

## **OfS Student Panel report**

### **Issue**

1. An update on the 10 July 2018 Student Panel meeting and recent Student Panel activity.

### **Recommendations**

2. The board is invited to note the report and factor in the views of the panel when carrying out its role.

### **Further information**

3. Available from Nicola Dandridge: [nicola.dandridge@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:nicola.dandridge@officeforstudents.org.uk).

### **Member's interests**

4. Ruth Carlson, student experience representative on the OfS board, sits on the Student Panel.

## Background

5. The Student Panel held their second meeting on 10 July 2018. The agenda focussed on the OfS's approach to student engagement; value for money; equality and diversity and access and participation. On student engagement and value for money the panel have set up subgroups to explore the issues in partnership with OfS officials and make recommendations.
6. The board should note that Shraddha Choudhury has now stepped down from the panel. She is an international student who has now completed her study as well as a year as president of the Exeter Student Guild. Her position will not be filled in this calendar year.

## Panel meeting update

7. Student engagement: Following the April meeting of the panel, a subgroup was established to further explore the questions 'Why should the OfS engage with students?' and 'Should the OfS support providers to engage with their students?' The subgroup developed some recommendations which they discussed with the panel (Annex A). The panel welcomed the work of the subgroup which was discussed in the context of the general duties of the OfS. The panel acknowledged that with respect to provider engagement with students, the OfS could only work at a sector level. The subgroup agreed to finalise the paper and report back to the next meeting. The panel also discussed the draft definition and principles for OfS engagement (Annex B) with students which will become the cornerstone of the OfS student engagement strategy. Suggestions from panellists will be fed into the next iteration of the draft and the panel will be kept informed of progress. The student subgroup will continue to be involved in the development of the student engagement strategy.
8. Value for money: Following the April meeting of the panel, a subgroup was established to work with OfS officials to help shape and develop the OfS strategy for value for money. The subgroup have developed a set of five principles in approaching value for money (Annex C). The panel welcomed these principles and added that the context for researchers and international students ought to be considered. The panel also raised the question of how the OfS are going to define success in this area. Finally, the panel raised the question of what is meant by 'fair' in this context and agreed that it cannot mean a concept of value for money being applied evenly across all groups as it is defined differently by different people. OfS officials will take these principles forward in developing the strategy and will bring initial thinking back to the subgroup shortly to enable them to continue to shape this work.
9. Equality and diversity: The panel were given early sight of the OfS's draft Equality and Diversity Statement and Objectives (Board paper BD-2018-July-5.1) and invited to offer their views on it. The panel were clear that the OfS needed to put significant emphasis on and be transparent about its own approach to equality and diversity if it is to be setting high expectations of the sector. The panel asked for a report at the next meeting on the OfS's own approach to equality and were eager to explore what role panellists might have in working with OfS officials on this.
10. Access and participation (A&P): The panel were invited to comment on the OfS's developing access and participation strategy. The discussion covered the importance of engaging with schools, what approach the OfS will take to encourage access for applicants

with criminal records and the importance of high quality information, advice and guidance. The panel welcomed the proposal to explore integration of A&P priorities into the teaching excellence framework, as well as the proposal to move towards a more risk-based approach to monitoring but wanted to see more information on both of these in future. Finally, the panel were eager to explore how improvements can be made to the quality of student engagement at providers when A&P plans are developed.

### **Future activity**

11. An outline agenda was agreed for the September meeting, to cover:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Planning for the 'Student Panel 2019'
- The OfS mental health strategy
- Reports from the subgroups on student engagement and value for money
- Report from the OfS on equality and diversity

12. Panellists have also been invited to join the late afternoon and evening sessions of the board Away Day on 25 September.

### **Paper publication date**

13. We expect to be able to publish this paper three weeks after the meeting.

## **Annex A: Student Panel response to the OfS Board on Student Engagement**

### **Issue**

1. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, the Student Panel were invited to consider two questions regarding OfS's approach to student engagement. These questions had been previously considered by the OfS Board. The questions were:
  - Why should the OfS engage with students?
  - Should the OfS support providers to engage with their students?
2. After this initial discussion, a subgroup was formed of panellists to formulate a response to the Board and to form a roadmap for the nascent OfS Student Engagement Strategy with Amanda Wilcox (OfS).

### **Recommendations**

3. The board is invited to:
  - a. Note the response, for information.
  - b. Consider its recommendations for future engagement with students.

### **Background**

4. The Student Panel were appointed in January, 2018. At the first full meeting of the panel on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, the panel discussed the two questions relating to student engagement that the Board had discussed previously. After this meeting, of April, a subgroup of panellists was formed to work with the OfS to inform the development of a student engagement roadmap.
  - The subgroup consists in: Ruth Carlson (OfS Student Experience Board Member), Shraddha Chaudhary (President of Exeter Guild), Zahra Choudhry (Vice President of Education at University of West London Students' Union) and Ben Hunt. Ben Hunt is convening the group and is liaising with Amanda Wilcox (OfS) on issues pertaining to the nascent Student Engagement Strategy.
  - The subgroup convened in early June to discuss the two questions presented to the Board and to summarise the view of the panel as discussed at the April meeting.

### **Why should the OfS engage with students?**

5. It was the panel's view at the April meeting that the OfS should engage with students. The reasons for the regulator's engagement with students were:
  - Public perception: the title of the regulator, as well as its explicit regulatory approach in the regulatory framework to be focused on the interests of students in the short, medium and long term.
  - Widening Participation: to understand the needs and interests of disadvantaged students in terms of access, retention and success. The panel also highlighted the need for an understanding of attainment gaps from students who are disadvantaged because of them.
  - Generational differences: to be reflective of generational differences between students and OfS.
  - Regulatory relevance: for the OfS to remain representative of the interests of students in the longer term and to be adaptive to these interests.

## Why should the OfS support providers to engage with their students?

6. It was the panel's view at the April meeting that the OfS should support providers to engage with their students. The reasons for this were:
  - Holistic provider engagement: the panel felt from their experience as students that providers often do not engage with particular demographics of students effectively, with particular emphasis on international and postgraduate students.
  - Accountability: students need proper mechanisms to hold providers to account.
  - Normalisation of student engagement: the OfS could play a positive role in normalising student engagement in providers.
  - Best practice: the OfS should aim to share and encourage best practice for provider engagement with students as a regulator representing the interests of students.

## Subgroup discussion

7. The subgroup discussed the views of the overall panel in further detail, including how the OfS could engage with students and how the OfS could support providers to engage with their students.
  - Regarding how the OfS could engage with students, the subgroup agreed that there should be a central triage within the OfS for student queries. It was also recommended that the nascent Student Engagement Strategy takes account of the range of the student experience, including the experience of postgraduate and international students, and their particular interests and issues.
  - Regarding how the OfS could support providers to engage with students, it was felt that there were three possible regulatory options for the OfS: (1) do not provide support for providers (2) provide best practice for providers (3) actively encourage and normalise provider engagement with students.
  - There was a uniform view that the OfS should still have a role in promoting best practice regarding student engagement to providers.
  - The subgroup argued that option three should be pursued due to the overall view of the panel that providers often fail to adequately engage students. Some initial ways of achieving this could be to strengthen the need for student engagement within student protection plans, or in university governance structures.

## Recommendations

8. The subgroup recommends that:
  - The OfS seeks to engage with students both through the nascent Student Engagement Strategy and organisationally to put students at the heart of the regulator.
  - The OfS continues to develop mechanisms of normalising provider engagement with students, including looking at ways this could be encouraged in the short term in student protection plans, access and participation plans.

## Annex B: Definition and principles of student engagement

### Our definition of students:

We define the 'student' as any individual who is, has, or may be considering, undertaking a programme of study with a registered provider irrespective of their age, background, nationality, location or mode of study etc.

### Our purpose for engaging with students:

We will engage with students to inform our regulatory processes and decision-making, to proactively gather student input to inform our priorities and activities, and to evaluate our performance in these activities.

### Our definition of student engagement:

The involvement of meaningful and representative student perspectives in our organisational governance and activities at both sector and provider level.

### Our principles of student engagement:

- Our student engagement will follow from our regulatory functions and our objectives, and we will begin every engagement with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve (**Purposeful**).
- We will seek out students who are potentially affected or interested in the impact of our work from a representative range of programmes, backgrounds, modes of study and providers, and make it easy for them to engage (**Inclusive**).
- We engage students at all points of our activities and will agree on when and how to engage with clear mechanisms to feed back on their input (**Timely**).
- We will be open and honest in our engagement with students and set clear expectations, ensuring that their contributions will be taken into account in our decisions and ensure that they know how (**Transparent**).
- We acknowledge and respect the expertise, perspective and the needs of students and we will provide information, support, time and space to allow them to engage in a meaningful way (**Respectful**).

## **Annex C: Value for Money subgroup draft principles for OfS approach to value for money**

1. **Keep it broad** - every student has different reasons for attending a HE institution, therefore a different definition of value. We must not pre-define value.
2. **Keep it transparent** - to champion advice and guidance, especially relating to where student fees are spent. The aim is to manage expectations but also apply pressure from publicity to institutions to better spend student fees.
3. **Keep it simple** - the language surrounding student finance, funding and general guidance should be better explained. Most effective terminology to be explored.
4. **Keep it fair** - value must be seen across all demographics attending the institution, especially disadvantaged groups. Value for all must be championed.
5. **Time for change** - the aim of this work is to have a genuine positive impact on the sector, to improve value for all students, not just to continue a conversation and manage expectations.

## **Annex D: Draft Student Panel meeting minutes**

### **OfS Student Panel Meeting - Minutes**

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018

**Time:** 15.00 – 18.00

**Location:** Finlaison House, Furnival Street

<b>Attendees:</b>
Ben Hunt, Chad Allen, Lizzie Pace, Xenia Levantis, Zahra Choudhry, Shakira Martin, Shades Chaudhury (chair), Sinead Brown, Alice Richardson, Stuart Cannell, Luke Renwick, Nicola Dandridge, Conor Ryan, Amanda Wilcox, Sarah Bruce, Edward Davison

<b>Apologies:</b>
Megan Dunn, Ruth Carlson

#### **Item 1: Chair's welcome**

1. The chair thanked panel members for joining the meeting.
2. The chair thanked panellists for their varied contributions since the April meeting, in particular those who had volunteered to participate in the subgroups on value for money and student engagement.
3. The chair noted the ongoing recruitment campaign for a student voice representative on the OfS Board.
4. It was noted that this was Shades' last meeting and the panel thanked her warmly.

#### **Item 2: Approval of 18 April 2018 meeting minutes**

5. The minutes from the April meeting were approved with panellists appreciating their clarity.

#### **Item 3: Chief Executive's report**

6. The chair invited the OfS's chief executive to give a brief update to the panel. This included information on the process of provider registration, an overview of the OfS transformation programme and organisational design process and confirmation that the OfS was continuing to work with the panel and the board to ensure that the panel's role continued to evolve. The chief executive echoed the chair's thanks to the panellists for their involvement during the preceding months.

#### **Item 4: Student Engagement**

7. Conor Ryan (OfS) introduced himself as the new OfS Director of External Relations. Conor outlined his thoughts on the OfS Communications strategy and the Information Advice and Guidance strategy. Conor stressed that he was keen for the panel to be involved in the development of both of these strategies.
8. Ben Hunt introduced the work of the subgroup on student engagement and the draft recommendations to report back to the OfS board. Amanda Wilcox (OfS) discussed how the recommendations fitted with the OfS's duties at both sector and provider level. The panel welcomed the work of the subgroup and agreed that the paper should be finalised for the OfS board taking into consideration the panel discussion.

9. Amanda Wilcox (OfS) introduced the draft student engagement definition and principles to the panel. The panel welcomed these and the opportunity to comment on them. Comments received would be incorporated in to the next draft of the definition and principles in preparation for them to be incorporated into a board paper on student engagement. The subgroup would continue to be engaged in the development of the OfS Student Engagement Strategy.

#### **Item 5: OfS's approach to Value for Money**

10. Due to technical issues the agenda item on Value for Money was postponed until the next meeting of the Student Panel. A brief update was provided by members of the subgroup for Value for Money on progress of the group and the emerging principles.

#### **Item 6: Developing the OfS Strategy for Access and Participation Plans and Equality and Diversity**

11. David Barrett (OfS) provided an overview on the work to develop the OfS strategy on Access and Participation Plans. The discussion covered the importance of engaging with schools, what approach the OfS will take to encourage access for applicants with criminal records and the importance of high quality information, advice and guidance. The panel welcomed the proposal to explore integration of A&P priorities into the teaching excellence framework, as well as the proposal to move towards a more risk-based approach to monitoring but wanted to see more information on both of these in future. Finally, the panel were eager to explore how improvements can be made to the quality of student engagement at providers when A&P plans are developed. Panellists provided feedback on the questions posed and agreed that they were keen to continue to be involved in and kept informed of progress for this work.
12. Dan Aldridge (OfS) provided an overview of the work to develop the OfS strategy on Equality and Diversity (E&D). Panellists agreed that this was an important area of work and asked how OfS practice around E&D reflected what was being asked of the sector. The panel asked for a report at the next meeting on the OfS's own approach to equality and were eager to explore what role panellists might have in working with OfS officials on this. Panellists provided feedback on the questions posed and agreed that they were keen to continue to be involved in and kept informed of progress for this work.

#### **Item 7: Report on meeting with Stand Alone**

13. Zahra provided an update on a meeting that she had with the charity Stand Alone who champion issues for estranged students. Panellists were particularly interested in this work and thanked Zahra for bringing it to their attention. Panellists endorsed Zahra continuing to explore opportunities to raise awareness of this issue.

#### **Item 8: Agenda forward look**

14. The chair introduced items on the agenda forward look. Panellists also requested that free speech, barriers to access, information advice and guidance and challenges to new providers regarding student engagement were considered as future items. Panellists also requested an annual work plan that would set out meeting dates, agenda items and milestones for the OfS.

#### **Item 9: Panel Feedback**

15. The chair led feedback from the panellists without OfS officials present and then concluded the meeting.