



Department
for Education



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

The Right Honourable Peter Riddell CBE
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6 March 2018

Dear Peter,

Report on the Recruitment Competition for the Office for Students

Many thanks for your letter and report on the recruitment competition for the Office for Students (OfS) dated 26 February 2018.

In your letter and report, you point out that it was wrong not to have consulted with you in advance of the decision to appoint from outside the student experience competition, and therefore this was in breach of paragraph 3.3 of the Governance Code on Public Appointments. I accept these findings and note that this will appear in your annual report. We intend to ensure the right approach is taken going forward.

I also note what you say on our approach to the length of tenure of the student experience role. For the avoidance of doubt, once the decision had been taken to appoint from outside the competition, this was always intended to be an interim appointment. The length of the appointment was reduced from one year to six months based on an understanding that 6-9 months was the range of your preference for the interim appointment. Again I recognise that if the Department had consulted you formally as the Code requires, it could have benefited from your advice on this matter as well as other aspects of the appointment. I can, however, confirm that the successful candidate and all unsuccessful interviewees were informed of the interim nature of the appointment before any announcement was made.

I can confirm that the Department intends to launch the full competition for a permanent “student experience” representative to the OfS with the intention of recruiting prior to the end of June 2018. I am glad you have clarified that Ruth Carlson, the interim appointment, should be free to apply for this longer-term position. I am very grateful to her for having agreed to accept the offer of the interim appointment and was pleased to have met her and her colleagues personally when I visited the inaugural meeting of the OfS student forum.

We accept that due diligence was inadequate in relation to the public statements of Toby Young. As a result the Department has already reviewed due diligence processes following your blog on this subject on 9 January and will consider your further thoughts as set out in the annex to your report. As part of our response we are setting up a Nominations Committee which as part of its remit will provide internal scrutiny of DfE public appointments processes, including due diligence.

I note your findings in relation to other aspects of the “student experience” competition and will carefully and seriously consider them, as well as your recommendations. I will write to you soon to set out more details with regard to the appointment of the new student experience board member.

As I said in Parliament last week there are lessons to learn from this experience and we intend to learn them and I look forward to benefiting from your advice on future processes to appoint members to the OfS. I have copied this letter to Robert Halfon, the Chair of the Education Select Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Gyimah', written in a cursive style.

SAM GYIMAH MP