

Student panel update

Issue

1. To update the board on the work of the student panel.

Recommendations

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

Further information

3. Available from Cassie Agbehenu (cassie.agbehenu@officeforstudents.org.uk) or Natasha Slade (natasha.slade@officeforstudents.org.uk)

Paper publication date

4. This report will be made available on the OfS website.

Update:

1. Martha Longdon has previously given a verbal update on the February student panel meeting and the minutes from that meeting are now included in Annex A.
2. The student panel met again on Thursday 8 April. James Wharton and Gurpreet Dehal joined. There was an open discussion, in which the panel asked James about his role and priorities as the new Chair. James and Gurpreet noted that their priorities for the OfS included learning from the last 12 months, maintaining the flexibility and positive access that learning online has created, maintaining public confidence in English higher education, retaining teaching and learning quality, and improving access and participation and student wellbeing.
3. There were two policy development discussion sessions at the meeting. The first session explored the International student experience. Feedback from this session will inform a joint project between the OfS and UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) as part of the new International education strategy. Themes from the discussion included:
 - broadening support for students across university could be beneficial. It was highlighted that some students may not seek mental health support because it may not be culturally

acceptable or normalised.

- learning online over the past year has brought greater accessibility for international students who can re-watch lectures at their own pace, access transcribed lectures and join conferences easily.
- support for international students to gain employment and highlighting the benefits that the new graduate visa route has brought.
- creating a community on campus for international students which can help to bring a sense of belonging.
- engaging with international students so any issues they experience are identified.

The student panel also identified a need to improve communication and support for international students who have experienced harassment, hate or misconduct while at university; helping students to understand where students can go to report any experiences and improve the support needed throughout.

4. The second session explored ideas for a new package of resources to develop students' and students' unions' understanding of the regulatory environment and empower them in their partnerships with their providers. This is a training and resource project being developed by the student engagement team this year. Feedback included:

- having an induction for new officers.
- making access to materials and training available.
- building relationships between the OfS and students' unions.
- sharing case studies where the OfS has intervened if there has been a breach of regulatory requirements, to support students to understand the types of situations where this can happen.
- ideas also included having; videos, interactive content, infographics, quizzes and making all content engaging and accessible.

The student panel also discussed the idea of giving acknowledgement to students who have completed any courses/engaged in any inductions to highlight their participation.

5. Below is an update on the activity that the student panellists have been involved in outside of the panel meetings since the last board meeting:

- The first phase of the NSS review was published, members of the student panel engaged in the review throughout by attending workshops and having representation on the NSS review working group.

- Members of the student panel joined a workshop about the development of the TEF to input into the consultation proposals and discuss student submissions.
- A panellist has been involved with reviewing the OfS' insight brief on students without family support, which was published in April.
- Members of the student panel gave feedback on the harassment and sexual misconduct statement of expectations which has recently been published.

And with the Department for Education:

- Members of the student panel joined a workshop with the DfE to discuss the benefits and limitations of post qualifications admissions which would inform the consultation being led by the DfE.
 - Members of the student panel joined a session with the DfE to discuss the support needed for students who were graduating this year. The student panel gave feedback on the package of resources for graduates which would be published shortly.
6. The universities minister, Michelle Donelan wrote to the student panel to thank them for their engagement and openness in sharing their experiences and wider experiences of students during the pandemic. The minister is keen to continue to meet with the panel on an ongoing basis.
 7. Four student panel members have started their reciprocal mentoring connections with board members. Thanks to those who have volunteered to take part.
 8. Since the last student panel meeting, Sabrina Muntazir stepped down from the student panel.
 9. The next student panel meeting is on Thursday 3 June. This will be the final meeting of the academic cycle and the last meeting for Rose Bennett, Georgia Bell, Samuel Dedman and Joshua Sanderson-Kirk who will be reaching the end of their second year as panellists.
 10. Recruitment for new student panel members will open in May to recruit five new members to join the panel.
 11. A further update will be given to the board after the final meeting of the cycle.

Annex A: OfS Student Panel Meeting

Thursday 18 February 2021

Time: 1400 – 1800

Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Martha Longdon (Chair) Ramy Badrie, Jo Barlow, Georgia Bell, Rose Bennett, Samuel Dedman, Erk Gunce, Miranda Harmer, Maisha Islam, Molly Lawson, Nikhita Nachiappan, Joshua Sanderson-Kirk, Bryony Toon, Aimear Wolstenholme

OfS: Cassie Agbehenu, Nicola Dandridge, Natasha Slade

Board members: Michael Barber, Elizabeth Fagan, Verity Hancock.

Apologies

Francesco Masala.

Item 1: Chair's welcome

1. The chair of the student panel, Martha Longdon (ML) welcomed attendees to the second student panel meeting of this academic year.
2. The chair noted apologies from Francesco Masala.

Item 2: Chief executive update

3. ML invited the OfS Chief Executive to give her update to the panel.
4. Nicola Dandridge spoke about the OfS' approach to regulation during Covid-19 and a range of events that had taken place over the last few months including; publication of student guide to notifications, student panel meetings with the minister, the publication and launch event of the digital teaching and learning review, the appointment of Lord Wharton as the new OfS Chair and recent announcements from the government about free speech.
5. Nicola also expressed her thanks to the panel for their continued commitment to student engagement and voice. She noted the impact of the panel on her work, the work of the OfS and also on the Minister for Universities. She commented on the increased engagement with the panel this academic year and shared her thoughts about the importance of their focus on influencing and challenging the OfS.

Item 3: Student panel and board member Q&A

6. ML welcomed three OfS board members to the meeting, Michael Barber, Elizabeth Fagan and Verity Hancock, and invited them to introduce themselves.
7. Michael Barber expressed his gratitude and support of the panel, crediting Nicola, Martha and the previous chair of the student panel Ruth Carlson for leading with distinction, quality and thoughtfulness and increasingly informing everything we do.

8. Michael Barber highlighted that the digital teaching and learning report would be published shortly and invited the student panel members to join the online event.
9. EF and VH shared their reflections of the recent board meeting.
10. Members of the panel asked board members to consider whether there are areas of work that the two groups could work on together. Possible topics were discussed with consideration to level 4 courses, consideration to place, quality and standards in HE and pathways through higher education.
11. ML thanked Michael Barber for being so welcoming to the student panel members as Chair of the OfS, for valuing and seeking student voice throughout and for enabling student members of the board to contribute actively and confidently.
12. Michael Barber, Verity Hancock and Nicola Dandridge left the meeting.

Item 4: Chair's update

13. ML thanked the panel for their involvement throughout this academic year. She noted that the panel has been very busy and involved in several OfS policy development projects, as well as meetings with the Minister, speaking events, discussions between meetings and attendance at various DfE forums.
14. ML reiterated that the digital teaching and learning event was happening on Thursday 25 February which the student panel were invited to join and that the team appreciate the panel's involvement in this work.
15. ML advised that there would be an opportunity to be involved in a TEF workshop soon and further details would be circulated by the student engagement team.
16. ML highlighted that the NSS review was ongoing and that a decision-making meeting was scheduled in March.
17. ML gave an overview of the agenda and stated that there would be two discussion sessions including the first on student involvement in OfS investigations and the second on developing the next OfS strategy.

Item 5 - Quality and standards consultation: student involvement in OfS investigations

18. ML handed over to Gail Wilson, Senior Officer and Nicholas Holland, Competition and Registration Manager, Compliance and Student Protection for their session on student involvement in OfS investigations.
19. Gail and Nicholas introduced themselves and gave context to the piece of work. They outlined that the first phase of the consultation had ended, and the responses were being analysed. This session with the panel would be used to explore how the OfS could engage students in regulatory investigations and how the OfS can engage in a flexible and proportionate way.
20. The student panel split into two groups to discuss how the OfS could gather student feedback during regulatory investigations, the pros and cons for this and potential issues.

21. Themes across both discussions included: working with and building relationships with students' unions, clear communication and considering methods of engagement to ensure a wide range of students engage. The student panel also highlighted the importance of tailoring the approach to each university, college or students' union who will have different levels of resource.

22. ML thanked Gail and Nicholas for running the session.

23. Gail and Nicholas thanked the panel and explained how the panel's engagement would support the development of the OfS' future approach to regulating quality and standards.

Item 6 - Developing the new OfS strategy – exploring our aspirations

24. ML handed over to Josh Fleming, Head of Strategy Oversight and Implementation and Matthew Davey, Senior Officer for their session on Developing the new OfS strategy – exploring our aspirations.

25. Matthew Davey gave an overview of a literature review which has been completed as part of the development of this work.

26. The panel were invited to break into two groups to discuss their reflections on the current strategy and what the student panel would like to see included in the next one. Both groups highlighted that students should be the focus for the OfS, and other stakeholders should be considered. They also commented that concepts such as 'value for money' can be reductive and the wider student experience should be considered.

27. Group one emphasised the importance of transparency and clear communication to give confidence to students that they can work constructively with the OfS, and to make it clear what the OfS prioritises as well as where it can't intervene. The group also explored transfer between institutions and pathways into employment.

28. The second group emphasised the importance of access and participation, ensuring that everyone who would benefit from higher education can at any stage of life, and a focus on supporting all students to succeed.

29. Themes across both discussion groups included: flexibility for students with a focus on lifelong learning, consider the full diversity of the student population, widen the conception of 'experience' beyond an academic focus, greater communication around additional opportunities that students can be involved in to gain further experience and skills while studying in HE, focus on pathways throughout the entire student lifecycle, a focus on the resources and facilities available to students to develop skills, and to emphasise the societal impact of higher education and have a greater link to local communities.

30. ML thanked Josh Fleming and Matthew Davey for attending and facilitating the session.

31. Josh and Matthew thanked the panel and advised that their comments and ideas would inform further development of the strategy.

1740 – 1800 - Closed session

32. ML noted the date of the next meeting and thanked OfS staff and Elizabeth Fagan for attending the meeting. OfS staff and EF left the meeting.