

Student panel report

Issue

1. Updates from the 2019 student panel, covering their training day and first meeting together on 2 May.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to note the updates contained in this paper.

Further information

3. Available from Edward Davison (Edward.davison@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Member's interests

4. Not applicable.

Updates

5. As board members will have seen, the appointment of five new student panellists were announced on 26 February this year, following a comprehensive application process led by Martha Longdon. The new appointments to the 2019 panel are:
 - Georgia Bell (production design student and president of the students' union at the Northern School of Art)
 - Rose Bennett (masters student and student experience officer (postgraduate) at the University of Birmingham)
 - Samuel Dedman (history graduate and vice-president education at the University of Southampton students' union)
 - Sabrina Mundtazir (student nurse at the University of Huddersfield and a care leaver)
 - Joshua Sanderson-Kirk (president of the student association at the University of Law and chair of the GuildHE student unions' network)

These new panellists joined nine members who opted to continue for a second term, including Shakira Martin who has agreed to continue in her role as a panellist for the full year, beyond the conclusion of her presidency of the National Union of Students (NUS). In addition, Ben Hunt has joined the OfS as a member of staff working in student engagement, on secondment. Following this move, Ben has stepped down from the student panel.

6. The student panel completed a training and induction day on 4 April which included an introduction to the OfS, an exploration of student engagement practices across other national networks (with support from the QAA student advisory group) and training on influencing and challenging (delivered jointly by the NUS and The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP)). The panel also conducted an initial priority setting exercise and discussed ways of working, which fed through into a revised terms of reference discussed and endorsed at the 2 May panel meeting. It was clear from this training day that the panel is well-placed to further its impact on the OfS's work. This will be supported by the additional staff that have been recruited to support the development of the OfS's student engagement strategy and the delivery of student engagement activity. The panel did also express its desire to go further in developing the panel's relationship with the OfS board, predominantly through Martha as the student representative on the board, but also through increased direct contact with board members. How to do this in a way that is meaningful and impactful will be given further thought but in the meantime if there are any board members who would like to join a student panel meeting, please get in touch with Edward Davison (edward.davison@officeforstudents.org.uk).
7. The student panel met for its first formal meeting of the year on 2 May 2019. At the meeting the panel agreed an updated terms of reference (Annex A) and held a workshop led by Yvonne Hawkins (Director for Teaching Excellence and Student Experience) and Rob Stroud (Head of Student Protection and Market Exit) exploring the ways in which students' interests are protected in the event of provider, campus or course closure. In particular, the

panel urged the OfS to look at ways to compel providers to make student protection plans much more visible to students and to ensure that they are clear and understandable. The panel also urged the OfS to give attention to the ways in which the OfS can ensure that information and advice will reach students in the event of provider, campus or course closure, paying particular attention to vulnerable and hard to reach students who may not always be strongly represented in student unions or representative groups. Finally, the panel also urged the OfS to work closely with the Student Loans Company and the government to explore the ways in which students affected by market exit scenarios can be supported through second loans or debt forgiveness, where they have to extend their study. The meeting concluded with the panellists trialling a set of questions that the student engagement team are developing for an upcoming consultation on its student engagement strategy. The panel were supportive of the vision for this strategy and particularly emphasised the role that the OfS can play as a trusted source of advice and guidance to students, along with the need for staff having direct engagement with students to either be sufficiently skilled in doing so. These considerations will be taken forward into the developing OfS student engagement strategy.

Paper publication date

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

Annex A – Agreed terms of reference for 2019 panel

Office for Students' Student Panel – Terms of Reference 2019-2020

Values Statement:

9. The Student Panel exists to challenge and improve the 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 OfS' values of:
 - i) Ambition
 - ii) Openness
 - iii) Learning
 - iv) 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 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

3. 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:

4. 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 6 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.