

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 (shaded sections exempt from publication).

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

Key activities

4. Since joining the OfS in July, my priority has been driving forward our work to finalise the OfS's next strategy. We held a successful strategy development day in September and we have incorporated the thoughtful contributions of board members old and new to produce a near-final version for discussion at this board meeting. Having reshaped the document around our four new strategic attitudes, I am confident that the new strategy will be an effectively guiding document for the OfS in the coming years.
5. At the end of September, Martin Coleman and Elizabeth Fagan came to the end of their terms on the board. Both Martin and Elizabeth had served on the OfS board since the creation of the organisation, and I would like to record my thanks to both of them for their dedication and contributions over the years.
6. We have also welcomed Jane McCall, Neil Swift, Simon Wilde and Andrew Wilson to the board over the summer. I was pleased to be able to meet them in our London office for an induction day on 6 September and it was helpful to have their fresh perspectives feed into to our strategy development day.
7. We were joined on our strategy day by colleagues from PA Consulting, who I have been working with to design a programme of board development work. I found their observations helpful and they will continue to support us in the coming months to reflect on how we can best work together as a board. This is an important activity to implement the spirit of the Behan Review recommendation to review the board's effectiveness, and an opportunity for us to ensure we are performing at our best enter this new strategic period for the OfS.
8. We are proposing to draw on their interactions with individual members and the overall board as we compile our end of year report on board effectiveness. It is my intention we undertake a formal review in 2026-27, once the next intake of board NEDs has found its feet; the application process is now live on the Gov.UK website and I will say a little more on this topic at the meeting.
9. Exempt from publication.
10. I have also been working closely with OfS colleagues on some changes to our governance structure to better oversee the OfS's work as we mature as a regulator and implement our new strategy. This has included launching the new Provider Panel in September, which the board agreed at our July meeting and will give sector leaders the opportunity to provide advice and challenge to our work. Further proposals to evolve the roles of our board committees are presented in a separate paper in this meeting.

Media and speaking engagements

11. I attended the Universities UK conference on 3 September, where the chief executive and I presented a joint plenary session with vice-chancellors. During the session, I was able to speak about the new attitudes which are framing our strategy, as well as announce the recruitment

campaign for the new provider panel, which were both broadly welcomed by attendees. My opening remarks were published on the OfS website.¹

12. Just before the conference, I spoke to the Times about a range of topics, including our plans to link more regulatory consequences to TEF ratings, the sector's management of subcontracted provision and how to engage students with their courses.² My comments about the future of the TEF were discussed on BBC and Times Radio, as well as widely in the sector press.
13. I was also able to join Independent HE's Heads of Institution meeting on 26 September. I took a similar approach as at the UUK conference and this prompted a number of questions which were in some cases provider specific; where necessary, I have shared these with OfS colleagues.

Meetings and visits

14. Since joining the OfS in July, I have held a number of introductory meetings with sector stakeholders to introduce myself in my new role and understand their perceptions of the OfS. So far, I have met with the Chairs and Chief Executives of the Committee of University Chairs, Universities UK, the Association of Colleges, Independent HE and University Alliance and have further meetings planned throughout the autumn.
15. In addition, I have met with a number of other sector bodies with whom the OfS works closely, including the Student Loans Company, the Quality Assurance Agency, UK Research and Innovation and Jisc. I have also had initial meetings with officers of the National Union of Students and just prior to this board meeting will be joining a meeting of the OfS's Student Interest Board.
16. I have also had the pleasure of visiting a number of institutions over the summer, each with distinct sizes, shapes and missions with which I was less familiar. I was grateful to the staff and students who gave up their time to tell me about their experiences and also to the members of governing bodies, who generously shared their insights into the challenges of overseeing an institution. It was so helpful to see how each provider viewed their role in their local communities and the national sector, and to understand their operating context. Thank you to the Place (London Contemporary Dance School), Norland College, City of Bristol College, the Dyson Institute and Warwickshire College Group for hosting me and for the work that goes into arranging these visits.

Board development

17. Exempt from publication.

¹ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/edward-pecks-speech-to-universities-uk-2025/>

² See: <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/education/article/failing-universities-tuition-fees-office-for-students-wq8cghvvz>