**OfS CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK**

**OfS ENGAGEMENT METRIC**

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| Method | Ranking (1 being most preferred) |
| Talking to students – ground visit | 4 |
| Opinion data (surveys) | 3 |
| Hiring students/grads | 2 |
| Briefing to representatives | 1 |
| Don’t engage | 5 |

**EXPLAINING OUR RESPONSE**

We chose to rank ‘briefing to representatives’ as the preferred way for the OfS to engage with students, as this reinforces the role of sabbatical officers as representatives of the wider student body at that institution. Officers are paid to represent and gather feedback on issues facing students on an institutional level; they devote a lot of time to understanding their institution and how it works. However, we would argue that it is imperative that engagement is not just in the form of briefings to representatives; this should be a two-way process where officers were able to give feedback about the institution to the OfS as well. They are best placed to tap into existing channels of feedback, as well as having a platform to innovate if the existing networks prove unyielding of results. This means officers can provide a breadth of opinion in a concise time window, if the SU is notified in advance of the focus of the feedback. This should be a set of officers who have similar positions within universities to ensure that officers are focusing on similar issues with similar priorities in order to produce results that can be accurately mapped on to one another to produce comparable results.

The problem with hiring individual students is that it may yield extreme views which are not representative of the wider student body. Those views would then become statistically significant due to the small sample size and distort the perception of the University. However, hired students would have the time to dedicate to forming response and understanding the complex interactions between the multiple causes of an issue. It is important to remember that having individual student representatives is already standard practice in many universities when hiring senior and academic staff. This is a process that could be transformed to work for the OfS.

Surveys are the least useful method of engagement. Without mentioning the level of survey fatigue in the student population; surveys lack the nuance of actual responses. Surveying large quantities of students means that not all responses will be informed responses, creating watered-down results of the opinion generally held by students. Depending on the demographic data asked for by the OfS in these consultations, critical underrepresented groups could have their opinions watered down by the general view of the larger student body. In order to develop sound and suitable policy that benefits the student population as a whole, as well as honours our commitment to representing underrepresented groups, opinions should be constructive and well-informed to create tangible and actionable results.

The concept of not engaging would be the least useful for the OfS. As the OfS is the regulatory body representing the interest of students at a national level, it needs to find out how and by what margin it is achieving these goals. The impression the OfS has given us is at present is that it has spent too much time working directly with staff, and that there has been little engagement with students. Therefore, we would recommend to the OfS to engage with students through the aforementioned channels.

**ANYTHING ELSE TO ENGAGE STUDENTS?**

We would welcome a more active partnership between OfS and Students’ Unions more generally, because we are the two bodies who have regulatory power to hold institutions to account. There should be an active relationship between the two to support and effect change to the benefit of the student body.

In order to facilitate good communication between the OfS and SUs, we would suggest a combined briefing to inform reps and solicit feedback in one sitting, instead of one-way communication via webinar, for example. The most beneficial would be regional surgeries/workshops for SU Officers to attend. These would include an agenda in advance, so that officers can come prepared and knowledgeable on pressing matters. The SUs can gather opinion on issues to be discussed, and crucially this moves the OfS into students’ spaces. Where needed, a regional surgery could provide a wider but manageable cross-section of attendees from interested universities with the opportunity for complex issues to be discussed in sufficient depth.

Furthermore, we feel that sabbatical officers and other incumbent student representatives are being underused by the OfS at present. The sabbatical officer system exists in a crucial space to understand and condense student voice, and should be used by the OfS accordingly. We feel democratic trust in reps is being downgraded in favour of the approach that needs to find out what ‘ordinary students’ think. There is enough breadth in officer experience of being informed and accurately reporting issues to aid the OfS in engaging students.

Ideally students should have a vague awareness of OfS because it is a regulatory body that impacts on their education. Universities should have a responsibility to make students aware that they have the OfS to go to in the same way as the OIA. If this is the case, it would be beneficial for the OfS to run training with University advice centres, both within the main University structure and the SU, so that students are able to receive the best quality advice and support.