

New joint Chief Executives of Office for Students to steer sector

30.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne have been appointed joint CEOs of the higher education regulator.

Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne have been appointed as the first joint Chief Executives of the Office for Students (OfS).

The pair will lead the higher education regulator in protecting students' interests and maintaining quality across the sector.

Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne bring extensive senior experience from across government, sharing previous roles as Directors General at the Department for Culture Media and Sport and Department for Transport, as well as Directors of Higher Education at the Department for Education.

They have been appointed to a single Chief Executive role as a job-share partnership, reflecting their proven track record of delivering together over the last 16 years.

Their appointment, following an open recruitment process, will take effect from 15 June. They will work closely with the Office for Students Board and the higher education sector to deliver the regulator's priorities over the next four years.

To ensure continuity, Josh Fleming - the current Director of Strategy and Delivery at the OfS - will serve as Interim Chief Executive from 1 April, following the departure of former Chief Executive, Susan Lapworth.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said:

This is a crucial moment for higher education, with universities facing real financial pressures and students needing confidence that their courses will have the quality to equip them for the future.

Ruth and Polly bring the experience needed to lead a strong, effective regulator that holds the sector to high standards and delivers for students.

Their leadership will enable the Office for Students to continue its work to protect students' interests and support a stable, world-leading sector.

Chief Executives of the Office for Students, Ruth Hannant and Polly Payne, said:

It is a great privilege to be appointed as Chief Executive of the Office for Students having been part of its journey at the outset.

The Office for Students and its independent regulation plays a crucial role in ensuring those from all backgrounds can benefit from high quality higher education.

We look forward to working collaboratively with colleagues across the higher education and skills system to deliver for students.

The Office for Students is the independent regulator of higher education in England, responsible for ensuring students from all backgrounds receive high-quality education and value for money.

In recent years, the government has refocused the efforts of the Office for Students towards monitoring the financial sustainability of universities, to help create a secure future for our world-leading sector.

Chair of the Office for Students, Edward Peck, said:

I am delighted that Polly and Ruth are bringing their extensive experience and expertise to the leadership of the OfS as we continue our journey towards becoming an exemplary regulator of higher education.

The OfS Board and I look forward to working with them as we pursue our strategy focused on being ambitious for students, collaborative with education providers and sector agencies, vigilant about the use of public money and vocal about both the strengths and weaknesses of English higher education.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-joint-chief-executives-of-office-for-students-to-steer-sector>