touch and involved.
8. The chair confirmed that the student panel meetings would be moving to an academic cycle for the 2020-21 year.
9. The chair noted that the OfS's Remuneration and Nominations committee had made the decision to confirm that there would always be student representation in its membership, either through the student representative on the board or from the student panel. In particular, the chair noted that this had been noted publicly and that it sent a strong signal about the importance of student engagement at the OfS.
10. The chair reflected on the November OfS board meeting and highlighted the success of the student engagement presentation, thanking the panel for their critical role in the development of the OfS's student engagement strategy.

Item 2: Approval of the minutes

11. The chair asked the panel if they had any comments on the minutes from the meeting of 24 October 2019.
12. Amendments to the wording of point 21.2, 23.1 and 34.1 were requested and the minutes were approved subject to those changes.

Item 3: Update – Horizon Scanning Panel meeting

13. Joshua Sanderson-Kirk and Lizzie Pace reflected on their attendance at the Horizon scanning meeting of 25 November 2019.
14. Both gave an overview of the purpose of the meeting, noting that horizon scanning tends to be hypothetical. Topics covered within these meetings included

demographic changes in the UK, carbon emissions and climate change, artificial intelligence and the ethics of its use in higher education, subject trends and the migration patterns of international students.

15. It was noted that the diversity of educational experience could be increased on the Horizon Scanning panel, but the impact on students within each topic was increasingly of focus within the meetings. Michael Barber welcomed this feedback and asked that it was fed back to colleagues working on the horizon scanning panel.

Item 4: Update - Experience in the OfS Legal team

16. Joshua Sanderson-Kirk gave an update on a week he had spent working with the legal team at the OfS. Joshua gave an overview of the work which the team are involved in and gave some insight into the upcoming judicial review.
17. Joshua highlighted that although the legal team were fairly removed from students in their day-to-day work, he had felt that the team were working with the interest of students throughout their work. Josh thanked OfS staff involved.

Item 5: Board and student panel Q&A

18. Two board members, Kate Lander and Michael Barber gave some thoughts and reflections on their experience as OfS board members.
19. Kate Lander introduced herself and explained that she wanted to find out the priorities of the student panel.
20. Michael welcomed the contribution of the student panel, highlighting the various ways that the senior team engage with the student perspective alongside their work with the panel, for example through NSS, NUS, visits to universities and meeting students within a range of providers and contexts. Michael noted that the student panel brings further insight and has rightly challenged the OfS at times, as well as shaping the development of policy in advance of it reaching the board, as demonstrated through the student engagement strategy.
21. Michael particularly noted the increase in ambition in relation to access and participation as an example of the OfS's impact so far.

22. Panelists discussed a number of topics with the visiting board members. These included:

- The ways in which panelists could be involved in the OfS's work after completing their terms
- The importance of the OfS's join up with other parts of the education system and with employers
- The priority that the OfS should place on understanding the experiences of students who take non-traditional routes into and through higher education
- The importance of appreciating the full diversity of provision across the sector and the way in which some providers may experience different regulatory burden to others
- The importance of information, advice and guidance, especially in relation to the promotion of degree apprenticeships

23. Michael highlighted the impact that the student panel have had and thanked all panelists for their input over the past two years. Michael suggested setting up a student panel alumni network which would enable the OfS and student panel to remain connected.

Item 6: Market exit and student protection session

The panel were joined by Rob Stroud, Head of Student Protection and Market Exit and Katie Twomey, Student Protection and Market Exit Manager.

24. Rob Stroud and Katie Twomey gave an update on their work since the previous session in May 2019.

25. It was advised that a consultation on the new student protection guidance will be launched which will seek views on updated student protection plan guidance across the sector, based on the OfS's experience of implementation of plans to date.

26. The panel discussed a range of scenarios which would need to be considered within student protection plans to ensure students are supported across a range of situations such as course closure, campus closure and provider closure. During this discussion the panel highlighted that consideration should be given to:

- student demographics affected
- subjects which would be affected

- resources needed to support students
- financial support such as payment for travel costs and relocation costs
- refunds or compensation
- clear communication to guide and support students which acknowledges where students should seek support through various circumstances
- an accessible student protection plan
- support to transfer to a different provider with similar entry tariff
- the potential for students being able to take their credits to another provider

27. Rob Stroud and Katie Twomey reflected on the level of support that students have received in similar situations.

Item 7: Harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education

28. The panel were joined by Emma Douthwaite, Safeguarding and Welfare Manager and Clare Isham, Senior Officer.

29. Emma Douthwaite and Clare Isham gave an overview of the consultation aims and purposes.

30. Questions were raised by the panelists around the circumstances that the OfS can regulate and to what extent in relation to:

- on campus, off campus and online
- the Erasmus program
- campus' based internationally
- whether regulation applies to degree apprenticeships and placements
- student and staff relationships in respect of PhD students who may work with staff at the provider
- whether the OfS could look at local specialists and understand what they are doing successfully, although it was noted that development and implementation of policies would be the role of the provider.

31. A question was raised around the balance between the responsibility of the institution and the police in cases of harassment and sexual misconduct. It was highlighted that there is a lack of clarity around the process and the current issues will be explored within the consultation.

32. The student panel read through the statement of expectations and highlighted a variety of issues such as:

- differing processes within providers and the level of support offered to students.
- the need for clear and accessible communications to explain the pros and cons of each reporting system (provider and/or police).
- the need for sufficient processes in place within providers was explored and to ensure that the support given matches the individual situation.
- data protection and GDPR within providers

33. The student panel discussed how the OfS could support behavior change in the sector which included:

- an idea which involved a campaign around harassment to solidify our position and highlight that we expect the sector to do more.
- support providers to work together with the OfS in a collaborative way to continue to improve their processes and support to students.
- building relationships with institutions to provide support in addressing these issues, so that they in turn can support students who are affected highlighting best practice to show what is working within the sector.
- consideration to the OfS notifications system and the possibility that this service could be used in a sensitive situation, and to think carefully about who may be reading notifications which could be received.

Item 8: Chief Executive's review of the year and forward look

34. The chief executive highlighted that this was the final meeting for some panellists (Chad, Sinead, Ruth, Shraddha, Zahra, Shakira, Lizzie and Alice) and noted their contribution over the last two years as founding members of the panel. The chief executive thanked the departing panellists for playing a critical role in kickstarting the OfS's approach to student engagement by informing and shaping the strategy which would be launched in February.

35. Nicola noted and discussed with the panel a number of developments since the last meeting. These included:

- The election of a new government with a strong majority
- Updated advice to students in relation to EU exit
- Litigation that the OfS has been handling

- The launch of a consultation setting out a proposed approach for the regulation of providers' approach to harassment and sexual misconduct
- The upcoming launch of a review of the admissions system and the panel's involvement in this
- Developments in relation to TEF
- Internal work in relation to equality diversity and inclusion, following the panel's previous challenges to the OfS on this topic
- The business planning process for the year ahead
- Nicola noted that the panel had advised the OfS on a variety of areas throughout the year but in particular in relation to:
 - Market exit and student protection
 - Student engagement
 - Funding in access and participation
 - Student protection plans
 - TEF
 - Student information, advice and guidance and Discover Uni

36. Nicola thanked the panel for their work in shaping our approach to significant issues. Nicola also noted the review of the panel's effectiveness that would be taking place and reiterated Martha's request for panellists to complete the survey to support the OfS to improve the panel.

37. Nicola wished those who were standing down the best of luck in the future and asked them to keep in touch.

Item 8: Feedback session

38. There was a feedback session which encouraged the panel members to reflect on their time over the past year and two years.

39. The chair of the panel thanked the panel for their contributions.

Annex B - OfS student panel meeting

Thursday 24 October 2019

Time: 1500 – 1800

Location: Finlaison House, London

Attendees

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

OfS: Nicola Dandridge, Edward Davison, Benjamin Hunt, Natasha Slade

Apologies

Cassie Agbehenu (OfS), Zahra Choudhry, Shakira Martin.

Item 1: Chair's update

12. The Chair welcomed the panel members to the third student panel meeting of 2019.
13. Apologies were noted.
14. The Chair highlighted the sessions explored at the last meeting which included access and participation and student protection plans.
15. The Chair provided an update of recent activity involving the panel and thanked the panel members for their contribution outside their formal meetings. A summary of some of the activity below:
 - Shraddha, Shakira and Ruth attended the board away day.
 - Martha and Shraddha participated in interviews which explored experiences of international and postgraduate students and the particular issues that these types of students face. Their input will inform an internal review of how the OfS represents the interests of international and postgraduate students.
 - Sam wrote a blog to encourage students to complete the student engagement survey which formed part of the student engagement consultation. The survey received over 500 responses with a large proportion of those responses from students. The Chair noted that there would be a session on this later on the meeting's agenda.
 - Shraddha and Alice participated in interviews with a digital communications consultancy, Pickle Jar. The interviews are informing the OfS social media strategy which will aim to make OfS's social media channels more engaging.
 - Joshua attended the second Horizon Scanning Panel meeting. Lizzie sent her apologies.
 - The Chair updated the panel on work she has been involved with for The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) and asked whether the student panel members would be interested in having an involvement in this work.
 - The Chair congratulated those panel members who received exam results over the summer.
16. The Chair advised that the agenda had been set in response to panellists' request to include the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) in a student panel meeting. The Chair mentioned that forthcoming sessions on Discover Uni and student engagement were an opportunity to see how work has progressed since the panel's input in previous meetings.
17. It was highlighted that the next meeting would be on Thursday 23 January 2020. The Chair noted that the meeting will be the final meeting for those student panel members who have been on the panel for two years. The Chair advised that there are intentions to

extend the meeting to add time for lunch and additional sessions. It was confirmed that the student engagement team will email timings shortly.

18. The Chair noted that as the January meeting will be the fourth meeting of the year, this would be a good time to reflect and see if any of the panel would be interested in writing a blog to capture reflections. It was advised that the student engagement team would email the panel in relation to this.

Item 2: Chief executive's update

19. The Chair handed over to Nicola Dandridge for the chief executive's update.
20. The chief executive thanked the panel for their work over the past couple of months and in particular to Shraddha, Shakira and Ruth who had attended the board away day. The chief executive noted that the panel had made a significant contribution in terms of challenging the OfS on diversity of its workforce, which is now a priority of the executive team.
21. It was highlighted that two board members (Gurpreet Dehal and Martin Coleman) attended the previous meeting and had expressed how impressed they were with the quality of discussion and how the panel operated. The board members acknowledged how important students' perspectives are and that joining the panel meeting had been a good opportunity to hear students' views on a range of issues. The chief executive confirmed that other board members are keen to join the next panel meeting on 23 January 2020.
22. An update was given to the panel members on progress with the registration process. Nicola thanked panel members for their suggestions and comments on how we could improve our communication with students when we publish a decision to not register a provider.
23. It was mentioned that the OfS is being litigated against in relation to some of its registration decisions. The chief executive emphasised that the OfS was prepared to defend its decisions robustly as they had been made in the student interest.
24. The chief executive drew attention to the recent Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report on racial harassment in higher education and noted that the OfS is focusing on utilising its regulatory role to drive improvements for students. The chief executive referenced 'The OfS Insight event: Improving student lives' on 6 November 2019 and reiterated the panel members would be welcome to attend.
25. A student panel member asked how we can regulate racial harassment. The chief executive explained that there are regulatory conditions which enable the OfS to regulate primarily in terms of ensuring that reporting mechanisms are accessible, transparent and effective. The chief executive emphasised that the OfS is looking closely at developing its role further in this area.
26. The student panel challenged the clarity of rules around reporting harassment.

Item 3: Approval of the minutes

27. The panel approved the minutes of the July meeting.

Item 4: TEF

28. The chair introduced Richard Smith to lead a session on the TEF.

29. Richard Smith ran through the background of the TEF, provider-level TEF and the TEF award ratings.

30. The panel were asked to discuss in what ways the TEF has been helpful to them as students.

The panel summarised their personal experiences of TEF as applicants:

- A panel member commented that they took TEF into account but highlighted that other factors were also important such as the feeling of a campus.
- A panel member who studied at a small institution stated that they had found TEF helpful as it gave security and confidence in the decision to go to that smaller provider knowing that the provider had been through the assessment process. The provider had a TEF gold which had been reassuring.
- It was commented that smaller providers were doing incredible things but would not be recognised in league tables. The TEF was therefore seen as an opportunity for smaller providers to showcase the fantastic work they are doing which helps to create a more level playing field.
- It was mentioned that TEF is for undergraduate courses only and not postgraduate courses, and that this could be communicated more clearly.
- The panel felt that there should be clearer guidance and tighter limitations imposed around where providers can use their award in marketing material.

The panel summarised their personal experiences of the TEF in higher education, feedback included:

- The TEF is helpful for teaching-based institutions as it encourages providers to reflect and focus on the teaching quality.
- The panel questioned what happens to verify that the information in submissions is correct. In response to this, it was communicated that careful consideration is given by the panel members and assessors to the quality of evidence that underpins claims made in submissions. It was noted that future guidance would establish clearer thresholds and principles for the quality of evidence underpinning submissions. It was important to note also that the panel and assessors carefully triangulate evidence across both the submissions and the metrics (e.g. data such as National Student Survey (NSS) scores which reflect student satisfaction).

31. Richard Smith talked through the subject-level pilots and the different models which were piloted. The increased level of student engagement within these pilots was outlined, including the introduction of a student declaration which sets out how students in a provider have engaged in the process.
32. The student panel discussed how student engagement within the TEF could be strengthened. Feedback included:
- The panel emphasised the importance of international students and how the satisfaction of international students can be captured and considered within the TEF assessments.
 - The panel welcomed more direct forms of student engagement.
 - The panel discussed the purpose of the TEF and how the TEF requires a lot of resource from the sector and providers. The panel questioned whether the purpose of the TEF is for provider recruitment, the enhancement of teaching in higher education or to inform student choice.
 - The panel identified that the TEF is burdensome for universities but they get lots of feedback. Providers can reflect on what they are doing well and identify where they can celebrate excellence.
33. Richard Smith explained that there has been an independent review which is due to be published which will advise on the future direction of the TEF.
34. The panel were asked how they would improve the TEF in future. Feedback included:
- Consider including postgraduate taught (PGT) provision in the TEF (if it is not linked to fees), although it was noted that this could be a challenge as a lot of postgraduate courses have under 40 students so the data is limited.
 - Having an award below Bronze, such as 'TEF pass' to show that providers who receive bronze are doing well. The panel mentioned that there could be more TEF awards which are in between bronze and silver – e.g. bronze/silver award or silver/bronze.
 - Increase the level of student engagement – collecting qualitative feedback which gives insight into the student experience.
 - That NSS is currently the only or main set of data which informs about student satisfaction and that a mix of data would be beneficial, both quantitative and qualitative.
 - That there was a need to align the TEF and the regulatory framework with strong endorsement for ensuring this is done thoroughly and well. For example, questions like 'what happens if you fail the TEF' and the interventions that it would trigger needed to be carefully considered in light of the regulatory framework.

35. Richard Smith thanked the panel for their input.
36. The Chair thanked the panel for their contribution and advised that their comments will be noted at the board meeting in November 2019.

Item 5: Discover Uni

37. The Chair handed over to Catherine Cameron to lead a session on the new information, advice and guidance resource, Discover Uni.
38. Catherine Cameron ran through a demonstration of the website. Catherine explained that Discover Uni was launched in September 2019 and was now in a beta phase which meant that the team were collecting feedback which will inform the development of the site.
39. Catherine specified that the team were keen to receive the panel's input on the site and potential changes to data and its presentation, design enhancements, discoverability of content, transition and transfer and course level links with UCAS.
40. Feedback from the panel included the below points:

The panel liked:

- The simple design.
- Consideration of accessibility and that the website had been through an accessibility audit.
- That the TEF rating was not located on specific subject pages and instead on the provider page.

The panel discussed:

- Communicating more clearly that the website is for courses across the UK.
- Communicating that the website is for undergraduate study only and not postgraduate.
- Adding support for students which helps them to decide what course to apply for, for example having a search engine which takes into account the courses you enjoy which then gives suggestions for higher education courses. It was explained that this is not a function on the website because we link out to other sites who are already doing this well.
- Having more information to guide graduates on what they can do with their degree, it was advised that the website links out to Prospects who already have this information.
- That it would be useful to include gender splits on courses displayed

- The panel noted that not all students know that the OfS exists and that we should increase the awareness of the OfS among students and also focus on communicating that Discover Uni is managed by the OfS to emphasise that it is a credible source. The panel mentioned that the website could have OfS branding so it is recognisable to students. It was explained that it is jointly owned by four countries so the website cannot have OfS branding only.
- The panel recommended that we should link to student protection plans.
- The panel recommended that our regulatory work should be communicated in some way through Discover Uni.

Development:

- The panel commented that the Discover Uni logo looked very corporate.
 - The panel asked about how people are getting to the website. It was explained that the website is currently '.org.uk' and will be moving to '.gov.uk' and once domain changes, traffic will come from widgets in addition to users coming through searches. Information about Discover Uni will also be going into training materials for advisers and OfS will be promoting through social media.
 - The panel questioned the number of times it takes to click through the site. Catherine Cameron shared that this aspect had tested well with users.
 - The panel questioned whether you can compare institutions – it was advised that there is a shortlisting feature and a compare functionality for the site will be implemented shortly.
41. The panel expressed an interest in sharing more comments and views on Discover Uni. This was encouraged and any members wanting to share feedback can do so via OfS colleagues.

42. Catherine Cameron thanked the panel for the feedback.

Item 6: Student engagement

43. The Chair invited Ed Davison and Ben Hunt to lead a session on the student engagement strategy.
44. An update on the student engagement consultation was given which included insight into the recommendations which would be included in the student engagement strategy.
45. The student panel were asked for their feedback on the direction of the strategy:
- The student panel members questioned whether there could be oversight of the board's interaction with students and whether the board should be set a certain amount of time to spend with students each year. It was highlighted that board members come to the student panel meetings, students go to the board away day

and there is interaction with the student experience board member, Martha Longdon and Kathryn King who is also a board member and current PhD doctoral research student. It was emphasised that the interaction and the purpose of the interaction is important and not only the amount of time spent interacting with students.

- The student panel emphasised the importance of communication and that the OfS needed to focus more on building awareness of the OfS among students. Drawing a link between the TEF, the NSS, building an understanding of students' rights and Discover Uni under one umbrella or campaign was explored.
- It was highlighted that the panel could play more of an ambassador role, and that the panel could promote what they do more, which would also help to increase awareness.
- The panel asked when the strategy will be reviewed and emphasised that updates on the ways in which students are having an impact on the OfS would be useful.

46. The Chair of the panel thanked the panel for their questions and comments.

Item 7: Closed session

47. OfS staff left the room for the student panel to feed in any thoughts and comments to the Chair.