

Press release: Chief Executive of new Office for Students announced

The Department for Education has today (5 July 2017) announced the appointment of Nicola Dandridge as the inaugural Chief Executive of the Office for Students (OfS).

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

The OfS is a new public body, established in law by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The OfS will be the regulator for the Higher Education sector and will put the student interest at its heart. It will be innovative in its approach to student participation, success and employability. The OfS will put the student interest at its heart and be innovative in its approach to student participation, success and employability. Once fully operational in April 2018, the OfS will replace the [Higher Education Funding Council for England \(HEFCE\)](#) and the [Office for Fair Access \(OFFA\)](#).

Nicola Dandridge is moving to the OfS following 8 successful years as the Chief Executive of Universities UK.

Justine Greening Secretary of State for Education said:

Nicola Dandridge's knowledge and experience will be key for this important role.

The OfS will replace an outdated regulatory system with a framework that can truly respond to the challenges of our 21st Century and ensure the university system meets the needs of the students.

Jo Johnson Universities Minister said:

I am delighted that Nicola Dandridge is taking up this crucial role. Her knowledge and experience of the higher education system makes Nicola an excellent choice to work alongside Sir Michael Barber at the helm of the OfS.

The new regulator will rightfully put the interests of students at the heart of regulation and play a pivotal role in reforming one of our nation's greatest assets – the higher education sector.

Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students said:

Nicola's focus on students, her experience in improving

participation and equality for disadvantaged groups, and her years of experience in the higher education sector position her extremely well as the Chief Executive of the Office for Students. Nicola is absolutely passionate about student success, in terms of academic excellence and employability. She will bring the student perspective to everything she does.

Nicola will be instrumental in ensuring that the Office for Students enables the sector to improve outcomes for students. I look forward to working with her to shape the brand new regulatory framework, putting student participation, academic success, and employability at its heart.

Nicola Dandridge said:

I am delighted to be appointed as the first Chief Executive of the OfS. It will be a tremendous privilege to work with Sir Michael Barber and colleagues at HEFCE and OFFA in leading the new organisation.

The creation of the OfS presents an unparalleled opportunity to ensure that every student enjoys a rewarding educational experience and secures the outcomes that they want, whatever their background and whatever their aspirations.

The Secretary of State for Education has also agreed the transfer of 6 members of the current HEFCE board to the OfS board, while the process of recruiting the remaining board positions continues. This includes plans to secure the student voice, by appointing at least one board member with experience of representing students' interests.

1. Nicola Dandridge is currently Chief Executive of Universities UK (UUK), a sector body that supports UK universities by working directly with government, the private sector, the professions and sector agencies. Nicola has been at UUK since September 2009. She was previously Chief Executive of the Equality Challenge Unit, a higher education agency that works with the sector to promote equality for staff and students. Before joining the Equality Challenge Unit, Nicola was a lawyer, qualified in both England and Scotland and working in private practice.
2. The HEFCE Board Members who have been recruited into new roles in the OfS are:
 - Martin Coleman (Deputy Chair)
 - David Palfreyman
 - Steve West
 - Carl Lygo
 - Gurpreet Dehal
 - Kate Lander
3. More information about the OfS board roles and application packs can be found on the [Public Appointments website](#)

4. The HEFCE and the OFFA will be replaced with the OfS in April 2018. The OfS will:
 - have an explicit legal duty to promote choice and consider the student, employer and taxpayer interests
 - operate a risk-based approach to regulation, focusing attention where it is needed and reducing the burden on low-risk institutions
 - have a duty to promote equality of opportunity This will mean looking beyond getting students from disadvantaged backgrounds into university – they will also be charged with making sure that providers are doing all they can to support the students throughout their course, helping to tackle drop-out rates and support disadvantaged students into employment.
5. Speaking on the confirmation of 6 of the OfS Board Members, Sir Michael Barber said:

I am very pleased to see the appointment of Carl Lygo and David Palfreyman, Gurpreet Dehal, Kate Lander, and Steven West as board members for the Office for Students. They bring a combined wealth of experience, from commercial markets to the higher education sector, that will be invaluable as the Office for Students introduces a brand new regulatory approach built around the student. Their diverse perspectives and expertise will be brought to bear on the opportunities and challenges we will face as we enable new providers to join the sector.

Martin Coleman's appointment as Deputy Chair is also very welcome. Martin's background as a leading competition lawyer and competition policy specialist will help set the new tone for the higher education sector in England: a competitive market, guided by sophisticated regulation, geared towards delivering exceptional outcomes for students.

Finally, I am happy to announce the campaign to recruit the remaining members of the board. We will appoint a student representative, who will have a crucial role in bringing the student perspective to everything we do. Additionally, we will ensure that our appointments reflect the diversity and wide range of backgrounds of the student population and our nation as a whole.

Speech: 55th Special Session of OPCW Executive Council

Thank you Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Estonia on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks.

The United Kingdom thanks the Director General for the comprehensive and thorough Fact Finding Mission reports on recent investigations into the incident at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April this year and in to an incident at Um Housh in September 2016.

The OPCW's swift response, deploying the FFM to investigate the allegations of chemical weapons use in Khan Shaykhun within 24 hours of the claims being made, was exemplary. Your team worked in the most testing of circumstances. All of us here today should be grateful for the dedication of your staff.

As your report details, what happened in Khan Shaykhun was the worst of human acts. The banned nerve agent sarin was used to kill at least 100 people, including many children, and to injure more than 200. Even samples that the Syrian Government tested and shared confirm that sarin was used. So those facts are not in dispute. The use of chemical weapons is a war crime. There is now a pressing need to find out who was responsible, and to seek justice for the victims. I am grateful for the Director General's swift work to pass the FFM's report to the OPCW/UN Joint Investigative Mechanism so that they can work to identify the perpetrator of this most horrific crime.

We welcome the fact that the JIM is also looking into the FFM's report on an exposure to sulphur mustard in Um Housh in September 2016. Impunity for such crimes is never acceptable. This Council must take a firm stand against all chemical weapons use, and all perpetrators must be brought to justice.

The United Kingdom's assessment is that it is almost certain that the Syrian Government was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April. Let me briefly explain why.

There is no evidence to suggest that any party to the conflict in Syria, other than the Syrian Government, has access to a complex nerve agent such as sarin. We note that the FFM's report refers to testimony from witnesses describing the presence of jets in the area at the time of the attack. Only the Syrian Air Force has the capability to launch a chemical weapons attack from aircraft, and it has already been condemned by this Council for having been found to have used chemical weapons, deployed from aircraft, on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

Meanwhile the Syrian Government's story has changed on multiple occasions since the horrific events of 4 April, twisting a new narrative each time to fit the emerging facts. First there was a blanket denial of any sarin release, then they told a simply extraordinary story of an airstrike on a supposed jihadist chemical weapons storage facility on April 4th, which they said made sarin; now as we know, sarin is a relatively complex agent to develop and manufacture, and there is no credible evidence that anyone in Syria, other than the regime, has the capability to produce and to weaponise it. We all watched the terrible news footage reporting the early morning attacks in real time, but the Syrians have told us tales of an attack at

midday instead. And finally, the Syrian Government handed over samples which it had obtained and tested from the impact site, and proved positive for sarin, just like other samples that the FFM had tested. But now the Syrian Government seeks to discredit the FFM's report as, according to the Syrian Foreign Ministry's statement on 1 July, "the creation of a sick mind".

Mr Chair,

As we all know, the FFM is a professional, independent and impartial body, it has unparalleled technical expertise and works to a consistent and sound methodology. It is our duty to value and to protect the integrity and impartiality of the OPCW – anything less is frankly disrespectful to the ideals we all say we share. In that context I am glad to announce that the United Kingdom will provide further funds to support the OPCW's vital work through the Trust Fund for Syria Missions.

The Technical Secretariat has worked tirelessly over the past four years to shine the light of truth on Syria's chemical weapons programme. Since Syria joined the Convention, in the aftermath of the Ghouta atrocity in 2013, the Syrian Government has denied scientific reality and has covered up the full extent of its chemical weapons programme. Syria and its backers claim that it has destroyed its chemical weapon stockpiles. Yet the Director General has continued to report that the OPCW cannot declare Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme as "accurate and complete", and that serious "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain". While the Director General and the Technical Secretariat have worked tirelessly to establish the truth, Syria has failed to reciprocate. The Syrian government has provided limited information, only under pressure; and when challenged with evidence that made its previous position untenable. Syrian engagement with the OPCW has been neither meaningful nor honest. Their supposed cooperation is a facade. The JIM's finding in 2016 of repeated Regime use of chemical weapons underscores the fact that Syria has unquestionably failed to account for, or to destroy, its whole chemical weapons programme.

Mr Chair,

This Executive Council cannot turn a blind eye to such flagrant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. When the perpetrators of the atrocity in Khan Shaykhun are identified, we must act to send a clear message that chemical weapons use will not be tolerated, and that we are prepared to stand up to the values we all said that we held in common and which we enshrined in that Convention twenty years ago.

Finally, may I confirm that the United Kingdom will be pleased to support the Joint Declaration to be proposed today by France and Germany on this matter.

[Press release: PM call with Greek Prime Minister Tsipras: 5 July 2017](#)

This morning the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece to discuss the ongoing Cyprus settlement talks in Geneva.

The Prime Minister praised the constructive role that both parties have played to reach this point and reiterated that there is a major opportunity to be seized.

She added that any agreement requires all sides to show leadership and flexibility and that the UK will do it all it can to support a settlement.

[Press release: New fourth lane opens on M3 smart motorway](#)

Main construction on a £174 million project to upgrade the M3 in Surrey and Hampshire to a smart motorway has been completed on time Highways England announced on Saturday 1 July.

Overnight on Friday 30 June, the last of the cones were removed and a new fourth lane is now open for traffic in both directions. Work to test and commission the new smart motorway technology will continue for a short period, with the fully upgraded road opening to traffic later in July. A 50mph limit is in place for safety reasons while this work is carried out.

Highways England project manager Pranav Devale said:

I am delighted that we've opened this vital motorway upgrade on time. This new stretch of smart motorway will tackle congestion and improve journey times for the 130,000 drivers who use it every day.

Smart motorways add vital extra capacity, improve journey times and maintain high levels of safety. Drivers will also see better information about conditions on the road ahead and enjoy smoother journeys on the fully resurfaced road – as well as the smart motorway upgrade, we have also been carrying out the most extensive maintenance on the M3 since it was first built in 1971 in parallel with the smart motorway works.

I would also like to thank drivers for their co-operation and understanding during the final testing phase and hope they enjoy

the improved journeys between London and the south coast.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

The smart motorway upgrade has converted the hard shoulder of a 13.4 mile section of the M3 between Farnborough and the M25 to an extra traffic lane. New technology will make the road more resilient to disruption, improving journeys by using variable speed limits that will help tackle frustrating stop-start traffic and giving drivers better information on conditions ahead.

The extra running lane has opened for traffic as scheduled, with the smart motorway technology being switched on shortly afterwards. When the testing and commissioning is complete, the speed restriction will be lifted and all four lanes will operate at 70mph in normal conditions. The testing phase is expected to last for up to three weeks.

Work on major maintenance being carried out alongside the project is also substantially complete, but some activities – including the rebuilding of the Woodlands Lane bridge over the M3 near Windlesham – will continue until later in the year. None of this maintenance will require any permanent traffic restrictions on the M3.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

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[Press release: £50 million investment in M6 Knutsford roundabout](#)

The 'Option A' idea, to provide a new bridge across the middle of the roundabout where the motorway meets the A556, received the backing of three quarters of drivers, Cheshire East and Tabley councils and other local people responding to last summer's month-long consultation. Today it was unveiled as the option Highways England is taking forward in its preferred route announcement (PRA) for the improvements.

Highways England project manager Irene Ofei said:

We are delighted to announce the scheme we are taking forward is the one which was the overwhelming choice of people taking part in last year's consultation. We feel this option will deliver most and lasting benefits in terms of improving journey reliability and safety and increasing capacity.

The new link roads across the middle of the roundabout will take a lot of traffic away from other parts of the roundabout, reducing congestion for everyone.

While further work to refine the idea will now take place, construction work could start as soon as March 2019 but by March 2020 at the latest.

The improvements will involve significant construction in the middle of the roundabout over the existing M6 motorway carriageways. This will provide dedicated link roads between the northbound M6 and the new northbound A556 Knutsford to Bowdon dual carriageway as well as the southbound M6 onto the southbound, local, A556 road towards Northwich.

The improvements also include:

- wider lanes on the existing roundabout to increase capacity, including the bridges over the M6.
- new traffic lights on the roundabout and its approach roads.
- new traffic lights for the Tabley Hill Lane/Pickmere Lane junction.
- improvements to local access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders using the junction.

The reports setting out the preferred route announcement and detailing the responses to last summer's consultation can be found on the [consultation web page](#).

Money for remodelling the roundabout at one of the region's busiest road junctions is being provided as part of the Government's £15 billion Road Investment Strategy (RIS), and will help boost the Northern Powerhouse agenda of improving transport connectivity and reliability to help the economy of the North.

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