

Office for Students



APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF DATA ASSURANCE

APPOINTMENT BRIEF

JUNE 2020



BACKGROUND TO THE OFS

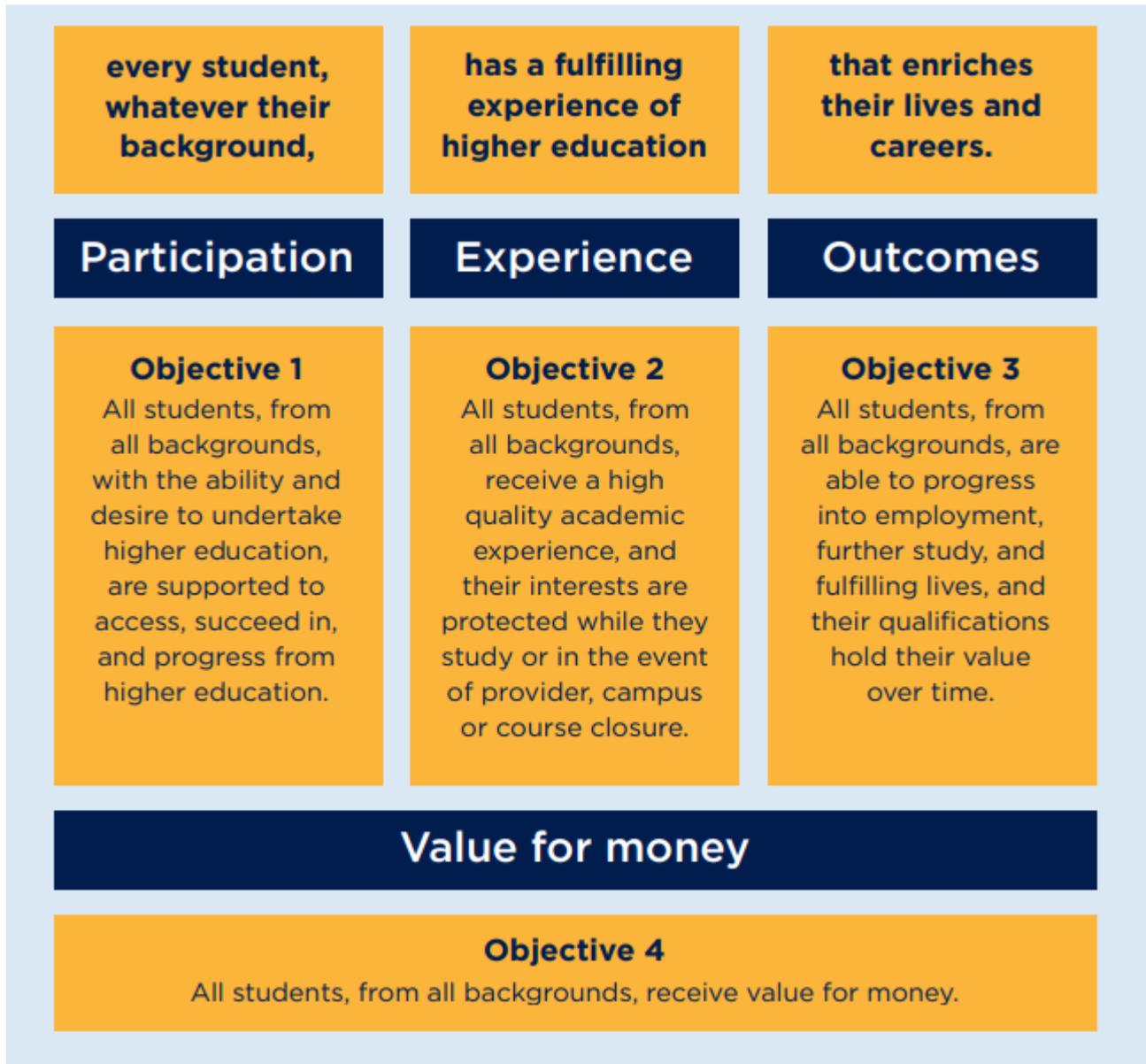
The OfS is the independent regulator of higher education in England. It regulates providers in the interests of students. Its aim is to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers. The OfS does this by regulating the higher education providers on its register to make sure they are delivering positive outcomes for their students. Where they are not, it takes action. At sector level, it regulates to create the conditions for informed choice, competition and continuous improvement in the interests of students. It ensures value for money in higher education for students and taxpayers.

An independent public body, reporting to Parliament through the Department for Education (DfE), the OfS became fully operational on 1 April 2018 when it replaced the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

Its work covers all students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, home or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning. Chaired by Sir Michael Barber, and by Nicola Dandridge CBE as Chief Executive, it is also advised by a panel of current and prospective students, and recent graduates.

Its regulatory objectives describe the outcomes it is seeking to achieve for students, past, present and future. They also bring essential benefits to employers, the economy and society.

It aims to ensure that:



The last two years have been a transitional period during which the OfS has put in place systems and processes in line with its duties under HERA. Where consistent with its role as an independent regulator, it worked closely with the DfE on areas where the latter exercise responsibility during the transitional period or on an enduring basis. The OfS's values (overleaf) guide the way it works with each other internally, and with its partner organisations and stakeholders.



Registration in the student interest

The OfS's regulatory framework is designed to protect the interests of students before, during and after their higher education by requiring providers to demonstrate that they are offering high quality higher education to their students. In order to be registered with the OfS they must meet, and maintain, a common threshold of quality, financial sustainability and transparency. They must also show that they are working to eliminate gaps in access and success between the most and least represented groups of students.

The OfS Register and the regulatory process

The OfS Register comprises a single, authoritative list of all the English higher education providers registered by the OfS. It gives assurance to students and taxpayers that a provider meets baseline requirements across a series of aspects which, taken together, mean that they are providing high quality teaching, learning and support for their students. Registration brings significant benefits for providers. Their students can apply for government-backed tuition fee and maintenance loans, and they can access public grant funding. They can apply to the Home Office for a licence to recruit international students, and to the OfS for the right to award degrees and call themselves a university.

In order to register with the OfS a higher education provider must meet a set of initial conditions relating to access and participation, quality and standards, student protection, financial viability and sustainability, and management and governance. These conditions will vary depending on the registration category for which the provider has applied. Once registered, a provider must meet a set of general ongoing conditions. The OfS assesses the likelihood that a provider will breach one or more of these conditions. Where it identifies a risk, it may decide to impose specific ongoing conditions – particular requirements a provider must meet in order to remain registered. It may also decide to monitor a provider more closely. Where the OfS finds a breach of a specific or general ongoing condition it will consider using one or more of a range of sanctions, including, potentially, de-registration.



THE ROLE - HEAD OF DATA ASSURANCE

The Data, Foresight and Analysis Directorate has four interconnected teams: Foresight & Insight; Analytics; Data Infrastructure; and Data Assurance. The Head of Data Assurance will ensure an effective data assurance programme is in place, reviewing existing approaches and developing novel approaches to assurance as required. They will manage a small team of data assurance experts to minimise OfS data Assurance risk and comprehensively investigate and defend data challenges.

PURPOSE OF POST

The Data, Foresight and Analysis directorate provides data and analytical support for the OfS. It supports a range of data collection, analysis and research activities that underpin the regulatory functions of the OfS.

The purpose of the role 'Head of Data Assurance' is to:

- Provide a clear and focused data assurance programme covering the range of OfS data use and that future risks to data quality are anticipated and monitored
- Review the effectiveness of existing data assurance approaches and develop novel approaches to assurance as required
- Robustly investigate and defend data assurance challenges and minimise OfS data assurance risk.

In this role, the postholder may support cross organisational projects from time to time.

For more information on the postholder's key responsibilities and enablers, please see Appendix 1

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Candidates will bring extensive experience in data assurance and/or audit and the ability to develop and deliver an annual data assurance programme. Able decision makers with independence of thought, candidates will have sound judgement and be able to adapt and create novel approaches to assurance activity. Candidates will be strong collaborators and leaders with the ability to manage a small team and their workload. Comfortable with ambiguity and personally resilient, candidates will be adept at communicating complex assurance issues effectively and building strong relationships inside and outside the organisation.

The key person attributes to fulfil this role are:

- Excellent leadership skills
- An ability to lead a small team of data assurance experts that will provide assurance over the data used to inform regulatory interventions, building knowledge and expertise in the team to ensure value added and not 'tick box' data assurance work
- Excellent judgement to provide advice to the competition and the register directorate about the extent to which providers are meeting conditions of registration F3 (Provision of information to the OfS) and F4 (Provision of information to the designated data body) of the regulatory framework for higher education in England (see pages 127-131 and 132 respectively of the framework [here](#)).
- An ability to build effective professional relationships internally and externally, with providers and sector bodies as appropriate
- An ability to work with uncertainty and a willingness to change and adapt with changing priorities
- Innovative with confidence to try new approaches to activities, and an ability to reflect, learn and develop from these
- An ability to build effective quality assurance processes into the team's work
- An acute attention to detail balanced with a 'big picture' awareness

Candidates must bring:

- Extensive experience in data assurance/audit
- Experience in identifying risk
- The ability to motivate and lead a high performing team
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- The capability to engage with internal and external stakeholders.



TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

Location: Bristol

Pay band: 10 (£58,497-60,361 PA)

Directorate: Data, Foresight and Analysis

Reports to: Director of Data, Foresight and Analysis

VALUING DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBLE WORKING

The OfS embraces and promotes equality, diversity and inclusion. We strive to reflect this in our workforce so that we represent the diversity of those whose interests we promote. We recruit by merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

We welcome flexible working, and as an organisation which exists to support education and lifelong learning, we are firmly committed to providing learning and development opportunities for all employees.

HOW TO APPLY

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to the **Office for Students** on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments, using code QAHAUAD.

Click on the **'apply'** button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter.

Candidates should state where they saw the advertisement (i.e. Saxton Bampfylde website) at the top of the covering letter.

The closing date for applications is **noon on Wednesday 22th July 2020**. **The next stages of the process will take place in line with current government guidance, supported by video technology when required. Candidates will be supported in the use of this technology throughout the process. We will make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that, if needed, candidates have access to communication support at all stages of the process.**

The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

APPENDIX 1

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Leading the directorate's staff and teams to deliver

- There is effective leadership within the directorate, across the organisation, and in support of other directorates. Staff are led by example, with leaders modelling: the OfS's behaviours and values: openness, diversity, ambition and learning; ensuring flexible, agile and collaborative working, including with staff and teams in other directorates
- In the areas for which the postholder is responsible, the outcomes and objectives in the OfS's business plan are delivered efficiently and effectively
- Risk to delivery is identified and actively managed with robust mitigation implemented where necessary
- Resources are aligned with priorities, and workload pressures are accommodated and managed, by working with other leaders in the directorate, across the organisation, and with providers and sector bodies as appropriate and necessary
- The allocation and management of activities for the directorate's staff and teams is clear and supports delivery of the OfS's functions and strategy
- Line management arrangements for the directorate's staff result in clear individual objectives, feedback on performance, and support for development. As a result, staff perform to high standards
- The director is advised and supported, with the postholder deputising as required

Develop an annual data assurance programme

- A clear and focused data assurance programme covering the range of OfS uses of data
- Future risks to data quality are anticipated and monitored
- Novel approaches to assurance activity are developed and trialled with the aim of improving effectiveness of assurance activities and minimising burden on providers

Ensure effective delivery of the data assurance plan

- The data assurance plan is delivered to expected high quality standards
- Challenges to the outcomes of assurance work are minimised and there are no successful challenges
- Complex or particularly sensitive issues that are escalated to the postholder are usually resolved effectively without the need to escalate further

Conduct novel or high-profile assurance work

- Novel approaches to assurance are developed and existing approaches are reviewed to ensure they remain effective
- Sensitive assurance work is completed and not subject to significant challenge

OfS directors are able to make judgements over the quality of data

- The director of competition and the register is able to make effective judgements about compliance with conditions of registration F3 (Provision of information to the OfS) and F4 (Provision of information to the designated data body) of the regulatory framework for higher education in England (see pages 127-131 and 132 respectively of the framework here https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1406/ofs2018_01.pdf.)
- The data assurance team's input into the review of progress of providers against the enhanced monitoring or conditions of registration F3 and F4 imposed can be relied upon
- The director for data, foresight and analysis is able to make judgements about the extent to which data can support current and emerging regulatory interventions
- Opportunities for providers manipulation of data to their own advantage are identified and mitigated

Supporting the OfS, the designated data body and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to collect high quality higher education data

- Systemic data quality issues are flagged to the designated data body
- The designated data body make appropriate changes to their systems and processes to minimise the risk of undetected data issues
- Work with appropriate colleagues to influence the ESFA to assist with addressing issues identified through the data assurance team's work with higher education data collected through them and used for our regulatory purposes
- The need for post collection data amendments is minimised
- Systematic issues with OfS collections are identified and appropriate mitigations suggested, including revisions to guidance or quality assurance processes

Relationships

- Effective relationships are developed with OfS colleagues to ensure new risks to data quality are identified and mitigated, and old risks are reviewed and reported on
- Effective relationships are maintained with providers undergoing assurance work, which will involve liaison with accountable officers, audit committees and similar
- Effective relationships are developed with the designated data body (HESA) and the ESFA to enable effective operation of data assurance, noting that this role is not the primary relationship manager with these bodies

ENABLERS

Knowledge and Learning

- Extensive experience of conducting data audit and assurance work including developing audit plans and processes, including quality assurance processes to ensure high quality, reliable outputs.
- Ability to understand new data definitions and be able to develop audit approaches to test compliance

Planning

- Ability to plan the work of a team including responding to emerging and changing priorities at short notice
- Ability to work flexibly across a range of issues

Communications

- Ability to write clearly and precisely on technical matters using plain language that conforms to house style, and to review the work of others on these matters
- Ability to communicate complex technical issues verbally often to non-technical audiences

Relationships

- Ability to motivate and lead a high performing team
- Ability to build appropriate professional relationships with operational staff at providers as well as with those in leadership roles
- Ability to build effective relationships across the OfS to ensure efficient and effective data assurance activity
- Stakeholder management including ability to manage potential conflict with providers