

Report from the Provider Panel

Board's primary role in relation to this paper:

- A. Set strategy
- B. Set risk appetite
- C. Oversee performance
- D. Understand context

Purpose

1. The board is informed of the work of the Provider Panel by receiving a report on the outcomes from each meeting. This report summarises the Provider Panel meeting held on 2 February 2026.

Recommendations

2. The board is invited to receive the report of the committee.

Work plan for 2026 and ways of working

3. The panel considered a proposed work plan of topics to discuss at meetings over the course of 2026, noting that it aims to strike a balance between longer term horizon scanning and current issues.
4. Panel members were keen to bring forward a planned discussion relating to freedom of speech to a meeting earlier in the year, and expressed an interest in a number of additional topics – including, but not limited to, subcontractual provision and validation, student insight work, regulatory burden relating to degree apprenticeships, and sector contributions toward the wider economy.

Industrial action

5. The panel considered a paper on OfS intervention during the recent period of industrial action affecting marking and assessment, including publication of a statement of expectations.
6. Panel members discussed the following:
 - a. Members were supportive of the OfS's approach to industrial action and welcomed further guidance from the OfS.

- b. There was discussion about the varied approaches to financial compensation resulting from industrial action.
- c. Members discussed a perceived need to identify and share best practice across the sector, and in particular provider types (university, further education college), in relation to industrial action. As a result, the OfS is planning to convene sector stakeholders (such as the Universities and Colleges Employers Association and mission groups) to identify and disseminate best practice.

Future quality system

- 7. The panel considered a paper on the future quality system. A similar version of this paper was seen by the OfS board at its February 2026 meeting.
- 8. Exempt from publication.

Artificial intelligence – call for evidence

- 9. The panel considered a paper on a proposed call for evidence on artificial intelligence in English higher education.
- 10. Panel members discussed the following:
 - a. Some of the opportunities AI presents and the importance of AI reaching the education sector.
 - b. A perception that the OfS doing this exploratory work could be perceived as a pre-cursor to regulatory action in the future. Panel members generally considered that the OfS's formal regulation role in respect of AI should be limited to tackling potential risks from increased use of AI.
 - c. That the OfS should convene collaboratively with sector bodies, Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, and mission groups on AI opportunities and risks in higher education.

Paper publication

- 11. To be published externally along with the board papers (subject to appropriate redactions).