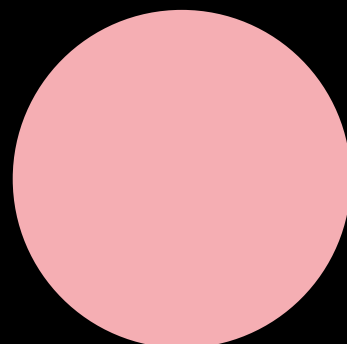
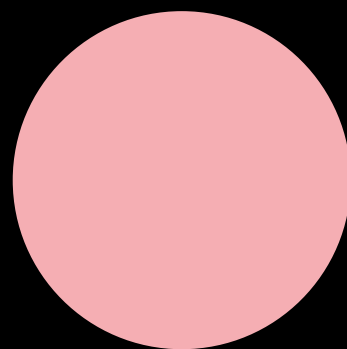


21<sup>st</sup> May 2026

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# Office for Students stakeholder survey report



# Executive summary

## Background

The Office for Students (OfS) is looking to build on its efforts to foster stronger, more collaborative relationships with the higher education sector. Understanding provider perceptions is a vital part of this work. Introducing a new annual stakeholder survey was also one of the recommendations in a 2024 independent review of the OfS<sup>1</sup>.

This survey builds on previous qualitative research commissioned by the OfS in 2023<sup>2</sup> and 2024<sup>3</sup> which resulted in the regulator making a number of changes to how it communicates and engages with providers. This included a new fortnightly email update to accountable officers from the chief executive, online quarterly updates for accountable officers, and an annual provider visits programme. These changes have been well received.

This is the first time the OfS has asked every registered institution about their experience of being regulated, with a plan to repeat the research annually and track how perceptions change over time.

The survey was conducted between the 15th of January and 13th of February 2026. 171 accountable officers completed the online survey, from 428 who were invited to participate (40% response rate<sup>4</sup>).

## Summary of findings

### Overall perceptions of the OfS

Provider ratings of the OfS are evenly split. A third have either a positive (35%), neutral (34%) or negative (32%) perception of the regulator. However, Universities have more negative perceptions (50%) compared with further education colleges (FECs) (17%) and specialist institutions (29%).

While accountable officers report an improvement in the overall relationship with the OfS over the past 12 months, there are still obstacles to overcome. Only 44% of accountable officers reported that they have confidence in the OfS as a regulator and just 37% feel able to raise concerns or questions without fear of negative consequences. However, extreme negative views remain rare (only 11% strongly disagreed with the statement on confidence, and 13% strongly disagreed that they feel able to raise concerns).

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<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a261fda3c2a28abb50d758/Independent\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_office\\_for\\_students.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66a261fda3c2a28abb50d758/Independent_review_of_the_office_for_students.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/refreshing-our-engagement-with-providers/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/sector-perceptions-of-ofs-engagement-and-communications/>

<sup>4</sup> This rate is in line or higher than comparable regulator surveys such as CQC's annual provider survey (25.6% response rate in 2025) or the FCA Practitioner survey from 2023/24 (39% response rate).

The sector recognises that the OfS acts in the interests of students (56% agree), but only 42% of accountable officers say the OfS considers sector feedback and just 39% agree that it works collaboratively with the sector.

### **Regulatory expectations**

There is almost unanimous acknowledgement of the importance of having a higher education regulator (96%). Providers with a more positive view of the OfS overall are more likely to agree that having a regulator for higher education is “very important” (92% agree vs 70% average).

Most accountable officers agree that the reasons for regulatory changes are communicated transparently, and that the OfS provides timely and sufficient guidance to navigate these changes.

It is important and striking to note that nearly half of accountable officers (43%) agree that OfS regulation of quality has prompted their provider to make changes to the quality of education for their students in the past year.

The perceived effectiveness of the OfS is mixed. Over two fifths (44%) describe it as “somewhat effective” with remaining opinions split between NET: Effective (27%) and NET: Ineffective (29%). FECs are most likely to perceive the OfS as effective (44%), in contrast to Universities where only 7% describe them as such.

Perceptions of OfS transparency and the guidance they provide are better, with 61% agreeing with this construct (see methodology for construct explanation). This is highest among FECs (72%) and Specialist: Creative (69%) providers compared with Universities (49%) and Specialist: Other (54%) providers.

Over three quarters (77%) of providers say they understand the OfS's strategic aims and priorities, and most (58%) also agree that these aims reflect what is important for the sector.

In terms of setting expectations, there is a slight mismatch between providers that agree they know what the OfS expects from them (65%) and what they can expect from the OfS (54%).

### **Communications and engagement**

Providers’ engagement with the OfS is very strong. Almost all (89%) of providers read email updates from the OfS's chief executive. Two thirds (66%) report interacting directly with OfS staff over the past year, though this differs significantly by provider type (87% of Universities vs 34% of FECs).

Communications and engagement activities are consistently seen as useful, especially those that involve direct interaction with OfS staff or the senior team. However, there is some variation by type of provider. For example, currently only 41% of Universities that received letters from the OfS described them as useful (vs 60% average).

The tone of OfS communications could be improved, with just under half of providers (47%) saying it is appropriate (dropping to 24% among Universities). There is also improvement needed in the clarity of regulatory guidance, relative to other communications. Some providers say they find it difficult to engage constructively with the OfS (with 23% reporting that they can't engage constructively).

The direction of travel is positive, with the majority of providers (51%) describing an overall improvement in the quality of OfS communications in the past year and only 4% saying it has worsened. Opinions of OfS communications are improving among Universities and specialist providers in particular. There have also been specific improvements in tone (42%) opportunities for dialogue (45%) and the overall relationship (42%). However, no aspect showed more than 10% "significant improvement".

### **Areas for improvement**

When asked how the OfS could improve the way it communicates and engages with the sector, almost a quarter (24%) of respondents who answered this question said they want more tailored communications that display a better understanding of their institution and their context.

Providers said that they want the OfS to work more collaboratively and build trust with the sector. Accountable officers would like to have a dedicated named contact at the OfS who understands their institution and that they can engage with as needed.

Timing and tone of communications are also highlighted as areas for improvement. Accountable officers would also like the OfS to do more to consider timing and tone when sending information or making requests, and to be more timely in its responses.

## Introduction

The OfS's new strategy for 2025-30 sets out a commitment to work more collaboratively with the higher education sector, in the interest of students. Understanding how the OfS is perceived by the providers it regulates is an important part of this.

The survey focused on three areas: overall perceptions, regulatory expectations, and communications and engagement. The results will help the OfS to understand in a more granular and representative way how different providers perceive them and enable the regulator to monitor how well it is doing in its efforts to improve.

Two key performance measures (KPMs) of the OfS's strategic objectives rely on the data from the survey; these are 'KPM 3: The proportion of accountable officers reporting that the OfS's regulation has led to quality improvements', and 'KPM 4: The proportion of accountable officers reporting trust and confidence in OfS communications'.

The questions relating to **overall perceptions** were looking for a topline indication of providers' opinions towards the regulator. Questions on trust and collaboration were included to reflect concerns raised in a 2024 independent review of the OfS, about a lack of trust between the OfS and the sector, and a 2023 report by the House of Lords Industry and Regulators' Committee. Trust and confidence are also emphasised in the OfS strategy 2025-30, which states: "Two-way, trust-based, relationships with the institutions we regulate are an important foundation for effective regulation". Questions on the quality of the relationship considered whether providers felt able to discuss challenges or raise concerns with the OfS.

The focus on **regulatory expectations** was designed to assess general levels of support for higher education regulation, as well as how effective providers consider the OfS to be. Gaining insight into providers' strategic understanding of the OfS helps clarify whether it needs to do more to communicate its aims and priorities. The OfS was also looking for feedback on transparency, the quality of its guidance, providers' expectations, and the impact of regulation on students.

To assess **communications and engagement**, questions focused on the tone and clarity of the OfS's communications, reflecting past concerns about overly formal or technical language. The questions also sought to improve the OfS's understanding of how institutions are engaging with its communications, and which kinds of communications and engagement activities institutions find most useful. Such questions help determine if communication efforts are fostering effective two-way dialogue and building trust, as well as indicating how the OfS might reach out to institutions most effectively. Asking providers what has improved and what they would want to see improved, is also crucial for fostering better engagement.

## Methodology

**The objective** of this research was to understand the perceptions of the OfS among accountable officers at the higher education institutions it regulates, particularly regarding its communication and engagement effectiveness. The research objectives also sought to draw insights on providers' understanding and expectations of the OfS, as well as perceived changes and improvements over the past 12 months.

**Fieldwork** consisted of a 5 to 10-minute online survey. Fieldwork was conducted between the 15<sup>th</sup> of January and 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2026. 171 accountable officers completed the survey, from 428 who were invited to participate (40% response rate). Respondents received an initial invitation from Savanta, followed by two reminders each a week apart, and a final reminder directly from the OfS. Below is the breakdown of participation by provider type:

- » Further education college: 41 completes from 143 invited (29%)
- » Specialist: Creative: 26 completes from 59 invited (44%)
- » Specialist: Other: 37 completes from 83 invited (45%)
- » University: 54 completes from 112 invited (48%)
- » Other: 13 completes from 30 invited (43%)

**Statement constructs** were established for analysis, to make it easier to interpret thematically related statements. These combinations were based on the factorial analysis of results obtained during the pilot survey (see appendix for details).

Further information on methods used to design the survey and significance testing are included in the appendix.

# Findings

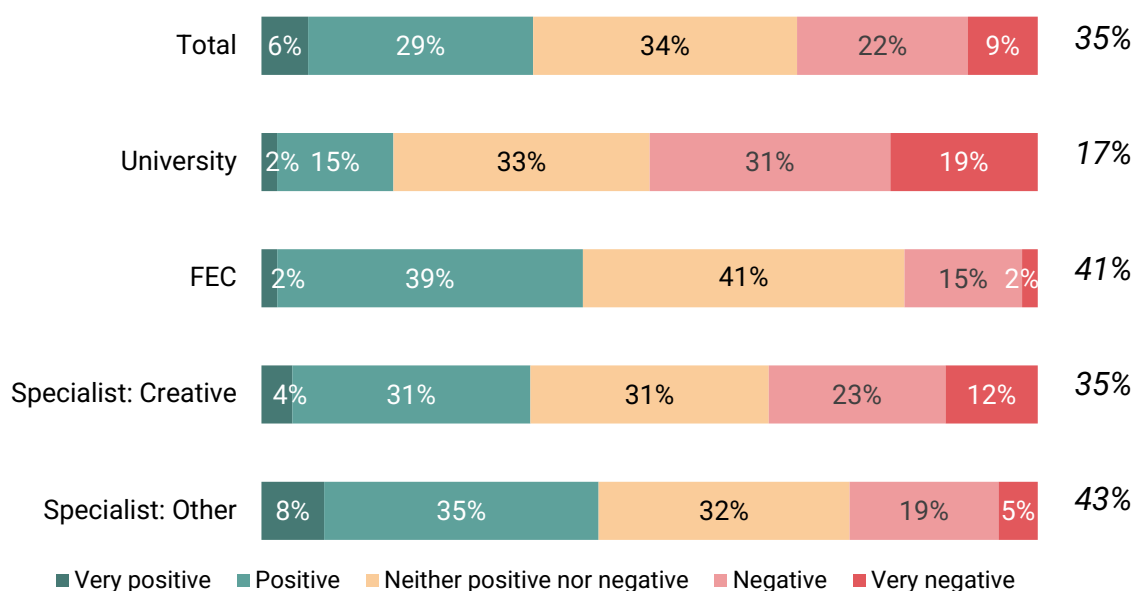
## 1. Overall perceptions of the OfS

Perceptions of the OfS are mixed. Universities are significantly more likely to report having a negative perception of OfS, with half (50%) having a negative perception compared with 17% for FECs and 29% of specialist institutions. Amongst FECs, the largest share of accountable officers report having neither a positive nor negative perception (41%), and a third of specialist institutions also report having neither a positive nor negative perception (32%).

Just under half (45%) of institutions with more than 20,000 students report having a negative perception of the OfS. This is significantly higher than those with fewer than 250 students (19%).

**Chart 1<sup>5</sup>. Q13. Overall perception of the OfS (% selected)**

**Net: Positive**



## Trust, confidence and collaboration

Over half of accountable officers agree that the OfS acts in the best interest of students. However, this drops to under a third (31%) among Universities, significantly lower than all other provider types, including FECs (73%), Specialist: Creative (58%) and Specialist: Other (65%) institutions.

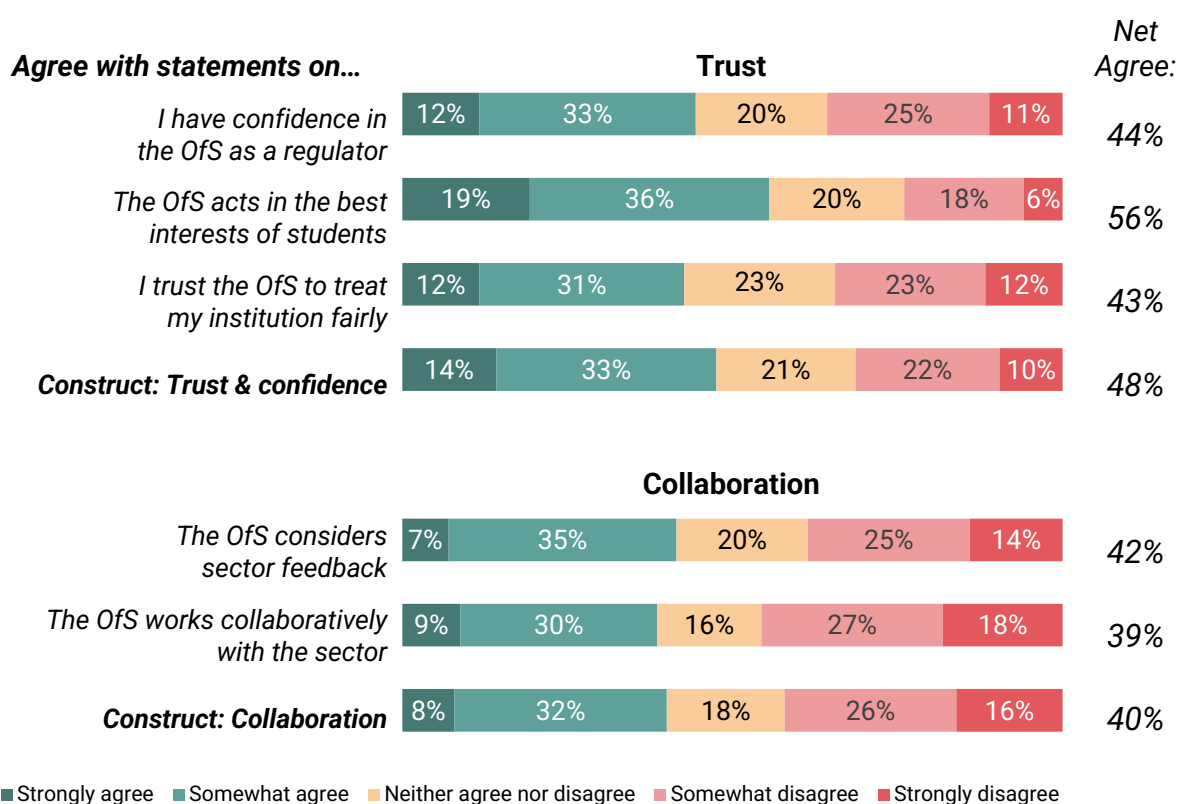
Figures around collaboration are slightly lower: only two in five (40%) accountable officers agree with the collaboration construct. This figure drops to 15% among institutions with more than 20,000 students, compared with over half (53%) of institutions with fewer than 250 students.

<sup>5</sup> Q13. Reflecting overall, how would you rate your institution's perception of the OfS? | Base: All respondents (n=171), Universities (n=54), FEC (n=41), Specialist: Creative (n=26), Specialist: Other (n=37)

FECs consistently show higher levels of agreement on statements related to trust compared with other institution types, with more than three in five expressing confidence in the OfS as a regulator (61%), that it acts in the best interest of students (73%) and that they trust the OfS to treat them fairly (56%). FECs also have above-average agreement among statements related to collaboration (51%) but not as much as Specialist: Other providers (54%).

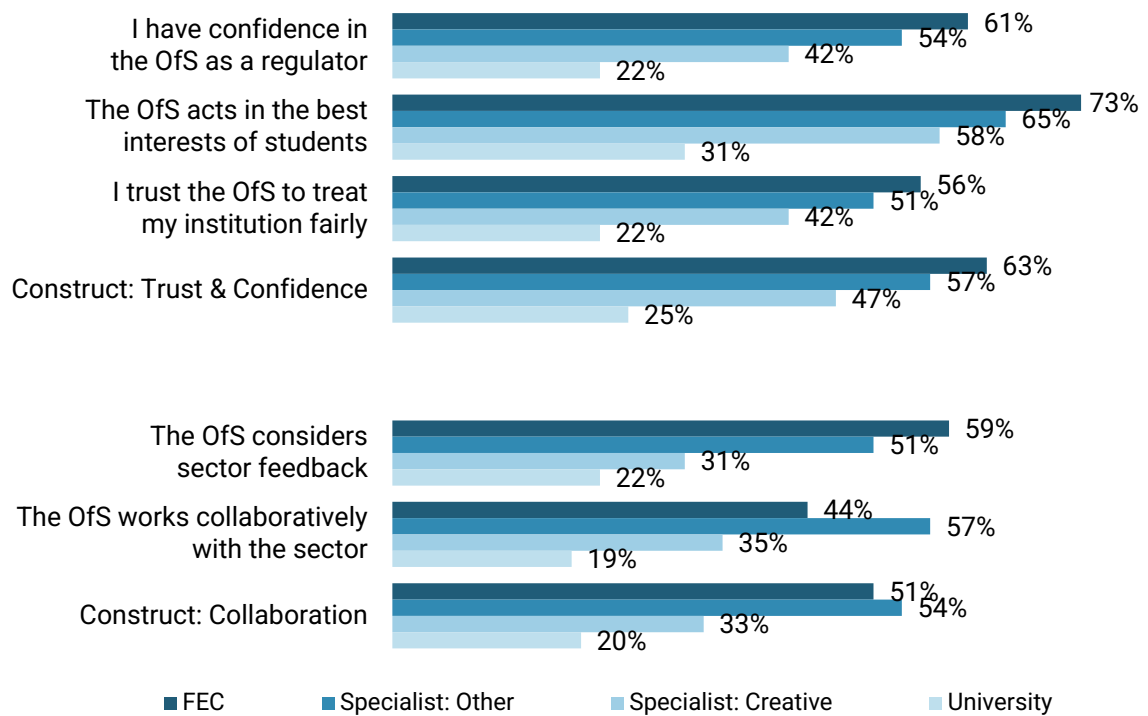
Universities on the other hand, have the lowest levels of agreement across all statements related to trust, confidence and collaboration, with the OfS acting in the best interests of students highest at 31%, and only around a fifth agreeing with any of the other statements.

**Chart 2a<sup>6</sup>. Q1b. Agreement with statements on trust and collaboration (% selected)**



<sup>6</sup> Q1b. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with each of the following statements? | Base: All respondents (n=171) | NOTE: The constructs “Trust & Confidence” and “Collaboration” are derived by taking the average value for each code of the statements shown above it on the chart.

**Chart 2b<sup>7</sup>. Q1b. Agreement with statements on trust, confidence and collaboration by provider type (% NET: Agree)**



**How providers say they want OfS communications to improve:**

*"Convince us you want to work collaboratively and listen"* **University**

*"Start a process of co-regulation with universities."* **University**

*"Engage positively with providers and recognise that effective regulation is a joint activity between the regulator and the regulated"* **University**

*"I think there needs to be greater trust built between the regulator and providers to support open conversations, and a sense that the regulator really wants what is best for the sector."* **University**

*"Adopt a more collaborative approach - we all want the same thing i.e. the best interests of students"* **University**

<sup>7</sup> Q1b. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with each of the following statements? | Base: Universities (n=54), FEC (n=41), Specialist: Creative (n=26), Specialist: Other (n=37)

NOTE: The constructs "Trust & Confidence" and "Collaboration" are derived by taking the average value for each code of the statements shown above it on the chart.

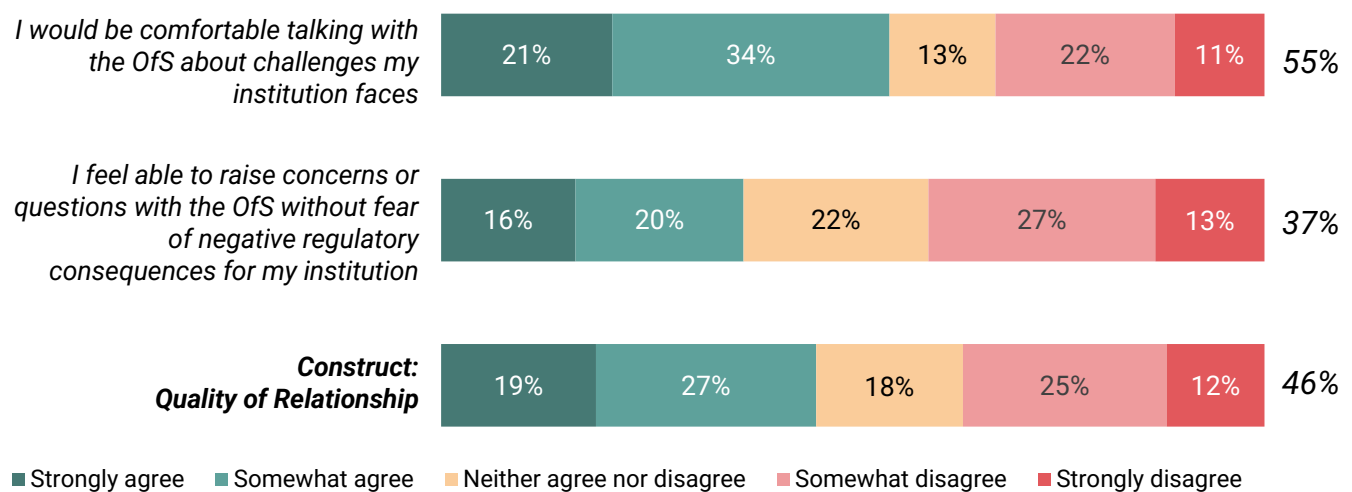
## Quality of relationship

Over half of accountable officers feel comfortable talking about challenges with the OfS, but they worry about negative consequences for their institution when raising questions or concerns. FECs (54%) are significantly more likely to agree that they feel able to raise concerns with the OfS compared with both Universities (24%) and Specialist: Creative providers (19%).

By provider type, FECs are much more likely than average to agree with the quality of relationship construct (61% vs. 46% average). Universities on the other hand are more likely to disagree with the construct (54% vs. 37% average).

**Chart 3a<sup>8</sup>. Q6. Agreement with statements on quality of relationship (% selected)**

Net Agree:



### How providers say they want OfS communications to improve:

*"Having an online meeting with our key OfS contact at least yearly, to build relationship and trust, and provide an opportunity to ask any questions."* **Specialist: Other**

*"Be prepared to build trust through dialogue"* **Specialist: Other**

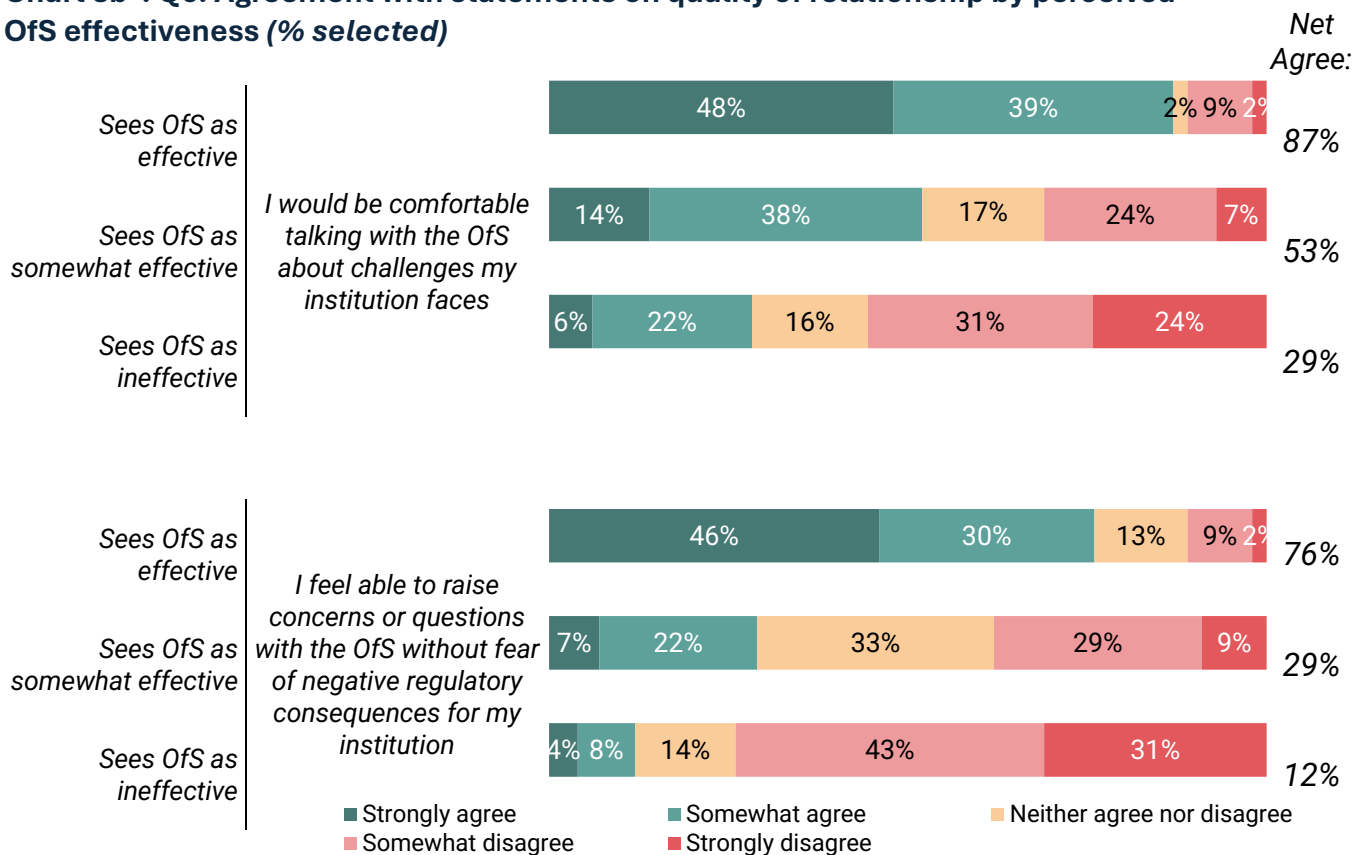
Willingness to engage openly with the OfS is much higher among those who generally view it as effective, but drops sharply for providers that do not regard the OfS to be effective. More than 4 in 5 (87%) of institutions rating OfS as effective feel comfortable talking about challenges (vs. 55% average) and 76% feel safe raising concerns (37% average). Among those who view the OfS as ineffective, negative sentiment dominates: nearly three quarters (73%) disagree that they can raise issues without fear of repercussions.

<sup>8</sup> Q6. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? |

Base: All respondents (n=171) NOTE: The construct "Quality of Relationship" is derived by taking the average value for each code of the 2 statements shown above it on the chart.

There also appears to be a link between perceptions on tone and willingness to raise concerns. 60% of those who felt that the tone of OfS communications is appropriate reported that they can raise concerns with the OfS, compared with just 16% of those who do not agree that the tone of OfS communications is appropriate.

**Chart 3b<sup>9</sup>. Q6. Agreement with statements on quality of relationship by perceived OfS effectiveness (% selected)**



**How providers say they want OfS communications to improve:**

*“As a highly specialist institution training young people for a specific industry it would be helpful to have an OfS liaison who regularly visits our institution to help us interpret guidance and give us confidence we are meeting the ongoing conditions of registration”*

**Specialist: Creative**

<sup>9</sup> Q6. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? |

Base: All respondents (n=171); Those describing the OfS as... Effective (n=46); Somewhat effective (76); Ineffective (49)

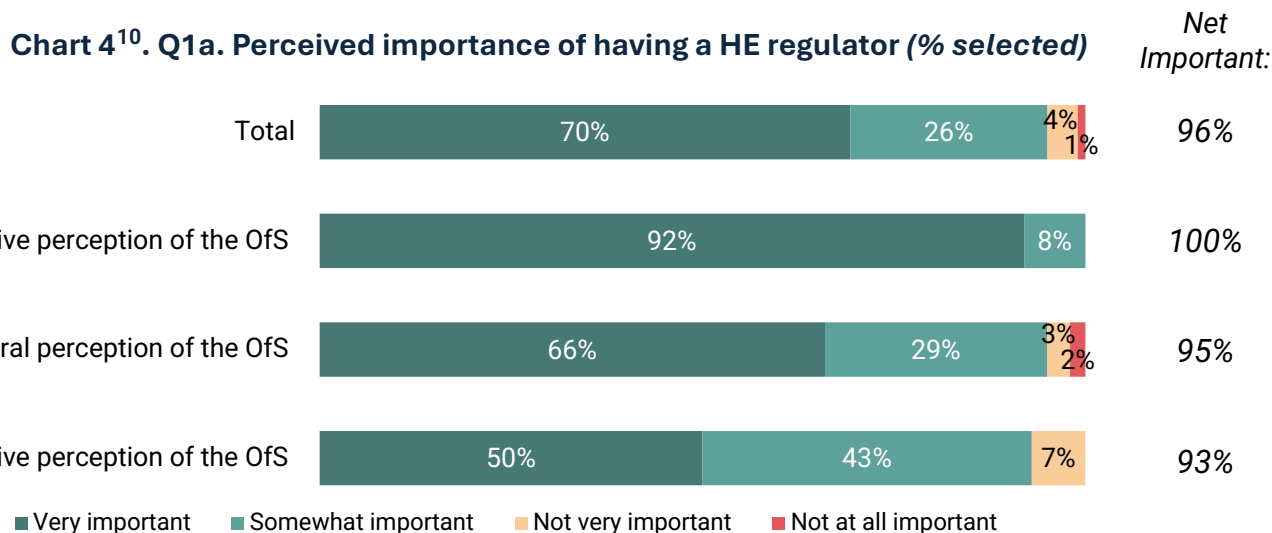
## 2. Regulatory expectations

### Importance of having a higher education (HE) regulator

Providers are almost unanimous in saying that it is important to have an HE regulator, with 70% saying this is very important.

Accountable officers' overall perceptions of the OfS are linked to their views on the importance of having a regulator. Among those with positive perceptions of the OfS, 92% said that having a HE regulator is very important. Among those with negative perceptions of the OfS, this share drops to just 50%.

All provider types agree that it is very important to have a HE regulator. The largest difference is between Specialist: Creative and Specialist: Other providers (62% vs 78% very important).



### Effectiveness of the OfS as a regulator

Perceptions of the OfS's effectiveness are mixed; few Universities consider the OfS to be effective and conversely, few FECs consider it to be ineffective.

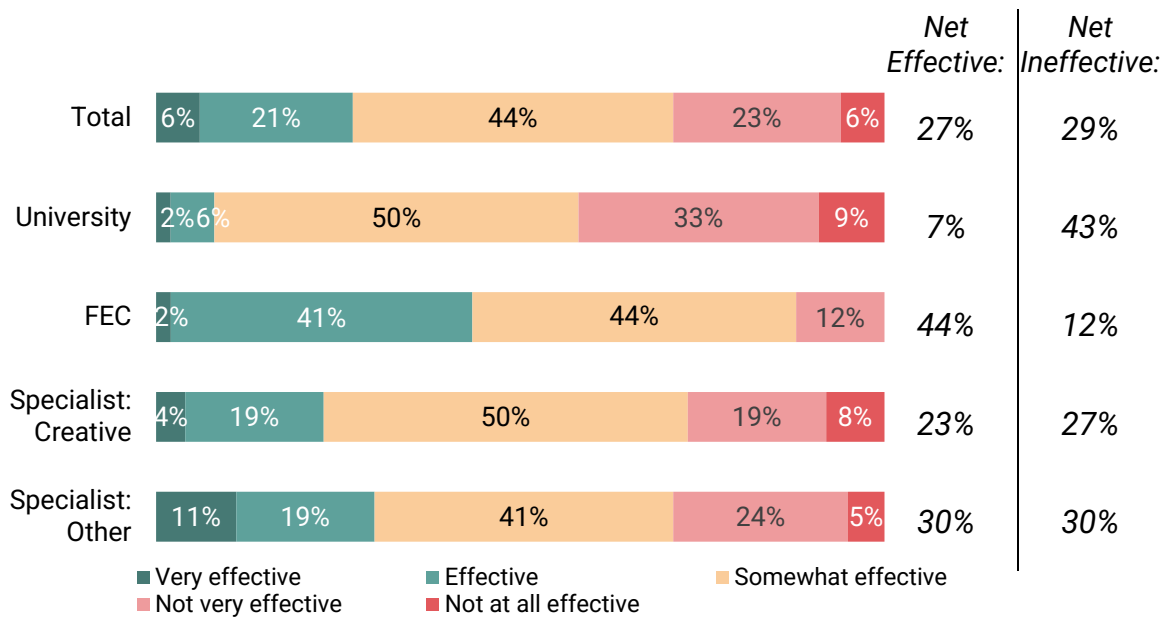
Even though FECs are the provider type most likely to consider the OfS to be effective (44%), only 2% say it is very effective, which highlights the potential for improvement even among this group.

Similarly, of the 43% of Universities that consider the OfS to be ineffective, most of them (33%) say it is "not very effective" instead of "not at all effective" (9%).

<sup>10</sup> Q1a. How important do you think it is to have a higher education regulator? |

Base: All respondents (171); Stakeholders with a positive perception (59); Stakeholders with a neutral perception (58); Stakeholders with a negative perception (54)

**Chart 5<sup>11</sup>. Q2. Perceived effectiveness of OfS as regulator (% selected)**



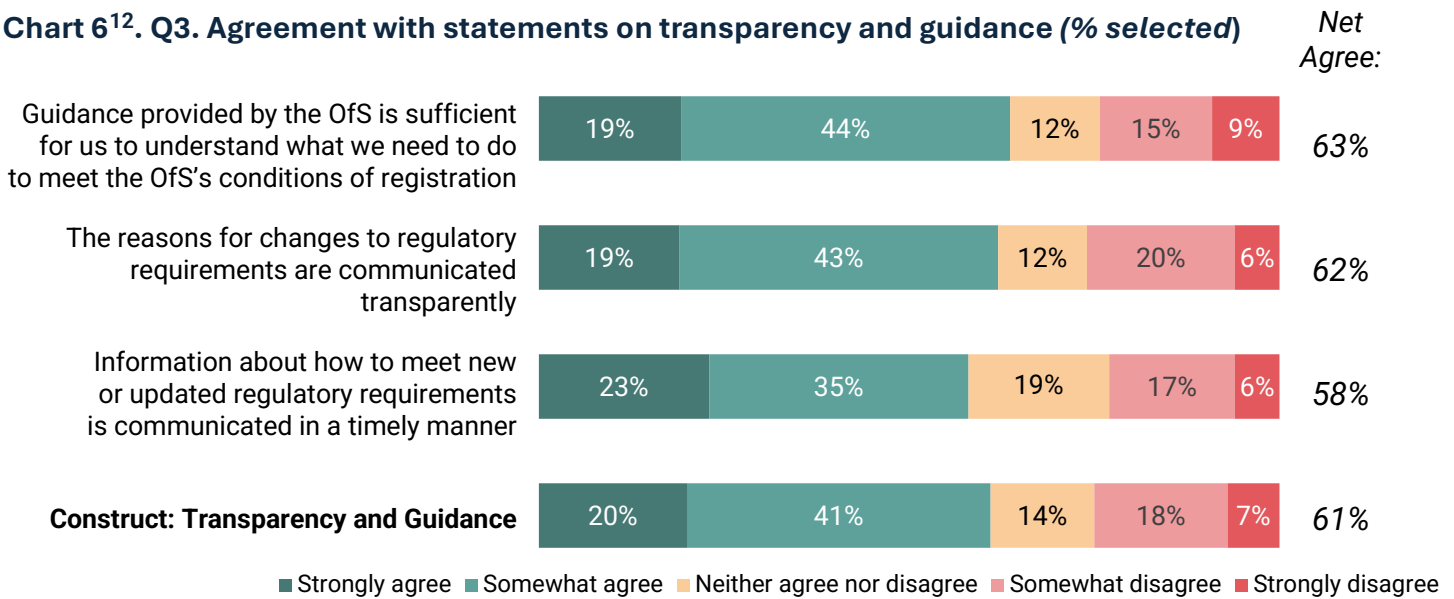
### Transparency and guidance

Most accountable officers agree that the reasons for regulatory changes are communicated transparently, and that the OfS provides timely and sufficient guidance to navigate these changes. FECs and Specialist: Creative providers are both more likely than Universities or Specialist: Other providers to agree with the transparency and guidance construct (72% and 69% vs 49% and 54%).

The share of agreement for each of these statements is relatively consistent among each provider type except for Specialist: Other providers. Among this group, only 51% agree that the OfS communicates information on how to meet regulatory requirements in a timely manner. More than three-quarters (81%) agree that guidance on these changes is sufficient and 76% agree the OfS communicates the reasons for changes transparently.

<sup>11</sup> Q2. How effective do you consider the OfS to be as a regulator? |  
 Base: All respondents (171); University (54); FEC (41); Specialist: Creative (26); Specialist (37)

**Chart 6<sup>12</sup>. Q3. Agreement with statements on transparency and guidance (% selected)**

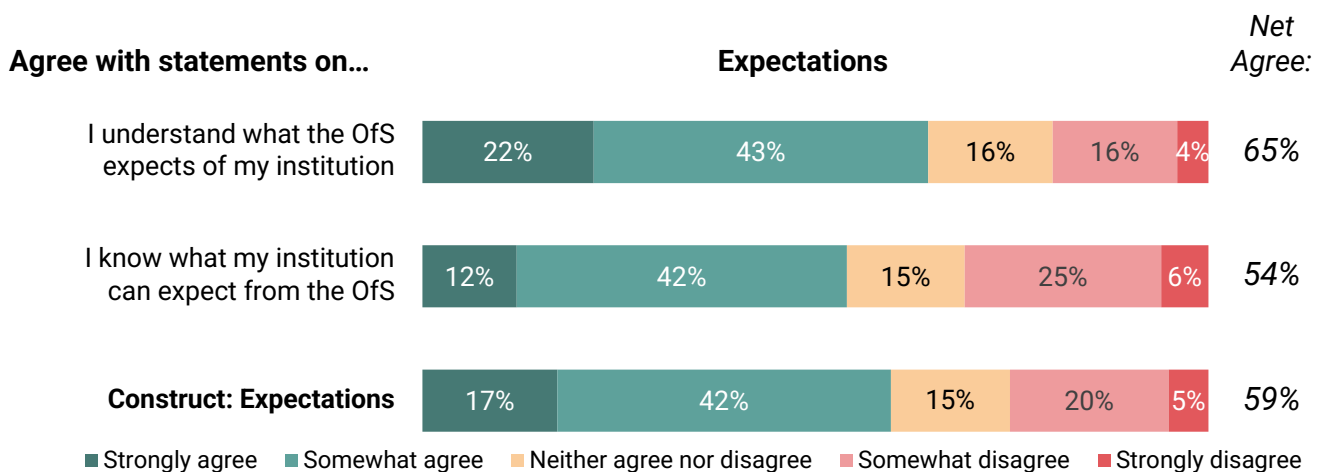


**Expectations**

Two thirds (65%) of accountable officers say that they understand what the OfS expects of their institution, but slightly over half say they know what they can expect from the OfS.

This is mostly consistent across different provider types though FECs are significantly more likely to agree with the construct than Universities (66% vs 50%).

**Chart 7<sup>13</sup>. Q3. Agreement with statements on Expectations (% selected)**



<sup>12</sup> & <sup>12</sup> Q3. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with each of the following statements? | Base: All respondents (171) | NOTE: The construct "Transparency and Guidance" and "Expectations" are derived by taking the average value for each code of the statements shown on the chart.

**How providers say they want OfS communications to improve:**

*“Give clear timescales for when it will be received and regular milestones if it is being delayed.”*  
**Specialist: Other**

**Strategic understanding and impact**

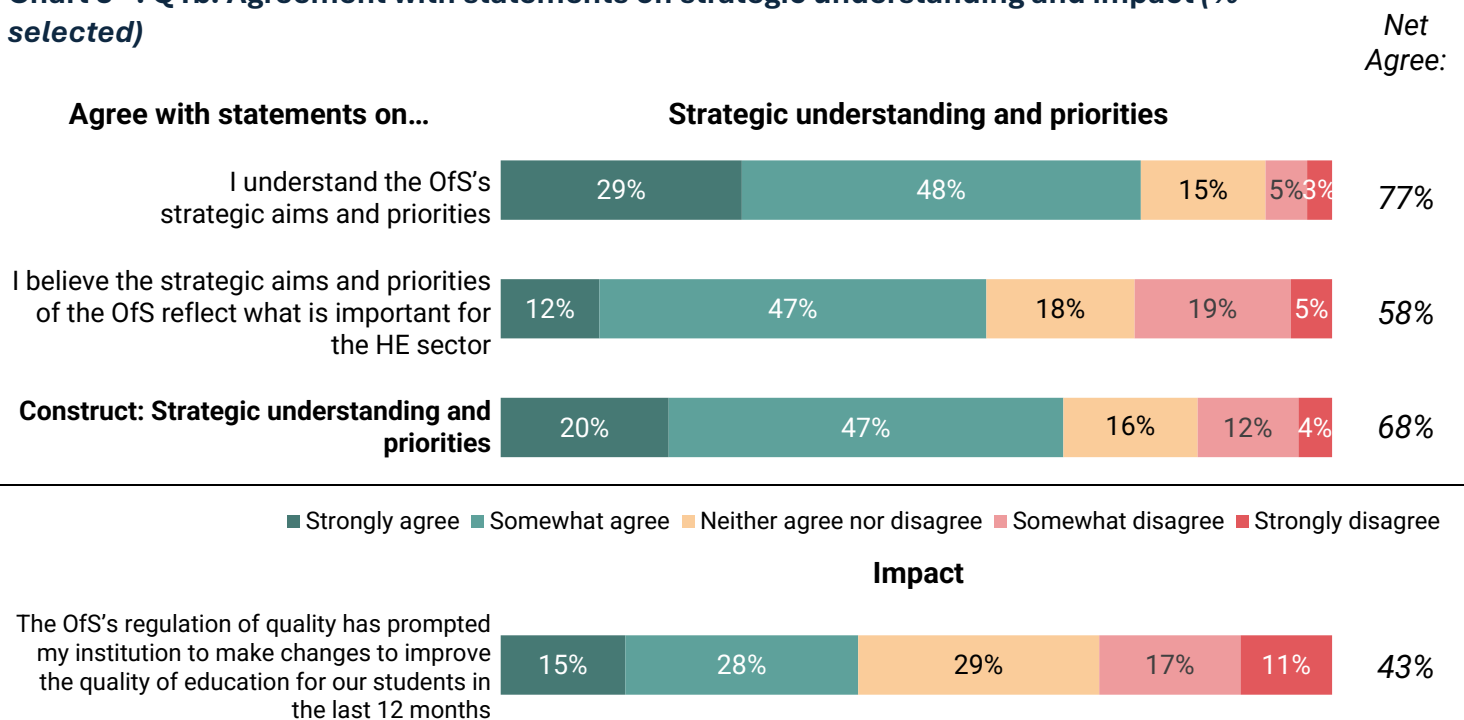
Over three quarters of providers say that they understand the OfS’s strategic aims and priorities, but not as many agree that these reflect what is important for the HE sector.

Stakeholders from Specialist: Creative institutions are slightly less likely than other provider types to say that they understand the OfS’s aims and priorities (62% vs 77% average) or that these aims reflect what is important in the HE sector (42% vs 58% average).

Among providers with 5 000-20 000 students, 76% say they understand the OfS’s priorities (vs 77% average). However, they are twice as likely as other providers to disagree that these reflect what is important in the HE sector (48% vs 24% average). By contrast, only 16% of providers with fewer than 250 students disagreed with this statement.

Regarding the impact of OfS regulation, over two fifths of providers (43%) agree they have made improvements in the quality of education for their students in the last 12 months due to OfS regulation of quality.

**Chart 8<sup>14</sup>. Q1b. Agreement with statements on strategic understanding and impact (% selected)**



<sup>14</sup> Q1b. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with each of the following statements? | Base: All respondents (171) | NOTE: The construct “Strategic understanding and priorities” is derived by taking the average value for each code of the 2 statements shown on the chart.

### 3. Communications and engagement

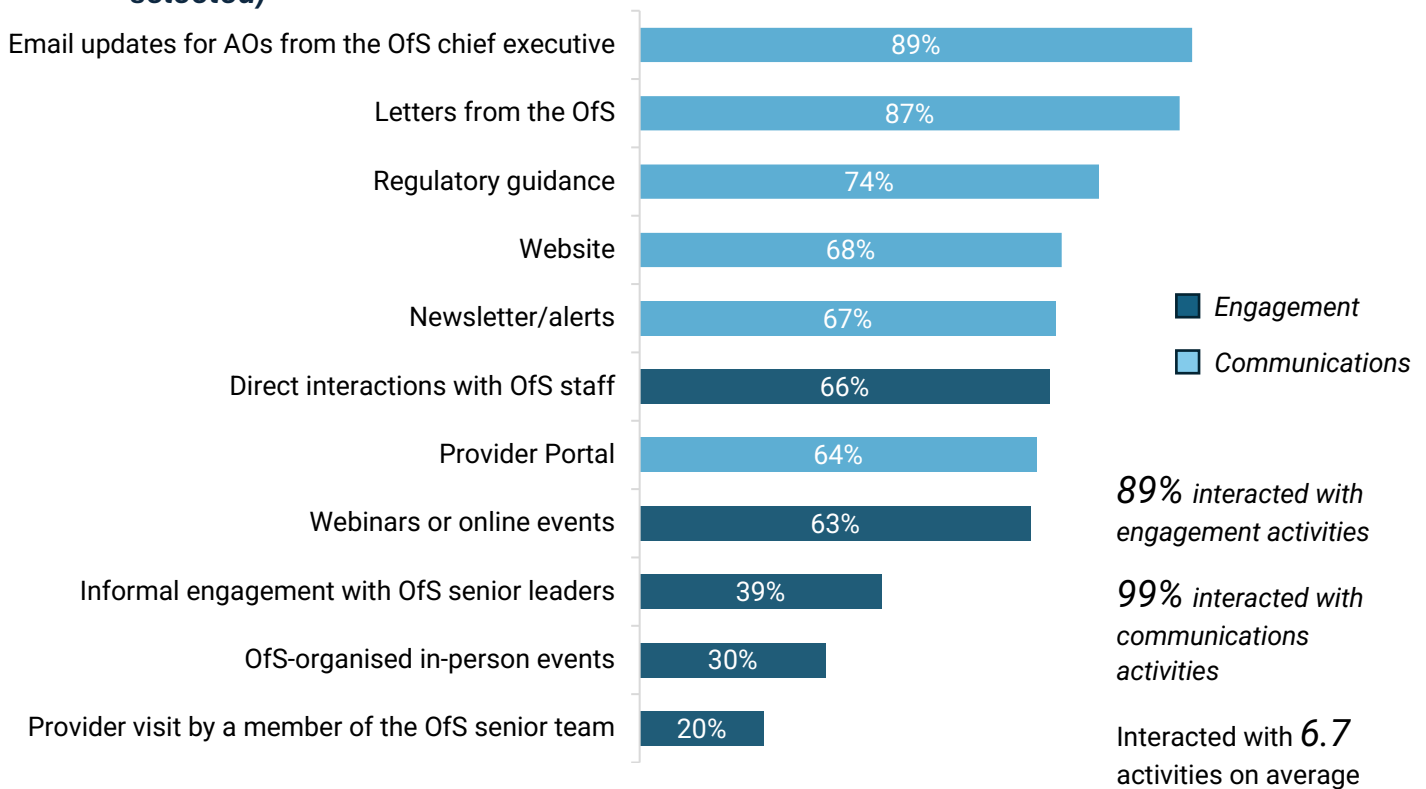
#### Interaction with OfS communications and engagement activities

Almost all accountable officers (89%) reported receiving email updates from the OfS chief executive and letters from the OfS. Providers also have relatively high levels of engagement (74%) with regulatory guidance. In terms of engagement activities specifically, two thirds (66%) had some direct interactions with staff over the last year, and a similar number (63%) attended online events.

FECs' engagement with the OfS is narrower than for other provider types. These providers engaged with six activities on average, where the overall average is seven. Only 34% report having direct interactions with OfS staff compared with 87% of Universities.

Almost two in five (39%) report informal engagement with OfS senior leaders over the past 12 months. This varies significantly by provider type as 57% of Universities have had this type of interaction compared with 27% of FECs.

**Chart 9<sup>15</sup>. Q4a. Interaction with OfS communications and engagement activities (% selected)**



<sup>15</sup> Q4a. Which of the following OfS communications and engagement activities have you engaged with in the past 12 months? | Base: All respondents (171)

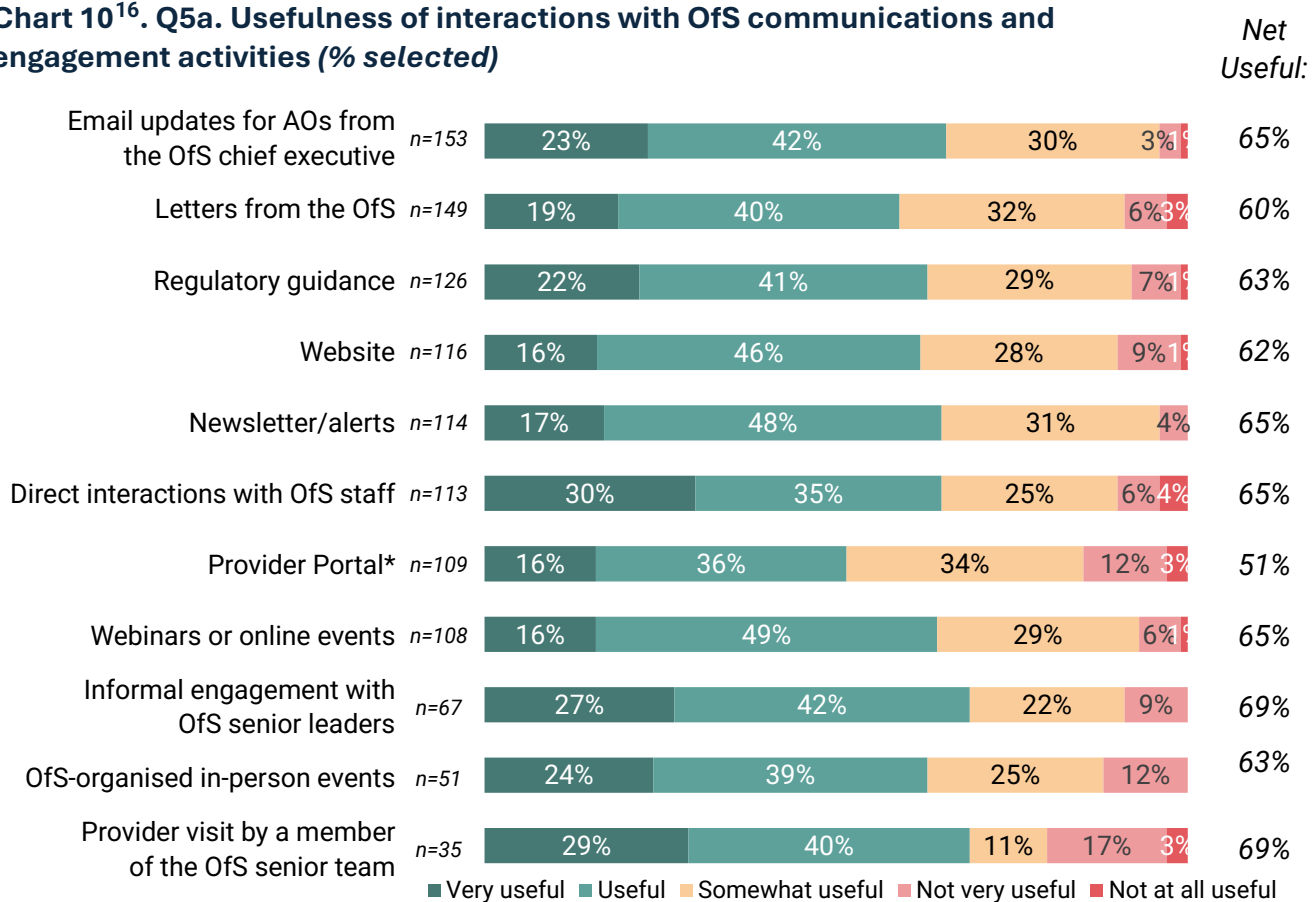
## Usefulness of interactions with OfS communications and engagement activities

Direct interactions with OfS staff, provider visits, and informal engagement with OfS senior leaders were most likely to be viewed as very useful to providers. The (now replaced) provider portal was seen as the least useful.

Specialist: Other providers are the most likely to say that regular email updates from the OfS chief executive or letters from the OfS are useful (81% and 76% vs 65% and 60% average). In contrast, only 41% of Universities describe letters from the OfS as useful.

The usefulness of provider visits varies by provider type. Universities are the least likely to describe visits as useful (54%). This activity has the lowest share of neutral viewpoints (11% somewhat useful).

**Chart 10<sup>16</sup>. Q5a. Usefulness of interactions with OfS communications and engagement activities (% selected)**



When describing interactions with OfS communications and engagement activities, regular email updates perform well across all metrics, while regulatory guidance performed least well for all descriptors.

<sup>16</sup> Q5a. How useful have you found these communications and engagement activities? | Base: All who interacted with the respective activities (35-153) | NOTE: Feedback on the provider portal was gathered prior to the rollout of the new portal. These figures are assumed to refer to the old portal.

Half of accountable officers (50%) describe regulatory guidance as easy to understand. Larger providers (those with more than 5000 students) are least likely to say that regulatory guidance is easy to understand (32%). By contrast, 71% of providers with between 500 and 5000 students said that they find regulatory guidance easy to understand. Among small providers with fewer than 500 students, 54% did so.

Appropriate tone is the descriptor least likely to be associated with any activity (save regulatory guidance). Universities are consistently 17-18 percentage points below average in likelihood to associate tone with each engagement activity (ranging from 44%-61%). The exception to this is email updates where appropriate tone has 75% association by Universities (-6% vs average).

<b>Table 1<sup>17</sup>. Q5b. Description of interactions with OfS communications and engagement activities</b>						
<i>(% selected)</i>						
	<i>Base</i>	Informative	Easy to understand	Timely	Relevant	Appropriate tone
Regular email updates for accountable officers from the OfS chief executive	<i>n=153</i>	90%	90%	90%	92%	81%
Webinars or online events	<i>n=108</i>	84%	91%	80%	89%	78%
Letters from the OfS	<i>n=149</i>	83%	74%	79%	89%	63%
Regulatory guidance	<i>n=126</i>	82%	50%	69%	84%	63%

### **Tone and clarity of communications and contacting the OfS**

While there is improvement to be made in regulatory guidance clarity, 61% of accountable officers reported that OfS communications overall are clear and easy to understand.

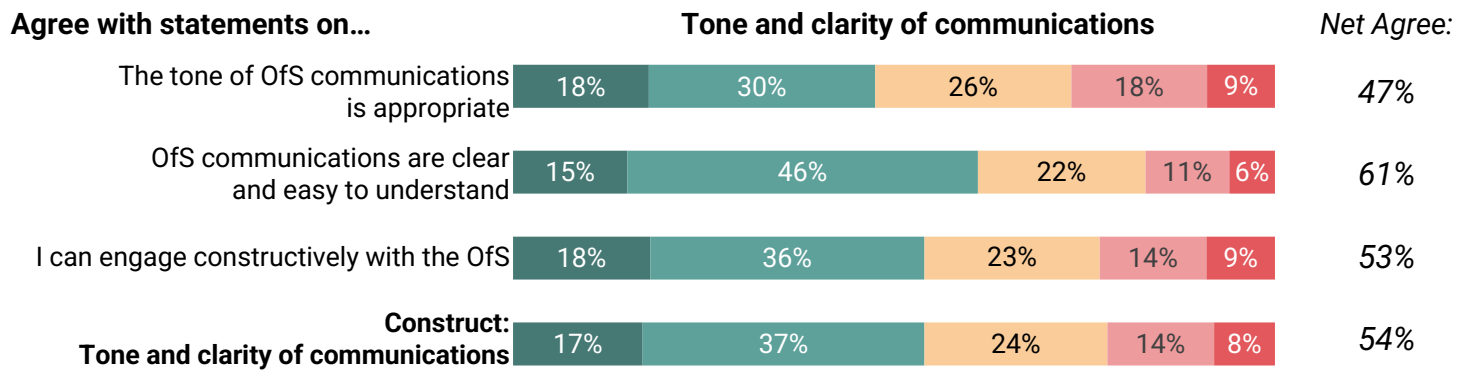
There is broad agreement across all types of providers that they know how to contact the OfS when needed, with just 3% of accountable officers saying they strongly disagree with this statement. Specialist: Other providers were more likely than other provider types to report that they are able to engage constructively with the OfS (62% vs 53% average).

However, fewer providers agree that the tone of OfS communications is appropriate, with Universities much less likely to agree with this statement (24% vs 47% average).

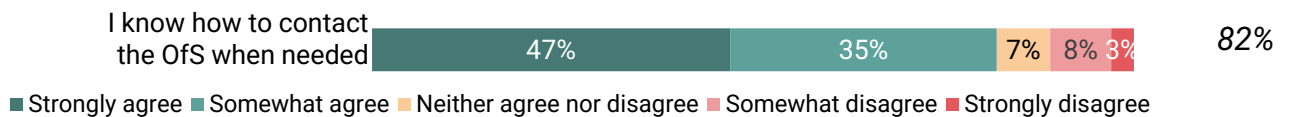
<sup>17</sup> Q5b. Would you describe [ACTIVITY] as... |

Base: All those who interacted with the respective activities (108-153)

**Chart 11<sup>18</sup>. Q6. Agreement with statements on tone and clarity of communications and contacting the OfS (% selected)**



**Practical access**



**How providers say they want OfS communications to improve:**

*“Use plain English. Often communication communications are overly legalistic in nature. They state something in numerous pages what can be said more directly and simply. We spend a lot of time trying to work out what is being said because of the legal tone of the documents”* **FEC**

*“Plain English rather than quasi legal jargon.”* **University**

*“There have been a small number of communications within which the tone could be improved”* **University**

*“Be supportive in tone”* **Specialist: Other**

*“Letters need to adopt a less officious tone”* **Specialist: Creative**

**Change in quality of OfS communication and engagement over the past 12 months**

Opinions of OfS communications and engagement are improving, particularly among Universities and specialist providers. Very few providers report that the quality of communications and engagement has worsened.

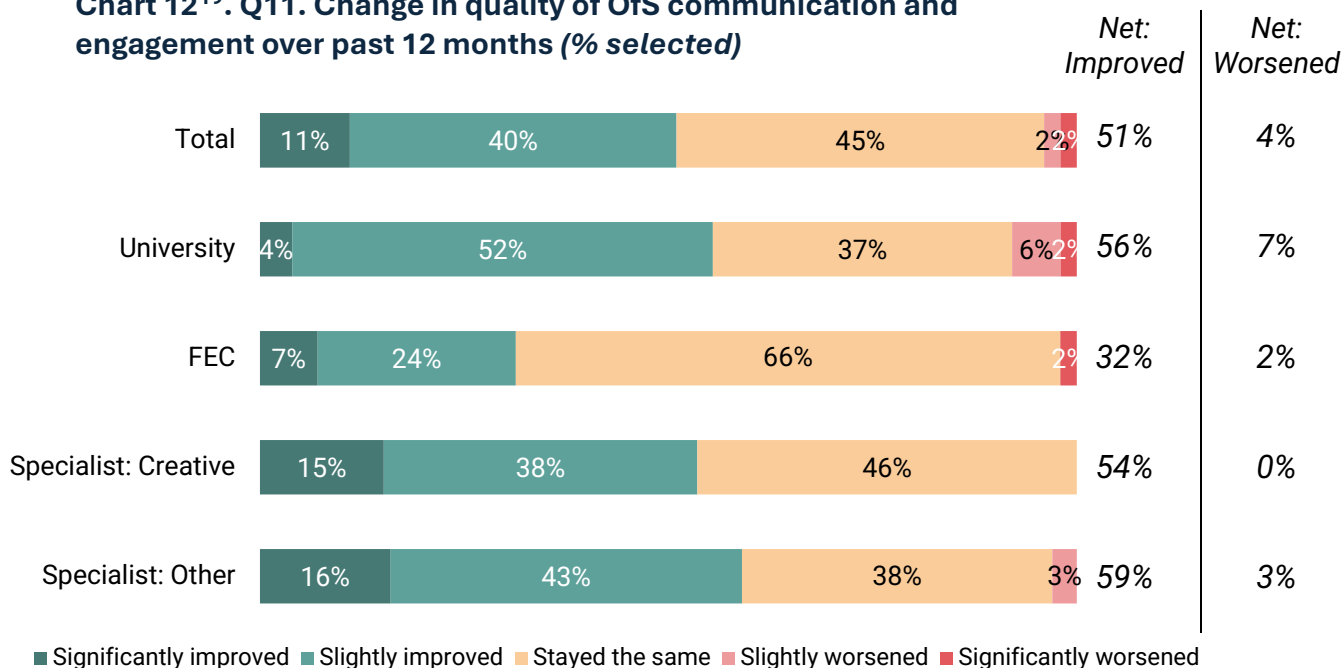
Despite having a more negative view of the OfS than other providers, Universities are slightly more likely than average to say that the quality of OfS communications has improved (56% vs 51% average). FECs are less likely to say the quality of communications improved, this may be due to having an already positive view of the OfS.

<sup>18</sup> Q6. To what extent, if at all, do you agree with the following statements? | Base: All respondents (171) | NOTE: The construct “Educational expectations” is derived by taking the average value for each code of the 2 statements shown above it on the chart.

Institutions with more than 20,000 students are most likely to report that the quality of engagement with the OfS has 'slightly improved' (64% vs. 40% average). However, none said that it has 'significantly improved' (0% vs. 11% average).

Among accountable officers with an overall negative perception of the OfS, a third (33%) report that quality of engagement has improved in the last 12 months.

**Chart 12<sup>19</sup>. Q11. Change in quality of OfS communication and engagement over past 12 months (% selected)**



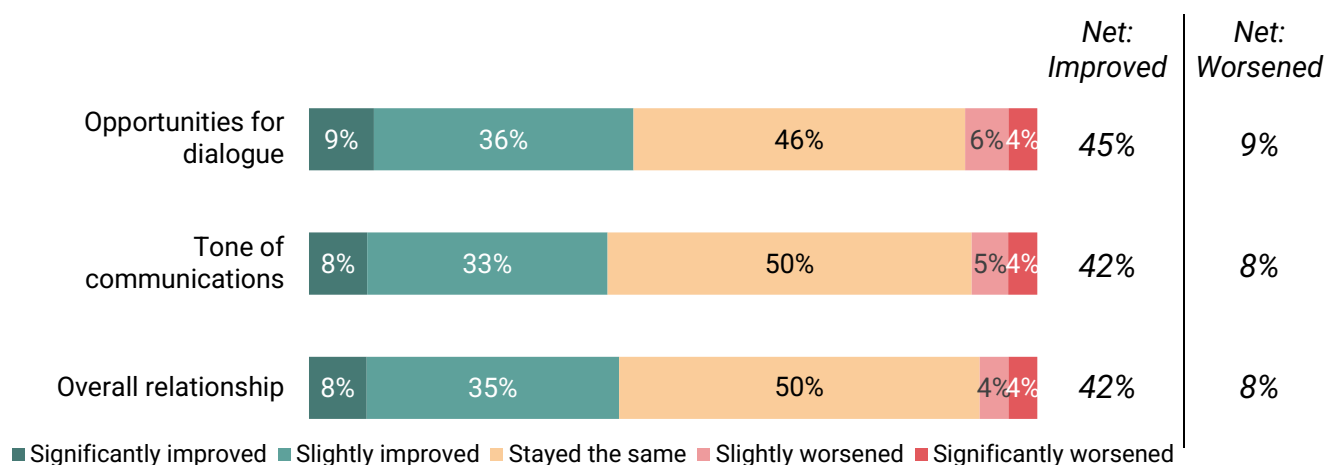
Around two in five accountable officers report an improvement in opportunities for dialogue, tone and overall relationship, but the largest share reports no change on these aspects. Where there is progress, it's most likely to be described as slightly improved.

FECs are most likely to say that all aspects of communications have stayed the same, particularly on overall relationship (66% vs. 50% average), while Universities are more likely to say that the overall relationship has improved compared with FECs (50% vs. 29%)

Perceived changes are also linked to overall perceptions of OfS. Those with a negative perception of the OfS are more likely to say that the overall relationship (65%) and opportunities for dialogue (57%) have stayed the same rather than improved.

<sup>19</sup> Q11. In your view, has the quality of OfS communication and engagement with your institution over the last 12 months: | Base: All respondents (n=171), University (n=54), FEC (n=41), Specialist: Creative (n=26), Specialist: Other (37)

**Chart 13<sup>20</sup>. Q12. Change in aspects of OfS communication and engagement over past 12 months**



### Improvements providers want to see

When asked about how the OfS could best improve its communications, accountable officers are clear that they want OfS communications to demonstrate an understanding of their specific context and needs, with calls for more tailored approaches. The OfS received similar feedback in its provider perceptions research in 2023 and 2024 – in relation to FECs in particular. In response, the OfS developed a new approach, including a webpage with tailored information for colleges and events designed for a college audience.

Timing was raised as an issue, with providers asking the OfS to consider timing when sending information or making requests, to be more timely in its responses, and clearer on timelines. Accountable officers would also like to have a dedicated named contact at the OfS who understands their institution and that they can engage with as needed.

*“Understand our context as small colleges with a small HE provision. Many updates are communicated for larger organisations” **FEC***

*“Engage with institutions as a trusted partner not as parent/child. Take time to understand the difference in types of HE providers” **FEC***

*“Be more timely with responses” **University***

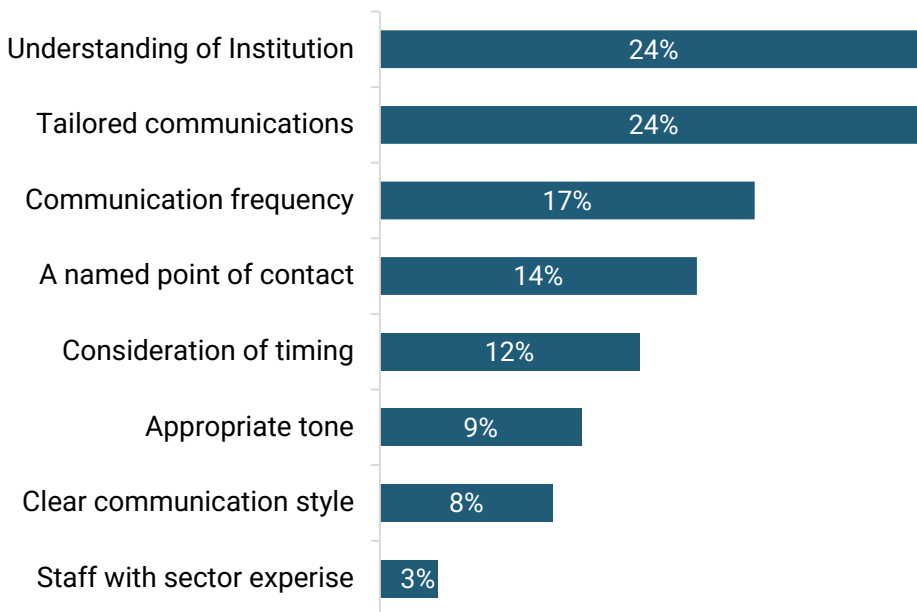
*“Reduce the number of comms to essential only. Consider the timing of comms e.g. taking account of holiday periods.” **FEC***

*“Have a person (account manager-type role) with whom we could speak on an appropriately regular basis if needed” **Specialist: Creative***

*“More open and continual conversation” **University***

<sup>20</sup> Q12NEW. For each of the following elements of the OfS’ communication and engagement with your institution, please specify whether they have improved, worsened or stayed the same over the last 12 months. | Base: All respondents (n=171)

**Chart 14<sup>21</sup>. Q7. Most desired improvements for OfS communications (% mentioned)**



<sup>21</sup> Q7. What is the single most important thing OfS could do to improve its communications with your institution? | Base: All respondents excluding “Don’t know” (n=133)

# Appendix

## Methodology

**Cognitive interviews** were conducted among n=5 senior leaders from OfS-registered providers in the English HE sector (excluding accountable officers) at an early stage in the research to ensure that both the questions and the answers were fully understood, that interpretations aligned with what was intended, and that no answer options were missing.

**A pilot survey** was then conducted among n=60 senior leaders between the 28<sup>th</sup> of November and 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2025. The aim of this survey was to ensure the survey length or specific questions did not impact completion and that the scales used to answer questions were appropriate to capture the range of stakeholder opinions. Following the pilot survey, the scale of several questions (Q2, Q5a, Q11, Q12) were expanded to avoid answers being too clustered.

**Cronbach's alpha and factorial analyses** were also used to measure reliability of the survey questions and to identify items measuring the same construct.

**Significance testing** has been carried out via Z-tests for all questions. Where differences have been highlighted as significantly different, this indicates a statistically significant difference in scores to other sub-groups at a 95% confidence level.

## Data tables

<b>Q1a. Importance of a HE regulator</b> <i>(showing all)</i>						
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Net: Important	NET: Unimportant
Total	70%	26%	4%	1%	96%	4%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q1b. Agreement with statements regarding OfS strategy</b> <i>(showing all)</i>							
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree
I understand the OfS's strategic aims and priorities	29%	48%	15%	5%	3%	77%	8%
I believe the strategic aims and priorities of the OfS reflect what is important for the HE sector	12%	47%	18%	19%	5%	58%	24%
The OfS acts in the best interests of students	19%	36%	20%	18%	6%	56%	24%
I have confidence in the OfS as a regulator	12%	33%	20%	25%	11%	44%	36%
I trust the OfS to treat my institution fairly	12%	31%	23%	23%	12%	43%	35%
The OfS considers sector feedback	7%	35%	20%	25%	14%	42%	39%
The OfS works collaboratively with the sector	9%	30%	16%	27%	18%	39%	46%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q2. Perceived effectiveness of the OfS as a regulator</b> <i>(showing all)</i>							
	Very effective	Effective	Somewhat effective	Not very effective	Not at all effective	NET: Effective (top 2 box)	NET: Ineffective (bottom 2 box)
Total	6%	21%	44%	23%	6%	27%	29%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q3. Agreement with statements regarding OfS regulations</b>							
<i>(showing all)</i>							
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree
I understand what the OfS expects of my institution	22%	43%	16%	16%	4%	65%	19%
Guidance provided by the OfS is sufficient for us to understand what we need to do to meet the OfS's conditions of registration	19%	44%	12%	15%	9%	63%	25%
The reasons for changes to regulatory requirements are communicated transparently	19%	43%	12%	20%	6%	62%	26%
Information about how to meet new or updated regulatory requirements is communicated in a timely manner	23%	35%	19%	17%	6%	58%	23%
I know what my institution can expect from the OfS	12%	42%	15%	25%	6%	54%	31%
The OfS' regulation of quality has prompted my institution to make changes to improve the quality of education for our students in the last 12 months	15%	28%	29%	17%	11%	43%	28%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Engagement with the OfS</b>	
<i>(showing all)</i>	
	Total
Regular email updates for accountable officers from the OfS chief executive	89%
Letters from the OfS (formal communication usually sent digitally as PDFs)	87%
Regulatory guidance	74%
Website	68%
Newsletter/alerts	67%
Direct interactions with OfS staff	66%
OfS Provider Portal	64%
Webinars or online events	63%
Informal engagement with OfS senior leaders	39%
OfS-organised in-person events	30%
Provider visit by a member of the OfS senior team	20%
Other	2%
None of these	0%
NET: Engagements	89%
NET: Communications	99%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

**Q5a. Usefulness of OfS engagement and communications**

(showing all)

	Base	Very useful	Useful	Moderately useful	Slightly useful	Not at all useful	NET: Useful	NET: Not useful
Provider visit by a member of the OfS senior team	n=35	29%	40%	11%	17%	3%	69%	20%
Informal engagement with OfS senior leaders	n=67	27%	42%	22%	9%	0%	69%	9%
Direct interactions with OfS staff (email, telephone, 1:1 meetings)	n=113	30%	35%	25%	6%	4%	65%	10%
Regular email updates for accountable officers from the OfS chief executive	n=153	23%	42%	30%	3%	1%	65%	5%
Newsletter/alerts	n=114	17%	48%	31%	4%	0%	65%	4%
Webinars or online events	n=108	16%	49%	29%	6%	1%	65%	6%
OfS-organised in-person events	n=51	24%	39%	25%	12%	0%	63%	12%
Regulatory guidance	n=126	22%	41%	29%	7%	1%	63%	8%
Website	n=116	16%	46%	28%	9%	1%	62%	10%
Letters from the OfS	n=149	19%	40%	32%	6%	3%	60%	9%
OfS Provider Portal	n=109	16%	36%	34%	12%	3%	51%	15%

Base: Those who engaged with OfS engagement activities or communications (n=35-153)

**Q5b. Description of communications and engagement activities**

(showing %Yes)

	Base	Informative	Easy to understand	Timely	Relevant	Appropriate tone
Webinars or online events	n=108	84%	91%	80%	89%	78%
Regulatory guidance	n=126	82%	50%	69%	84%	63%
Regular email updates for accountable officers from the OfS chief executive	n=153	90%	90%	90%	92%	81%
Letters from the OfS (formal communication usually sent digitally as PDFs)	n=149	83%	74%	79%	89%	63%

Base: Those who engaged with OfS engagement activities or communications (n=108-153)

<b>Q6. Agreement with statements regarding OfS regulations</b>							
<i>(showing all)</i>							
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree
I know how to contact the OfS when needed	47%	35%	7%	8%	3%	82%	11%
OfS communications are clear and easy to understand	15%	46%	22%	11%	6%	61%	17%
I would be comfortable talking with the OfS about challenges my institution faces	21%	34%	13%	22%	11%	55%	32%
I can engage constructively with the OfS	18%	36%	23%	14%	9%	53%	23%
The tone of OfS communications is appropriate	18%	30%	26%	18%	9%	47%	27%
I feel able to raise concerns or questions with the OfS without fear of negative regulatory consequences for my institution	16%	20%	22%	27%	13%	37%	41%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q11. Change in quality of OfS communications in past year</b>							
<i>(showing all)</i>							
	Significantly improved	Slightly improved	Stayed the same	Slightly worsened	Significantly worsened	NET: Improved	NET: Worsened
Total	11%	40%	45%	2%	2%	51%	4%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q12new. Change in quality of OfS communications in past year</b>							
<i>(showing all)</i>							
	Significantly improved	Slightly improved	Stayed the same	Slightly worsened	Significantly worsened	NET: Improved	NET: Worsened
Opportunities for dialogue	9%	36%	46%	6%	4%	45%	9%
Tone of communications	8%	33%	50%	5%	4%	42%	8%
Overall relationship	8%	35%	50%	4%	4%	42%	8%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)

<b>Q13. Overall perception of the OfS</b>							
<i>(showing all)</i>							
	Very positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very negative	NET: Positive	NET: Negative
Total	6%	29%	34%	22%	9%	35%	32%

Base: All Respondents (n=171)