

DfE guidance letter on Access & Participation

Issue

1. In their guidance letter dated 23 November 2021, the Secretary of State and Minister for Higher Education set out their strategic guidance for access and participation, to coincide with the announcement of John Blake as the new OfS Director for Fair Access and Participation. John will join the OfS on 1 January 2022.
2. The guidance letter signals a desire to see greater engagement by universities and colleges with schools, as a way of raising attainment, addressing school standards and increasing student aspiration. The letter indicates that Access and Participation plans should include targets for school support, involving such activities as summer schools, programmes of intervention in schools, and targeted bursaries for living costs, with credit being given for activity that leads to students achieving good outcomes beyond attending the university or college undertaking the activity. Plans should also include targets on higher and degree apprenticeships, level 4 and 5 provision, Higher Technical Qualifications, and flexible access routes. The progress made by the OfS in relation to increasing access is noted, and there is acknowledgement of our current focus on the Black attainment gap, completion, and graduate outcomes, together with our ongoing work to tackle poor quality provision.

Recommendations

3. The board will be aware that the OfS must have regard to guidance letters from the Secretary of State. The board is therefore invited to note the terms of the letter of 23 November 2021, with a view to discussing it at more length at its 3 February 2022 board meeting at which point the new Director for Fair Access and Participation will be in attendance.

Further information

4. Available from Nicola Dandridge.