



Office for Students' Student panel: Terms of reference 2019-2020

Values statement

1. The student panel exists to challenge and improve the Office for Students (OfS) by putting the student voice at its heart. To achieve this, it will work in an open, transparent and inclusive way, respecting the diversity of perspectives among panellists and the student population.
2. This values statement is aligned with the OfS's values of:
 - Ambition
 - Openness
 - Learning
 - Diversity

Purpose

3. Meaningful student engagement is a top priority for the OfS and members of the student panel. The student panel ensures that students' views inform the OfS's decision-making processes. The student panel also plays a critical role in advising and influencing the OfS's activity, helping the OfS regulate higher education effectively.

Membership

4. The panel is selected through fair and open recruitment. The membership should include a broad and diverse range of future, current and former higher education students from different backgrounds, institutions and modes of study.
5. Panel members are appointed for one year, with the option to continue for a further year.
6. The panel is chaired by the student representative on the OfS's board, Martha Longdon, for the duration of her term as a board member.

Responsibilities of the panel

7. The panel is an important source of advice to the OfS board. The relationship to the OfS board is both proactive and responsive, with the panel able to decide its own priorities whilst also reacting to the priorities and requests of the OfS board. In order to fulfil its role, the panel's activity will include, but not be limited to, engagement in the following areas:

Student insight

7.1 To help the OfS to understand, and take account of, the interests of students (short, medium, and long term) in its policy development and decisions.

7.2 To take a strategic view of the sector, in order to provide advice and perspectives beyond one's own experience of higher education.

Specific duties

7.3 To receive reports of the OfS board's meetings from the student representative on the board.

7.4 To respond to relevant consultations as appropriate.

7.5 To advise the OfS in developing its student engagement strategy.

7.6 To advocate, on behalf of students and the OfS, in the student interest.

7.7 To provide timely reports to the OfS board, following panel meetings.

Duties of the OfS

8. The OfS commits to:

8.1 Providing appropriate support and resource to the panel, including through training, to facilitate meaningful discussion and informed decision making

8.2 Ensuring the panel has access to appropriate resource in carrying out its duties

8.3 Demonstrating to the panel how it is responding to its advice and recommendations

8.4 Providing advice and guidance to the panel, where appropriate. For example, in communications and engagement with the media, panellists will have access to professional support.

Meetings

9. The panel meetings will be conducted as follows:

9.1 The panel will meet at least four times a year.

9.2 The panel will be chaired by the permanent student representative on the OfS board.

9.3 The student representative on the OfS board will report the decisions and activity of the panel to the OfS board.

9.4 Panel members will declare any conflicts of interest whenever and wherever they arise.

9.5 The panel requires the presence of six members, including the Chair, to be quorate.

9.6 Decisions of the panel will normally be made by consensus, but in exceptional circumstances a vote may be taken. The Chair of the panel has the casting vote in the event of a tie and should also aim to take account of the views of any absent members.

9.7 Panel members would normally be present in person at meetings but may join meetings virtually, by exception.

9.8 Agendas will be approved by the Chair with an invitation to any panellist to submit matters for inclusion on the agenda.

9.9 A formal minute will be taken of all panel meetings.

9.10 The minutes of each panel meeting will be checked by the Chair, before being shared with the panel and then passed to the OfS board. Panel minutes will go to the OfS board for noting and will be published as part of the OfS board papers.

9.11 The Chair has the authority to call an extraordinary meeting of the panel should circumstances require.

9.12 The panel and the OfS shall review the panel's terms of reference annually.

9.13 The panel may have observers at the discretion of the Chair.

9.14 The chief executive of the OfS may attend all panel meetings as an observer.