



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
House of Commons
London
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22 July 2020

Dear Robert,

Recruitment of the Chair of the Office for Students – Pre-appointment process

You may be aware that Sir Michael Barber, current Chair of the Office for Students, has recently announced that when his term of office finishes on 31 March 2021 he does not wish to serve another term.

As this is such an important role, I would like to move swiftly to appoint a replacement for Sir Michael, ready to work with me and other ministers to set the strategy and vision the Office for Students and the Higher Education sector for the future.

I am writing to you to set out my plans for making that appointment and outline the type of person we are looking for to fill this role. I have therefore enclosed with this letter our draft advertisement for the role, as well as the role specification, advertising strategy and timeline. The membership of the advisory assessment panel for the appointment is still being confirmed.

I would like the post to be advertised over the summer period, starting on 18 August 2020 and would therefore be very grateful for any comments the Committee may have on the attached documents by 7 August 2020.

Due to the tight timeline for the appointment, we might, therefore, need to continue our correspondence on the role into the first week of recess, if you are content to do that. This is essential to ensure that an appointment is made in advance of Sir Michael's departure in March next year.

This is the first step in the appointment process and I understand that you may also choose to scrutinise the shortlist and undertake a pre-appointment hearing once I have chosen my preferred candidate. I will ask my officials to contact your clerk about the next steps and attached timeline, but I would hope any hearing could take place in early January 2021.

I look forward to the Committee's involvement in appointing the second Chair to this highly important role for the Higher Education sector.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Secretary of State for Education

ANNEX A

ROLE OF THE CHAIR

1. Work closely with Ministers and government officials to set a new clear strategic direction for the OfS, taking it into the next phase of its critical work.
2. Support and challenge the Chief Executive on the effectiveness and performance of the OfS, monitoring progress against its objectives and ensuring it is discharging its statutory duties in line with government policy, and in a way which minimises bureaucracy wherever possible.
3. Build effective relationships with partners in the provider, research and business community, to engage with them, share data, work together on areas of common interest and promote understanding of the OfS' role and its activities.
4. Steer and manage the OfS board. Make recommendations to Ministers on the appointment of board members, ensuring that board membership reflects the diversity of the UK, and ensuring high standards of propriety and robust financial management across the OfS.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Applicants will be assessed against the following criteria. If there is a high volume of applicants, preliminary sifting will be done using only the first criteria. In your application, as well as sharing your C.V with us, you should demonstrate clearly how you meet each of the following requirements of the post (max 300 words per criteria – if this is exceeded only the first 300 words will be considered).

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

1. Excellent strategic thinking capability, experience of setting a clear vision and demonstrating strategic leadership in a range of contexts and complex environments.
2. A strong communicator with outstanding ability to influence and build effective relationships with stakeholders across the public, private or voluntary sectors, including the ability to communicate effectively with ministers.
3. Experience and a sound understanding of board management and commitment to the principles of public life.
4. Commitment to the principles of levelling up, championing opportunity for all, and representing or advocating for disadvantaged regions in the UK.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

5. Sound knowledge and understanding of the operation of regulatory activity, the strengths and limitations of regulators, and the implication of these matters to the higher education sector.