



Student debrief

Consumer protection in Higher Education

27 January 2026

Introduction to today's team



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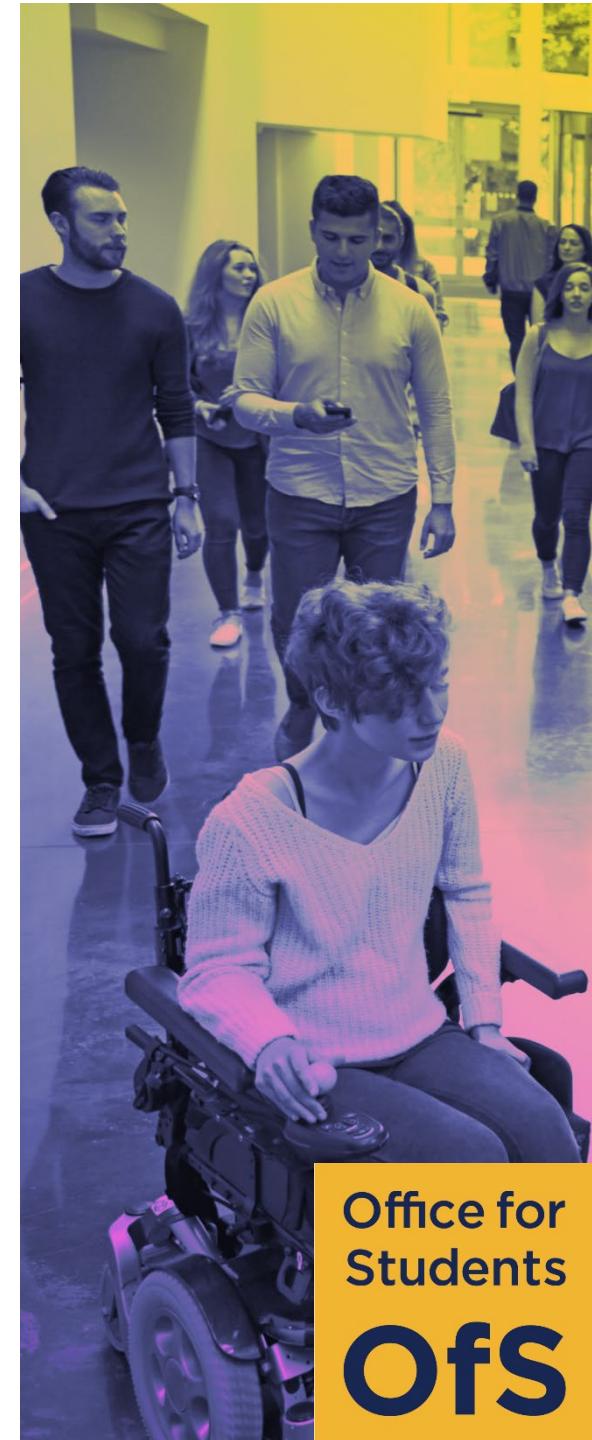


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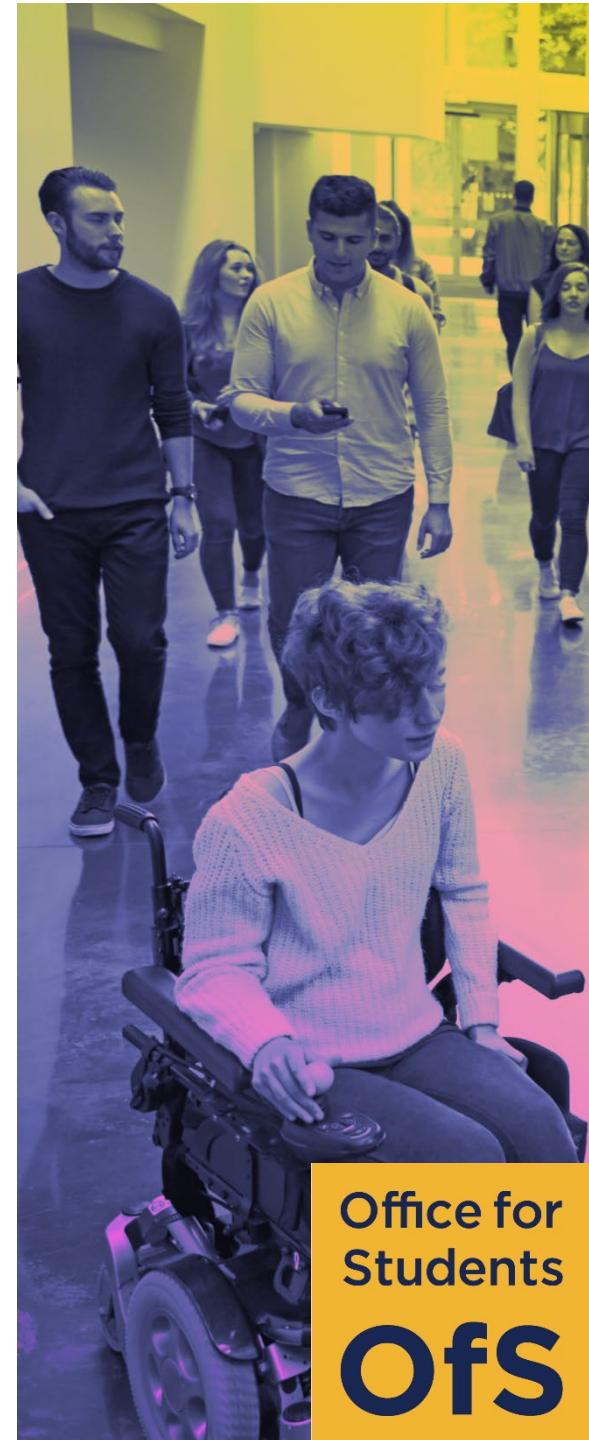
Today we will:

- Share recent OfS news and developments
- Discuss what consumer protection means to students
- Open the floor to questions in general
- Not discuss live cases and individual providers



How your input will be used

- These events are a great way for us to hear your views and experiences as part of our work to understand and act in the interests of students.
- Therefore, comments, feedback and observations from this session may be used to inform and develop our policy and could also appear in OfS publications.
- To protect anonymity, any contributions we use will be unnamed and most likely paraphrased.



Since our last event...

- OfS published a new strategy that explains how OfS will regulate in the interest of students.
- OfS published information for institutions to consider when supporting students with disabilities.
- The OfS is advising institutions on degree classification to ensure that it reflects the knowledge and skills of students.



Consumer protection team:



Sally Lambis
**Head of Regulatory
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Dr Katy Lawn
**Senior Regulation
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Why consumer protection matters in higher education

- The relationship between students and universities isn't exactly like buying a product or service - but it has similarities.
- **Many students feel that universities/colleges are not delivering what was promised:**
75% of students said promises were not fully met.*
- **Disruptions to students' courses are common:**
70% of students experienced at least one disruption to their learning.

*Source: OfS poll of 2,001 higher education students at OfS-regulated universities and further education colleges in England. Full paper here: [ofs-explorations-consumer-rights.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/reports-and-publications/explorations-consumer-rights.pdf).



Your thoughts:

What does being treated fairly mean to you as a consumer of higher education?

What is fair treatment?

OfS is considering setting out some principles which universities and colleges must follow:*

1. Promote students' understanding of their rights
2. Deliver the education and services they have promised to students
3. Proactively identify risks to delivery of courses and services
4. Act in good faith (i.e. honesty, openness)
5. Enable students to receive effective support with complaints

Please select the two principles which feel most important to you.

*Note that these principles are in development



Example: Part 1

Jordan enrols in a Master's in Environmental Management at a university. The university's marketing materials and course handbook promise:

- Extensive fieldwork opportunities
- A specialist module on 'Sustainable Practice' delivered by industry experts
- Transparency and partnership with students in course decision-making

Jordan accepts the offer on this basis, paying full international fees and relocating to the UK.

But, after the first semester, the university decides to:

- **Remove** the 'Sustainable Practice' module
- **Cancel all international fieldwork**, replacing it with an online case-study exercise

The decision is made internally without consultation with current students.

Do you think the university's actions in this scenario were fair?

Example: Part 2

- When Jordan and others query the changes, they are told that the changes are '**academically equivalent**'.
- They are also told that '**the course handbook allows the university to make changes** at any time'.
- The university is also **facing financial challenges**.

Do you think the university's actions in this scenario were fair? Why?

Student contracts

- All students enter into a **contract** with their university/college. This contract sets out the **rights and obligations** of the student and the university/college.
- **Issues:**
 - The language in contract documents can be hard to understand
 - Each university / college sets contracts out differently
 - Documents can be hard to find
- We also know that **some student contracts do contain terms which are unfair.**

Do you think a more consistent, student-friendly approach to student contracts would help?

We'd love to hear from you.

We'll be asking what students think about our proposals for a new approach to consumer and student protection in our consultation at the end of spring.

- The format will be an online survey on our website where you can respond (publications/consultations)
- We'll email you directly with the link
- Sign up to Student News
- LinkedIn, X



Questions?

What topics would you like to see from us?

Topics previously covered:

- The OfS and our work
- AI
- Financial cuts
- Freedom of Speech

What students have said they would like to hear from us?

- Quality of courses
- Post-graduate students
- Experiences of care-experienced and estranged students
- Accommodation
- Progression (careers and employability)
- Tuition fee increase
- Apprenticeships

Student News: Are you a subscriber?



Welcome!

If you're reading this at the start of your higher education journey – congratulations and a warm welcome. If you're a returning student, welcome back!

Check out our short film about who we are, how we support students, and what you should expect from your university or college.



Scan to sign up!



Thanks for attending!

Please tell us what you thought of today's event.

Join us again for our next student debrief in spring.

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