



Department
for Education

Office for Students Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Candidate information pack



WELCOME



Thank you for your interest in becoming the new Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom for the Office for Students (OfS).

Our higher education sector has a long and proud history of offering a space for a range of views to be freely expressed and debated, allowing conventional wisdom to be challenged and have played a fundamental role in reforming society in a positive way.

Freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental to our liberal, democratic society but of particular importance within our higher education sector. The free and open discussion and exploration of ideas has fuelled the progress of freedom and emancipation. All staff and students should feel safe to challenge conventional wisdom by putting forward and discussing ideas that may be controversial or unpalatable, as long as those views remain within the law.

There is a growing concern of a chilling effect on university campuses that means that not all students and staff feel able to express themselves without fear of repercussion. We have seen this in research as well as a number of personal testimonies from academics. Students and staff may, for example, feel unsupported to challenge conventional wisdom or fear that their views on international political, historical or social issues will expose them to intimidation or harassment.

Government is clear that any activities at higher education providers (HEPs) that seek to limit lawful free speech and academic expression are unacceptable in all but a limited number of circumstances. Without action to counter attempts to discourage or even silence unpopular views, intellectual life on campus for both staff and students may be unfairly narrowed and diminished. This is why Government has introduced the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill/Act to ensure that these fundamental values are protected.

A key measure in the Bill/Act is the creation of a new role of the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom which will be part of the OfS Board. We are therefore seeking to appoint an outstanding new Director to be the first holder of this new position.

You will provide visible leadership to the OfS's approach to freedom of speech and academic freedom. You will oversee the performance of the OfS's freedom of speech functions, including the operation of a new complaints scheme for individuals, and the OfS's approach to compliance for providers and SUs. You will have a central role in the development of guidance and best practice.

We also expect you to ensure that the OfS's new general duties for freedom of speech and academic freedom shape the way it performs its functions. Forging an effective working relationship with the Chief Executive, the Chair and the board of the OfS will be key.

This will be a demanding role which will require involvement with highly controversial issues and a considered understanding of the various legal duties and rights in play. This Government believes that freedom of speech and academic freedom should not be partisan issues and that all individuals on campus benefit from higher education being an environment in which open and constructive debate can thrive.

My department is focused on equality of opportunity, and I am committed to ensuring that 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. If you have the skills and experience, we are seeking, we look forward to hearing from you.

Rt Hon. Nadhim Zahawi
Secretary of State for Education



ABOUT THE OFS

The OfS, as the independent regulator of HE in England, aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of HE that enriches their lives and careers.

The work of the OfS covers all HE students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, national or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning.

The OfS's four primary objectives are:

- Participation – All students from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake HE are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from HE.
- Experience – All students, from all backgrounds receive a high-quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.
- Outcomes – All students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.
- Value for money – All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.



ABOUT THE ROLE

The Secretary of State for Education is seeking a new Director for Free Speech and Academic Freedom. The successful applicant will be responsible for overseeing the OfS's free speech functions.

These are set out in the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill 2021 as well as the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This will include:

- Overseeing the promotion of the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education and reporting to the OfS board on freedom of speech and academic freedom matters.
- Overseeing the implementation and operation of a new complaints scheme for individuals, ensuring that students, staff and visiting speakers have a clear route to redress if they have suffered adverse consequences as a result of exercising their freedom of speech rights.
- Overseeing the OfS's approach to compliance for providers and students' unions in relation to their freedom of speech obligations, identifying systemic issues and reporting on these to incentivise compliance.
- Oversee the development of any guidance in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom, including best practice guidance.
- Working to the chief executive and closely with others in the OfS executive team to ensure that freedom of speech and academic freedom is integrated into the overall approach of the OfS as well as working with providers to ensure a transparent and coherent approach to the obligations placed on providers and their students' unions for free speech and academic freedom.
- Contributing to the development, leadership, management, and success of the Office the Students as a member of the Executive Team.



WHO WE'RE 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 three criteria.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

1. Strategic and influential leadership skills, with the ability to lead a complex debate and shape public and sector attitudes, in a complex and dynamic environment.
2. Proven communication, negotiation and influencing skills at a senior level, which would enable you to build effective relationships with Ministers, the OfS board and Executive and across the sector, commanding the respect of a diverse range of stakeholders.
3. A demonstrated commitment to consistently and publicly upholding the values of freedom of speech and academic freedom.
4. The ability to manage and bring about sector-wide change in light of new or developing Ministerial policies and priorities.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

5. Experience of one or more of the following: operating complaints or other ombudsman style schemes; the operation of academia and higher education; the work of a regulator.
6. An understanding of the legal framework concerning freedom of speech and academic freedom, including how this relates to other relevant legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 and the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Department is focused on equality of opportunity and is committed to ensuring that those appointed better represent the views of the communities which they serve.

We 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.

The Department for Education has a strong culture of inclusion and diversity, and it wants to encourage applications from people with a diverse range of backgrounds and educational routes.

We want to ensure any appointee to the Department's arm's length bodies is committed to promoting diversity, in its broadest possible sense. This will include embedding a commitment to the principles of levelling up and championing opportunity for all across the organisation, helping to ensure that the organisation is one in which a genuinely diverse range of views can be expressed, without fear or favour.

CHAMPIONING SOCIAL MOBILITY

The Department champions social mobility 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 appointments and expect all our leaders, including in arm's length bodies, to take action to attract and retain staff from all backgrounds, while also supporting them to progress within their careers.

DISABILITY CONFIDENT

We are a member of the Government's Disability Confident scheme and have achieved Disability Confident Leader status, signifying our role as champions of the scheme. We use the Disability Confident symbol, along with other like-minded employers, to show our commitment to good practice in employing people with a disability. We ask that all applicants complete an anonymised Diversity Monitoring Form used for gathering data only in order to ensure departments are recruiting from the widest possible pool. The information you provide is held by the Department for Education and not shared with the selection panel.



TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

Location

This is intended to be a full time, executive position (1.0 full-time equivalent). The successful candidate will work flexibly, based in either London or Bristol. Remote working may also be a possibility.

Applications may be considered from candidates wishing to do this on a part-time basis of 0.6 or higher.

Term

The role will be for a 4-year term, with the option of this being extended.

Remuneration

The role attracts an annual salary of £99,164 pro rata

Expenses

You will be reimbursed for any travel and subsistence expenses you necessarily incur while on official OfS business at the appropriate rate.

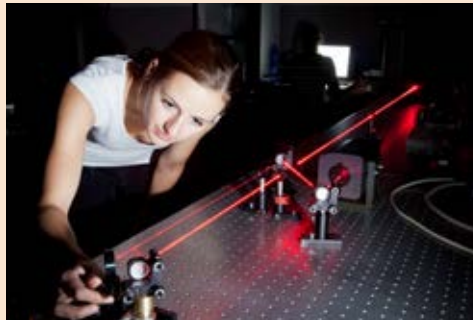
Pension

The Director for Free Speech and Academic Freedom will be eligible to join the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

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 that you have sound understanding of and commitment to the principles of public life (which are set out on page 9).



HOW TO APPLY

The closing date for applications is the 13th July.

Please submit the following documents by email to:
Fos.billteam@education.gov.uk

1. A CV

2. Candidate Application Form

3. Diversity Monitoring Form

Please include the heading “Director for Free Speech and Academic Freedom: Office for Students” in the subject box of your email and submit your application documents as separate attachments.

As well as sharing your C.V with us, you should demonstrate clearly, in the candidate application form, 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).

Please note the following:

- We cannot accept applications submitted after the closing date.
- Applications will be assessed solely on the documentation provided. Please refer to the advert and checklist to ensure you have provided the necessary
- documentation.
- Applications will be acknowledged upon receipt.
- Feedback will only be given to candidates unsuccessful following interview.
- When 30 or more applications are received, it is likely that your application will be “pre-assessed” before it is passed to the Advisory Assessment Panel for consideration. You should be aware that in this situation, your application might not be considered in full by all the members of the Panel.
- We intend to notify candidates within two weeks of interview. Interviews will likely take place in September

If you have any queries about the role or the appointment process, please contact fos.billteam@education.gov.uk.

If you are not completely satisfied, please raise any complaint in the first instance to: [tbc]If you are not completely satisfied, please raise any complaint in the first instance to:
fos.billteam@education.gov.uk



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

Carrying out Public Office business, including making external 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 Department for Education's Free Speech team if you would like to make a complaint regarding your application at fos.BILLTEAM@education.gov.uk

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