

## 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 (subject to appropriate redactions).

For further information, please contact Edward Peck, [chair@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:chair@officeforstudents.org.uk).

## Key activities

4. On 30 March, I was pleased to confirm that the Secretary of State had appointed Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne as the new chief executives of the OfS.<sup>1</sup> Ruth and Polly join us from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport where they are currently Directors General, Society, Media and Culture. They were previously Directors of Higher Education and Higher Education Reform at the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and played a key role in the creation of the OfS during the passage of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. I know colleagues will join me in welcoming Ruth and Polly when they start their role on 15 June.
5. In the meantime, I am pleased that Josh Fleming has agreed to serve as interim chief executive. My thanks to Josh for stepping up and for ensuring that the OfS continues to make progress towards becoming an exemplary regulator during this interim period.
6. I want to offer a warm welcome to five new board members who are joining us at this meeting, having been appointed from 1 May. I am pleased also that they have agreed to contribute as members of our board committees. Evelyn Asante-Mensah is joining the Student Interest Board. Kirstin Baker is joining the Quality Assessment Committee. Sumita Hutchison is joining the People Committee. Julia Mundy is joining the Risk and Audit Committee. Richard Stables is joining the Financial Sustainability Advisory Panel.
7. The recruitment process for new board members identified two individuals who have been added to a reserve list and will be recommended for appointment to the board as existing terms expire. They have both agreed to join board committees in the meantime as independent members. Suresh Ariaratnam, a seasoned non-executive director in health, culture and the voluntary sector, will join the Public Affairs Committee. Anne Heal, with extensive experience across regulated sectors including transport and healthcare, will join the Provider Panel.
8. In addition, we have been exploring operating a 'boardroom apprentice' scheme, which enables those who would like to serve on a public or third sector boards to learn and gain experience before they take that step. Alex Stanley, currently Vice-President of the NUS and a member of the Student Interest Board, will attend the board from October 2026 as our first participant in this scheme.
9. We have also appointed three independent members to the Financial Sustainability Advisory Panel, which will meet for the first time in June. Simon Brodie, a World Bank consultant, brings expertise in insolvency, underpinned by advisory work with several Commonwealth countries on the design and operation of insolvency regimes. Jerry Cope adds significant audit and operational leadership experience from a business career involving turnaround activity and complex stakeholder management, including as a former Managing Director at Royal Mail. Jon Saunders brings regulatory and financial expertise from his role as Head of Financial Regulatory Policy at DCMS, and has extensive experience overseeing restructuring in financial services, including advising on mergers; he is also a qualified accountant.
10. Finally, we have established the Public Affairs Committee, which will operate in an initial phase until December 2026 to establish its ways of working, during which time we will run an open

---

<sup>1</sup> See: [Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne appointed as OfS chief executives - Office for Students](#)

recruitment. Alongside Suresh Ariaratnam, we have made four further independent member appointments for the initial phase: Diana Beech, Director of the Finsbury Institute and former Chief Executive of London Higher; Rory Gribbell, Director of Strategy and Engagement at Ofsted; Craig Leviton, a senior public affairs and communications consultant at FGS Global; and Jonathan Simons, Director of Education at Public First. They bring extensive experience in education policy. Board member Andrew Wilson has agreed to join them on the committee.

## Meetings and engagements

11. On 4 March I joined a roundtable of senior leaders of GuildHE members. Following an update on our strategy, discussion covered several topics, notably governance, regulation/investigations, reprioritisation/subcontractual issues, collaboration, TEF, funding, and application processes. This generated some useful points for us to consider on the themes of communication, innovation, and (consistent with one of our new strategic attitudes) being more vocal where we see good practice occurring in the sector. Attendees, including our GuildHE hosts, welcomed both the chance to discuss issues in person and the transparency being adopted by the OfS.
12. On 12 March, I joined a meeting of the board of Universities West Midlands. Colleagues were keen to discuss the financial pressures in the sector, foreign interference and some of their reflections on the market shaping aspects of the Skills White Paper. It was also a pleasure to visit the campuses of University College Birmingham and University of Wolverhampton to understand more about their strategic plans and the experiences of their students.
13. On 20 and 21 April I visited York St John University and the University of Bradford. I met also with senior leadership from the University of York and joined a roundtable event with Vice-Chancellors and Principals of Yorkshire Universities. A range of issues were discussed, including our new approach to quality, foreign interference, harassment and antisemitism, financial pressures and reflections on how to increase collaboration across cities and regions.
14. Also in March, I continued my ongoing engagement with my counterparts at several sector organisations. In the company of Josh Fleming, I was pleased to meet with the Chairs and CEOs of both UCAS and Jisc. It was helpful to see the number of ways the OfS works closely with other bodies who support the sector. I held an introductory meeting with Dr Helen Galbraith, incoming Chair of the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA), where we discussed several upcoming opportunities for OfS to engage with AHUA members in developing our regulation, putting our collaborative strategic attitude into action.
15. Exempt from publication.
16. Exempt from publication.