



OfS student panel meeting

2 November 2023

Time: 1400–1800

Location: Mary Ward House, Tavistock PI, London WC1H 9SM

Present members: Caleb Stevens (Chair)

Michael Steele

Misha Patel

Molly Edwards

Nkechi Adeboye

Oscar Minto

Anita Hashmi

Thibau Grumett

Thomas Freeston

Attending: Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive) (Item 1)

John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation) (Item 3 and 5)

Ruth Moss (Leadership Development Officer) (Item 5)

Matt Davy (Strategy Manager) (Item 5)

Charlotte Finlay (Student Surveys Senior Officer) (Item 8 and 10)

Laura Radcliffe (Project Support Administrator)

Apologies: Emma Maskell (Head of Student Engagement and Information)

Item 1 – Chair's welcome

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members to the meeting and introduced the OfS members of staff.
2. The chair outlined the agenda and encouraged panel members to watch the refresher training session which took place on 16 October, if they had not been able to attend.

Item 2: Chief Executive's update

3. The chair welcomed the chief executive, Susan Lapworth, to the meeting to begin her update.
4. Susan thanked everyone who signed up for a second year on the panel and highlighted the importance of the student panel.
5. The update included:
 - a. Changes within the executive team at the OfS, the new director of Regulation, Phillippa Pickford and the new director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom, Arif Ahmed.
 - b. Ongoing quality investigations into providers the OfS have concerns about. Three reports have been written to date. The reports show patterns of some providers recruiting large numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds but not putting the support in place for them.
 - c. Publication of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) results. The OfS can at times focus on areas of concern for institutions, the TEF gives us the opportunity to highlight positive findings.
 - d. Publication of the indicative timelines for implementing new duties around freedom of speech. The OfS have been negotiating with the DfE to implement a phased approach to this. Aiming to have the complaints scheme up and running by 1 August 2024.
 - e. Consultation on introducing a new condition of registration around Harassment and Sexual Misconduct. The outcome of the pilot prevalence survey will be released early next year. In the meantime the OfS ran a small scale poll which has shown that an alarming number of students have experienced some form of unwanted sexual behaviour since joining higher education. The OfS is going to discuss this data with the sector in the next year.
 - f. Refreshed engagement programme with providers. Senior colleagues and OfS board members have been visiting providers.
6. The chief executive invited questions from the panel:

Questions	Responses
a. Will the general election impact the OfS?	There is a lot of uncertainty in the run up to an election. The purpose of having an arm's length organisation is that we are not impacted by this. We have our strategy and will continue to pursue this. We need to understand the new minister's position.
b. With the appointment of the new Head of Communications, Sophie McIvor, is there going to be a new strategy to communicate what the OfS does to students?	In due course, Sophie will develop a broader communication strategy. Our primary mission is to regulate in the interests of students. At times, for example with the House of Lords's report, we can be at risk of being pulled into conversations with other stakeholders in the sector. It's important to keep the focus on students, which is also true for the new communication strategy.

Questions	Responses
c. You mentioned that the small scale Sexual Harassment and Misconduct poll had surprising results, what were the estimated results and what was this based off?	One of the reasons why the OfS is doing this work, is because the existing data about sexual harassment and misconduct isn't very good or relevant to students. There are various self-selected student surveys but these aren't necessarily representative of the student population. There is also the England and Wales crime survey however this is based on households and student households don't fall into this. Based on the more informal conversations that we have been having with students we had a sense that student focussed data would be worse than what is reflect in the crime survey, however the results are even more alarming than we had anticipated.

d. The chief executive thanked the panel for their work.

Item 3 – Discussion 1: House of Lords Committee Inquiry report

7. The chair welcomed John Blake, the Director for Fair Access and Participation. John outlined that the purpose of the session is for panel members to share their views on the content of the House of Lords report.

- a. The Student Panel shared their reflections with John Blake, and it was agreed these would be taken forward as part of the OfS's review of its activity on student engagement

Item 4 – Discussion 2: Refreshing our approach to student engagement

8. The chair welcomed Director for Fair Access and Participation, John Blake, back to gather the student panel's thoughts on how to refresh our approach to student engagement and the student panel model specifically.

9. John Blake explained that his current thinking around student engagement is that there are three 'ins' into this work:

- a. Input: what do students and representatives think that the regulator needs to know.
- b. Insight: what we as the regulator think we need to know about what students think, feel or do.
 - i. Input and insight might be the same but at times it might be different. For example, some students do not believe sexual harassment and misconduct is present in higher education. The OfS is unlikely to appoint someone to the panel with these beliefs but it's important for us to understand why some students might think this.
 - ii. There is an insight piece about areas of work that is collectively significant but doesn't appear individually important.

c. Information: what do we think students need to know.

- i. Some thinking needs to be done around what students and others in the sector do with this information, and how responsible we should be for this.

10. John Blake invited the panel to answer the following questions:

- a. How we can refresh our approach to student engagement?
- b. Is the student panel effective?
- c. Should student unions (SUs) or other student groups have formal links with the panel?

11. John Blake reflected on the responses and explained that the next step is to consult with stakeholders. He will bring these findings back to the student panel for further discussion.

12. The chair thanked the director and he left the meeting.

Item 5 – Discussion 3: Horizon scanning for the OfS Strategy

13. The chair welcomed Ruth Moss and Matt Davey from the strategy team to discuss horizon scanning for the OfS strategy.

14. Ruth Moss explained that the aim of the session was to get the panel's thoughts on what issues might impact the higher education sector in the future. Prior to the meeting, the panel were asked to complete a survey which allowed them to submit the three issues that they considered most critical for the future of English higher education.

- a. The strategy team reviewed these responses and identified the top five issues that could pose the greatest risk over the next five years to the OfS's four regulatory objectives (Participation, Experience, Outcomes, Value for money) and which fit with our regulatory powers.
- b. The student panel were invited to review and discuss these five issues.

15. The strategy team thanked the panel for their contribution.

Item 6 – Student panel impact

16. The chair handed over to Charlotte Finlay, Senior Officer for the Student Engagement team to speak at the meeting.

17. Charlotte Finlay summarised the impact of the discussions with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) team at the last student panel meeting which included:

- a. Elements of the student submission guidance could have been clearer and the timelines were too short. The TEF team are now starting to consider better ways to incorporate students and improve support for the next exercise.
- b. Engagement with students was lower than expected, the team will do more to promote TEF and engage with a broader range of students.

- c. Engagement comes at a cost for sabbatical officers and student representatives who have other aims and priorities they want to deliver. The discussion with the student panel gave the TEF team a better understanding of the time and workload for student authors. The team will make it a priority to encourage and provide opportunities for students to start preparing for TEF 2027 earlier on, so the burden does not fall on a single author in a single year

Item 7 – Overview of the student panel terms of reference

- 18. Charlotte Finlay outlined that the aim for the discussion is to revisit the student panel terms of reference and establish whether they are relevant and fit for purpose this academic year.
- 19. Discussed point 11.5 regarding the number of student panel members which need to be present to be quorate and agreed to changing this from six to five.
- 20. Discussed point 11.15 which highlights the deputy chair position. The chair invited panel members to express an interest in the position by Monday 6 November 2023.

Item 8 – Close of session

- 21. The chair thanked the student panel for their contributions.
- 22. The OfS staff exited the meeting to allow for a panel member closed session.