

Report from the Horizon Scanning Panel

Issue

1. The board is informed of the work of the Horizon Scanning Panel by receiving a report on the outcomes of each meeting. This report will be supplemented by an oral report given by the chair of the OfS and the Panel.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to receive the report of the final meeting of the Horizon Scanning Panel pilot on 16 November 2020.

Main points from the November meeting

3. The Panel received and discussed a presentation on the review of scenarios to inform the next OfS strategy, with the aim of informing the further development of the scenarios which would be the subject of OfS board discussion.

Further information

4. Available from Sir Michael Barber.

Chair's welcome

1. In welcoming members to the final meeting of the Horizon Scanning Panel pilot, the chair noted that future arrangements for the Horizon Scanning function would be determined by the new chair and the Executive of the OfS. He thanked the external members for their contributions throughout, and for the helpful discussion at the last meeting informing the Review of Digital Teaching and Learning.

Review of scenarios to inform discussion at the board planning event

2. A paper had been provided to the panel setting out hypothetical scenarios for the future of higher education in England in 2030. The panel was asked to comment to further develop the scenarios.
3. The scenarios were intended to be plausible descriptions of the future landscape, not predictions. They covered benign and forced innovation, and the expansion and contraction of domestic student numbers. The scenarios allow the board to test the developing OfS strategy for 2021-2024 through consideration of the range of possible opportunities and threats we might see in the future English higher education system, and how these might interact with the decisions we are making now.
4. Members were thanked for their comments on an earlier draft. Each of the scenarios was discussed in turn and there was also discussion of themes applying across all scenarios – such as the macroeconomic climate and the role of technology in the development of higher education.
5. The panel stressed the value of universities as multi-dimensional organisations, which are also part of a wider local, national and international eco-system, contributing to scholarship, research, community and culture.
6. The panel was asked to make any comments as actionable as possible, to help the board to view strategic objectives through the lens of each scenario.

Conclusion of the horizon scanning pilot

7. The chair thanked members for their stimulating insights throughout the pilot, and the contribution they have made to the work of the OfS. OfS staff members also thanked members for sharing their knowledge and insights, which helped to give them a more rounded view of the role played by higher education providers. The chair thanked the secretariat team for their hard work in supporting the panel during the pilot.
8. The chair would discuss with his successor thoughts on the form that the horizon scanning function may take in the future, noting that he was keen that external dialogue is maintained.