

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 work undertaken and issues that have arisen since the last board meeting on 9 June 2025 to the extent that they are not covered in other board papers.

Decisions requested

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

Paper publication

3. To be published externally along with the board papers with appropriate exemptions.

For further information, please contact Susan Lapworth, Chief Executive.

Quality and standards

Quality case work

4. On 25 June we published a case report on our quality investigation relating to computing courses at Bradford College which were provided in partnership with the University of Bolton (now the University of Greater Manchester).¹ This set out our decision about compliance and regulatory action based on our published assessment report. We found that both the college and the university had breached condition B1 (academic experience) and B4 (assessment and awards). We consider that the college has already taken several actions which provide a sufficient remedy for our concerns, including ceasing recruitment to the relevant courses. We

¹ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/bradford-college-works-with-the-ofs-to-address-concerns-about-the-quality-of-computing-courses/>.

found the university at increased risk of a future breach of quality conditions in relation to its partnership activity and will continue to monitor this risk.

Apprenticeship end-point assessments

5. We have now completed 59 onsite provider visits and finalised 54 monitoring assessment reports. Year two assessment activity is scheduled and underway and we aim to conduct a similar number of assessments. We are planning for year three activity, taking a more risk-based approach to determine which apprenticeship standards should be assessed. We are updating our published guidance to reflect the learning from the first year of assessments and plan to publish an insight brief later this year to report more on our findings.

Implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023

6. On 19 June we published Regulatory advice 24: guidance related to freedom of speech. The guidance is intended to help providers and constituent institutions navigate their new duty to secure freedom of speech and to maintain a freedom of speech code of practice.² This duty comes into force on 1 August 2025, alongside a duty on providers and constituent institutions to promote freedom of speech in higher education.
7. We consulted on the guidance between March and May 2024, and on 19 June we also published a document analysing responses to the consultation and explaining our decisions.³ When we consulted on the guidance, we also consulted on changes to the regulatory framework to reflect new duties placed on the OfS in relation to promoting the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom. These changes are confirmed in the decision document.
8. We also published short guides for students and providers, and outcomes of a survey of academics focused on perceptions of freedom of speech in higher education.⁴

Free speech investigation

9. Exempt from publication.

Equality of opportunity

Access and participation plans

10. We have started the assessment of new access and participation plans for 2026-27. As of 10 July we have received seven plans and completed our assessment of five plans. We expect a further 40 providers to submit plans by 31 July. We are seeing an increase in requests for potential variations to existing plans from providers seeking to make significant changes as a result of financial concerns.

² See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-24-guidance-related-to-freedom-of-speech/>.

³ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/consultation-on-proposed-regulatory-advice-and-other-matters-related-to-freedom-of-speech-analysis-of-responses-and-decisions/>

⁴ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/freedom-of-speech/>.

Regulating harassment and sexual misconduct

11. In the lead up to the full requirements of condition E6 coming into effect on 1 August, we have been engaging with the sector to support understanding of and compliance with the new condition. This has included engaging with sector representative bodies, participating in webinars, responding to queries from and engaging with individual providers and publishing four 'explainer' videos, addressing common questions that have arisen in recent months.⁵

Uni Connect

12. On 5 June we published a call for evidence on initial proposals for the establishment of new regional access partnerships to succeed Uni Connect.⁶ We envisage these new regional partnerships will have a wider remit to improve equality of opportunity. They will deliver a reformed national collaborative access programme and bring together higher education providers in each region, agreeing and coordinating targeted efforts which would be captured in the access and participation plans of individual providers.

Registration and degree awarding powers

13. We have announced that we will reopen for new registration and degree awarding powers (DAPs) applications and resume paused assessments on 28 August. We have contacted all providers directly affected by the pause.⁷ We are increasing the capacity of the registration team through recruitment ahead of reopening to respond to an anticipated increase in demand. We continue to progress the remaining 13 cases that were not subject to the pause and expect to conclude a further five of these by August.
14. We currently have five quality and standards assessments in progress for registration and have now published a total of 10 reports following registration decisions.
15. We currently have 12 open DAPs assessments and have completed a total of 22, with 12 reports published.

16. Exempt from publication.

Enabling regulation

Financial sustainability

17. We continue to work through new financial data from providers, updating our risk assessments. Our increased engagements with providers, and the specific monitoring plans we have with those with greater financial challenge, is benefiting our understanding of financial risk. Exempt from publication.

⁵ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/student-protection-and-support/harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/video-explainers/>

⁶ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regional-access-partnerships-call-for-evidence/>

⁷ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/update-on-ofs-plans-to-resume-assessments-for-new-registration-degree-awarding-powers-and-university-title-applications-in-august/>

18. We continue to model sensitivity to financial risks and the impact of potential government policy changes and we are preparing for analysis and modelling of UCAS recruitment and visa data in the autumn recruitment round.

19. Exempt from publication.

20. We continue to deliver a programme of financial deep dive reviews (11 reviews so far), using framework professional services consultants. These are providing greater insight into how some individual providers facing financial challenges are identifying, assessing and managing financial risk, and testing the capacity and capability to deliver transformation plans. These reviews have significant benefit for the OfS in understanding the financial challenges and the preparedness of providers for them. They enable us to design more specific monitoring and engagement plans centred around key milestones, and to hold providers to account for findings which highlight weaknesses. The reviews also provide significant value for providers, as they benefit from the findings of the expert consultants.

21. We continue to engage closely with the DfE and are actively sharing information and collaborating on the engagement of higher risk cases.

Protecting public funding

22. In May 2025, we opened a new investigation into the London School of Science and Technology (LSST) in relation to its students taught under a subcontractual arrangement with Buckinghamshire New University, **exempt from publication.**

23. In November 2024, we opened an investigation into Brit College Limited, with an initial focus on the Diploma of Education and Training course (“DET”). Our data audit identified concerns relating to student placements on the DET course, and we shared relevant information with the DfE. On 4 June, the Secretary of State made a final decision to de-designate all courses at Brit College with immediate effect. This decision means that any prospective students will not be able to access student finance from the Student Loans Company to study at Brit College, and existing students need to transfer to a different provider to continue to access student finance. The awarding body, Pearson, is facilitating the transfer and award of credit for current HND students. We have made a provisional decision to deregister the provider.

Consumer protection

24. We have noted recent reports of providers taking more proactive steps to protect the interests of students during periods of industrial action, including some universities offering compensation to students where teaching has been missed due to strikes.⁸ The follows our recent letter to universities and colleges in April 2025, in which we reiterated our expectations for how they should support students before, during and after industrial action, backed by evidence from our research into the impact of previous marking and assessment boycotts on students’ experiences.⁹

⁸ See <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/newcastle-university-offers-students-strike-compensation>

⁹ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/protecting-the-interests-of-students-during-industrial-action/> and <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/marketing-and-assessment-boycotts-student-insight-report/>

Efficient and effective OfS

25. I signed and submitted to the NAO the OfS's annual report and accounts for 2024-25 on 7 July 2025. At the time of writing, we are expecting the report to be laid before Parliament and published on 17 July 2025.