



Chief Executive'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 achievements, issues and activities since the last meeting of the board that are not otherwise covered in separate papers.

Decisions requested

2. The board is invited to note the updates contained in this paper.

Paper publication

3. To be published along with the board papers (subject to appropriate redactions).

For further information, please contact Josh Fleming, Interim Chief Executive.

Interim priorities

4. I'm delighted to be writing my first and only chief executive's report. Working with the chair and executive team, I have set five priorities for my time leading the organisation.
5. My first priority is to accelerate the OfS's transformation into an organisation that deeply understands students' perspectives and uses them to drive its work. As part of this, I'm taking every opportunity available to hear from students directly, doing some form of engagement every week of the interim period. In the past few weeks I've joined meetings with student representatives on our engagement plans and weekend loans, met with students from the Sotheby's Institute of Art and Vogue College of Fashion as part of a provider visit, and heard from students at our Student Debrief on harassment and sexual misconduct. I'm grateful to all the students and representatives involved for taking the time to share their reflections and experiences with the OfS.
6. Beyond my own engagement, we're transforming the way all OfS colleagues are exposed to student perspectives. We've launched our Students in Focus series to bring individual stories to life for OfS colleagues. We're increasing opportunities for staff to connect with the real-world impact of our work and to meet with students at their institutions. And we're improving the way we communicate student research internally to make sure OfS colleagues are experts in the latest findings relevant to their areas of work. This applies to our own research, including our three upcoming publications related to freedom of speech, commuter students, and accommodation, as well as insights from elsewhere.
7. We're also working to improve awareness of the OfS among students, ultimately with a view to empowering them to use OfS regulation to help themselves. The platonic ideal is for students to never need to worry about the regulator – their provision is so excellent that it doesn't even cross their minds. While we continue to strive towards this end, we should not let perfect be the enemy of the good. Pragmatically, students being better equipped to work with their institutions to improve their experience and outcomes can only be a good thing. By the end of the interim period we will have launched pilots on new routes to engage with, and provide resources to, student representatives.
8. My second priority is to continue to deliver regulatory reform in the interests of students. Colleagues have been busy following last month's productive board discussion on our proposals for an integrated quality model. We are on track to publish outcomes to our phase one consultation in June.
9. We are making similarly good progress on our efforts to improve our processes internally. We continue to trial applications of artificial intelligence to improve our efficiency while retaining our humanity. For example, we've run successful blind trials of an AI registration tool that supports colleagues to assess registration cases by summarising and organising documents and highlighting areas of concern. These trials are in addition to efforts to improve our registration processes themselves, with a view to making them more time efficient while remaining fair and robust.
10. This quarter is a busy one for publications, and my third priority is to leverage these to shape the sector and demonstrate the four attitudes of our strategy. By the time of the board meeting, we will have published our May financial sustainability report and our latest analysis of our

2025 Sexual Misconduct Survey. We also published our consultation on treating students fairly in April. You can read more about these below. In each instance these publications present an opportunity for us to influence the sector in a way that benefits students and exemplifies our new strategic approach.

11. Fourthly, I am prioritising maintaining momentum on regulatory casework in the interests of students. Colleagues continue to work at pace. In April we launched a review into the outcomes for students on Diploma in Education and Training (DET) courses and the associated amount of student loan money paid to institutions while those courses were delivered.¹ Similarly, our live investigations continue to progress, with milestones tracked routinely to maintain momentum.
12. Within this priority is an objective to lead the organisation and the sector through the outcome of the University of Sussex judicial review. The judgment was handed down on 29 April. Since the judgment became public, I have focused on supporting staff, responding to media enquiries, and conveying our position to stakeholders: that we are disappointed in the outcome, we have a willingness to reflect and learn, and that the importance of freedom of speech to higher education is unchanged. As I write we are considering the implications of the judgment and whether to appeal; I will update the board verbally at the meeting.
13. My fifth and final priority is working with the executive team and the chair to strengthen the OfS's senior leadership as we guide the organisation during this period of change. I'm grateful to our fantastic executive team for their work and support during this period, and I look forward to welcoming our new board members at the coming meeting.

Key achievements, issues and activities

14. **Treating students fairly.** On 16 April, we launched our consultation on protecting students' rights as consumers.² We have set out proposals for new ongoing conditions of registration that would require universities and colleges to treat their students fairly in relation to their higher education provision and the services that support it, as well as publishing information about student contracts, complaints, refunds and compensation that is clear and accessible to students. The consultation will be open for 12 weeks and we have indicated that new conditions could be in place by this autumn.
15. **Weekend loans.** Over the past months we have been aware of an issue that impacts a large number of students studying on full-time weekend-only courses. These students were receiving maintenance support for which they were ineligible. Our immediate priority has been to protect students' interests, as they are in this difficult situation through no fault of their own. As we follow government's decision making on how it wishes to address the repayment of these loans, we have published information on our website³ and I wrote to registered providers to

¹ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/ofs-announces-a-review-into-the-diploma-in-education-and-training-course/>

² See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/ofs-proposes-stronger-protections-for-students-to-ensure-institutions-are-treating-them-fairly/>

³ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/maintenance-loan-eligibility-for-students-studying-at-weekends/>

remind them of their responsibility to treat students fairly.⁴ We have been working closely with the Department for Education, the Student Loans Company and affected providers to ensure that they are doing all they can to protect students in this situation, while we gather information to inform any future regulatory engagement or intervention we consider appropriate.

16. **Freedom of Speech Commencement.** On 20 April, the government announced that it would commence relevant provisions of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 relating to the OfS free speech complaints scheme and conditions of registration.⁵ The commencement regulations will bring the complaints scheme provisions into force on 1 September 2026. We are now developing the complaints scheme rules with a view to publishing these ahead of 1 September. The duties on the OfS to establish both initial and ongoing conditions of registration will take effect from 1 April 2027, and we are beginning work now to develop and to consult on these conditions. Together, the complaints scheme and conditions of registration will represent a significant improvement in our approach to regulating free speech and academic freedom.
17. **Sexual Misconduct Survey.** On 8 May, we are due to publish a supplementary sector-level analysis of the 2025 Sexual Misconduct Survey, building on the main findings published in September 2025. This analysis provides additional detail on how reported experiences of sexual misconduct vary across student groups and study contexts, including by subject, provider type and key student characteristics. The findings confirm that patterns of reported experience are mixed and do not point to a single explanatory factor. The analysis sets out sector-level patterns in reported experience and does not identify causes or assess individual provider performance. Alongside the supplementary analysis, we will also publish an evaluation of the 2025 survey, which considers survey design, delivery, data quality and lessons for future iterations. The press notice also set out that we will re-run the sexual misconduct survey as part of the National Student Survey in January 2027, to strengthen the evidence base and support more robust analysis over time, as well as our intention to publish provider-level data from the 2025 and 2027 surveys.
18. **Oversight of subcontractual arrangements.** On 12 March, we published the outcome of our consultation on new requirements for lead providers to ensure that they have proper oversight of subcontracted provision.⁶ We had 83 responses to the consultation which broadly supported the intent of our proposals. We introduced a new condition of registration E10 applying to any lead provider with 100 or more students registered on subcontractual courses each year, which came into effect on 31 March. The condition requires lead providers to publish information about the proportion of student fees that they retain from these arrangements and maintain an information source setting out their oversight arrangements for these partnerships. We expect that these new requirements will help safeguard students' experience and outcomes, while assuring taxpayers that public funding is being used appropriately.
19. **Financial sustainability report.** Our annual report on the financial sustainability of the sector is due for publication on 12 May, the day before this board meeting. Information on our

⁴ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/maintenance-loan-eligibility-for-students-studying-at-weekends/>

⁵ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-powers-to-protect-vital-free-speech-at-universities>

⁶ See: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/new-tighter-controls-of-subcontractual-courses-to-protect-the-interests-of-students-and-taxpayer-money/>

conclusions from the report will be shared with the board as part of the background information for the meeting. Colleagues will be able to give an oral update to the board on the publication during the meeting.

20. **Reporting decisions made under delegated authority.** The OfS scheme of delegation that came into effect on 24 November 2025 makes provision for the Chief Executive to report to board those decisions he or she considers particularly contentious (including because of material risks to the continuity of study for students, public controversy, or a legal challenge against the OfS). I will update the board verbally at the meeting on 13 May.