



Approved minutes of the OfS board meeting – 10 December 2025

- Present members: Professor Edward Peck (Chair)
Dr Arif Ahmed (Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom)
(excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
Verity Hancock
Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive) items 1-5 and 11.3
Simon Levine
Jane McCall
Professor Chris Millward (Interim Director for Fair Access and Participation)
Caleb Stevens
Neil Swift
Simon Wilde
Andrew Wilson
- Attendees: Patrick Curry (Director, Higher Education Oversight, Department for Education) (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
Ashley Harshak, PA Consulting (observer) (items 1-9)
- Apologies: Katja Hall
- Officers: Josh Fleming, Director of Strategy and Delivery (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
David Heron, Head of Governance (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
Katherine Jacob, Corporate Governance Senior Officer (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
Lynne Mace, Head of Human Resources (item 11.3 only)
Philippa Pickford, Director of Regulation (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)
Nolan Smith, Director of Resources and Finance (excluding item 11.3)
Sarah Stoney, General Counsel (excluding items 11.2 and 11.3)

Item 1. Chair's welcome

1. The chair welcomed board members, OfS officers, the Department for Education (DfE) representative, and the observer from PA Consulting.
2. Apologies had been received from Katja Hall.
3. Katja Hall steps down from the board on 31 December 2025, at the end of her second term. She has been a member of the OfS board since 2018 and has chaired the Risk and Audit Committee since 2023. Board colleagues acknowledged her significant contributions to the board and committee and thanked her for her service.

Item 2. Minutes of the last meeting

4. The minutes of the board meeting on 10 October 2025 were approved with no amendments.
5. Exempt from publication.

Item 3. Chair's report

6. The chair invited reflections from members who had attended the OfS strategy launch event held that morning. Feedback included:
 - a. The event was a useful opportunity for the OfS to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and was well attended by a senior audience. The panel responded well to questions.
 - b. The Minister for Skills' clear backing of the OfS's approach was helpful in support of our strategy.
 - c. The board noted the variety of views and reactions to our regulation, often differing across stakeholder groups like students and different groups of providers. Some attendees had wondered if the OfS could increase the pace of interventions and activity. It was noted that this needed to be balanced with ensuring robust and balanced regulatory processes.
 - d. The board suggested that the OfS should hold similar events in the future.
 - e. The board recorded its thanks to the OfS staff who had delivered such a successful event.
7. Exempt from publication.
8. Recruitment for the Provider Panel has been completed and successful candidates have been invited to join.
 - a. The panel will consist of members from a diverse range of providers, regions and mission groups. It was confirmed that applications had been received from a representative range of providers.
 - b. The panel will meet shortly before each board meeting, and the chair of the panel will report its discussion to the board.
9. Following the discussion at the last board meeting about amendments to the scheme of delegation, feedback from members was taken into account and the revised scheme of delegation was adopted on 24 November 2025.

Item 4. Chief executive report

10. The chief executive highlighted the following points from her report:

- a. The interim data collection for the financial sustainability of providers has been completed. This allows us to see if a provider is on track to meet its forecast. **Exempt from publication.** The 2025 Annual Financial Return is currently being collected from providers and the executive team will report on our initial analysis to the board in February.
- b. The chief executive appeared at the Commons Education Committee on 25 November alongside the Minister for Skills, to give evidence for its inquiry into higher education providers' financial sustainability and insolvency.
- c. The OfS has recently published an independent report into the impact of our published quality assessments. The report confirms that our assessment reports are being used across the sector as intended: to support providers to reflect on their practice and drive improvement. The perception that reports tend to focus on weaknesses rather than good practice is accurate, because assessments are carried out where concerns are identified, while the TEF is the tool which allows identification of excellence. The proposed future quality model would integrate these two systems and facilitate more rounded assessments.
- d. The OfS has recently published a series of reports on lessons learned from our investigations into degree classification algorithms. Our investigation of three providers identified issues that may be widespread across the sector. The academic credibility of degree awards is fundamental to the reputation of the sector and so its importance will continue to be emphasised. The board emphasised the importance of ensuring the sector grips the degree classification challenge.

11. Further information was provided about the following matters:

- a. A review of our approach to degree awarding powers authorisations is being planned. This is intended to drive improvement in academic quality and strengthen the reputation of the sector.
- b. **Exempt from publication.** The additional income from the 2025-26 academic year fee increase will be fully realised in the next financial year.
- c. **Exempt from publication.**
- d. In relation to antisemitic harassment and intimidation, the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom wrote to accountable officers in November to underline that the legal duty to take reasonably practicable steps to secure lawful freedom of speech does not prevent institutions from having robust anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, including in relation to antisemitic harassment. In addition, our new condition of registration on harassment and sexual misconduct (condition E6) requires each institution to take steps to address harassment. This includes taking appropriate disciplinary steps against students or staff who have been found to engage in (for instance) the stirring up of racial hatred against Jewish or Israeli students or staff.
- e. In relation to the government's new international student levy, feedback suggests that providers are content with the OfS's role in collecting it.

f. Exempt from publication.

Item 5. Operating environment

12. The paper provided an overview of recent political, sector and student developments that shape the OfS's operating environment.

13. The following comments were made:

- a. The heartbeat surveys have not shown much change over time. The executive team is now considering the next steps in their development, including publication of the data, and increasing use of the findings internally. The format of future surveys will be adapted as needed. The board was supportive of future publication.
- b. The proposed work programme for the provider panel was welcomed. It was suggested that there should be a discussion of the purpose of the panel at its first meeting, and that the chair should seek the views of members of the panel on what they would like to discuss. The provider panel forward plan should be put together with the board forward plan so members can assess how the two interact.

Item 6. The government's Post-16 education and skills white paper

14. The paper set out the implications for the OfS of the government's Post-16 education and skills white paper.

15. Exempt from publication.

Item 7. OfS Communications and engagement strategy

16. The proposed OfS communications and engagement strategy for 2025-30 was shared with the board.

17. The Student Interest Board (SIB) had discussed the strategy at its meeting earlier that day and had given positive feedback. Exempt from publication.

18. Exempt from publication.

Item 8. Report from the Risk and Audit Committee

19. The committee met on 25 September and 20 November 2025. The board received a written report on the September meeting and an oral report on the November meeting.

20. At its November meeting, the committee had discussed:

- a. Cyber security. Exempt from publication.
- b. Environmental and sustainability strategy. Exempt from publication.
- c. Risk management. Exempt from publication.
- d. Internal audit. Exempt from publication.

- e. National Audit Office audit planning and OfS accounting policies.
- f. Accountability for public funding and financial risk assurance.

21. Exempt from publication.

22. The following comments were made about the written report of the September 2025 meeting:

- a. In relation to the recommendation in the independent PwC report on Data Futures to recruit independent advisors, it was clarified that this recommendation arose from issues related to lack of independent assurance in the Data Futures programme. The roles will be to provide assurance, challenge and expertise to the programme and sponsorship boards.

Item 9. Risk report

23. The board received a report on the status of the OfS strategic risks.

24. Exempt from publication.

25. Exempt from publication.

26. Exempt from publication.

Item 10. Market exit cases

27. The board received an update on market exit risk across the sector. Exempt from publication.

28. Exempt from publication.

29. Exempt from publication.

Item 11. Report from the People Committee

11.1 Unrestricted report

30. The committee met on 24 November, and had discussed the following:

- a. People KPIs and risks.
- b. Workforce planning. Exempt from publication.
- c. People strategy.
- d. Pay and reward.

31. Exempt from publication.

11.2 Restricted report – chief executive's performance

32. The committee had discussed the chief executive's performance. The board discussed the report of the committee and there is a separate restricted minute of this discussion.

11.3 Restricted report – senior performance and succession planning

33. The committee had discussed senior performance and succession planning. The board discussed the report of the committee and there is a separate restricted minute of this discussion.

Item 12. Report from the Quality Assessment Committee

34. The board noted the report of the July committee meeting.

Item 13. Annual plan for board business

35. The board noted the annual plan for board business.

AOB

36. The board thanked OfS staff for the high quality and concise papers.
37. The board will next meet on 10 and 11 February 2026, for a planning event followed by the formal board meeting. The planning event will include discussion of the 2026-27 business plan, and PA Consulting will deliver board development work. Members were invited to propose other items to discuss.