

OfS student panel meeting

26 July 2022

Time: 1400–1630

Location: Virtual

Present members: Martha Longdon (Chair)

Jo Barlow

Erk Gunce

Maisha Islam

Molly Lawson

Nikhita Nachiappan

Ezra Rose

Amy Stanning

Lila Tamea

Aimear Wolstenholme

Attending: Laurence Atkins (Risk Manager – Compliance and Student Protection, OfS)

Ranjeet Dhinsa (TEF Senior Officer, OfS)

Nike Gustave (Competition and Registration Manager, OfS)

Benjamin Hunt (Student Engagement Manager, OfS)

Christie Jones (Student Engagement Officer, OfS)

Alex Lunnon (Graduate Trainee, OfS)

Susan Orr (Lead blended learning reviewer)

Jack Thompson (TEF Manager, OfS)

Gemma Tombs (Senior Risk Manager – Compliance and Student Protection, OfS)

Apologies: Ramy Badrie

Miranda Harmer

Niel Lewis

Francesco Masala

Rahul Mathasing

Bryony Toon

Item 1 – Chair’s welcome and update

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members and provided an overview of the topics for the meeting.
2. The chair thanked those who participated in recent events and workshops including:
 - a. Taking part in our student panel interviews throughout July.
 - b. Meeting with new OfS staff to discuss their experiences as students, and the work of the student panel.
 - c. Taking part in the blended learning review.

Item 2 – Discussion session 1: Consumer protection

3. The chair welcomed the Senior Risk Manager and the Competition and Registration Manager to the meeting.
4. The Student Engagement Manager provided initial context on the project, outlining that several other similar panels commission research in other regulators. It was envisaged that the panel would advise and shape a research project in the area of student complaints.
5. The OfS staff provided an overview on the consumer protection conditions, student complaints, and what providers are required to do under the law.
6. The group then split into two breakout rooms for a discussion where panel members were asked:
 - a. What types of barriers might students face when making complaints?
 - b. Are any barriers more prevalent for particular groups of students or at different provider types?
7. The panel fed back that:
 - a. Barriers could be broken down as being processed based (steps to submit a complaint, how long a student has to submit it, etc.), or based on perception (how the complaint could impact their progress in the course, their team projects, etc.)
 - b. Other barriers include:
 - i. Lack of awareness that you can make a complaint, and how to start the complaints process.
 - ii. Anxiety and peer pressure from tutors about seeming like a ‘troublemaker’ by making a complaint.
 - iii. Not being familiar with the provider’s advice and support. For example, international students who may not know to seek advice from the students’ union.

- iv. Reputation that the provider has a complex complaints process could be sufficient to deter students from trying.
 - v. Not knowing when a complaint would be out of scope, such as in cases of academic judgment.
- c. Barriers to making complaints can be greater for:
- i. Widening participation students.
 - ii. Black, Asian and minority ethnic students.
 - iii. Carers, parents, or those working while studying as they don't have time to go through the complaints process due to their commitments.
 - iv. Disabled students, as the complaints processes can be inaccessible, and they don't want to be identified as instructors would normally know who they are.
 - v. Postgraduate taught students and students taking short courses who feel it is not worth making a complaint as they are studying for a shorter period of time.
 - vi. Postgraduate research students who may worry about impact on supervisory team relationship, funding & collaboration, and limitation of career prospects.
 - vii. Younger undergraduate students unfamiliar with their providers complaints process and consumer rights more broadly.
- d. Barriers could be mitigated by providers publishing student case studies that showcase examples of complaints, complaint outcomes, and how to use the providers complaints process.
- e. Students who have support throughout the process (from a parent, friend or staff member) may be more likely to have their complaint upheld.
8. The panel agreed that it was in support of the OfS's proposal to commission research in this area. The OfS staff explained that the next steps would be for the staff team to go away and begin refining the research scope and purpose, and come back to meet with the panel in October.
9. The OfS staff members thanked the panel and left the meeting.

Item 3 – Discussion session 2: Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) student contact guidance and training

10. The chair welcomed the TEF Senior Officer and TEF Manager to the meeting to begin their session on the next steps in the TEF exercise, and their plans for student engagement regarding the TEF student submission.

11. Panel members were asked:

- a. Are the proposed plans for events and resources to support the new student submission the right level of engagement?
- b. Would students feel comfortable contributing in an online event?
- c. What networks should the OfS use to engage students?

12. The panel fed back:

- a. With a large online event, some considerations include:
 - i. Ensuring that the technical functionality would allow for successful engagement.
 - ii. Students may not feel confident to speak up in a larger event.
 - iii. It may be more impactful to host a set of smaller events on a regional basis rather than a large one.
- b. Offering regional writing workshops for the student contacts responsible for their providers student submission could be useful.
- c. Having providers involved in sharing resources and facilitating events to support student contacts could offer a comfortable space for students to participate.
- d. Financial compensation for student contacts should be considered.
- e. Non-financial benefits for student participation in the TEF student submission should be considered, such as formal recognition, certificates, or skill development that they can use as evidence on their CVs.

13. The OfS staff members thanked the panel and left the meeting.

Item 4 – Discussion session 3: Blended learning

14. The chair invited the lead blended learning reviewer, Risk Manager – Compliance and Student Protection, and Graduate Trainee to introduce themselves and begin their session on the draft themes from the blended learning review.

15. From the draft document of the themes, the panel were asked:

- a. What stood out as positive?
- b. What worried, concerned, or surprised you about the themes?
- c. What themes or comments would panellists who took part in the interviews like to highlight?
- d. What are the key messages that should be in our final report?

16. After discussing the draft themes (the final report still to be published externally), the panel fed back that:
- a. Teaching staff often thought the blended learning provision offered was more effective than how the students perceived it to be.
 - b. It will be important to distinguish between areas related to blended learning provision, and issues with teaching and learning broadly.
 - c. The final report should consider:
 - i. That more students may be able to access learning provision because of blended learning options.
 - ii. That there are potential benefits from blended learning (like accessibility features and flexibility) for groups such as disabled students and students with caring responsibilities.
 - iii. That the report should reflect potential positives and negatives of blended learning. Blended learning can be useful moving forward, if done properly and learning from the negatives
 - iv. A reflection from the students who took part of the review and whether there are any particular groups whose views might not have been represented in the process.

Item 5 – Reflections on the student panel and feedback

17. The Student Engagement Manager shared highlights of what the panel participated in and achieved over the past year and thanked outgoing panel members.
18. Panel members then shared their highlights from the year and provided feedback on how the panel experience could improve.
19. Highlights included:
- a. Attending the OfS strategy launch event.
 - b. The support and community around the role, both with staff and other panel members.
The feeling of making a difference.
20. Feedback included:
- a. The panel would like further mentoring opportunities, both between panel members themselves and with OfS board members.
 - b. The panel would like further access to OfS platforms and apps to support them in their role?
 - c. It would be positive to continue offering the opportunity for panel members to join meetings virtually as we return to more face-to-face meetings and events.

Item 6 – Closed session

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