

## Chief executive's report

### Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on work undertaken and issues that have arisen since the date of the last board meeting on 13 May 2021, to the extent that they are not covered in other board papers.

### Recommendations/decisions required by the board

2. The board is invited to:
  - a. Note the updates contained in this paper.
  - b. Comment on the proposals regarding email usage in paragraphs 27 and 28.

### Further information

3. Available from [Nicola Dandridge](#).

## Summary of main activity

4. Since the last board meeting two months ago, our primary focus has been on analysing the phase one consultation on quality and standards, as well the responses to the separate funding consultation, and translating both sets of responses into specific proposals. Our proposals in relation to both these exercises are set out in board papers 5.1 and 6.1.
5. These consultation processes require detailed and expert analysis and absorb considerable staff time from across the organisation. We continue to focus on robust prioritisation, continuously looking at how we can deploy our limited resources on areas that can have most positive impact on students and our wider stakeholders.
6. Proportionate regulation and reducing regulatory burden continue to be a priority. As described in paragraph 18 below, we approach all our regulatory activity through the lens of how we can ensure that we are responding in a risk-based and proportionate way that focuses activity on areas of highest risk, reducing burden on low risk universities and colleges to the greatest extent possible. This will form a particularly important element of the quality and standards proposals, where we are looking to sharpen our ability to intervene when it is required, but explicitly not intervening or expecting providers to change what they are doing where they present low risk.
7. Work continues in relation to the development of our new strategy (paper 4.1), with an increasing focus on engaging OfS staff in its development over the next month, prior to the publication of a public consultation on the proposals in September.
8. We continue to work closely and constructively with the DfE to understand and, where appropriate, advise on their reform agenda (including in relation to the Skills Bill, Free Speech Bill and further work ahead of the next Spending Review). We propose to discuss these and other issues further with the board at the annual awayday planned for 22 September 2021.

## Participation

9. Since the last board meeting we have published evaluation reports on the Uni Connect programme, which is supporting universities and colleges to work together on their outreach to schools in their local areas, and the AI and Digital skills programme, which is developing postgraduate conversion courses to enable graduates from other disciplines to work in this area. The Uni Connect evaluations demonstrate how sustained outreach, including at least seven activities for a minimum of three hours in each academic year, improves knowledge of higher education and builds confidence to make informed decisions. The AI and Digital skills evaluation shows how the new courses and student finance developed through the programme are supporting a more diverse intake to these subject areas than before; 46 per cent of students on the new courses are women, compared with 27 per cent on other computing master's courses and 19 per cent of the technology workforce.
10. We have decided to publish this year's National Student Survey and Graduate outcomes on Discover Uni, with a single year's data for the most recent year, to be published for both surveys. The data will be accompanied by prominent caveats explaining the possible effect of the pandemic on results. We published on Discover Uni a set of downloadable resources for students, teachers or advisers to guide higher education choices. So far, there have been

1,356 downloads of the updated 2021 resources and a good click through rate from emails that went out from UCAS to just over 4,000 advisers and 20,000 UK and international applicants. Over the last year there have been over 10,300 downloads of our targeted Discover Uni PDF resources.

11. On 27 May 2021 we published our latest [Insight Brief](#), 'Improving opportunity and choice for mature students' and accompanied this with a successful [Insight Event](#), where we were joined by the universities minister, Jo Barlow from our student panel and Lord Bilimoria, the president of the Confederation of British Industry, among others. The event focused on the opportunity to help a new generation of adult learners to upskill, following a significant increase in mature learners during the pandemic and the announcement of the government's Lifelong Loan Entitlement.
12. On 27 May 2021 we announced that Chris Millward would end his four-year term of office in December 2021. Statements from Chris, the OfS and the universities minister can be seen [here](#) and board members should note that [applications](#) for the next director for access and participation closed on 1 July 2021. An appointment for Chris' successor is expected in autumn 2021 and will be a decision for the Education Secretary.

## Experience

13. In follow up to the publication of our statement of expectations in relation to sexual misconduct and harassment, I [wrote](#) on 10 June 2021 to ask all providers to review and update their systems, policies and procedures to ensure they are in line with the statement ahead of the next academic year. The letter asked providers to inform us if they thought they would not be able to implement the statement. It also reminded providers that we will consider the options for formally connecting the statement of expectations to our conditions of registration during the coming year as we review the impact of the statement.
14. Analysing the responses to our November phase one consultation on the regulation of quality and standards has been a significant exercise. This work is now informing our phase two consultations, which will propose more detailed revised conditions. The first will relate to high quality courses and reliable standards, and we aim to publish it later this month. The second will cover student outcomes, and we will publish it this autumn, aligning it with proposals for the reformed the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).
15. Because the revised TEF cannot be implemented until early 2023, on 10 June 2021 we wrote to all providers to confirm the anticipated timeline and approach, letting them know that we would extend current TEF awards until this time. We also wrote to providers without a TEF award informing them how to apply for a voluntary provisional award for this period. We have now published revised TEF branding [guidelines that](#) clarify that, due to the length of time since awards were made, we do not expect providers to use TEF awards within their promotional materials during the period of extension, but any that had already been printed before guidance was updated did not need to be recalled. This reflects the advice from university leaders and students on the TEF advisory group that the significant lapse of time since the last TEF awards would mean that it would be misleading to students to promote the awards.
16. The HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey published on 24 June 2021 documented significant falls in students reporting good value from their higher education experience, largely

connected with the impact of the pandemic. I spoke at the conference that launched the report, and there was coverage in [The Guardian](#), [Press Association](#), [Mail Online](#), [Wonkhe](#) and BBC News and Times Radio. We will shortly be publishing the National Student Survey results, which have in the past shared some similarities with the HEPI survey results, albeit with a much larger sample of students and more granular provider level breakdowns.

17. The board will have seen widespread coverage of the proposed boycott by academics of Oriel College, following its decision to retain the Rhodes statue. This story was first reported in [The Daily Telegraph](#) and was then followed up in [the Daily Mail](#), [BBC News](#) and [The Times](#). The OfS's interest here was on the potential impact any boycott could have on current and prospective students. James wrote an article for [The Sunday Telegraph](#) setting out his concerns, and this article was also mentioned in articles in [The Times](#) and [Daily Mail](#).

## Outcomes

18. Shortly after the last board meeting, on 19 May 2021, we published our experimental measure, [projected completion and employment from entrant data](#) (Proceed). The measure reveals substantial differences between providers and subjects in terms of the number of students who continue with their course and go on to find professional employment or further study shortly after graduation. We consider that these measures represent important information for prospective students. We have no plans to use this indicator for regulatory purposes. Board members will note that the Secretary of State for Education made repeated reference to the Proceed metrics in his recent [speech](#) to the HEPI conference on 24 June 2021. The metric was well covered in the media, with coverage in [The Times](#), [Daily Telegraph](#), [Mail Online](#), [University Business](#), Times Higher Education and [University Business](#).
19. On 23 June 2021 we launched a [review](#) of the policies and practices of a number providers of the use of 'inclusive' assessment practices that disregard poor spelling, punctuation and grammar when students' work is assessed. This review sits alongside our existing work to drive up the quality of higher education courses and will identify approaches that maintain rigour in assessment and those that do not. The review was covered by the [Daily Telegraph](#), [Sunday Telegraph](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Guardian](#) and [Evening Standard](#).
20. A detailed overview of our communications activity is available at Annex A.

## Efficient and effective

21. On 8 June 2021 we published our [annual report and accounts](#), which are laid before Parliament pursuant to schedule 1 paragraph 13 of HERA. The report summarises our work over the last year, and describes how we adjusted our regulatory approach to help providers manage the additional demands of the pandemic, while continuing to operate risk-based monitoring activity. We also set out how we set expectations of quality and clear, timely communications with students during the shift to online teaching.
22. We published on 25 June 2021 a report assessing the financial sustainability of higher education providers in England. Our analysis showed that the sector is in reasonable financial health, though it projects a decline in performance in 2020-21 to be followed by a slow recovery from 2021-22 onwards. The report does note that a range of factors could still pose significant financial challenges for the sector.

23. Our work to monitor and reduce regulatory burden has continued. We continue to factor considerations of burden into all regulatory work, and are now operating a more streamlined and carefully structured approach to our communication with providers, which has been welcomed by the sector. On 18 May 2021 we published a new key performance measure which tracks the administrative burdens we place on providers across five areas: volume of data and information returns; number of OfS conditions of registration subject to enhanced monitoring requirements; percentage of providers submitting new access and participation plans; number, word count and readability of OfS regulatory documents; regulatory fees.
24. We updated and published the equality, diversity and inclusion statistics for our own staff on 8 June 2021. The report contains information about our staff in relation to age, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and caring responsibilities. The report also updates on our progress against six EDI recruitment targets. We are currently meeting target 5 (minority ethnic appointments) and met target 1 (per cent disclosure rate of protected characteristics) for all characteristics apart from disability. Targets 2, 3, 4 and 6 are yet to meet their minimum rolling periods, so are provisional at this stage. We appear to be on track to meet target 2 (female appointments at high pay bands) and target 4 (minority ethnic appointments at high pay bands) when they reach their minimum rolling periods but we are unlikely to meet target 3 (male appointments). We will not report on target 6 (LGBT+ appointments at high pay bands) until it has reached its minimum four-year rolling period, to reduce the risk of identifying individuals.
25. The latest OfS risk report is at Annex B. The overall risk environment remains fairly stable but we are managing some significant risks. Some of the risks relate to delivery due to the increasing volume and complexity of demands on the organisation, alongside limited resources and capacity. These risks are being managed and monitored closely by the executive team, mitigated to the extent that it is possible through robust prioritisation. As the board will be aware, robust prioritisation means that there are many things we would wish to do but are unable to do due to resource constraints.
26. Board members may be aware that Gurpreet Dehal will conclude his term of appointment at the end of December 2021. The Department for Education will be advertising new appointments to the OfS board, for members to succeed both Gurpreet and Steve West.
27. Exempt from publication
  - a. Exempt from publication
  - b. Exempt from publication
28. Exempt from publication