

OfS student panel meeting

2 March 2023

Time: 1400–1800

Location: OfS London office, and online.

Present members: Caleb Stevens (Chair)
Nkechi Adeboye
Molly Edwards
Thomas Freeston
Thibau Grumett
Rahul Mathasing
Oscar Minto
Misha Patel
Amy Stanning
Michael Steele
Lila Tamea

Attending: John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation) (Item 6)
Rob Denny (Student Surveys Manager) (Item 8)
Nike Gustave (Compliance and Student Protection Manager) (Item 5)
Christie Jones (Student Engagement Officer) (Items 1-9)
Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive) (Item 2)
Emma Maskell (Head of Student Engagement and Information) (Items 1-9)
Sarah Matthews (Leadership Development Officer) (Item 6)
Amy Norton (Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) (Item 5)
Catherine Read (Senior DRU Officer) (Item 5)
Laura Radcliffe (Team Administrator) (Items 1-9)
Rachel Houchen (Board member) (Item 3)

Apologies: Anita Hashmi
Ezra Rose

Item 1 – Chair’s welcome

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members to the meeting and introduced the Head of Student Engagement and Information, who attended in place of the Student Engagement Manager role.
2. The chair thanked board member Dayo Olukoshi for attending the last meeting, and thanked the previous chair, Martha Longdon, for their work before stepping down.
3. The chair thanked those who participated in recent activities, including:
 - a. Attending the OfS staff conference.
 - b. Taking part in an advisory group for the sexual misconduct prevalence survey.
 - c. Taking part in a panel for the postgraduate programme funding competition.

Item 2 – Chief executive’s update

4. The chair welcomed the chief executive to the meeting to begin her update.
5. The update included:
 - a. The publication of the consultation on a new condition designed to tackle harassment and sexual misconduct.
 - b. Developments of the prevalence survey on sexual misconduct.
 - c. Cost of living, and an Insight brief on the topic shortly to be published.
 - d. The upcoming parliamentary reception being hosted by the OfS.
 - e. Quality investigations underway.
 - f. Progress being made by the National Union of Students (NUS) to address the report on antisemitism.
6. The chief executive thanked the panel for their work and left the meeting.

Item 3 – Board and student panel session

7. The chair invited Rachel Houchen, an OfS board member, to the meeting.
8. Rachel Houchen shared her areas of interest in higher education, particularly access and participation plans and the importance of regional representation to ensure wide ranging views are captured.
9. Panel members asked the following questions:
 - a. How she had been involved in access and participation plans in the past?

- i. Rachel Houchen responded that she had attended provider visits in the North East with the Director for Fair Access and Participation, and had met with Newcastle University a number of times to gather their opinion.
 - ii. She emphasised that it is important to maintain support for disadvantaged students once they do enter higher education.
- b. How providers who are tight on resource can offer sufficient support to ensure students feel a sense of belonging, especially international students and distance learners?
- i. Rachel Houchen agreed that there is a cost balance, but that there does need to be support in place otherwise dropout rates will increase.
- c. A panel member commented that when students from underrepresented backgrounds get into university, they often feel as though they are lucky to be there rather than deserving to be there.
- i. Rachel Houchen responded that it is important to embed aspirations to attend university or college in students well before they apply and instil in them the confidence that they belong there.

Item 4 – Discussion session 1: Harassment and sexual misconduct consultation

10. The chair invited the Compliance and Student Protection Manager and Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to begin their presentation.
11. With the consultation published on a new condition to regulate providers on harassment and sexual misconduct, the aim of the session was to update the panel on the proposals and discuss how to encourage other students to share their views.
12. The policy team shared an overview of the consultation proposals, and invited questions and feedback from the panel. The policy team explained the expected timeline of the consultation.
13. Panel members asked the following questions:
- a. How can we ensure this condition will be implemented and reported correctly, and that what providers share with the OfS is accurate?
 - i. The policy team answered that if the OfS receives a report stating that a provider hasn't met the conditions, they would approach this in line with our existing approach for monitoring compliance with conditions of registration.
 - b. How would the OfS identify who would be the appropriate person to deliver training on misconduct at providers?
 - i. The policy team answered that training should be credible and evidence based.
 - c. How is a relationship being defined?
 - i. The policy team talked through the definition set out in the consultation.

- d. With student and teacher relationships, what would happen where staff are on short term contracts at a provider where they may already be involved with a student, or for postgraduate research (PGR) students who also have teaching roles?
 - i. The policy team welcomed this point on short term contracts and considered that the definition of a 'relevant staff member' for the purposes of registering or prohibiting a relationship with a student wouldn't be affected by a staff member's contract type or length. With PGR students, if they have a supervisory role or will influence another student's teaching, learning or pastoral care they are a relevant member of staff. Providers would need to make sensible case-by-case judgements in these cases.
- e. How long would the 'relevant staff member' status last?
 - i. The policy team answered that this would depend on the responsibility or influence the member of staff does or does not continue to have over a student. If they have left the provider, they're likely to no longer have a position of responsibility or influence over the student.

14. The chair proposed arranging an additional meeting to continue the discussion. He thanked the staff members for their time.

Item 5 – Equality of opportunity risk register

- 15. The chair welcomed the Director for Fair Access and Participation and Leadership Development Officer to the meeting.
- 16. The director shared a presentation about the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register, explaining that it is a tool for providers that would outline risks that students may experience across different stages of their education. The stages include:
 - a. Accessing higher education.
 - b. When students are on their course.
 - c. Progression from higher education.
- 17. The risk register is not an exhaustive list. Providers should consider their own context in the light of the risk register, and ensure that they are acting on the greatest risk to their students or potential students. The OfS would expect most large providers to deal with a mixture of risks to both within their own institution and across the sector.
- 18. Panel members shared:
 - a. Financing education is a risk that flows through every stage of the student lifecycle. In a 2021 census it was reported that 10,000 Muslim students alone forgo university because of barriers, including financial.
 - b. Universities exist within the wider system and many students think that they can't access the same opportunities as their peers.

- i. The Director responded that providers should continue to engage in their local and regional community. There has been progress over the years in the attitude towards accessing education, and there is now recognition of the many of barriers to entry.

19. The director thanked the panel for their time and left the meeting.

Item 6 – Discussion session 2: Sexual misconduct prevalence survey

20. The chair invited the Student Surveys Manager to begin their presentation about the pilot prevalence survey on sexual misconduct.

21. The Student Surveys Manager shared that the aims of surveys of this kind are to gain a better understanding on the extent and scale of sexual misconduct in higher education. There are a number of similar surveys that have been conducted in other countries that can be used as a basis for this work, but will be adapted to fit the English context.

22. The first step is to run a pilot survey to test the feasibility of running it on a national scale.

23. The Student Surveys Manager asked the panel for feedback on the following:

- a. The proposed question topics and wording.
- b. How we can minimise the potential for harm to the participants taking the survey.

24. The panel fed back:

- a. Use of language is important for this topic.
- b. Sending the survey around assessment periods could be triggering to students, potentially impacting their grades.
- c. More consideration is needed for the questions to ensure they are inclusive of the LGBTQ community, and different cultures.
 - i. The Student Surveys Manager responded that this would be addressed during cognitive testing of the survey wording.
- d. A question around how incidences of sexual misconduct impacted students' mental health in the long and short term would be useful.
- e. It is important to signpost to mental health resources as a way to minimise harm, as it could be the first time a student is sharing their experiences.
- f. It may be helpful to promote the survey through specific groups, such as the 'urban angels', who promote support for sexual misconduct.

25. The panel asked the following questions:

- a. How would students be contacted, and would there be scope to conduct sessions in a controlled environment, like on campuses?

- i. The Student Surveys Manager answered that students would be contacted through email, and potentially by text message.
 - ii. In person sessions would be complicated for the scope of the survey. The survey will be set up to really clearly signpost what to expect, and will include a question about their experience of the survey.
- b. Would students be consulted before providers give their contact details to the OfS to send out the survey?
- i. The Student Surveys Manager responded that they wouldn't need to, as the survey is for the provision of a public task. However, it would be useful for providers to let their students know that the survey would be sent out prior to build credibility and trust, as many will not have heard of the OfS.
- c. Would there be a scale of increasing severity for different instances of sexual misconduct?
- i. The Student Surveys Manager responded that there would not be an increasing severity scale as it can lead to people feeling alienated.
- d. Could the survey be opened to those who don't complete their course, as there might be some people who have left due instances of sexual misconduct?
- i. The Student Surveys Manager responded that there are methodological limitations in testing graduates and leavers, but if in the future this were to become a yearly survey, continuation rates could potentially be measured.

26. The chair suggested sending further feedback by email, and potentially discussing the topic at a future meeting.

27. The Student Surveys Manager thanked the panel for their time and left the meeting.

Item 7 – Closed session

28. OfS staff exited the meeting at this point to allow for a panel member closed session.