

News story: Minister welcomes 'accountability revolution' in higher education

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah has called on the new universities regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), to put a “laser-like focus on students” at its inaugural conference today (28 February).

[Speaking](#) to leading figures from the Higher Education sector at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London, the Minister outlined the significant progress that has been made by the Government to establish the OfS.

At a time when the university sector is experiencing unprecedented levels of scrutiny, the Minister set out how the launch of the OfS signified “a new age – the age of the student”. He called on the sector to embrace this new era and made clear that he expects the OfS to put student interests at the centre of everything they do.

The conference marked the publication of the [OfS new framework](#) – a blueprint for higher education – and the biggest regulatory change in Higher Education in over a quarter of a century. The truly modern framework will ensure our world-class universities are able to rise to the challenges of the future.

In his speech, the Minister set out his vision for a successful higher education sector, including how universities must fulfil their vital civic duty in society by championing student interests and transforming their lives.

Speaking at the OfS conference today, Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

Since taking office I have visited universities around the country to talk to students and listen to their hopes and concerns.

What students have told me is that they value excellent teaching, high quality information and want a system that is responsive to their needs.

The new regulator will have real powers to deliver these goals. By putting students' interests first, the OfS will play a key role in delivering an accountability revolution.

The Office for Students will replace HEFCE and OFFA as the single regulator for higher education in England. It will take up its regulatory role in April 2018.

The minister's speech can be read in full [here](#)

The Secretary of State's guidance to the Office for Students is available [here](#)

The new Regulatory Framework is available [here](#)

News story: Appointment of Professor Jo Swaffield and Dr Brian Bell to the MAC

Their appointments follow a rigorous recruitment process that was regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

The Chair of the MAC, Professor Alan Manning said:

Jo and Brian bring a wealth of expertise and experience and I am delighted to welcome them as members of the Migration Advisory Committee.

Jo Swaffield

A Professor of Economics and Head of Department at the University of York, Professor Swaffield is an applied micro labour economist with strong research expertise in the UK labour market and a track record of providing quality research evidence to government. Her main research fields are in labour economics and applied micro-econometrics, focusing on issues such as the gender wage gap, low wages (including minimum wages and the Living Wage), and also employment (particularly in terms of working hours).

Professor Swaffield's research has been published in leading economics journals and gained external funding from prestigious funders. She has delivered a number of commissioned research reports that have formed part of the evidence base for the Low Pay Commission's recommendations on the UK's National Minimum Wage.

Brian Bell

Dr Bell has been a Senior Lecturer, King's Business School, within Kings College London since January 2017, following four years as an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at Oxford University. Dr Bell is a world leading labour economist who is widely published, and his work on immigration has included papers examining the progress of immigrants in the labour market in the UK, and the impact of immigration on crime in the UK.

Dr Bell has worked extensively outside academia, including at the Bank of

News story: Genome sequencing project reaches the halfway mark

The 100,000 Genomes Project was launched in 2012 and has now reached the halfway mark – sequencing 50,000 human genomes from 40,000 patients.

Patients have already benefited from their participation in the project:

- participants with rare diseases have received faster diagnoses
- cancer patients have received personalised treatment programmes only made possible by the project

The project aims to provide better insight into the cause of diseases and how diseases develop in each individual. This will ensure that medicine is more targeted and there will be fewer unwanted side effects.

While many developed countries are working on genomic medicine initiatives, no other has the reach and impact of the 100,000 Genomes Project. Patients are recruited through care and treated through routine channels thanks to the unique structure of the NHS.

Of the 50,000 genomes mapped so far:

- 8,000 are for cancer patients
- 42,000 are for rare disease patients and family members

Breast, brain, colorectal, lung, prostate and renal are among those cancers to have been successfully sequenced.

Whole genome sequencing gives a more complete picture of the precise genetic changes causing an individual's cancer. It opens up a greater range of treatment options.

Early analysis has found genetic changes in more than 60% of cancer patients, which could potentially provide new therapies through clinical trials for some of these patients.

Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

This incredible achievement shows once again why the UK is a world leader in genomic medicine.

We're backing our world-leading scientists and clinicians in the NHS to push the boundaries of modern science and embrace new

technology – using data to transform the lives of patients and families through quicker diagnoses and personalised treatments.

It is testimony to the hard work of the clinicians and scientists across the NHS and volunteers for the project that we can continue to harness the very best of the NHS and remain at the forefront of this pioneering field.

Sir John Chisholm, Executive Chairman, Genomics England said:

The 100,000 Genomes Project was a stunningly ambitious project when announced by the (then) Department of Health 5 years ago. Since then, Genomics England and NHS England (now joined by Scotland, Northern, Ireland and Wales), working with a huge number of ground-breaking partnerships, have built the infrastructure and protocols to deliver health-enhancing diagnostics from consented patients with undiagnosed rare genetic disease and common cancers, while at the same time enabling their data (in de-identified form) to provide the basis for research leading to improved therapies and treatments.

Having built the platform and reached the 50,000 halfway point we are now able to operate at a scale to complete the target by the end of 2018.

Currently, the average rare disease patient in the UK consults 5 doctors, receives 3 misdiagnoses and waits 4 years before receiving their final diagnosis.

Genomic testing is changing the lives of patients with a rare disease – often providing diagnoses for the first time after years of uncertainty and distress, known as the ‘diagnostic odyssey’.

Professor Sue Hill OBE, Chief Scientific Officer for England and Senior Responsible Officer for Genomics at NHS England, said:

This is an important milestone for the project and has only been possible because of the contribution and commitment of the participants in the project and their families.

The milestone also marks how healthcare professionals from across the NHS have come together to transform care for the future, demonstrating how this technology can be utilised as part of routine care to improve patient lives and keep the NHS a world-leader in this important area of medicine. Working together patients and professionals have achieved so much and I would like to say a personal thank you to each and every one for playing their part.

We are on track to complete recruitment to the project this autumn and, from then, the use of these cutting-edge genomic technologies will be embedded in the NHS through the new Genomic Medicine Service offering real benefits to patients and healthcare delivery.

News story: UK and Germany work towards stronger defence relationship



Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson with German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen

The pair and their teams met to discuss strengthening defence ties. The German Defence Minister and Gavin Williamson also took the opportunity to meet a group of German junior officers, who have been learning about UK defence at the Ministry of Defence.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The UK and Germany face the same intensifying threats to our way of life and we work closely together to protect our citizens from harm.

Germany is one of our closest allies and I look forward to even closer cooperation.

The visit follows on from increased cooperation between the two countries. February saw the successful Ministerial Equipment Capability Cooperation talks in Berlin and the latest annual UK-Germany Army Staff Talks, which took place in London.

Germany was formally recognised as a 'tier one' defence ally in November 2015's Strategic Defence and Security Review. The country has also recognised the UK as a key defence partners in its equivalent review.

Both nations have a strong history of working together in NATO and as part of the Counter-Daesh coalition, working together to tackle terrorist threats, build allies' capacity and boost Europe's security.

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[News story: Welsh rail services set to be devolved following historic agreement](#)

The transfer of rail services to the Welsh government has taken a significant step forward with the laying of a draft order in Parliament.

The draft order was laid before Parliament today (28 February 2018) and will, subject to approval from MPs, Lords and the Privy Council, devolve the procurement and management of Wales and Borders franchise train services within Wales. This follows detailed discussions between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government on how powers will be devolved to Welsh ministers.

The agreement also takes into account the fact that many of the franchise services operate on both sides of the border between England and Wales and includes safeguards to protect all passengers using these routes.

Rail Minister Jo Johnson said:

This is a positive and significant step in the franchise devolution process and is an example of the effective cooperation between the UK and Welsh governments.

The devolution of these powers delivers on recommendations made by the Commission on Devolution in Wales and demonstrates the commitment we made as a government in the 2015 St David's Day Agreement.

Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport Ken Skates said:

I welcome this recognition of the extensive nature of the cross-border services – and services wholly within England – provided by the Wales and Borders franchise and the need for appropriate accountability for rail operations on each side of the border.

It will be important for devolution of funding for Network Rail to be delivered in the future and I will continue dialogue with the Department for Transport to that end.

As well as continuing with present franchise funding arrangements, the UK government will also provide an extra £125 million towards upgrading the Valley Lines, part of the Welsh Government's metro project in South Wales.

The draft Welsh Ministers (Transfer of Functions) (Railways) Order 2018 was laid before Parliament following formal approval by Welsh ministers. It will go before the Commons and Lords for scrutiny.