

# Policy Cheat Sheet

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Jumping straight into the world of higher education policy can be complicated and overwhelming at first. It can often feel like you are trying to catch up with a television series, starting on the fourth season. Whilst a lot of understanding policy will develop through time, this cheat sheet should help you navigate some of the key terms, mechanisms and stakeholders that are prevalent in the sphere of higher education policy.

## General Terms

### **Policy**

At its core, policy is *'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual'*. Policy lays out ways of thinking, actions proposed, rules and guidance. Oxford SU also envisions policy as encompassing knowledge and research about higher education. Policy support is about ensuring that student change-making is informed by insights in the sector.

### **Briefing**

A briefing is any way in which policy is disseminated to an individual. Briefings can come in the form of documents, presentations, bitesize information chunks or even just a casual chat. Briefings are usually produced by policy specialists to make the information accessible and digestible.

### **Consultations**

A consultation is usually run by a key body to gather thoughts and insights from the sector to feed into policy creation. Oxford SU will often respond to key consultations as a representative body presenting student thoughts such as the Office for Students Strategy Consultation or promote consultations to students for completion such as the University's Race Equality Task Force Consultation.

## At The University

### **Committees / Working Groups / Forums**

The university's governance operates through a series of committees, working groups, forums etc. These are meetings of relevant university staff, and often student representatives to not only discuss but approve changes at Oxford. All university policies will be consulted on and approved at least one (but often many more) university committees. These committees also regularly discuss the impact on national higher education policy, on the university.

### **Council**

University Council is the university's executive governing body. There are twenty-five members of Council, and three sabbatical officers attend the meeting as attendees. University Council is responsible for academic policy and the strategic direction of the university and make key decisions as to how the university operates. There are five main subcommittees of Council, and all other subcommittees/working groups/forums will feed into one of these five subcommittees.

### **Conference of Colleges**

Conference of Colleges is the equivalent of University Council for the collegiate system. Yet,

Conference of Colleges has less governing power due to the independent nature of the colleges. Whilst University Council can set out a policy that needs to be adopted by the whole university, Conference of Colleges can issue guidance to colleges, but not enforce rules. As with the university, there are many subcommittees and forums that feed into Conference of Colleges.

### **Congregation**

Congregation is described as the sovereign body of the University. There are near 5,500 members of Congregation which is made up of all Oxford academic staff, and more senior academic-related staff. Congregation votes on key changes for the university.

### **Education Policy Support (EPS)**

EPS are the operational department at Oxford responsible for overseeing higher education policy; both responding to national higher education policy and creating and implementing university policies themselves. They are also responsible for quality assurance, which means the standard of education and awards given within the collegiate university.

### **Academic Administration Division (AAD)**

AAD is a group of university services that offer support and information to students and their learning experience at Oxford. They oversee student recruitment, student services, student administration, and educational policy. EPS sit within AAD.

## **Outside the University**

### **Office for Students (OfS)**

The OfS are the independent regulator for higher education institutions in England. Their goals are to ensure every student, regardless of their background can participate in higher education, receive a high-quality academic experience, are able to progress into careers and further study, and receive value for money.

### **Department for Education**

The Department for Education is the UK government department responsible for all elements of education. They create national policy for higher education from the promises and principles of the current UK government. Their policies are on a national scale. The current Secretary of State for Education is Nadhim Zahawi, and the Minister of State for Universities is Michelle Donelan.

### **National Union of Students (NUS)**

The NUS is a national student collective who campaign on behalf of issues for students on a national scale. Much like a students' union they are led by elected student officers who run on manifestos and campaign on issues. Students are not members of NUS, but their students' unions are. Some students' unions have passed policies to disaffiliate from NUS, however the majority remain members.

### **Universities UK (UUK)**

UUK is a national collective of universities, and they represent universities on a national level. They often run taskforces and produce guidance for universities on key issues within the higher education sector. They also will issue statements and stances on issues that arise.

### **The Russell Group**

The Russell Group is a collection of twenty-four universities that are often considered the most

prestigious universities in the UK. It is estimated that the majority of research funding in the UK goes to members of The Russell Group.

### **Post-1992 University**

Post-92's are universities that were formally polytechnic colleges. These were given university status in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Often post-92's are discussed in opposition to Russell Group universities.

### **Access and Participation Plan (APP)**

Every higher education institution registered with the Office for Students must create an Access and Participation Plan which lays out the principles for improving equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed and progress in higher education.

### **National Student Survey (NSS)**

The NSS is an annual survey open to all final year undergraduate students to feedback on their experience at university. Many students' unions have partaken in a boycott of the NSS previously, including Oxford SU, due to its links to TEF and the marketisation of education.

### **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)**

The TEF is a government exercise to assess the quality of teaching in Higher Education Institutions and how they ensure high success outcomes for students. Providers will receive either a gold, silver or bronze award on the basis of their teaching. The TEF has been considered controversial in the past for the way it was previously used to inform raising tuition fees, its contribution to the marketisation of Higher Education and its link to the NSS as a data gathering metric. The TEF is currently undergoing a review through the OfS.

### **Research Excellence Framework (REF)**

The REF is like the TEF; however it assesses Higher Education Institutions research quality and outcomes. It is much less controversial than TEF, as its focus is less on students, and more on universities research output. Occasionally PGR students can contribute to REF.

### **The Augar Report**

The Augar Report, is a report officially titled 'Independent panel report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding', but colloquially named after the Chair of the panel, Dr Philip Augar. This report lays out an alternative view for Higher Education in England. This review laid out a series of recommendations, including the reintroduction of maintenance grants, more funding and vision for Further Education Colleges and most notably, the reduction of undergraduate fees to £7,500. This report was published in May 2019, and there has yet to be a considerable response from the government to its proposals.

### **Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)**

HESA are experts in UK higher education data who collect, assure and disseminate data about higher education in the UK. They produce official statistics that are published as open data on a series of areas including: Students, Widening Participation and Graduates.

### **The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)**

The QAA are the quality assurance body for higher education in the UK. They maintain that universities are upholding the higher education standards that students expect. They are an independent body who monitor academic quality and standards, and developed the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

### **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)**

The OIA is an independent body who review student complaints in HE across England and Wales. If a student is unsatisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they made to their institution they can appeal this outcome through the OIA who will rule on this. If a provider is found to have done something wrong, the OIA will make recommendations to the provider to put this right. The OIA also publishes anonymised data on the cases they deal with, which is helpful for students to see what complaints are being upheld.

### **Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)**

HEPI are an independent think tank devoted solely to higher education in the UK. They contribute towards HE policy debate in the UK, and contribute research and discussion on key issues in HE.

### **WonkHE**

WonkHE is a blog that dissect and publish summaries of the latest debates and updates in HE. Their blog is ran by contributors from across the sector who offer insights and opinions on key issues within HE.