



The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

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11th October 2024

Dear Helen,

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

You may be aware that I recently appointed Sir David Behan as interim chair of the Office for Students. This was an exceptional direct appointment given the immediate resignation of the former chair, Lord Wharton on 9 July. As this is such an important role, I would like to move swiftly to appoint a substantive replacement for Sir David.

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 as soon as possible and ideally by mid-October, for a period of four weeks. This is essential to ensure that an appointment is made in advance of Sir David's short-term appointment ending in Spring 2025.

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 by mid-February 2025 latest.

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

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education



Helen Hayes MP, Chair Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP

Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
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22 October 2024

Dear Bridget,

Thank you for your letter dated 11 October 2024, regarding the recruitment of the chair of the Office for Students (OfS).

I appreciate the urgency and importance of appointing a substantive replacement for Sir David Behan. The role of the chair is indeed crucial for the Higher Education sector. It is essential that a suitable candidate is promptly identified, ahead of Sir David's appointment ending in Spring 2025.

I have reviewed the enclosed advertising strategy, draft advertisement, role specification, and timeline. The advertising strategy is appropriate, and I am pleased that the department will be circulating the post to stakeholder groups and relevant networks. I have no objection to the decision to approach two potential candidates directly. I hope this strategy will attract a diverse range of high-quality candidates. If, upon review before the closure of the recruitment exercise, this is not the case, the department should consider alternative approaches.

Turning to the role specification, the Department should consider whether the criteria labelled as 'desirable' ought to be moved to 'essential' criteria. Deep knowledge and experience of regulatory principles and practice, along with an understanding of the challenges facing the higher education sector, are vital for any incoming chair of the OfS. The successful candidate will need to be able to use regulatory levers to drive improvement and culture change, and must understand not only what challenges face the sector but also why these challenges have arisen.

Once appointed, I am sure that the Education Committee will value the opportunity to engage in the pre-appointment process, including scrutinising the shortlist and conducting a pre-appointment hearing. I will instruct my secretariat to coordinate with your officials to ensure the hearing can take place by mid-February 2025, subject to committee authorisation. I hope that the urgency of the recruitment will not impede any scrutiny by the Committee, and I would be grateful if you could ensure documentation is provided at appropriate timeframes to allow my committee to consider matters in the detail they deserve.

I hope that this feedback is useful, and I look forward to working with you to appoint a new chair who will effectively lead the Office for Students and support the Higher Education sector.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Helen Hayes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Helen Hayes MP
Chair of the Education Committee