

# Disabled Students' Commission



We are seeking six commissioners for the Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) – five general commissioners and one student voice commissioner.

## Background

1. A new **Disabled Students' Commission (DSC)** was announced by the Universities Minister, Chris Skidmore, on 28 June 2019 to take the work of the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group (DSSLG) forward. The Minister tasked the new Commission to inform, influence and challenge the sector to transform its approach to inclusive teaching and learning.
2. The Minister has appointed Professor Geoff Layer as Chair of the DSC. The Universities Minister asked the OfS to nominate a commissioner: this will be Chris Millward, Director of Fair Access and Participation. The Minister has delegated the Chair the responsibility to work with the OfS to run a public appointments process for the rest of the commissioners.
3. In addition to the Chair and the OfS representative, a maximum of six commissioners will be appointed. One commissioner should specifically represent the student voice.
4. The commissioners will be selected through a fair and open recruitment process, using a person specification and a skills matrix to ensure the DSC balances skills across the whole student lifecycle.
5. The membership should reflect the diversity of the English higher education sector and include leaders, practitioners and a representative of the student voice.

## Purpose

6. The DSC is an independent group that will:
  - a. advise, inform and challenge the English higher education sector (including providers, sector agencies, regulators and government) to improve models of support for disabled students in higher education;
  - b. identify and promote effective practice that helps those with disabilities have a positive and successful experience at university.

## Applying to be a Disabled Students' Commissioner

### Terms of appointment

7. We are appointing DSC commissioners for a period of three years. Commissioners are appointed as individuals and, if they are unable to attend, representatives may not stand in.
8. Commissioners are expected to attend four meetings of the DSC during a year, usually in London. A fee for attendance at meetings of £300 and expenses may be claimed in accordance with the rules of the organisation managing the DSC.
9. Commissioners are subject to individual appraisal by the Chair. Commissioners are expected to register any relevant personal interests.

### Applications and further information

10. The terms of reference for the DSC are at Annex A. For the person specification for its commissioners, see Annex B (general commissioner) or Annex C (student voice commissioner). For further information contact: Estelle Kane on 0117 931 7490, or email your queries to [dsc@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:dsc@officeforstudents.org.uk).
11. If you wish to be considered for appointment please send an application statement addressing the person specification, **by midnight on 20 October 2019**. Your application statement should be no longer than one side of A4. Please include your name, commissioner role (general or student voice) and contact details on your statement.
12. Additionally we ask that you complete the equal opportunities monitoring form, available from the DSC page on the OfS website<sup>1</sup>. Your application must be submitted by email to [dsc@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:dsc@officeforstudents.org.uk).
13. The OfS is committed to ensuring equal opportunities and we welcome applications from underrepresented groups. The equal opportunities monitoring form enables us to determine whether we are receiving applications from a diverse range of applicants. The form will be detached from your application. Following the initial shortlisting process, we may use equality, diversity and inclusion information to consider whether our shortlist is sufficiently diverse. The form includes an option on each question for 'prefer not to answer'. Additionally, if a candidate chooses not to complete the form, this will not affect their application.
14. If you require any reasonable adjustments or have any specific requirements for interviews, please give details of these in your application.
15. We intend to conduct interviews for these roles in London on:

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<sup>1</sup> The equal opportunities monitoring form, together with the rest of the information pack, is available at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/disabled-students-commission/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/disabled-students-commission/)

## **Applying to be a Disabled Students' Commissioner**

- a. 14 November 2019
  - b. 15 November 2019
16. For those applicants that we intend to invite to interview, we will conduct due diligence searches of social media in relation to information relevant to the decision of whether or not to appoint.
17. We aim to inform all candidates about the outcome of the recruitment process by the end of November 2019.

## Annex A: Terms of Reference

### Background

1. The Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) replaces the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group (DSSLG). DSSLG was chaired by Professor Geoff Layer (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wolverhampton) and established in 2016 partly in response to changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) through which higher education providers were expected to provide some personal support for disabled students, which until then had been provided through DSAs.
2. The DSSLG prepared guidance on inclusive teaching which was published in 2017<sup>2</sup>. DSSLG has been largely inactive in the last 18 months due to sector changes emerging from the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and resource challenges.
3. The Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) was announced by the Universities Minister on 28 June 2019 to take the DSSLG work forward. The Minister tasked the new Commission to inform, influence and challenge the sector to transform its approach to inclusive teaching and learning.

### Purpose

4. The DSC is an independent group that will:
  - a. advise, inform and challenge the English higher education sector (including providers, sector agencies, regulators and government) to improve models of support for disabled students in higher education
  - b. identify and promote effective practice that helps those with disabilities have a positive and successful experience at university.

### Membership

5. The Universities Minister appointed Professor Geoff Layer as Chair of the new Disabled Students' Commission (DSC). The Minister asked the OfS to nominate a commissioner: this will be Chris Millward, Director of Fair Access and Participation. The Minister has delegated the Chair the responsibility to work with the OfS to run a public appointments process for the rest of the commissioners.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-report-offers-guidance-to-support-disabled-students>

## **Disabled Students' Commission**

- a. In addition to the Chair and the OfS representative, a maximum of six commissioners will be appointed. One commissioner should represent the student voice.
- b. The commissioners will be selected through a fair and open recruitment process, using a person specification and a skills matrix to ensure the DSC balances skills across the whole student lifecycle.
- c. The membership should reflect the diversity of the English higher education sector and include leaders, practitioners and a representative of the student voice.
- d. The Commissioners will be appointed for terms of three years, in the first instance, with the possibility of reappointment.

## **Responsibilities of the Disabled Students Commission**

6. The Commission should be a credible and influential source of advice and challenge to the sector.
7. The Commission will help the sector to achieve more positive outcomes for disabled students in relation to access, participation, success and progression by challenging higher education providers, the OfS, the DfE, and the third sector to accelerate the pace of change in creating inclusive learning and living environments for disabled students.
8. In order to fulfil its role, the Commission will:
  - a. take a strategic view of the sector, informed by commissioners' own knowledge, the student voice, and robust, independent research and evaluation
  - b. engage and influence the sector in developing high quality evidence and using this to implement effective practice
  - c. challenge the sector, the OfS and the DfE, where progress is not fast enough, by providing high quality evidence and guidance on effective practice
  - d. work collaboratively with each other to encourage and incentivise collaboration across the higher education sector
  - e. ensure its work is effectively promoted across the sector.

## Disabled Students' Commission

### Key activities

9. As a priority, the Commission will develop its priorities, targets and measures through stakeholder engagement. These priorities are to be shared with the OfS and the DfE on an annual basis. This will include reference to:
  - a. the OfS Key Performance Measure 5, which seeks to close the gap in attainment between disabled and non-disabled students within five years (2017-18 to 2021-22) and
  - b. where appropriate, OfS, sector and government work on student mental health.
10. The DSC will commission research (either on its own, through members or Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO)<sup>3</sup> and gather other intelligence and evidence to better understand disabled students' access to, experience of, and progression from higher education.
11. The Commission will provide evidence-based advice and recommendations, inclusive of disabled students' voices, to the government, the OfS and the sector.
12. The DSC will communicate and effectively disseminate its recommendations and findings appropriately, including, but not limited to:
  - a. an annual 'state of the nation' report about the picture of disability in higher education in England
  - b. sector-wide events
  - c. ministerial reports.

### Responsibilities of the Office for Students

13. The OfS commits to supporting the Commission for three years through:
  - a. providing a grant to a supporting, third party organisation to fund reasonable costs and expenses of the DSC to enable it to operate effectively. The OfS will place conditions on that grant to ensure value for public funds
  - b. active engagement with the Commission as required.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about TASO, see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/transforming-access-and-student-outcomes/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/transforming-access-and-student-outcomes/)

## Disabled Students' Commission

### Responsibilities of the organisation supporting the Disabled Students' Commission

14. The supporting organisation commits to providing:
  - a. a full secretariat and support function to the DSC, primarily working with the Chair but also supporting all the Commissioners to fulfil their roles and achieve the objectives of the DSC
  - b. a strategic view of the sector, informed by commissioners' own knowledge, the student voice, and robust, independent research and evaluation.
  - c. value for money through effective project management and compliance with the OfS conditions of grant
  - d. regular dialogue with the DfE and the OfS, including quarterly updates
  - e. appropriate resource to support the Commission with both research, policy development and communications
  - f. secretariat support for other ad hoc thematic working groups which could be convened by stakeholder organisations or commissioners to explore different themes or impairment issues, or different issues affecting the various points of the student lifecycle
  - g. communications and dissemination of the work and outputs of the DSC, which may include reports, communications and events to highlight particular issues and effective practice for disabled students.

### Responsibilities of the Department for Education

15. The DfE commits to seeking strong Ministerial support to the Commission and engagement with the DSC's annual priorities.

### Behaviours and values

16. The OfS, the DfE, hosting agency and all commissioners commit to:
  - a. professional and respectful conduct always
  - b. robust and open discussion that results in taking shared responsibility for decisions reached
  - c. the declaration of any conflicts of interest whenever and wherever they arise
  - d. discretion and judiciousness in all public comment.

# Annex B: Person specification for general commissioners

## Roles and responsibilities

The primary role of the DSC commissioners on the Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) is to support, challenge and influence the higher education sector in providing equality of opportunity for disabled students.

## Skills and experience

### Essential

1. To have significant experience, at senior level, of either:
  - a. providing higher education on behalf of an English higher education provider or being responsible for the provision of higher education by such a provider; or
  - b. graduate recruitment and employability; or
  - c. leadership in disability policy in public, private or third sector organisations.
2. Significant experience of developing and implementing evidence-based effective practice to support equality of opportunity for disabled students, in one or more of the following areas:
  - a. Driving institutional change in inclusive practice
  - b. Contributing to the knowledge base in this area
  - c. Developing and implementing resources to support inclusive practice in teaching and learning
  - d. Evaluating inclusive practice.
3. Proven ability to communicate complex information with clarity and credibility.
4. Demonstrable experience influencing decision makers and/or practitioners.
5. Ability to use evidence and data to make persuasive arguments and achieve stakeholders buy-in.
6. Demonstrable ability to collaborate and build coalitions to achieve strategic objectives.



## **Disabled Students' Commission**

### **Desirable**

7. To be currently engaged in:
  - a. the provision of higher education or in being responsible for such provision; or
  - b. graduate recruitment; or
  - c. developing disability policy within a private, public or third sector organisation.
8. Demonstrable understanding of disabled students' perspectives on their experience of higher education and/or graduate employability.
9. Demonstrable understanding of access, success and progression students' issues for underrepresented groups.

### **Availability**

10. Able to prepare for, attend and participate in four meetings a year, usually in London. The first meeting for successful candidates will be in December 2019 or January 2020.
11. Able to take an active part in the work of the Commission, both in meetings and by online means and able to attend other relevant events on an ad hoc basis.

## Annex C: Person specification for student voice commissioner

### Roles and responsibilities

The primary role of the student voice commissioner on the Disabled Students Commission (DSC) is to represent current and future disabled students' perspectives in higher education in the work of the Commission.

### Skills and experience

#### Essential

1. Recent experience<sup>4</sup> as a student in higher education at levels 4 – 7<sup>5</sup>.
2. Demonstrable experience and understanding of advocating for and making a difference to, disabled students in higher education and/or graduate employability.
3. Ability or potential to:
  - a. think strategically about issues that might affect disabled students in higher education on a national level
  - b. use evidence and research to inform views
  - c. articulate and present views to the Commission
  - d. challenge ideas and decisions effectively, ensuring the student voice is heard.
4. Experience of working effectively as part of a team, constructively influencing work and accepting collective decisions.

#### Desirable

5. Understanding of the barriers that some students may face including issues around access, success and progression for underrepresented groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Experience of being a student in higher education in the last five years

<sup>5</sup> The meaning of qualification levels can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

## **Disabled Students' Commission**

### **Availability**

6. Able to prepare for, attend and participate in four meetings a year, usually in London. The first meeting for successful candidates will be in December 2019 or January 2020.
7. Able to take an active part in the work of the Commission, both in meetings and online and able to attend other relevant events on an ad hoc basis.

This document was last updated on 3 October 2019.