



Department for Education

Office for Students – Chief Executive

Candidate Information Pack

Closing date: 12 January 2026

Foreword

Thank you for your interest in becoming Chief Executive of the Office for Students (OfS).

England's higher education sector is one of the most dynamic and diverse in the world. Our universities and colleges serve communities across the country, each with distinct missions, values and strengths, from world-leading research institutions to specialist providers and further education colleges that open doors to opportunity for many. They provide a driving force for economic growth and are a central part of our plans to put education front and centre of national life. This rich tapestry reflects the diversity of our nation, and it is vital that the leadership of the sector does too.

The government is committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity and ensuring that every student, regardless of background, can access high-quality education and graduate with the skills to thrive. The Office for Students plays a central role in delivering this vision, regulating the sector to ensure financial stability, quality and outcomes that truly benefit students and society.

These are pivotal times for higher education in England. The government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, published earlier this year, sets out a bold vision for a reformed system that is more specialised, financially sustainable, aligned with the needs of our economy and widens access to higher education for the most disadvantaged in society. This ambition is reflected in the Prime Minister's new national target for two-thirds of young people to be engaged in higher-level learning by the age of 25. The OfS will be central to delivering this vision as it enters a new phase of development shaped by the recommendations of the "Fit for the Future" review.

We are seeking a Chief Executive who can lead the OfS through the next phase of its work, confident in navigating regulation in a large, complex, internationally important and high-profile sector. We are looking for someone who is deeply committed to ensuring the regulator delivers on its core priorities – maintaining high standards of quality, regulating in the interests of students, protecting public investment and ensuring the financial sustainability of providers. You will be expected to support the sector in meeting the ambitions of the White Paper, including the shift towards a system that better meets the skills needs of the economy, underpinned by a confident, agile regulator that drives continuous improvement, tackles low-quality provision and abuses of public money.

This is a leadership role of national significance. It demands strategic vision, operational rigour and a deep commitment to the transformative power of education.

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Thank you once again for considering this opportunity. If you believe in the power of education to transform lives and want to contribute your unique skills and experience to this vital work, we look forward to hearing from you.

Bridget Phillipson
Secretary of State for Education

About the role

The Chief Executive of the OfS is a full-time executive role at the forefront of the government's higher education agenda. The Chief Executive will lead the OfS in acting as the independent regulator for higher education in England, championing the interests of students.

The Chief Executive will lead on the implementation of the new OfS strategy. The strategy sets out four attitudes to guide the OfS's approach to risk-based regulation and drive the delivery of its objectives:

- Ambitious for students from all backgrounds.
- Collaborative in pursuit of our priorities and in our stewardship of the sector.
- Vigilant about safeguarding public money and student fees.
- Vocal that higher education is a force for good, for individuals, communities and the country.

The OfS will focus on three areas of priority: quality; student experience and support; and sector resilience. This includes making sure students receive a high-quality education and get the experiences they have been promised.

Accountable to the Chair of the OfS Board, Professor Edward Peck, the Chief Executive will be responsible for the overall leadership, management and resourcing of the OfS, an organisation of approximately 500 people, building capacity and capability to ensure the OfS's effective performance as the regulator of higher education in England.

The Chief Executive will coordinate and implement actions determined by the OfS Board. They will need to work closely with government and sector bodies, as well as with stakeholders across the higher education sector. The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring the OfS aspects of the higher education system are delivered successfully.

Responsibilities

- Provide overall leadership and management of the OfS as the independent regulator of higher education in England, delivering the new strategy and its vision in championing the interests of students.

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- Oversee the effectiveness and performance of the OfS and ensure it is discharging its statutory duties in line with ministerial priorities, government policy and actions, and direction determined by the OfS Board. This includes ensuring that the OfS operates efficiently through improved ways of working.
- Work closely with Ministers and government officials to take the OfS through its next phase of critical work, including in relation to driving up quality, increasing opportunity and reducing bureaucracy.
- Represent the OfS to Parliament, students, stakeholders across the higher education sector and the media, championing its work.
- Ensure robust financial management is in place, being accountable to the OfS Board and Parliament for all funding allocated to and by the OfS as the Accounting Officer.

About the Office for Students

The OfS is the independent regulator of higher education in England. Its primary aim is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.

It regulates in the interests of students and prospective students from all backgrounds, whether they are undergraduates, postgraduates or studying other levels of higher education; UK-based or international; studying full-time or part-time; or based on campus, learning at a distance or in work-based settings.

Created by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), which sets out its powers and duties, the OfS regulates through a voluntary register of higher education providers. Over 420 providers are registered with the regulator, teaching or supervising over 2.5 million students.

Through its regulatory framework, the OfS promotes high-quality education to ensure that all students, regardless of background, achieve outcomes that will meet the skills needs of the economy.

The OfS is funded primarily through registration fees paid by the higher education sector. The OfS also distributes the Strategic Priorities Grant funding annually to support teaching and students in higher education.

As an independent public body, the OfS reports to Parliament through the Department for Education.

Who we're looking for

It is essential that you provide, to the best of your ability, evidence and proven examples in each of the following selection criteria. Candidates' responses will be further discussed with those invited for interview. If there is a high volume of applicants, preliminary sifting will be done using only the first Essential Criterion.

Essential criteria

- Ability to provide operational, cultural and strategic senior leadership to a complex organisation. This should include demonstrable success in ensuring an organisation is progressing and performing effectively in relation to its objectives, and a track record of identifying and implementing efficiencies to embed a culture of continuous improvement.
- Proven system, as well as organisational, leadership skills, with evidence that gives confidence in the candidate's ability to play a key role in the leadership of the English higher education sector.
- A track record of managing corporate change and setting strategic direction in the context of organisational transformation.
- An outstanding communicator with the ability to influence, command the respect of and build effective relationships with stakeholders across the public, private or voluntary sectors.
- Commitment to the principles of social mobility, and to delivering high quality and standards in English higher education.
- Expertise in, or a demonstrable strong commitment to, higher education.

Desirable criteria

- Experience of regulatory activity, and an understanding of the strengths and limitations of regulators, and the implications of these matters for the higher education sector.

In your application please include:

- A CV setting out your career history, with key responsibilities and achievements relevant to this role.
- A supporting personal statement (maximum two pages of A4) detailing how your skills, qualities and experience provide evidence of your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the essential criteria.

Equality and diversity

We encourage applications from people with a diverse range of backgrounds. The Department champions social justice in all of its policies and is committed to opening up opportunities for people from all backgrounds, all socio-economic classes and all regions of the UK. We are committed to embedding this principle into our recruitment and public appointments.

Disability Confident: We are a member of the government's Disability Confident scheme. As part of implementing the scheme, we guarantee an interview for anyone with a disability whose application meets the essential criteria for the role and who has asked that their application be considered under the scheme. Indicating that you wish your application to be considered under the scheme will in no way prejudice your application.

Terms of appointment

Location

The Office for Students has offices in London and Bristol and the post-holder will be expected to attend those offices frequently and regularly. The role holder will be required to attend bi-monthly board meetings which are normally held in-person.

Time requirement

This is a full-time executive position. The contract will commence in April 2026. The appointment will be for a 4-year term, with the option of this being extended.

Remuneration

The Chief Executive will be employed by the OfS and will receive a salary of c. £145k per annum, depending on skills and experience. The Chief Executive is also eligible for non-pensionable, non-consolidated, discretionary performance-related bonuses each year for exceptional performance.

Expenses

You will be reimbursed for any travel and subsistence expenses necessarily incurred while on official OfS business in line with the OfS travel and subsistence policy.

Pension

The Chief Executive of the OfS will be eligible to join the Civil Service Pension Scheme. Key benefits include:

- A defined benefit pension that is inflation-proof and not subject to investment risk.

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- Generous employer contributions, typically over 28% of pensionable earnings.
- Flexible retirement options, including the choice of a tax-free lump sum.
- Death in service benefits and survivor pensions.
- Support for ill-health retirement.

Conflicts of interest

You should note the requirement to declare any conflict of interest that arises in the course of OfS business and the need to declare any relevant business interests, positions of authority or other connections with organisations relevant to the business of the OfS. If the selection panel is concerned that such interests may impact on the independence or perceived independence required for this role, they will discuss their concerns with you if you are invited for interview.

Other

You will be expected to demonstrate high standards of corporate and personal conduct. The successful candidate will be asked to subscribe to a Code of Conduct for Members of the Board and must confirm a sound understanding of and commitment to the principles of public life (see: www.gov.uk/government/government-efficiency-transparency-and-accountability).

How to apply

To apply you will need to create an account or sign in on the Public Appointments website. Once you are logged into your account, click on “Apply for this role” and follow the on-screen instructions. To apply, all candidates are required to provide:

- a Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- a supporting statement
- equality information
- information relating to any outside interests or reputational issues

Create an account: apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/create-account

Sign in: apply-for-public-appointment.service.gov.uk/auth/sign-in

You will be asked to check and confirm your personal details to ensure your application is accurate. You will also have the opportunity to make a reasonable adjustment request or apply under the Disability Confident scheme before you submit your application.

The closing date for applications is 12 January 2026.

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Those successfully shortlisted will be invited to engagement panel(s) ahead of interview. The Secretary of State and/or Minister Smith may decide to meet appointable candidates before making final decisions.

Principles of public life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. Consistent with the Governance Code, applicants will be assessed on merit, and all candidates for public appointment will need to uphold the standards of conduct set out in the Seven Principles of Public Life. These will be tested as part of the selection process and the Selection Panel must satisfy itself that all candidates for appointments can meet these standards, which are:

Selflessness: Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

How to complain

Please contact the OfS sponsorship team at the Department for Education if you would like to make a complaint regarding your application:

OfficeforStudents.APPLICATIONS@education.gov.uk

We will acknowledge your complaint upon receipt and respond within 15 working days.

If you are not content with our response please contact the Commissioner for Public Appointments: publicappointments@csc.gov.uk

Further information on complaints can be found on the Commissioner for Public Appointments' website: publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk