



## **Student panel update**

### **Issue**

1. To update the board on the work of the student panel since the last update on 15 May 2019.

### **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](mailto:edward.davison@officeforstudents.org.uk)).

## Background

4. At the time of the last update the 2019 student panel had been formed (with five new members and nine returning members) and panellists had attended an initial training day. Since then there have been two meetings as well as further activity which is detailed in this paper.

## Updates

5. The panels' 2 May 2019 meeting was updated on verbally at the board's 15 May 2019 meeting and the approved minutes from this meeting are now attached in Annex A. The panel met again on 4 July 2019, where they were joined by board members Martin Coleman and Gurpreet Dehal. This meeting focused primarily on the development of student protection plans and our approach to access and participation funding and sharing effective practice. These agenda items had been identified as priorities by the panel and followed logically from the panels' 2 May discussion on market exit, where panellists had strongly recommended improvement of student protection plans and their communication to students.
6. In their discussion of approaches to funding within access and participation the panel highlighted the importance of provider accountability for the use of funding, ensuring that providers spend money allocated impactfully, and that providers engage students around the use of funding. The panel raised the importance of avoiding the use of funding to reward failure and to not lose innovation through evidence-led approaches. The panel also recommended that providers should focus on success and progression and not just access.
7. Within the sharing effective practice session discussion, the panel identified the challenge of encouraging providers to collaborate and share best practice where they are in competition. The panel suggested that OfS should create a trusted source of evidence that the sector could draw on, and showcase emerging practice as well as established best practice which reflects the diversity of the sector. It was noted that the establishment of The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) will go a long way towards providing this evidence base.
8. In preparation for the student protection plan session, the panel were asked to find their own or another provider's student protection plan. The accessibility of the plans was a concern, as some plans had been hard to find and language was unclear. The panel highlighted that the involvement of students in the development of SPPs would be critical, and emphasised the importance of providers engaging with students in a meaningful way. It was identified that the needs of different student groups (e.g. international students) should be more clearly reflected in the next iteration of SPPs. The panel also suggested that the OfS should develop student facing communications about student protection plans to raise awareness of their purpose and also suggested having a 'Know your rights' campaign.
9. The panel were enthusiastic about forging closer relationships with the board through the attendance of board members at their most recent meeting and attendance of panellists at the board's planning event. Following the board's recommendation, OfS colleagues also produced some text that covered six different methods of engagement for the panel in the work of the OfS, including but not limited to direct engagement with the board.

10. In addition to formal meetings, members of the panel have been engaged in a number of other ways. These include:
- a. Lizzie Pace and Josh Sanderson-Kirk attending the horizon scanning panel
  - b. Sabrina Mundtazir featuring on the OfS's soon to be launched student information and advice website, Discover Uni
  - c. Shakira Martin speaking at the OfS's 'Catalyst for Change: Protecting students from hate crime, sexual violence and online harassment in higher education' conference
  - d. Rose Bennett supporting the OfS's review of the postgraduate survey
  - e. Georgia Bell facilitating a student engagement consultation session at the Northern School of Art
  - f. The establishment of sub-groups focussing on access and participation; international & post graduate students; student protection plan guidance; OfS communication
  - g. Discussion of student protection in cases of market exit that have been communicated to the panel

#### **Paper publication date**

11. This report will be made available on the OfS website shortly after the board meeting.

## Annex A – May meeting minutes

### OfS Student Panel Meeting – Minutes

Date: 2 May 2019

Time: 15:00-18:00

Location: Finlaison House, London

<b>Attendees:</b>
Chad Allen, Lizzie Pace, Zahra Choudhry, Shakira Martin, Sinead Brown, Ruth Carlson, Martha Longdon (Chair), Samuel Dedman, Rose Bennet, Georgia Bell, Sabrina Mundtazir, Josh Sanderson-Kirk, Nicola Dandridge, Edward Davison, Cassie Agbehenu, Benjamin Hunt

<b>Apologies:</b>
Shraddha Chaudhary, Alice Richardson

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

1. Martha Longdon introduced herself as Chair of the Student Panel and welcomed returning panelists Chad Allen, Lizzie Pace, Zahra Choudhry, Shakira Martin, Sinead Brown and Ruth Carlson. The Chair also welcomed newly appointed panelists Samuel Dedman, Rose Bennet, Georgia Bell, Sabrina Mundtazir and Josh Sanderson-Kirk.
2. Apologies were noted.
3. ML noted that last year a lot of ground was covered and that this year the panel will be focusing on a new set of issues, led by the prioritization exercise that the panel had been conducted at the panel's training day, as well as the OfS's board and strategic priorities.
4. The Chair updated the panel on relevant OfS activity:
  - a. On 1 May there was the first OfS Insight Event, focused on contextual admissions. The BME attainment gap and commuter students were also discussed. Josh Sanderson-Kirk was thanked for attending and Shakira Martin thanked for contributing as one of the panellists.
  - b. The UUK/NUS BME attainment gap report was published on 2 May, the morning of the panel meeting and the chair committed to ensuring that the report would be circulated to panel members to read.
  - c. At the OfS board meeting in March there were discussions of the OfS's Business Plan and an update on the OfS's approach to improving Information, Advice and Guidance for students.
5. The Chair ran through the remaining agenda items for the meeting:
  - a. The amended terms of reference.
  - b. CEO's Update.
  - c. A session on student protection and market exit, led by Yvonne Hawkins, Director of Teaching Excellence and Student Experience, and Rob Stroud, Head of Student Protection and Market Exit.
  - d. A session on Student Engagement, led by Cassie Agbehenu, Student Engagement Manager and Ben Hunt, Student Engagement Adviser.
  - e. Closed discussion and feedback.

#### **Item 2: Approval of the Minutes**

6. The minutes of the December panel meeting were approved.

**Item 3: Chief Executive's Report**

7. The Chair invited OfS' Chief Executive to give an update to the Panel. This included updates on: the registration process and the implications of the OfS's decisions; the OfS business plan; the registration fee. The chief executive commented that the insight event on the 1 May had been an excellent event and thanked Martha Longdon, Josh Sanderson-Kirk and Shakira Martin for their contributions.
8. The chief executive took a number of questions from the panel, including how the panel reports to the Board, the timeline for decisions around provider registration and the implications of the new fee regime.

**Item 4: Terms of Reference**

9. The Chair invited comments on the terms of reference. It was commented that the first sentence of the terms should be amended to be more concise and that the panel should register interests. Finally, the panel asked for clearer guidance on how decisions would be made in the event that members were absent. Subject to these changes, the panel approved the terms of reference for 2019-2020 and the chair stated that these would be circulated.

**Item 5: Student Protection and Market Exit**

10. Yvonne Hawkins and Rob Stroud joined the meeting. Yvonne explained what processes and student protections are in place in case of campus, course or provider closure. Rob then introduced two discussions for the panel, where the OfS was seeking their input. These were:
  - a. To seek the panel's views on the priorities for current students experiencing a market exit, with regard to the information, advice and guidance they should receive.
  - b. The point at which students should be informed of potential market exit and the tensions in this decision between future, current and past students.

A summary of the session can be found in Annex A.

**Item 6: Student Engagement**

11. Cassie Agbehenu and Ben Hunt introduced current OfS work around student engagement and facilitated an exercise to inform the student engagement strategy, asking panelists to reflect on their own experiences of positive and negative student engagement, as a trial run for a proposed consultation exercise on the development of the OfS's student engagement strategy. A summary of the session can be found in Annex B.

**Item 7: Closed Session**

12. The Panel had a closed session to feedback to the chair on the meeting, without staff present.

## Annex A

### Market Exit and Student Protection summary note

The feedback from the Panel will be utilised in shaping our future activity in this area. A summary of the items we identified from the panel in the group discussions were:

- *Information packs should be provided to students faced with market exit (with a number of suggestions regarding both the content and how it should be distributed).*  
We will consider this with regard to how we encourage providers to provide their own information, advice, and guidance, to students, and will consider what we may be able to provide as the regulator in this area. In particular, we will feedback to colleagues drafting the new guidance on Student Protection Plan requirements.
- *Make providers have comms plans for the hard to reach students – e.g. distance learning, those on placements, commuter students, disabled etc.*  
This is already an expectation for the assessment of market exit packages for most of the student groups identified, although not all. We will continue to push providers in this area. Through the OfS's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion action plan we have recently highlighted that an action for the SPME team in the coming year will be to develop an approach to considering provider's Equality Impact Assessments as part of our assessments of market exit packages.
- *Make it a requirement that providers have engaged their students in the development of their SPP*  
This is already an expectation through the Regulatory Framework – paragraph 386 states: “The plan should be revised regularly to ensure that the risk assessment remains current and the mitigating measures remain practicable, relevant and effective. The plan should be produced in collaboration with students to ensure that their views, interests and needs are taken into account. The plan should be published in a clear and accessible way”. If students are concerned about this not being adhered to, then they can notify the OfS via <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/complaints-and-notifications/>.
- *OfS should communicate in a formalised way with SUs as well as providers.*  
We will consider the extent to which we can do this within the legal limits of information sharing that the Higher Education and Research Act sets out. Not all providers have a Students' Union, and we would want to avoid an unintended consequence of limiting with who we might want to contact if we needed engagement with a wider part of the student body. We absolutely see students as needing to be part of the process when a market exit occurs and a package is being developed.
- *Stress test the new SPP guidance with some members of the Panel/students before it's issued.*  
We will be highlighting this to colleagues in the Competition and Registration directorate who are responsible for drafting the document when we meet with them to input and codify our expectations.

Additionally, on the topic of “when/should the OfS tell students if a provider was facing difficulty” we noted the discussion highlighted the complexities in this area – including the OfS inadvertently exacerbating issues by putting them into the public domain. We noted feedback that where the OfS had significant concerns about provider viability, we need to be mindful of seeking not to expose further cohorts of students to risk. We noted generally students felt that having more information published consistently across all providers may help in encouraging providers to address these issues, and a feeling that providers needed further incentives to address issues in this area. We noted the Panel's concern that the type of provider most likely to be affected by whole provider market exit was also likely to be a provider where there was a greater proportion of disadvantaged students who may have fewer options available to them. We note that the feedback from the Panel would be considered by the OfS Board – individual cases of this sort are likely to require consideration by the Board in the future, and therefore some of these matters may be addressed through discussion there.

## Annex B

### Student Engagement Summary Note

The Student Panel underwent a workshop exercise on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May regarding the emerging student engagement strategy. This involved the following elements:

1. A general update on emerging student engagement thinking and activity that has already happened to date.
2. An exercise around individual panelist motivations, called 'the story of self'.
3. An exercise regarding times when panelists have felt listened to and well-engaged, or not listened to or well engaged, and what the features of this are, called 'the story of us'.
4. An exercise around what things could be drawn from areas of positive engagement for inclusion in the Student Engagement Strategy, called 'the story of now'.

### What did we learn?

We learned that:

- Individual panelists have varying reasons and motivations for joining the panel, some of them were issue based, for example, around value for money, whereas others were personal, such as wanting to represent particular voices on the panel of an underrepresented group.
- That good engagement involves clarity and the ability to listen and tangibly take forward suggestions. To approach discussions with openness, honesty and trust, having not already 'made your mind up'
- That locality and physical interaction is extremely important, including students feeling like they can relate to those who are engaging with them.
- That OfS needs to be seen as a trusted source of information in the sector by students, as students do not know enough about the rights and protections they have, and what recourse they have when these are breached.

### What will we do with this?

- The workshop approach worked effectively, and this will as such remain as a core part of the consultation approach for the strategy.
- Other exercises will be designed around the panel's reflections around what good engagement looks like, including physical and locally based exercises in providers and schools.
- The selection of HE providers and schools where the consultation will take place will take into account the need for diverse opinions and experiences and we will observe the need to understand the views of people in different places such as those without a lot of access to HE and coastal towns, which were raised by the panel as important.
- We will work with colleagues to look at surfacing more student stories as an organization.