

Office for  
Students



# Office for Students Strategy 2018 to 2021

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# Who we are

We are the independent regulator of higher education in England.

We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.

Our work covers all students whether undergraduate or postgraduate, national or international, young or mature, full-time or part-time, studying on a campus or by distance learning.

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**Participation**

**Experience**

**Outcomes**

### **Objective 1**

All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.

### **Objective 2**

All students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.

### **Objective 3**

All students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.

## **Value for money**

### **Objective 4**

All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.

It is by focusing on these four primary student objectives that we will also secure essential benefits to employers, the economy and society.

## What we will do

We will achieve these outcomes by fulfilling the duties placed on us by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, and using the levers in the regulatory framework (available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/)). We will establish a high quality threshold through our 24 conditions of registration that every registered higher education provider must meet, and we will intervene where they do not. Through these conditions, all students enrolled with a registered provider can be assured of a high quality educational experience.

Beyond this high quality threshold, we will ensure that all students are provided with the necessary information, advice and guidance so that they can make informed decisions about where and what to study. We will influence the sector to improve through incentives, allowing autonomous institutions to flourish and determine their own path.

## How we will do this

We are committed to equality of opportunity and social mobility for the full diversity of students in all our work. Many students wish to progress straight from school to a residential experience of higher education and mobile lives and careers; but it is just as important for higher education to create opportunities for a student who wishes or needs to study at home, to work in the community where they grew up and to learn later in life.

We will promote competition and choice for students. We will be an enabling, not a controlling, regulator, independent of government and of providers. We will be stewards of the sector, sustaining and developing an internationally competitive higher education sector that is admired around the world for its quality.

We will involve students – past, present and future – and employers in shaping what we do and how we do it. We will invite challenge and challenge ourselves, continuously reflecting on and evaluating our performance as a regulator.

We will respect the institutional autonomy of higher education providers. We understand the connection between institutional autonomy and successful outcomes for students, as well as success in other areas of institutional activity.

We will regulate with an appreciation of the global nature of higher education; for students, employers and providers, our approach will have implications far beyond England's borders.

We will work constructively and respectfully with providers, collaborating where we have common objectives. However, we will be uncompromising in intervening to prevent poor quality provision, behaviour or performance that damages students' or public interests.

We will work efficiently, and aim to reduce bureaucracy and ensure coherence with other regulators.

We will work closely with UK Research and Innovation, with government and with other partners, particularly in supporting the objectives of the industrial strategy, and will collaborate with colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Why we do it

We want to ensure that every student with the ability and desire to undertake higher education is able to make informed decisions about where, how and what to study, and to access a course that meets their needs and aspirations.

We want to see students, regardless of their background or identity, enjoying courses that stretch and inspire, that form part of a wider educational and social experience, and lead to the outcomes sought, whether that be employment or further study, wellbeing or resilience.

We want to ensure that students leave their courses with the knowledge, qualifications, skills and attributes that are required by employers, both now and into the future, or which support the setting up of their own businesses.

We want to see educated graduates, from all forms of higher education, who can flourish in the world as it is today and might be tomorrow.

## Why this matters

Students invest significant time and money in their studies. Undergraduate and postgraduate courses involve commitments of several years. Many students take out substantial loans, to be repaid when they graduate and earn over certain limits. They need to know that their investment of time and money is worth it.

The benefits of higher education go beyond the benefit to the individual student. It is a powerful driver of social mobility. Employers need graduate skills. Graduates are essential for delivering public services. Graduates and postgraduates are needed to support research, and its development into products and services.

A successful higher education system benefits not just the individual, but employers, our economy and society. It is a public as well as a private good.

## An efficient and effective regulator

We need to be an efficient and effective organisation to successfully deliver our four strategic objectives.

We will support and develop our staff to enable high performance across all our work.

We will be innovative and thorough in our systems and processes, holding ourselves to the high standards to which we hold the sector.

We will focus on our ability to learn and to improve ourselves, systematically tracking our performance and evaluating our impact. We will continue to learn from other regulators, organisations and sectors. Above all we will learn from and engage with students to better understand how we can regulate in their interests.

# Strategic outcomes

**This section will be updated in summer 2018 with our key performance indicators (KPIs) for each strategic outcome.**

**Participation** 'All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.'

- Access, success and progression are not limited by background and identity, and gaps are significantly reduced.
- All access and participation activity is underpinned by evidence and 'what works'.

**Experience** 'All students, from all backgrounds, receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure.'

- Students are able to choose from a diverse range of high quality higher education provision, which is responsive to the preferences and needs of students from all backgrounds and to the shifting national and global environment.
- Students have a positive experience of higher education and are highly satisfied with the quality of teaching, learning, wider experience and outcomes.
- Students' knowledge and skills are improved during their higher education experience.
- Students' interests are protected when events have a material negative impact on their ability to continue to study on a course, at a campus, or with a provider.

**Outcomes** 'All students, from all backgrounds, are able to progress into employment, further study, and fulfilling lives, and their qualifications hold their value over time.'

- Graduates and postgraduates leave with the knowledge and skills that will contribute to their national and local economies and communities, and drive productivity.
- Students' lives are improved and enriched by their time in higher education.
- Qualifications hold their value over time, and students are able to use them long after leaving higher education.

**Value for money** 'All students, from all backgrounds, receive value for money.'

- Higher education delivers value for money for students, graduates, taxpayers and employers, especially in the form of positive student outcomes.

**Efficient and effective** 'The OfS is an efficient and effective regulator.'

- The OfS is a well managed and appropriately structured organisation, which supports and develops its staff to enable delivery of its objectives.
- The OfS has the right systems and process infrastructure and resources to support delivery of its objectives.
- Regulatory burden for providers is minimised.

## Cross cutting strategic outcomes

In addition to these strategic outcomes, we will also measure progress against four cross-cutting outcomes. These will not be directly targeted through OfS activity, but if successful our work will make significant contributions to these areas.

- Public trust and confidence in higher education.
- National social mobility.
- Equality and diversity within the higher education sector and beyond.
- A dynamic national workforce.



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