

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).

For further information, please contact Edward Peck, chair@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Key activities

4. I would like to welcome both formally and warmly Polly Payne and Ruth Hannant to their first board meeting as the new chief executives of the OfS. Since joining us on 15 June I know they have been hard at work getting up to speed, meeting colleagues from across the sector, and helping the executive prepare for this board meeting. I have been pleased to join them in some of their introductory meetings with CEOs and chairs of sector bodies.
5. I would like also to record my thanks to Josh Fleming for serving as interim chief executive. He has not just provided stability during this period but helped us make real progress towards delivering our new strategy. This has encompassed delivering important developments in how we understand student perspectives and apply them to our work and leading the organisation commendably through our response to the University of Sussex judgment.

6. After following progress over recent months, I was pleased to see the publication of the Committee of University Chairs' (CUC's) new Code of Higher Education Governance on 17 June.¹ The new code is the result of a huge amount of collaborative work by the CUC team, to which we were pleased to contribute. At the launch of the code, Josh Fleming and I joined a CUC dinner where we joined in with stimulating conversations about effective governance that the new code had inspired.
7. The new code is an important sector-led intervention that demonstrates a commitment to strengthening governance practice. I welcomed the new code in a letter to provider chairs on 24 June, setting out my view of the next steps for governing bodies following its launch.²
Exempt from publication.
8. Since our last meeting, both the Public Affairs Committee and Financial Sustainability Advisory Panel have met for the first time. Each has submitted a report which is included on the agenda for this board meeting.

Meetings and engagements

9. **Exempt from publication.**
10. As ever, it has been a pleasure to visit a number of our registered providers to understand more about the diverse experiences of their staff and students. I joined Philippa Pickford on a visit to Arden University on 20 May, where we met with the chair and senior executives and a group of students with whom we talked about their flexible learning experience. On 27 May, I visited Birkbeck, where I was able to see the new Centre for Creative Artificial Intelligence. At Harper Adams University on 8 June, I visited its working farm and sampled new snack bars being developed by students. On 8 and 9 July, Ruth and I visited the University of Arts Plymouth, including a session with its full board, and the Eden Project based campus of Cornwall College. There was also a roundtable held with leaders of the three higher education providers in Plymouth.
11. I know that non-executive board member colleagues have continued to join OfS visits to registered providers during this period.
12. Polly, Ruth and I contributed to the meeting of the senior executives on the Cathedrals Group of universities on 24 June and I was in Sheffield on 30 June presenting at the AdvanceHE Teaching and Learning Conference.
13. OfS is a member of the Institute of Regulation and on 1 July I attended a roundtable for chairs where we discussed the regulation bill and some of the current common issues facing regulators.
14. I have also continued my engagements with sector bodies. As well as joining introductory meetings with the new chief executives, on 3 June I was pleased to meet with Professor Malcolm Press and Vivienne Stern of Universities UK, alongside Josh Fleming and Philippa Pickford. We were able to have an extended conversation about our respective perspectives

¹ See: <https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/2026/06/17/published-new-cuc-code-of-higher-education-governance/>

² See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/welcoming-the-cuc-governance-code-letter-to-chairs/>

on the current and future opportunities and challenges facing the sector and we look forward to similar sessions with other sector groupings in the future.