

Minutes of the OfS board meeting – 4 July 2024

Location: Teams

Timings: 1330 – 1700

Present members: Lord Wharton (Chair)
Arif Ahmed (Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom)
John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation)
Martin Coleman
Elizabeth Fagan
Katja Hall
Verity Hancock
Rachel Houchen
Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive)
Simon Levine
Dayo Olukoshi
Michael Spence
Caleb Stevens

Patrick Curry, Director Higher Education, Quality and Education from the Department for Education

Apologies: None

Officers: Jean Arnold, Deputy Director of Quality
Harriette Cradock, Chief of Staff
Josh Fleming, Director of Strategy and Delivery
Paul Huffer, Head of Legal
Katherine Jacob, Corporate Governance Senior Officer (clerk)
Lynne Mace, Head of Human Resources (item 1)
Meg Matthews, Head of Development and Effectiveness
Sophie McIvor, Head of Communications
Philippa Pickford, Director of Regulation
Jess Prestidge, Head of Strategy (item 6)
Nolan Smith, Director of Resources and Finance
David Smy, Deputy Director of Enabling Regulation
Mike Spooner, Senior Adviser to the CEO and Chair

Restricted Item 1. Remuneration and Nominations Committee report

1. This item has a separate confidential minute.

Item 2. Chair's welcome

2. The chief executive, executive directors, staff members and Patrick Curry joined the meeting.
3. Board members and the Department for Education (DfE) representative were welcomed.
4. No apologies were received from members.
5. The chair informed the board that since the last meeting he had:
 - a. Visited Dubai, hosted by the Dubai Economic Development Corporation (within Dubai Economy and Tourism), to learn more about current provision of, and future opportunities for, transnational education in Dubai, and to communicate our regulatory approach in this area.
 - b. Attended an introductory meeting on 2 July with Richard Pennycook, DfE Non-Executive Director.
6. The board noted its general duties as set out on the agenda and the need to have regard to these and other relevant considerations as it considers papers and makes decisions.

Item 3. Approval of minutes from the last meeting

7. The minutes of the board meeting on 23 May 2024 were approved.

Item 4. Chief executive's report

8. The chief executive noted highlights from her written report:
 - a. Plans to resume public-facing activities and publications in the week beginning 8 July when the pre-election restrictions are lifted.
 - b. Plans to engage with ministers and parliamentarians after the election.
9. It was acknowledged that a new government could pause work on legislative proposals or make changes to the commencement of new legislation and this may pause or change the work the OfS had been expecting to carry out this year.
10. The board noted that media coverage of the OfS's work had increased, particularly, driven by significant coverage of the OfS report on financial sustainability and the related Insight brief published in May. The board noted that routine media updates are being revised, and this will include improved sentiment analysis of media coverage.

Item 5. Jisc's Data Futures programme

11. This paper provided information on the progress of the Data Futures programme, its value for money, information about the independent review and the current position in relation to the data return due for submission in autumn 2024. The paper also included information about the additional oversight that will be in place, via the Risk and Audit Committee, for the delivery of this year's student data return.

12. The board heard that the OfS has recruited a Chief Data Officer to start in early July. One of her early priorities will be to develop a new data strategy.
13. It was agreed that there are a variety of reasons that the 2023-24 data return was challenging and delayed, and that the independent review will comment on this.
14. The board noted the update and asked to be kept informed of progress.

Item 6. Draft OfS strategy

15. The Head of Strategy joined the meeting.
16. The board had discussed strategy goals in June, and received an initial draft OfS strategy document informed by this discussion and the student and sector engagement conducted before the election was called. The board also received a revised timeline for the consultation, further details on some of the policy proposals and background information on the development of the definition of the student interest.

17. Exempt from publication.

18. The board heard that further engagement is planned after the election. The strategy team will take the board's feedback into account alongside the further engagement before producing a draft strategy for consultation.
19. The board welcomed the draft strategy and appreciated the significant effort that had gone into the development process.

Item 7. Risk report

20. The risk report updated the board on the current strategic risks and the principal corporate risks that are rated as 'high'.

21. Exempt from publication.

22. The board received the risk report.

Item 8. Annual review of strategic risks, risk appetite and tolerance

23. The board received a set of revised strategic risks, following the annual review by the Executive Committee and the Risk and Audit Committee.

24. Exempt from publication.

25. The board approved the revised strategic risks and the new strategic risk.

Item 9. OfS people update

26. The board received a paper providing the annual data about the OfS workforce and a summary of the people survey results. This had been discussed at the June meeting of the Remuneration and Nominations committee and was shared with the board for information.

27. The board received the update.

Item 10. Student panel update

28. The board received an oral report of the meeting held on 20 June.
29. The student panel had been joined by the Director for Fair Access and Participation and his team for a valuable discussion on defining the student interest. The panel had noted that perspectives among students differ: while most student panel members are engaged with the OfS as a result of their wider engagement with students' unions, other students, who are less engaged with the regulation of higher education, are less likely to see themselves as consumers.
30. The board heard that most members of the student panel have agreed to extend their terms into the next academic year.
31. The chair of the board thanked the student panel for their very targeted and constructive input.

Item 11. Finance report

32. A report was provided on the financial position of the OfS at the end of period two (31 May 2024).
33. Exempt from publication.
34. Exempt from publication.

Item 11. Report from the Quality Assessment Committee

35. A written report of the committee meeting held on 29 April was shared with the board and an oral update of the meeting held on 28 June was given.
36. At the June meeting, the committee had focused on degree awarding powers cases.
37. The committee was thanked for its significant work in recent months.

Item 15. Report from the Risk and Audit Committee

38. A written report of the committee meeting held on 6 June was shared with the board. At its meeting, the committee had discussed:
- a. Oversight of Jisc's Data Futures programme.
 - b. The revised strategic risks.
39. It was noted that the committee had not been able to complete its work in relation to the OfS Annual Report and Accounts because the process has been slightly delayed, including because of the election.

Closing remarks

40. Members and staff were thanked for their contributions.
41. The board was reminded that the next ordinary board meeting would be on 10 October 2024, in person in London. (Following the meeting, this date was changed to 9 October 2024).

42. Michael Spence and Verity Hancock left the meeting due to a conflict of interest. Patrick Curry left the meeting.