

# OfS student panel meeting

18 January 2024

Time: 1300–1700

Location: Mary Ward House, Tavistock Pl, London WC1H 9SM

Present members: Caleb Stevens (Chair)

Anita Hashmi

Michael Steele

Misha Patel

Molly Edwards

Nkechi Adebayo

Oscar Minto

Thibau Grumett

Attending: Susan Lapworth (Chief Executive) (Item 1)

Arif Ahmed (Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom) (Item 4)

Matthew Skuse (Senior Officer for Freedom of Speech (Item 4)

Heather Bowyer (Senior Officer for Access and Participation) (Item 5)

Charlotte Finlay (Student Surveys Senior Officer) (Item 8 and 10)

John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation)

Julia Moss (Student Surveys Manager)

Laura Radcliffe (Project Support Administrator)

## Item 1 – Chair’s welcome

1. The chair welcomed the student panel members to the meeting and introduced the OfS members of staff.

2. The chair congratulated Nkechi in her new appointment as deputy chair and thanked everyone who expressed an interest in the position.
3. The chair welcomed John Blake, the Director for Fair Access and Participation.

## **Item 2 – Chief Executive’s update**

4. The chair welcomed the chief executive, Susan Lapworth, to the meeting to begin her update.
5. The update included:
  - a. The recent publication of further quality assessment reports.
  - b. The continued publication of the final TEF outcomes.
  - c. The launch of two consultations relating to the OfS’s functions relating to free speech.
  - d. Collection of information about students’ unions from the relevant institutions that are now subject to the duties of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act.
  - e. The publication of awards of additional funding for growth in degree apprenticeships.
6. The chief executive invited a discussion with the panel on the points raised in her update.
7. The chief executive thanked the panel for its work.

## **Item 3 – Training: Introduction to Parliament and select committees**

8. The chair welcomed Charlotte Finlay, Student Surveys Senior Officer to begin her training on Parliament and select committees.
9. Charlotte Finlay explained that following on from the panel’s involvement in the OfS’s response to the House of Lords Inquiry, information about the role of select committees was raised as a training need.
10. The training covered:
  - a. An Introduction to Parliament:
    - i. role of the House of Commons
    - ii. role of the House of Lords
    - iii. difference between Parliament and Government.
  - b. Introduction to the work of select committees:
    - i. what are they
    - ii. how do they work
    - iii. what is their impact.

## **Item 4 – Discussion 1: Freedom of Speech**

11. The chair welcomed Arif Ahmed, Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom and Matt Skuse, Senior Officer for Freedom of Speech to the meeting.
12. The director explained that the aim of the discussion was to hear the panel's thoughts on:
  - a. The consultation relating to the free speech complaints scheme.
  - b. The consultation relating to the OfS's role in regulating relevant students' unions on free speech matters.
13. The director explained that:
  - a. The OfS's approach to regulating free speech is not political and is not aimed at protecting or promoting any particular views. The goal is to ensure that everyone involved in higher education is free to express their views within the law, no matter what they are.
  - b. He was particularly keen to hear the panel's views on how to encourage student engagement with the consultations.
14. The director gave an overview of the freedom of speech complaints scheme.
  - a. It will be available to students, academics, former students, former academics, actual and invited visiting speakers and those applying for jobs at an institution who believe they have suffered adverse consequences as a result of their university not upholding their freedom of speech duties.
  - b. The complainant will be required to raise their issue through their university's internal complaints procedure first. After 30 days or after the internal process is complete (whichever is sooner), the complainant will be eligible to use the OfS complaints scheme.
15. The director invited panel members to discuss the following:
  - a. What are their opinions around the principles of the free speech complaints scheme?
  - b. How can we encourage students to engage with the consultation?
16. The director gave an overview of the OfS's approach to monitoring students' unions in free speech matters.
  - a. Students' Unions (SUs) will have a duty to take steps to secure free speech within the law and to also produce a code of practice, explaining their values on freedom of speech and their approach to speaker events and other matters. The code must be applicable to any events and visiting speakers linked to SUs.
  - b. The code must include details about how the organizers of an event will not be expected to cover the costs of any security needed outside exceptional circumstances.
  - c. The OfS's duties relate to how SUs will be monitored.
  - d. Monitoring will be risk based and not routine. It will be based on intelligence we receive which indicates whether or not SUs are meeting their free speech duties.

17. The director invited panel members to discuss the following:
  - a. What are their opinions around the principles of the how OfS will monitor SUs?
  - b. How can we encourage students to engage with the consultation?
18. The director thanked panel members for their time and encouraged everyone to provide any further thoughts through the formal consultation process.

## **Item 5 – Discussion 2: Student engagement in the development of access and participation plans**

19. The chair welcomed Heather Bowyer, Senior Officer for Access and Participation.
20. Heather Bowyer explained the role of the Access and Participation Team.
  - a. The main regulatory lever for the team is the access and participation plans (APPs). Here the provider is asked to outline how it aims to reduce the risks to equality of opportunity within its own context.
  - b. APPs can only be approved by the Director for Fair Access and Participation or the OfS board. A plan can be approved for up to four years or not at all.
21. Heather outlined the expectations around student engagement in the development of APPs.
  - a. At a minimum, the provider should consult with students on the plan prior to submitting it to the OfS.
  - b. Providers should involve students as active partners and co-creators in the development, implementation and evaluation of their APPs.
  - c. Student representatives are being invited to complete a voluntary submission, which explains whether they support or do not support their provider's plan
  - d. .Only one student submission per provider is permitted. The submission should be representative of the thoughts of multiple students, rather than a single voice.
  - e. It must be submitted separately from the provider, but we ask that the students work with their provider to share insights which might support the provider to focus and refine its overall plan.
  - f. Of the 35 providers in the first wave of APPs, the OfS received 20 student submissions.
22. Heather Bowyer outlined that the aim of the discussion is to collect the student panel's views on how we can support and encourage students to engage with the student submission process.
23. Heather Bowyer invited the panel to discuss the following:
  - a. When was the last time you felt listened to by your higher education provider?
  - b. What made you feel listened to?

- c. What can providers do to encourage a student submission?
- d. What can the OfS do to encourage providers to support students in engaging with the student submission?
- e. What can the OfS do to support and engage students in the APP process?
- f. What other ways could students provide intelligence relating to an APP?

24. Heather thanked the panel for their input.

### **Item 6 – Student panel impact**

25. The chair handed over to Charlotte Finlay, Senior Officer for the Student Engagement team to speak at the meeting.

26. Charlotte Finlay relayed they key takeaways and impact of discussions with the panel from the previous meeting.

### **Item 7 – Close of session**

27. The chair thanked the student panel for its contributions.

28. The OfS staff exited the meeting to allow for a panel member closed session.