

Chair's report

Board's primary role in relation to this paper:

- A. Set strategy
- B. Set risk appetite
- C. Oversee performance
- D. Understand context

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the activities of the OfS Chair since the previous board meeting.

Decisions requested

2. The board is invited to note the contents of the paper.

Paper publication

3. To be published externally along with the board papers (subject to appropriate redactions).

Key activities

4. At our previous meeting, Susan Lapworth informed the board of her intention to step down as OfS Chief Executive from Easter 2026. This was announced publicly the following day.¹ As this meeting will be Susan's last board meeting, I would like to record my thanks for her dedication and contribution to the Office for Students and to the wider higher education sector. She was instrumental in the creation of the OfS and has led the organisation through much of its initial years, building a solid platform on which we can build. On a more personal note, I want to record my appreciation of the careful thought she put into my induction as Chair into the OfS, not least as I became the fourth holder of that position with whom she has worked. I am sure that Board members will want to join with me in wishing her the very best for her future endeavours.
5. Exempt from publication.
6. We have also been continuing our process of recruiting new non-executive board members for the OfS. I have conducted a large number of interviews in the last couple of weeks of January. I will provide an oral update to the board on progress during our meeting.
7. The new Provider Panel was launched on 15 January 2026, which included announcement of its membership.² Verity Hancock and I attended its first meeting on 2 February 2026 and we will be able to share our reflections during our meeting as well as share its views on some items on our agenda.
8. We have now appointed Alex Killick as our new independent member of the People Committee. Alex is an experienced human resources director, having held roles at universities and within the NHS, who holds several non-executive roles as well as working as a specialist consultant.

Meetings and engagements

9. On 19 January 2026, I was pleased, along with Philippa Pickford and Josh Fleming, to meet with the Chair and Chief Executive of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), along with a member of their board and the Executive Chair of Research England. The main topic was the Government's Skills White Paper, which we discussed at our previous meeting. We talked about the vision the government has set out for the sector in both teaching and research and discussed the expectation that OfS and UKRI work together to achieve the aims in the document. It was an interesting and constructive discussion, and executives from both organisations will be taking forward a programme of joint work. I will invite Josh and Philippa to update us on next steps at the meeting.
10. Also on 19 January 2026, Susan, Philippa and I held our quarterly meeting with the Chair and Chief Executive of the Committee of University Chairs (CUC). The OfS has been working closely with CUC on its review of its governance code. It was helpful, therefore, to hear their

¹ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/susan-lapworth-to-leave-the-ofs-at-easter-2026/>

² See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/ofs-launches-new-provider-panel-to-help-shape-future-regulation-in-the-interests-of-students/>

reflections on their progress so far and share ideas about how we could dovetail its launch of the code with announcements on future OfS work in this area.

11. I continued my introductions to sector mission groups on 22 January 2026, when I spoke to GuildHE's council meeting. As is typical, and appropriate, on these occasions, I found it a robust yet mutually respectful exploration of key issues facing the sector.
12. Colleagues and I continue to hold meetings with the Department for Education to discuss the market shaping aspects of the Skills White Paper and the potential implications for any role for the OfS in this work. I expect this close working to continue as officials develop detailed proposals.
13. Exempt from publication.