

Education Committee

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# Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students

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Third Report of Session 2024–25

HC 731

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# Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

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## Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

## Publication

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# 1 Background to the hearing

## Office for Students

1. The Office for Students (OfS) is a non-departmental public body, established by Part 1 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. It describes its purpose in its Draft Strategy 2025–2030 as to “ensure that students from all backgrounds benefit from high quality higher education, delivered by a diverse, sustainable sector that continues to improve”.<sup>1</sup>
2. The draft Strategy, which was open for consultation until 20 February, gave three strategic goals:
  - Quality [of Higher Education courses],
  - the wider student interest, and
  - sector resilience, encompassing financial sustainability and effective governance.

## Pre-appointment hearing request

3. Pre-appointment hearings by select committees for certain public appointments have been conducted since 2008 and are provided for within the Cabinet Office Governance Code on Public Appointments 2024.<sup>2</sup>
4. The Rt Hon Bridget Philipson MP, Secretary of State for Education, wrote to us on 11 October 2024 advising us that she wished to appoint a substantive replacement for Sir David Behan, who had been appointed interim Chair in exceptional circumstances when the previous Chair, Lord Wharton of Yarm, had resigned with immediate effect.<sup>3</sup> The Secretary of State enclosed the draft advertisement for the role, the role specification, advertising strategy and timeline and advised that she planned the post to be advertised by mid-October so that the appointment could be made before the end of Sir David’s appointment in the Spring. The documents are appended to this Report.

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1 Office for Students, [Draft Strategy 2025–2030](#)

2 Cabinet Office, [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#), February 2024, para 10.1

3 [Letter from Secretary of State](#), 11 October 2024; “OfS Chair”, OfS, [Press release](#), 9 July 2024; “OfS responds to government higher education announcement”, OfS, [Press Release](#) 26 July 2024

5. On 25 February 2025, the Department notified us that Professor Edward William Peck CBE had been chosen as the Government's preferred candidate to take up the post of the Chair of the Office for Students. Professor Peck's curriculum vitae and personal statement are appended to this Report.
6. Under guidance published by the Liaison Committee, Select Committees are encouraged to seek answers from a Candidate by use of a written questionnaire, inviting the disclosure of conflicts of interest and probing the Candidate's experience and plans for the role. Professor Peck's answers to our questionnaire are appended to this Report.
7. We accordingly invited Professor Peck to attend a pre-appointment hearing on Tuesday 4 March.

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## 2 The recruitment process

8. The recruitment campaign was launched on 30 October and closed on 28 November 2024. 28 applications were received in response. 4 candidates were invited to interview as they were deemed to have met the bar. Prior to interview, two candidates withdrew their applications on the grounds that they wanted to continue to focus on their current work.
9. Interviews were held on 4 February. The recruitment panel was chaired by Julia Kinniburgh, Director General of Skills, Department for Education and its members were Sir Kevan Collins, Lead DfE non-executive board member and Andrea Coscelli, Senior Partner and Head of Keystone Capital's practice in Europe (Independent panel member), previously CEO of CMA to 2022. The panel interviewed the remaining two candidates on 4 February 2025 and deemed Professor Peck appointable.
10. Following the interview stage, the Secretary of State agreed with the panel's recommendation that Professor Peck be subject to a pre-appointment hearing as the government preferred candidate.
11. The appointment is for a term of 4 years, commencing late Summer 2025.

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## 3 The Chair of the Office for Students

### Role and person specification

12. The Chair of the Office for Students is an appointment made by the Secretary of State for a term of 4 years. The job description for Chair states that it is seeking “an outstanding chair who can bring world class leadership, influence and strategic direction to the Office for Students board”.
13. The job description states that while England’s higher education sector includes “some of the best universities in the world”, the “increasingly difficult financial context” creates a particular need “to safeguard students’ interests”. Candidates will need to provide “strong, inspiring leadership”, “experience of working at the most senior level” and possess “first-rate strategic thinking”.
14. According to the role profile, the main responsibilities of the Chair are to:
  - Support and challenge the Chief Executive on the effectiveness and performance of the OfS;
  - Implement the core recommendations of the independent review of the OfS;
  - Deliver high standards of “regularity and propriety” supporting ministers on the appointment of board members and ensure the effectiveness and representativeness of the board; and
  - Lead the board in making decisions, with regard to guidance from the Secretary of State.
15. The recruitment pack drawn up by the Department for Education set out four essential criteria that the successful candidate would need to be able to demonstrate. They were:
  - Demonstrable strategic leadership experience at board level, including of driving organisational change and setting high standards for delivery of strategic objectives;



- Evidenced ability to guide effective decision making at a senior level, particularly in relation to the management of finance and risk;
- Outstanding ability to influence and build effective relationships with a wide range of senior stakeholders and experience of effective engagement with ministers and senior civil servants; and
- A commitment to the principles of public life and to the principle of removing barriers to opportunity in higher education.

**16.** Candidates were also expected to be able to demonstrate the following desirable criteria:

- Deep knowledge and experience of regulatory principles and practice, including how to drive improvement through regulatory levers and effecting cultural change; and
- Experience, understanding and analysis of the challenges facing the higher education sector.

## The Government’s preferred candidate: Professor Edward William Peck CBE

**17.** The Secretary of State’s preferred candidate is Professor Edward William Peck CBE. He is currently the vice-chancellor of Nottingham Trent University until Summer 2025 and his CV has been included as an appendix.

**18.** In the Secretary of State’s view,

Professor Peck has played a key role in supporting students and has a wealth of experience that will be instrumental in guiding the OfS forward. I look forward to finalising his appointment.<sup>4</sup>

**19.** In line with the guidance drawn up by the Liaison Committee on the conduct of pre-appointment hearings, our questioning sought to test the professional competence and personal independence of the candidate. The Liaison Committee also observes that a candidate will need to be able to withstand parliamentary and public scrutiny should they take up the post, and that questioning may therefore be robust.<sup>5</sup> We questioned Professor Peck on the following areas:

- the candidate’s priorities, if appointed;
- how his previous experiences have prepared him for this role;

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<sup>4</sup> [Preferred candidate to lead Office for Students confirmed - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>5</sup> Liaison Committee, *Pre-appointment Hearings*, Third Report of Session 2017–19, HC 2307, 19 June 2019

- the challenges facing the higher education sector today.
20. A transcript of the oral evidence is published on the Committee's website.

## The Committee's views on the suitability of the candidate

21. The Committee held a pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Office for Students, on 4 March 2025.
22. We welcome Professor Peck's engagement with his new role, and his focus on the student experience and welfare. We agree with his assessment that the most important priority for higher education is the student experience across a range of dimensions, including mental health and quality of courses. The financial viability of higher education providers presents critical challenges and we look forward to Professor Peck's embrace of the role the OfS can play in supporting institutions to plan and mitigate financial risk. His recognition that the sector needs to do more to widen access and participation for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds is important and we look forward to seeing how he guides the OfS Board on this goal.
23. Professor Peck's experience prepares him well for this new role. He has extensive executive experience after serving as Vice Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University since 2014. As a member of the independent advisory panel for post-18 education and funding, he has thought about the future of higher education from a strategic perspective and contributed to advice to government. His role as DfE Student Support Champion and Chair of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce equip him well for improving the performance of the sector in catering to a growing area of need from students. He has contributed as a board member to more than ten boards over his career and is well-prepared for the move to Chair of the Board. He is also familiar with regulatory frameworks and understands the important contribution of regulation to service design and delivery. We look forward to seeing the OfS develop under his Chairmanship and to hearing from him at future meetings.
24. We covered a number of areas of questioning with Professor Peck. We covered the recent criticism of the OfS by the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee and the recommendations for change put forward by the Behan Review. We then turned to the broader future of higher education itself and the role of the OfS in supporting students and the sector in a climate of financial precarity, while continuing to drive a high level of quality in academic courses. We asked Professor Peck how he would assert the independence of the OfS from Ministers, while maintaining good

relationships within government and outside it to bolster the credibility of the OfS. We asked him how he would guide the Board on protecting freedom of speech in academia; and what role the OfS could play in widening access and participation for students from under-represented backgrounds. Finally, we asked about value for money for students and how the OfS could champion the wider student experience, with particular attention to good mental health and zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

**25.**

**CONCLUSION**

The Committee endorses the appointment of Professor Peck as Chair of the Office for Students.

**26.**

**CONCLUSION**

A strong leadership team must work with the Chair to take the OfS forward. We will hold regular accountability hearings to examine the OfS and its leadership team as it works to support students, HE providers and the Government and address the current challenges facing the higher education sector.

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# Appendix 1: Posts which are subject to pre-appointment hearings by the Education Committee

HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills

Children's Commissioner for England

Chief Regulator, Ofqual

Chair of the Office for Students

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## Appendix 2: Correspondence from the Secretary of State

### Letter dated 11 October 2024 from the Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education, to the Chair of the Education Select Committee, Helen Hayes MP

#### **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.

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# Appendix 3: Recruitment information provided by the Department

## Government preferred candidate for the role of chair of the Office for Students (OfS) board

### 1. Preferred candidate: Professor Edward Peck

Professor Edward William Peck CBE is current vice-chancellor of Nottingham Trent University (until Summer 2025). He was brought up in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, educated at Ormskirk Grammar School, and the University of Bristol, graduating with a degree in Philosophy in 1981. He subsequently undertook graduate studies at Bristol Polytechnic and the University of Nottingham focusing on Health Services Management and Social Policy.

Having commenced a career in management with the NHS, and serving in a number of senior posts, Peck switched to an academic career bringing his practical experience of the NHS to the analysis of health management policy. He gained a PhD from the University of Newcastle and in 1992 joined King's College London, becoming the Director of its Centre for Mental Health Services. Subsequently, from 2002 to 2008, Peck was Director of the Health Services Management Centre at the University of Birmingham.

More recently in 2018 he was invited to join the panel of the Augar Review. In May 2022, DfE appointed him as its first Student Support Champion. In June 2023, he was appointed as the Chair of the Ministerial Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce.

A brief summary of Edward's career is as follows:

2014 – Summer 2025: Vice-Chancellor, Nottingham Trent University

2018 – present: Trustee of UCAS (Chair from 2024 – present)

2023 – present: Chair of the HE Mental Health Implementation Taskforce (to June 2025)

2022 – present: DfE Student Support Champion (to June 2025)

2018 – 2019: Member of the Independent Advisory Panel for Post-18 Education and Funding, the Augar Review

2008 – 2014: Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Social Sciences, University of Birmingham

**CV:** See Appendix 4.

**Personal Statement:** See Appendix 5.

## 2. Declaration of interests:

It was announced in January 2025 that the candidate, Professor Edward Peck, would step down from his role as Vice Chancellor and President of Nottingham Trent University in Summer 2025. His positions as chair of the HE Mental Health Taskforce and DfE Student Champion end in June this year. The candidate has also advised that if appointed to the role of OfS chair he would step down from his role as acting chair of the board of trustees of UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). He would also decline any future roles in the higher education sector and step away from his membership of three economic development bodies in Nottinghamshire.

The candidate has confirmed that there isn't anything of relevance which could impact the public confidence of his suitability. DfE officials have also carried out due diligence check (covering bankruptcy, social media and internet checks) and did not identify any issues or matters which would cause damage or impact negatively on government.

The applicant has declared that he was a member of the Labour Party in 2020 but undertook no political activity and has not been a member since.

## 3. Information about the role:

A summary of the role and background to the OfS is provided below. The full candidate information pack is provided at Annex C.

The Secretary of State for Education is seeking to appoint a new non-executive chair to the board of the Office for Students (OfS), to support and challenge the organisation as it continues its drive to improve higher education for students in England and deliver upon this government's higher education reforms.

## 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
- based on campus, learning at a distance or in work-based settings or anything in between.

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, and they teach or supervise over 2.5 million students.

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

On the census date of 31 March 2024, the OfS employed 461 full-time equivalent staff. The regulator is funded primarily through registration fees paid by the higher education sector. Fees for academic year 2024–2025 will total around £30 million. The OfS also distributes around £1.6 billion of government funding annually. This supports teaching and students in higher education, including for expensive to deliver subjects, students at risk of discontinuing their studies and funding to world-leading specialist providers.

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

## About the role

The responsibilities as chair are set out in the [Framework Document](#) between the Department for Education and the Office for Students. The chair is responsible for leading the Board in the delivery of its responsibilities including, but not limited to, the following:



**1.** Support and challenge the Chief Executive providing scrutiny on the effectiveness and performance of the OfS, monitoring progress against its objectives; formulating and ensuring successful delivery of the OfS strategy, promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources and ensuring it is discharging its statutory duties in line with government priorities in a way which minimises regulatory burden wherever possible.

**2.** Implementation of the core recommendations of the independent review of the Office for Students [“Fit for the Future: Higher Education Regulation towards 2035”](#), working closely with the sector to 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. Representing the views of the board to stakeholders and the general public.

**3.** Delivering high standards of regularity and propriety supporting ministers on the appointment of board members, ensuring that the board is working effectively and board membership reflects the diversity of the student population it serves.

**4.** Work with ministers, the permanent secretary of the Department for Education (as principle accounting officer) and senior government officials in leading the board of the OfS in the delivery of its statutory duties and responsibilities, ensuring that the board, in reaching decisions, has regard to guidance from the Secretary of State.

**Term Date** (length of tenure): 4 years (commencing late Summer 2025 tbc)

**Remuneration:** £59,000 per annum

**Time Commitment:** Approximately 2 days per week

The full role description and person specification are set out in the candidate pack at from page 16.

#### 4. Outline of the recruitment process

The competition ran from 30 October to 28 November 2024 and was advertised on the DfE Public Appointments website.

No.10, CDL and DfE ministers were consulted and cleared the content of the candidate pack. **28 candidates applied.**

The sift, conducted by the Advisory Assessment Panel (the panel), was held on 16 December and **4 candidates were selected for interview**. Prior to interview, two candidates withdrew their applications on the grounds that they wanted to continue to focus on their current work.

The Advisory Assessment Panel interviewed the remaining two candidates on 4 February 2025. The panel deemed Professor Peck appointable, the other candidate was deemed not appointable.

Officials provided post-interview advice to the Secretary of State who agreed with the panel's recommendation that Professor Peck be subject to a pre-appointment hearing as the government preferred candidate.

### 5. Details of the recruitment panel:

The Advisory Assessment Panel at sift was:

- Julia Kinniburgh, Director General of Skills, Department for Education (Panel chair)
- Richard Pennycook, Lead DfE non-executive board member
- Andrea Coscelli, Senior Partner and Head of Keystone Capital's practice in Europe (Independent panel member), previously CEO of CMA to 2022

The Secretary of State subsequently agreed that Sir Kevan Collins replace Richard Pennycook at interview stage, given his appointment as Lead DfE non-executive board member, replacing Richard Pennycook. Candidates invited to interview were informed of the panel change prior to interview.

The panel at interview was therefore as follows:

- Julia Kinniburgh, Director General of Skills, Department for Education (Panel chair)
- Sir Kevan Collins, Lead DfE non-executive board member
- Andrea Coscelli, Senior Partner and Head of Keystone Capital's practice in Europe (Independent panel member), previously CEO of CMA to 2022

Julia Kinniburgh declared at interview that she knew Professor Peck in a professional capacity given his role as the Higher Education Student Support champion, a DfE appointment.

## Job advertisement

Thank you for your interest in this important role.

England's higher education sector includes some of the best universities in the world. It is also incredibly diverse; our universities have a vast range of different missions and values, with world leading small and specialist providers and further education colleges widening access to higher education for many. Our universities and colleges are engines of economic growth and a key part of our plans to put education back at the heart of change and the forefront of national life.

This government is committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity. It is my aim to ensure higher education provides each and every student, whatever their background, with the skills they need to seize opportunity.

As the independent regulator of higher education in England, the Office for Students is fundamental to delivering this aim. It is also critical in ensuring that our universities and colleges make a strong contribution to economic growth, enabling our next generation of teachers, scientists, engineers, healthcare and IT specialists and other essential professionals and graduates to truly benefit from their higher education experience.

The Office for Students is entering an important stage in its development as a regulator. Whilst our universities and colleges continue to enjoy a world-leading reputation, the sector is facing challenges. In particular, these include the increasingly difficult financial context and the need to safeguard students' interests arising from that.

The government has recently published the report of Sir David Behan's independent review of the Office for Students: [“Fit for the Future: Higher Education Regulation towards 2035”](#). This vital report looks ahead to these challenges and how the sector will adapt to them, and sets out the future of regulation in this new environment. Its vision for the Office for Students is one of a confident regulator, refocussed to prioritise the financial stability of the higher education sector and deliver better quality and outcomes for students.

Strong, inspiring leadership is needed to navigate these challenges. We are therefore seeking to appoint an outstanding chair who can bring world class leadership, influence and strategic direction to the Office for Students board. The new chair will work closely with ministers, the chief executive and board members to ensure the Office for Students delivers on its priorities.

You will have experience of working successfully at the most senior level and possess first-rate strategic thinking capabilities which can be used to steer the Office for Students to contribute to economic growth and opportunity.

You will also have the ability to command the respect and inspire the confidence of ministers, parliament, higher education leaders, students and the general public; including the ability to represent the Office for Students effectively in the media.

I am committed to ensuring that public appointments better represent the views of the communities which they serve. I particularly encourage applicants from underrepresented groups, those based outside London and the South-East and applicants who have achieved success through non-traditional educational routes.

Thank you once again for your interest in this role. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Bridget Phillipson MP,

Secretary of State for Education

## Essential criteria

**The successful candidate must be able to demonstrate the following essential criteria:**

1. Demonstrable strategic leadership experience at board level, including of driving organisational change and setting high standards for delivery of strategic objectives.
2. Evidenced ability to guide effective decision making at a senior level, particularly in relation to the management of finance and risk.
3. Outstanding ability to influence and build effective relationships with a wide range of senior stakeholders and experience of effective engagement with ministers and senior civil servants.
4. A commitment to the principles of public life and to the principles removing barriers to opportunity in higher education.

## Desirable criteria

1. Deep knowledge and experience of regulatory principles and practice, including how to drive improvement through regulatory levers and effecting cultural change.
2. Experience, understanding and analysis of the challenges facing the higher education sector.

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# Appendix 4: Candidate's CV

## CV – Professor Edward Peck, CBE, DL, FAcSS, PhD

### Education

University of Bristol	1978–1981	2.1 Hons Degree, Philosophy
Bristol Polytechnic Management	1981–1982	Diploma in Personnel
University of Nottingham	1984–1986	MA Social Policy and Administration
University of Newcastle	1991–1997	PhD (Power and Decision-making in NHS)

### Substantive Roles

#### **Vice-Chancellor, Nottingham Trent University, 2014 – (summer 2025)**

Strategic leadership to achieve outstanding student experience, recognised in numerous University of the Year awards. NTU was granted TEF Gold in both national reviews and rated as Outstanding by Ofsted recently for its apprenticeship provision. Regular refreshing of Board of Governors to ensure astute challenge and broad diversity.

Significant personal contribution to widening access to NTU, exemplified by opening campus in HE 'cold spot'. Sustained contribution to skills development and economic growth through engagement with Midlands Engine, D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership, Nottingham Growth Board and East Midlands Combined Counties Authority (EMCCA).

NTU has doubled income to £440m in 23/24, becoming 6th largest UK university, with over 40k students, EBITDA of £36m, and net reserves over £100m. Enhancement of reputation of NTU as well as constant adjustment of academic portfolio and cost base.

Opinion leader amongst peers through sustained contributions to sector agencies and trusted advice to ministers and civil servants.

I am stepping down as VC in summer 2025 as part of a longstanding succession plan.

**Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Social Sciences, 2008–2014, Director, School of Public Policy, 2006–2007, and Director, Health Services Management Centre, 2002–2006, University of Birmingham (and Professor of Public Services Development)**

Significant national profile in policy, research, and teaching in health and social care, especially around governance, leadership, and management of integrated community services. Initiated international development in Guangzhou, originated University Free—and comprehensive—School, and President Elect of Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

**Director, Centre for Mental Health Services Development, Kings College London, 1994–2002 and Senior Consultant, 1992–1994**

Department of Health sponsored centre delivering transformation of mental health services from institutional to community settings. This followed managerial roles in NHS mental health services in Nottingham and Newcastle Health Authorities, having joined the NHS Graduate Management Training scheme in 1982.

### Public Appointments

Appointed by the Prime Minister as Member of the **Independent Advisory Panel for Post-18 Education and Funding Review** (the Augar Review), 2018–2019

Appointed by Minister for Universities as **Department for Education Student Support Champion** in 2022 and as Chair of the **Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce** in 2023; both roles extended by current Minister to 2025

Deputy Lieutenant, County of Nottinghamshire, 2022–present

### Board Appointments

Chair of **Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell Children’s Young People’s Strategy Partnership** and subsequently Children’s Trust, 2004–2008

Non-Executive Director of **Heart of England Foundation NHS Trust**, 2012–2014; Member of Policy and Resources Committee

Universities UK nominated Board Member of the **Universities and Colleges Employers Association**, 2015–2022; Member of Finance and Audit Committee 2015–2018; Chair, Remuneration Committee, 2019–2022

Member of Board of **D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership** and Chair of People and Skills Board, 2016–2018, and again 2022–2024 (rotational role for local VCs)

Trustee of **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service**, 2018–present; Deputy Chair, 2020–2024; and currently Chair, 2024– ; Member, 2020–2024 and currently Chair, 2024–, Membership and Nominations Committee

Member of the Management Board and Treasurer, **University Alliance**, 2015–2018

Elected Member of Board of **Universities UK**, 2019–2022

Chair of **Midlands Enterprise Universities**, encompassing Membership of the Board of **Midlands Engine**, 2020–present

Member of **Nottingham Growth Board**, 2021–present

Higher Education representative on **EMCCA Skills and Employment Committee**, 2024–

## Honours

Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences

Commander of the British Empire in New Year’s Honours List 2021, for services to Higher Education

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# Appendix 5: Candidate's Supporting Statement

## Personal Statement – Professor Edward Peck

Please find following evidence of my interest in and suitability for the public appointment of Chair, Office for Students. I would consider this role the culmination of my public and educational service to date and one which is crucial to both protecting student interests and supporting England's HE sector.

### **Strategic leadership experience at board level**

I have driven organisational change and delivered objectives at Board level for over 20 years:

- Appointed Independent Chair of Sandwell's Children and Young People's Strategy Board in 2004 to build collaboration between partner agencies and with young people to enable the creation of a Children's Trust, of which I was also the initial Chair.
- Non-Executive Director and member of Policy and Resources Committee of Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust, dealing with a range of performance and financial challenges, including the case of a consultant surgeon who was ultimately imprisoned.
- Trustee, Deputy Chair, and currently Chair of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). I have moulded UCAS strategy to focus on digital technology to enhance service delivery and appointed a new CEO to lead implementation. I ensure that Trustees oversee the delivery of key objectives by the Executive Team. I review the performance of current Trustees and lead the appointment of new ones. I represent UCAS across a range of media.

### **Experienced ability to guide decision making**

I have exhibited my ability to guide effective decision making across a range of settings:



- As Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University and member of Board of Governors since 2014, I have overseen doubling of income to £440m in 2023/24, created reserves of over £100m, and removed a major risk of disruption to students' studies by moving to local collective pay bargaining and avoiding industrial action.
- Through membership, at the invitation of the Prime Minister, of the Government's Review of Post-18 Education and Funding, 2018–2019, I shaped a report that continues to influence Government policy, championing the creation of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), a central plank of this Government's skills strategy.
- As a member of the Board of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, I influenced the approach to national pay negotiations across the higher education sector. As a member of Finance and Audit Committee in my first term and Chair of Remuneration Committee during my second, I oversaw the management of internal risks around financial sustainability and ensured effective executive reward.

### **Build Relationships with Senior Stakeholders**

- Evidence I established trusted and influential relationships with ministers and civil servants during the Post-18 Review is demonstrated by my subsequent appointment in 2022 by the Minister as the Department for Education's Higher Education Student Support Champion, tasked with prompting universities to enhance student experience.
- My achievements in that role led the Minister to appoint me as Chair of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce in 2023. This necessitated shaping an agenda around the concerns of bereaved parents and then mobilising the commitment to delivery across a wide range of stakeholders, including parents themselves, students, university mission groups and mental health charities. Endorsed by Minister Smith, the just released second report details interventions that will result in significant improvements in the support of students with mental health problems.
- I have been invited recently to join Minister Smith's Higher Education Vice- Chancellors Advisory Group.

### **Commitment to Principles of Public Life and Equal Opportunity in Higher Education**

- I have been a member of over ten boards and their committees during the last two decades within which I have observed rigorously the seven principles of public life articulated by the Committee of Standards

in Public Life. This is acknowledged in my appointments as both Commander of the British Empire for services to higher education in 2021 and Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Nottinghamshire in 2022.

- I have made NTU one of the flagship universities for delivering student experiences and outcomes that enable young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to transform their lives. In 2019, NTU was selected as University of the Year in the Social Mobility Awards.
- I instigated in 2020 the groundbreaking partnership between NTU and the FE College in Mansfield—a higher education ‘cold spot—which has now 500 students, mostly local and mostly mature, studying vocational higher education courses.

### **Deep Knowledge and Experience of Regulatory Principles and Practice**

- Across my leadership of thought and action in healthcare, social care and higher education, there has been a single golden thread: designing and delivering improvements in the experiences and prospects of users of mental health services and of students in higher education. I have worked at a senior level within three regulatory frameworks and understand effective regulation to be a key component of system design and delivery. I was one of the few Vice-Chancellors to support the creation of the Office for Students and, subsequently, the Teaching Excellence Framework.
- I endorse the analysis and recommendations in the report on the OfS from Sir David Behan. I welcome his emphasis on regulation as a tool of service improvement, highlighted also in the recent letter to the sector from the Secretary of State. They provide a platform for the OfS to achieve an appropriate balance between promoting goods and controlling bads that is described in the regulatory literature.
- Launching the Mental Health Taskforce, the Minister set a target of all English universities signing up to the University Mental Health Charter with the explicit undertaking that he would consider regulatory intervention through the OfS if not achieved. The number of universities that then enrolled shows that the potential to control bads through regulation can actively assist the promotion of goods.

### **Experience, understanding and analysis of the higher education sector**

- This is evidenced by my publishing numerous blogs and making regular media appearances on strategic and operational challenges facing higher education.

- I have been a member of the board of Universities UK, centrally involved in its analysis of and response to policy and practice issues.
- I am consulted regularly by civil servants on a formal—such as my membership of the Ministerial Group on the implementation of the LLE—and informal basis because of my original and reliable insights into the culture and structure of higher education.

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# Appendix 6: Candidate Questionnaire

## Motivation:

### **1. What motivated you to apply for this role, and what specific experiences would you bring to it?**

I supported the creation of a regulator for higher education—and the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)—when they were first proposed; indeed, I recall I was the first Vice-Chancellor to voice my support in public.

This endorsement was grounded in my longstanding belief that public service leaders should put the interests of their customers, in this case students, ahead of the interests of their institutions. Many do, most of the time. However, on occasions, they do not do so consistently or to the standards that students should expect. It is the task of the OfS to identify both the circumstances and the cases where these lapses occur and ensure provision is improved. I would welcome the opportunity to lead the delivery of this task.

This role would be the culmination of my public and educational service to date; one which is crucial to protecting student interests, enabling implementation of Government policy, and enhancing the reputation of England's HE sector at home and abroad.

I have extensive experience as an effective leader within the higher education sector in both executive and non-executive roles. I have led Nottingham Trent University to become one of the most respected providers in the UK for the quality of student experience and student outcome, achieving TEF Gold in both ratings to date. I have served as a Non-Executive or Trustee on over ten boards and their committees across three regulatory regimes, currently as Interim Chair of UCAS and member of three economic development bodies.

Based on the achievements of NTU, I was appointed the Department for Education's Higher Education Student Support Champion (HESSC) in 2022, tasked with prompting universities to enhance student experience based

on good practice. In 2023, I also became Chair of the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce, deploying the skills in quality improvement that I had acquired in my time working in and around the NHS.

I have played an influential role in the development of higher education policy, most prominently through my membership of the independent panel for the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding in 2018–2019 (the Augar Review).

I have a deep understanding of policy and practice in higher education, including the factors that drive institutional behaviour. As one expert on regulation has noted: ‘to develop effective regulation, you must understand the dynamics of competition’.

**2. If appointed, are there specific areas within your new responsibilities where you will need to acquire new skills or knowledge?**

Like UCAS, the OfS operates at the interface between applicants/students and higher education providers, in a context shaped by Government policy. Differences of view—provider perspectives can and do differ—are not always straightforward to shape into the most effective way forward. I will need to learn about the nuances of these relationships in this new setting, where the issues are broader and can appear more contested.

I recognise also that I have to develop further my knowledge of the legal framework within which regulation of higher education takes place as the OfS seeks the shortest and sharpest methods of designing regulatory interventions.

**3. How were you recruited? Were you encouraged to apply; if so, by whom?**

I was not encouraged to apply and did so through the gov.uk appointments portal.

### Personal Background

**4. Do you currently or potentially have any business, financial or other non-pecuniary interests or commitments, that might give rise to the perception of a conflict of interest if you are appointed?**

- **How do you intend to resolve any potential conflicts of interests if you are appointed?**

I would cease to be the Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University and Interim Chair of UCAS before commencing in this role.

**If appointed, what professional or voluntary work commitments will you continue to undertake, or do you intend to take on, alongside your new role?**

- **How will you reconcile these with your new role?**

I will not undertake any other commitments within higher education during my term.

**5. Do you intend to serve your full term of office?**

Yes.

OfS

**6. If appointed, what will be your main priorities on taking up the role?**

My initial priorities would be to:

- discuss with DfE ministers and officials their perspectives on current progress and future priorities for the OfS;
- assure the internal capacity and capability of the OfS—both Executive and Non-Executive—to deliver the recommendations within the Behan Review, the requirements of revised Freedom of Speech legislation, and the areas for further action emerging from the Government’s higher education policy;
- recommence the development of next OfS strategy to ensure that it addresses these and other factors in a compelling and accessible manner; and
- meet with senior stakeholders across the sector to create an open dialogue about the role of the OfS in overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities.

**What criteria should the Committee use to judge your/OfS’s performance over your term of office?**

In line with the Behan recommendations, you should expect me to deliver demonstrable progress on: the tangible impact of students’ interests on provider behaviour; the integration of quality assurance and improvement processes (e.g. through a repositioning of the TEF); the robust oversight of financial sustainability; and the protection of public money.

In addition, I would suggest two more criteria: the more effective engagement of, and confidence in, provider governing bodies as self-regulators; and regulation that enables flexible skills provision in support of the Government’s focus on productivity and growth.

## **7. How will you protect and enhance your personal independence and the institutional independence of OfS from the Government/ministers?**

Firstly, I would ensure that ministers, officials, and I agree the priority areas—the what—for the OfS along with a broad overview of the how they will be pursued. Secondly, I would use the existing channels of communication to address unforeseen events with them in an honest and open manner. However, thirdly, and crucially, I will be clear from the outset that there may be issues where I judge that the OfS must pursue an independent course action.

## **8. How do you assess the public profile and reputation of OfS?**

In my view, the OfS has a low public profile and thus judgements of reputation stem mostly from those active in higher education. It is recognised as seeking to engage positively with students and that its approach to the TEF and Access and Participation Plans has influenced adoption of good practice by providers. Recent changes in the tone of its communications and interactions have been welcomed across the sector.

However, based on the reflections of the Behan Review and my own observations and conversations, the OfS is not perceived to be developing quickly enough towards maturity as a regulator given the length of time it has been in existence. It is not judged to have created a mutually respectful relationship with providers, albeit responsibility for this situation cannot be one-sided. It has not put together a balanced range of interventions—ones that both promote good practice and control bad practice—that have had enough tangible impact on provider behaviour, including on continued provision of courses with poor outcomes.

## **9. What risks do you think OfS will face over your term of office?**

### **• How do you intend to manage them?**

The first is that monitoring the financial precarity of some higher education providers will continue to take up an increasing proportion of OfS time and attention without preventing significant institutional crisis. I will seek urgent briefings to establish the extent that current action plans within institutions will be sufficient to balance income and expenditure or whether further action by them, the OfS, or Government is required.

The second is that current provider steps to widen access and participation are accepted by OfS rather than being challenged by new approaches that reflect the potential for growing the diversity of students. For example, of 1.2m adults that register with UCAS each year, only 50% accept a place. Failure to achieve a step change here may be viewed as a failure of the OfS to drive aspects of the Government's agenda for an increasingly skilled workforce.

The third is that the OfS does not focus enough on the quality of support for students who have mental health challenges, are neurodivergent, have physical disabilities or have experienced periods in care. I will bring my experience as HESSC to bear on this risk.



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# Formal minutes

**Tuesday 4 March 2025**

## Members present:

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Amanda Martin

Darren Paffey

Manuela Perteghella

Mark Swards

Patrick Spencer

Caroline Voaden

Draft Report (*Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as the Chair of the Office for Students (OfS)*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 26 read and agreed to.

The Candidate's curriculum vitae and supporting documents were appended to the Report as Appendices.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

## Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 11 March 2025 at 9.30am]

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# Witness

The following witness gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Tuesday 4 March 2025

**Professor Edward Peck CBE**, The Government's preferred candidate [Q1-28](#)

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# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627