Advancing geography and geographical learning

Improving students' ability to make the right choices about higher education for them (OfS' proposed strategic approach)

The Office for Students invited feedback on its proposed strategic approach to improving students' ability to make the right choices about higher education for them – whether, what and where to study.

Respondent capacity / type of organisation:

Other

Do you think there are any critical gaps in the proposals?

Yes

The OfS's proposed strategic approach omits subject bodies [a term we use to refer collectively to organisations as diverse as professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), accrediting bodies subject associations and learned societies] as key information providers for tailored or personalised information, focusing only on higher education institutions and other bodies which take a more general approach.

We recommend this gap be addressed by including subject bodies as a key source of subjectspecific information and guidance to inform tailored support.

Most students search for institutions and programmes of study with a particular subject (or small group of subjects) in mind. Subject body advice is extensive, personalised to subjects (and sometimes to student cohorts or characteristics), independently recognised as innovative, designed in support of the transition between school and higher education, and valued by students, teachers and schools, parents and universities. Our recent experience in providing subject choice advice for geography includes, for example:

- Geography Ambassadors [https://www.rgs.org/schools/geography-ambassadors/] a subjectfocused scheme, free to schools, which recruits, trains and supports undergraduates, postgraduates and professional geographers to make school visits to share the benefits of geography in further study and careers. The scheme delivers 1100+ Ambassador sessions annually, typically to class-sizes of pupils, reaching an audience of c30,000 young people.
- Going Places with Geography [https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/going-placeswith-geography-brochure/] – Events for Key Stage 3 students on the importance of geography and its relevance for future study and careers.
- Study Geography and Support for Students [https://www.rgs.org/geography/studyinggeography-and-careers/] – Advice and resources to support students at all stages (school,

university, postgraduate and graduate) in choosing courses, applying successfully, and making the most of their studies in geography.

Are there any other key potential partners we should work with?

Yes

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We recommend this gap be addressed, by including subject bodies as a key source of subjectspecific information and guidance to inform tailored support.

Subject bodies of all types are in a unique position to provide subject-specific advice. They advocate for their disciplines (of interests to students) but maintain independence to individual higher education institutions. They allow prospective students (and their parents) to become better informed regarding the breadth and quality of options available to them should they choose to pursue a subject into higher education and beyond.

Subject bodies which accredit programmes of study, especially those leading to professional registration or Chartered status, are particularly well-placed to provide advice about the range of suitable study options for specific career pathways.

The proposed national online information resource would be strengthened by signposting students to subject bodies.

Undertaking a data mapping exercise to link A-Level (and other post-16 qualifications) subjects to the most relevant subject body/ies for each discipline and to the HE taught course subject data structure (HeCOS) may be a useful step to support subject information signposting.

Other comments, not addressed elsewhere

We await with interest the outcome of the TEF subject-level consultation pilots 2018/19 in informing how prospective students might receive and interpret subject-specific metrics for teaching quality and employment outcomes. We remain alert to the challenges of presenting subject-level TEF awards which aggregate distinct subjects (which are not always taught in the same school or faculty) due the use of the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) Common Aggregation Hierarchy 2 (CAH2).

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the role of subject bodies further with the Office for Students.