

# [Press release: Preferred candidate for Chair of Office for Students announced](#)

The Department for Education has today (7 February 2017) announced that Sir Michael Barber is the preferred candidate to become Chair of the Office for Students (OfS).

Sir Michael was selected for the role following an open and transparent recruitment process, overseen by the office of [The Commissioner for Public Appointments](#).

The Office for Students is a new public body being established in law by the [Higher Education and Research Bill](#). It will combine the existing regulatory functions of the [Higher Education Funding Council for England](#) (HEFCE) and the [Office for Fair Access](#) (OFFA), and will create and oversee a regulatory environment in higher education which puts the interests of students at the heart of the system, focusing on choice and competition.

Sir Michael Barber is a leading thinker and practitioner on public service delivery and has been at the forefront of global thinking in education for the past 20 years including in higher education, for example as a member of the [Browne Review of higher education funding](#).

Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, said:

I am delighted to confirm Sir Michael as the government's preferred candidate for this vital role as Chair of the Office for Students (OfS).

Sir Michael is a globally respected figure both in the sector and in government with an impressive record in leading and supporting public sector delivery.

The OfS will play a vital role in this government's ambitions for higher education by replacing a regulatory system from a bygone era with framework that can truly respond to the challenges of the 21st century. I welcome Sir Michael's commitment to the opportunities for higher education through the creation of this new body.

Minister for Universities Jo Johnson said:

I am delighted Sir Michael is taking up this crucial role. With his deep understanding of education systems, Sir Michael has a world-class background in delivering HE reform and is the right person to lead the creation of the Office for Students.

The OfS will play a pivotal role in reforming one of our nation's

greatest assets – the higher education sector. This new body will drive a focus on choice and competition and rightfully put the interests of students at the heart of regulation.

Sir Michael Barber said:

I am delighted to take on this role and deeply conscious of the degree of responsibility it involves. The higher education sector in England, with its welcome diversity, is a jewel in this country's crown. It has a major role to play in a global Britain and a fairer Britain.

The challenge will be to combine the traditions that make our universities great with the innovation that the decades ahead demand.

Above all the Office for Students will aim to create a framework in which universities are enabled to provide for students both high academic standards and employability for the 21st century.

I look forward to working with everyone to sustain and develop world-leading higher education in this country.

The Rt Hon the Lord Mandelson said:

Michael Barber is an excellent choice. His commitment to education and public service is strong and he knows the importance of university independence.

The Rt Hon Baroness Gillian Shepherd said:

Sir Michael Barber will bring to this post an outstanding intellect, a proven track record in education and business, and a strongly strategic approach.

Professor Sir Steve Smith, Vice Chancellor, University of Exeter said:

Sir Michael Barber is one of the most thoughtful and impressive educationalists I have worked with. His educational expertise has been sought by the Obama administration and the Pakistan government.

In all his work he has consistently put students first, striving to improve their education whatever their background. He is a tireless advocate for adding value educationally and sees education as a continuum from school to university. I can think of no one better

qualified to act in this incredibly important role.

The appointment will be subject to a pre-scrutiny hearing by the [Education Select Committee](#). If appointed, Sir Michael will serve a term of 4 years.