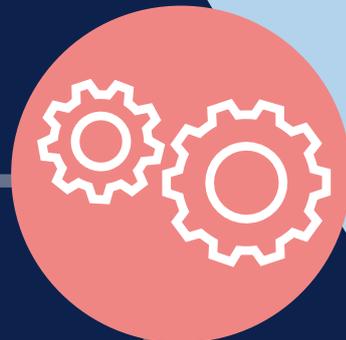


Business plan 2022-23



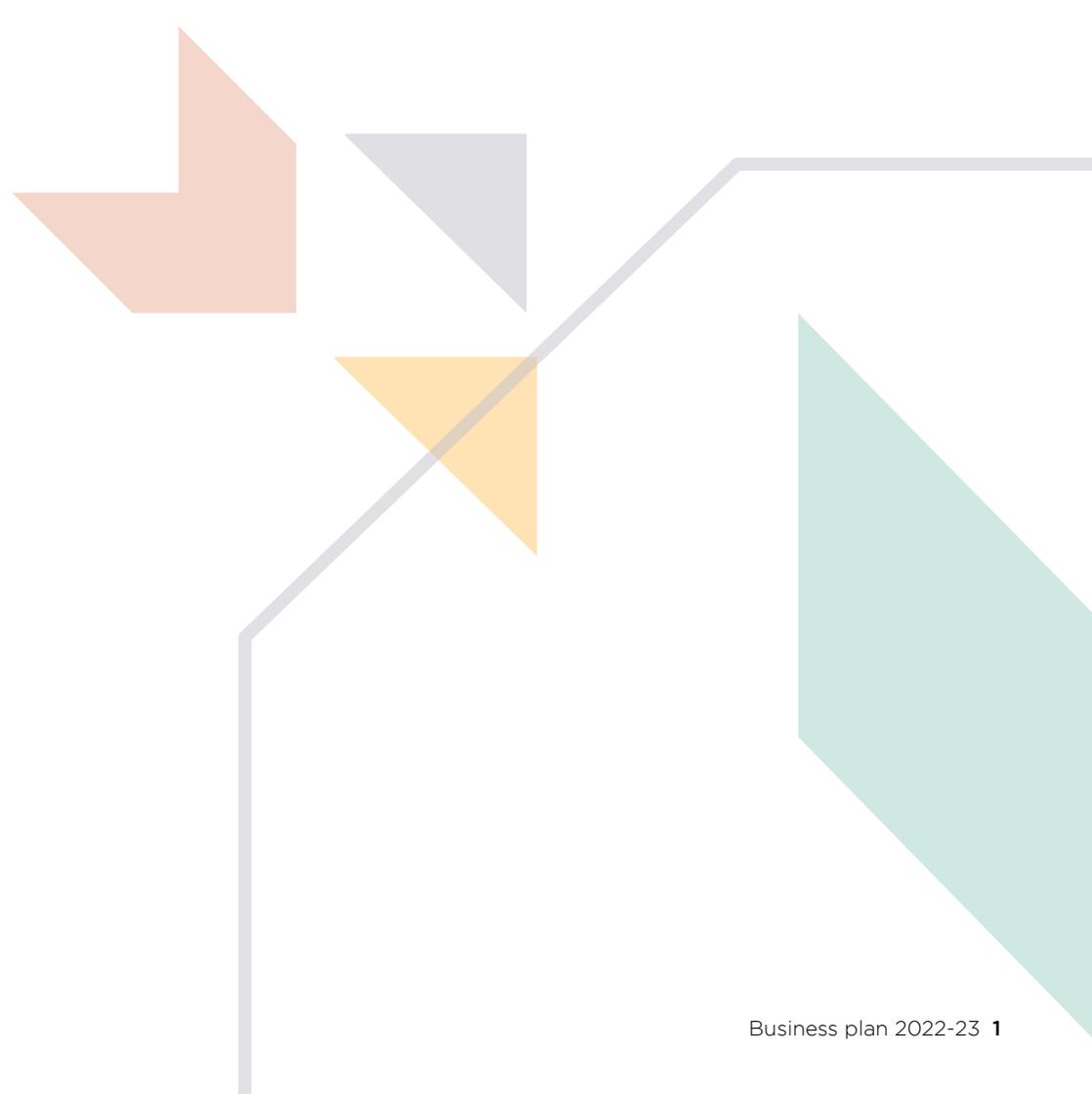
Reference **OfS 2022.24**

Enquiries to **info@officeforstudents.org.uk**

Publication date **26 May 2022**

Contents

Foreword	2
How the business plan works	3
Our eleven goals	4
Quality and standards	5
Equality of opportunity	9
Enabling regulation	14
Operations	17



Foreword

This business plan sets out what the Office for Students (OfS) will do in 2022-23, the first year of our new three-year strategy.¹

Since we were set up in 2018, a significant portion of our work has focused on establishing the OfS as the independent regulator of higher education in England. We registered over 400 universities, colleges and other higher education providers, giving assurance to their students that their institution met our regulatory expectations. We refined the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), incentivising providers to improve the quality of their teaching. And we introduced access and participation plans, ensuring providers were focused on equality of opportunity for their applicants and students.

Our work over the next three years will build on these foundations. We will ensure that universities and colleges registered with us continue to meet our expectations, with a particular focus on quality and standards and equality of opportunity.

We recognise that there are many excellent higher education providers and courses that are delivering a high quality educational experience for their students. Our role as a regulator is to identify and address instances where this is not the case. As such, this plan sets out our intention to intervene robustly where the evidence suggests universities and colleges are falling short of our regulatory requirements.

We are also entering a new phase for our work to ensure equality of opportunity for students. Universities and colleges have made important strides over the past few

years – such as outreach activities and tailored support for students – to ensure that learners from underrepresented groups can access and thrive in higher education. But persistent inequalities remain, and new challenges have emerged. This year we will start to evolve our regulatory approach to addressing these issues. This includes a clear focus for universities and colleges to work in partnership with schools to close the stubborn attainment gaps that remain the most significant barrier to higher education.

By focusing both on quality and standards and equality of opportunity, we will advance our primary regulatory objectives.² We will be addressing two aspects of higher education that are of huge importance to students and taxpayers, and that inter-lock – it is not possible to enhance one while neglecting the other. The ambition of this plan is to make progress in these two areas over the coming year. We will also ensure that the underpinning regulation that enables this progress is in place and working well.

This plan provides transparency about what we will do – and we welcome feedback on it. We will be led by evidence of ‘what works’ as we seek to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.

**Susan Lapworth, Interim Chief Executive,
Office for Students**

¹ The OfS strategy 2022-2025 is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-strategy/.

² See page 2 of our strategy.

How the business plan works

This OfS business plan sets out the work we intend to do in 2022-23 to make progress on our three-year goals. These goals are the specific outcomes we are seeking to achieve, as set out in our strategy for 2022-2025.³

In the strategy, we specify two areas of higher education that we will focus on over the next strategic period: 'quality and standards' and 'equality of opportunity'. The goals will either advance our two areas of focus or they will facilitate our work. They are listed on the next page.

In this business plan, we have recorded for each goal the activity we will carry out over the year. Against each, we have described the work, including the key actions and outputs. We have also set out the operational activities that enable our work, including how we plan to improve them.

The online version of the plan is available at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-business-plan/. To provide feedback on the plan, contact info@officeforstudents.org.uk.

³ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-strategy/.

Our eleven goals



Quality and standards⁴

Students receive a high quality academic experience that improves their knowledge and skills, with increasing numbers receiving excellent provision.

Students are rigorously assessed, and the qualifications they are awarded are credible and comparable to those granted previously.

Providers secure free speech within the law for students, staff and visiting speakers.

Graduates contribute to local and national prosperity, and the government's 'levelling up' agenda.



Equality of opportunity

Students' access, success and progression are not limited by their background, location or characteristics.

Prospective students can choose from a diverse range of courses and providers at any stage of their life, with a wide range of flexible and innovative opportunities.

Providers act to prevent harassment and sexual misconduct and respond effectively if incidents do occur.

Providers encourage and support an environment conducive to the good mental health and wellbeing that students need to succeed in their higher education.



Enabling regulation

Providers are financially viable and sustainable and have effective governance arrangements.

Students receive the academic experience they were promised by their provider and their interests as consumers are protected before, during and after their studies.

The OfS minimises the regulatory burden it places on providers, while ensuring action is effective in meeting its goals and regulatory objectives.

⁴ Our approach to the regulation of quality and standards is subject to a consultation process and the content of this document is not intended to pre-judge decisions that will be made as a result of that process.



Quality and standards

Students receive a high quality academic experience that improves their knowledge and skills, with increasing numbers receiving excellent provision.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will take action against providers where our requirements for high quality education are not being met. We will also encourage providers to go beyond these requirements by establishing our approach to the Teaching Excellence Framework, resulting in a rating for excellence for each provider.

Work area	Description
Investigation and enforcement	<p>We will identify courses and providers that may not satisfy our regulatory requirements for quality</p> <p>We will open a series of investigations, announcing these where appropriate</p> <p>We intend to publish the outcomes of investigations by the end of 2022-23</p>
Student outcomes⁵	<p>We will conclude our consultations on regulating student outcomes, and the data indicators we will use for this purpose, and will publish final policy decisions</p> <p>We will share with individual providers their student outcomes indicators and publish these at provider level</p> <p>We will assess the performance of individual providers on student outcomes and take action where appropriate</p>
Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)⁶	<p>We will conclude our consultation on the TEF and publish final policy decisions</p> <p>We will publish the TEF specification and invite submissions from providers</p> <p>We will recruit a TEF panel and support its members to assess the submissions</p> <p>We will publish the TEF indicators for individual providers</p> <p>We will publish and promote final TEF ratings in 2023-24</p>

⁵ The actions listed here are subject to consultation.

⁶ The actions listed here are subject to consultation.

Work area	Description
Transnational education (TNE)	<p>We will publish a report that provides insight into the TNE activities of English providers, based on regulatory data and engagement with stakeholders in the UK and overseas</p> <p>We will publish, with partners in the other UK nations, a joint statement, setting out for an international audience the regulatory arrangements that ensure UK-wide higher education quality and outcomes</p>
Designated Quality Body (DQB)	We will complete the triennial report on the DQB and submit this to the Secretary of State
Validation arrangements	We will assess our options for intervening in the validation system to increase the availability of high quality courses
Blended learning	<p>We will review the approaches being taken by providers to blended learning, which combines online activities and face-to-face teaching</p> <p>We will report on approaches to blended learning that represent high quality teaching and learning, and those that may fall short of our regulatory requirements</p>

Students are rigorously assessed, and the qualifications they are awarded are credible and comparable to those granted previously.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will take action against providers where there is evidence of grade inflation, and publish our regulatory decisions to encourage better assessment and awarding practices throughout the sector. We aim to secure public confidence in higher education qualifications.

Work area	Description
Analyse attainment data	We will publish an updated analysis of the changes in degree classifications awarded over time, including the extent to which these changes can be explained through statistical modelling

Work area	Description
Investigation and enforcement	<p>We will use attainment data and other intelligence to identify courses and providers that may not satisfy our regulatory requirements for rigorous assessment and awarding practices</p> <p>We will open a series of investigations, announcing these where appropriate</p> <p>We intend to publish the outcomes of investigations by the end of 2022-23</p>
Insight on assessment and awarding	<p>We will use what we learn from our investigations to communicate any broader concerns about assessment and awarding practices in parts of the higher education sector</p>

Providers secure free speech within the law for students, staff and visiting speakers.

What we will do in 2022-23

Using our existing powers, we will respond to individual cases where providers may not have secured free speech and academic freedom. Subject to Parliament's decisions, we will develop a new regulatory approach, shaped by engagement with students.

Work area	Description
Investigation and enforcement	<p>We will identify cases where a provider may have failed to take steps to secure academic freedom and free speech</p> <p>We intend to publish the outcomes of such investigations</p>
Response to new legislation	<p>Subject to the passage of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, and any relevant legislation enacted, we will develop a new regulatory approach to free speech and academic freedom</p> <p>We will involve students and students' unions in shaping our regulatory approach to free speech</p>

Graduates contribute to local and national prosperity, and the government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will ensure that providers satisfy, or exceed, our minimum requirements for students developing relevant skills and progressing to professional employment or further study. We will also run programmes to address current and anticipated skills shortages.

Work area	Description
Student outcomes⁷	<p>We will publish student outcomes indicators for individual providers, including the rate at which students progress to professional employment or further study</p> <p>This transparency will incentivise providers to deliver student progression outcomes that meet our minimum requirements</p>
Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)⁸	<p>We will publish the TEF indicators for individual providers, including the rate at which students progress to professional employment or further study</p> <p>This transparency will incentivise providers to deliver student progression outcomes beyond our minimum requirements</p>
Postgraduate conversion courses in data science and artificial intelligence (AI)	<p>We will continue to run this scheme with funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Office for Artificial Intelligence (OAI) to address the shortage of data science and AI specialists in the UK</p> <p>Later in the year, we will launch phase two and invite bids for funding</p>
Improving outcomes for local graduates	<p>We will conclude this funding initiative to improve employment outcomes for graduates who seek employment in their home region</p> <p>We will review monitoring reports from the funded projects and publish an evaluation of the scheme</p>
Student engagement in knowledge exchange	<p>We will conclude this funding partnership with Research England to involve students in knowledge and skills exchange between higher education and other sectors</p> <p>We will review monitoring reports from the funded projects and publish an evaluation of the scheme</p>

⁷ The actions listed here are subject to consultation.

⁸ The actions listed here are subject to consultation.



Equality of opportunity

Students' access, success and progression are not limited by their background, location or characteristics.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will reform our approach to access and participation plans to focus on our new priorities.⁹ We will monitor progress in delivery of current access and participation plans and ensure that providers are delivering high quality education and good outcomes for students from all backgrounds. Using funding, guidance and evidence of 'what works', we will support providers to make progress on access and participation.

Work area	Description
Access and participation plans	<p>We will continue to agree new, and monitor current, access and participation plans</p> <p>We will follow up a targeted way with individual providers that may not be on track to deliver their commitments to improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups in higher education</p>
New approach to access and participation	<p>We will continue to embed the new priorities for access and participation that we introduced in early 2022</p> <p>We will receive and assess the variations to plans for 2023-24 that we requested from providers in response to our new priorities</p> <p>We will launch a consultation on future access and participation plans for 2024-25 onwards, and publish final policy decisions</p>
Funding	<p>We will continue to deliver our Uni Connect programme, supporting local partnerships of providers to advise underrepresented groups about entering higher education</p> <p>We will evaluate and report on phase two of the programme and launch phase three, agreeing partnerships' plans and distributing funding</p> <p>We will issue student premium funding to providers</p> <p>We will oversee and evaluate the joint funding programme with Research England to increase access and participation in postgraduate research for black, Asian and minority ethnic students</p>

⁹ Our new priorities for access and participation are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/our-approach-to-access-and-participation/.

Work area	Description
Partnerships between higher education providers and schools	<p>We will incorporate attainment raising in schools into our Uni Connect funding programme</p> <p>We will provide guidance and support to the funded local partnerships to develop, deliver and evaluate their work to raise attainment</p>
Quality regulation	<p>Our regulation of quality and student outcomes will consider whether individual providers are delivering high quality and positive outcomes for students from all backgrounds</p>
Disabled students	<p>We will oversee the ongoing work of the Disabled Students' Commission, administered by Advance HE</p> <p>We will work with the Commission to review its impact and determine next steps beyond 2022-23</p>
International students	<p>We will work in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) and the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) to establish 'what works' in ensuring international students can integrate and receive a fulfilling academic experience</p> <p>We will conclude our call for evidence, seeking to identify effective practice in supporting international student integration, and publish the findings</p>



Prospective students can choose from a diverse range of courses and providers at any stage of their life, with a wide range of flexible and innovative opportunities.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will stimulate supply by funding and removing barriers to entry, while also promoting and improving the information available to prospective students in choosing courses. We will work with government to ensure our regulatory approach is appropriate in the context of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement.

Work area	Description
Preparation for Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE)	<p>We will work with government on the development of the underpinning legislation needed for the LLE, where this interacts with our regulatory powers and approach</p> <p>We will monitor and evaluate the higher education short course trial, which supports providers to offer greater choice and flexibility to students</p> <p>We will ensure effective regulation of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and degree apprenticeships, working with our regulatory partners</p>
Funding	<p>We will continue to allocate recurrent funding to subjects and courses that would otherwise be undersupplied by providers</p> <p>We will determine which providers should be considered world-leading specialists and, following consultation, decide how we should fund them</p>
Barriers to entry	<p>We will review the advice and guidance we publish for new providers applying to register with the OfS</p> <p>We will review our process for providers applying to use the word ‘university’ in their name</p>
Information for student choice	<p>We will run the National Student Survey (NSS) and use the results to inform student choice</p> <p>We will consult on and implement changes to the NSS</p> <p>We will provide information and guidance about different options for study through the Discover Uni website</p> <p>We will publish final policy decisions following our consultation on the publication of information about providers – seeking, where appropriate, to enable prospective students to better understand the value of the course and provider they are considering</p>

Providers act to prevent harassment and sexual misconduct and respond effectively if incidents do occur.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will collect evidence on the actions that providers are taking in response to our statement of expectations on harassment and sexual misconduct. We will engage with students and other stakeholders. Building on this evidence and understanding, we will set out our next steps to address these issues.

Work area	Description
Evidence and next steps	<p>We will use information from our regulatory casework, our stakeholder engagement and other relevant data to build evidence of systemic issues</p> <p>We will use the feedback from our recent virtual conference to review the progress made one year on from the publication of our statement of expectations</p> <p>We will publish an evaluation of the impact our statement has had on providers' behaviour, and set out our next steps to address harassment and sexual misconduct</p>
Stakeholder engagement	<p>We will continue to engage with other organisations with expertise to better understand the issues and inform our work</p> <p>We will continue to work with students to ensure providers act to prevent and respond to incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct</p>

Providers encourage and support an environment conducive to the good mental health and wellbeing that students need to succeed in their higher education.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will deliver and evaluate a range of programmes to support providers in developing their practice on student mental health.

Work area	Description
Challenge Competition¹⁰	We will conclude this funding initiative, to support innovative and collaborative approaches to improving student mental health outcomes, and publish a final evaluation

¹⁰ 'Achieving a step change in mental health outcomes for all students'.

Work area	Description
Mental Health Funding Competition¹¹	<p>We will continue to run this scheme, with funding from the Department of Health and Social Care and the DfE, to support students with characteristics identified as increasing the risk of poor mental health</p> <p>We will review monitoring reports from the projects funded under this programme and publish an interim evaluation report</p>
Student Space	<p>In partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), we will fund this initiative, delivered by Student Minds to provide wellbeing information and support for students</p> <p>We will commission an evaluation of Student Space, assessing the extent to which it limited the mental health impact of the pandemic on students</p>
Student mental health ‘what works’ project	<p>We will commission a project to help higher education providers identify and make use of effective practice in supporting students’ mental health</p>
Integrated mental healthcare pathways	<p>We will provide funding and information to support effective joint working between providers’ student support services and local NHS mental health services</p>
Suicide prevention	<p>We will scope further activity through which the OfS can add value to suicide prevention for students</p>



¹¹ ‘Using innovation and intersectional approaches to target mental health support for students’.



Enabling regulation

Providers are financially viable and sustainable and have effective governance arrangements.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will continue to monitor the financial viability and sustainability of providers and identify those that may face difficulties. Where necessary, we will intervene to protect the interests of students. We will also give assurance to organisations that fund higher education.

Work area	Description
Monitoring and intervention	<p>We will monitor the financial viability and sustainability of providers through the annual financial returns they submit and intervene where necessary</p> <p>We will respond to any cases of provider closure and will intervene to protect the interests of students</p>
Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC)	<p>We will compile and publish TRAC data, helping providers and public funders understand the costs of higher education teaching and research</p>
Funding assurance	<p>We will ensure we gain reliable assurance over the public funding we distribute to providers</p> <p>We will review our accounts direction to ensure that providers include necessary information in their audited financial statements</p>

Students receive the academic experience they were promised by their provider and their interests as consumers are protected before, during and after their studies.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will engage with students and other stakeholders to revise our requirements to ensure these set appropriate student protection norms for the higher education sector.

Work area	Description
New approach to student consumer protection	<p>We will engage with students to understand the issues we should focus on to protect their interests effectively</p> <p>We will consult on an updated approach to protecting the interests of students as consumers</p>

The OfS minimises the regulatory burden it places on providers, while ensuring action is effective in meeting its goals and regulatory objectives.

What we will do in 2022-23

We will become increasingly risk-based in the way we monitor compliance and take enforcement action. We will continue to seek opportunities to reduce burden and will engage with providers to test the burden of our regulation against the benefits.

Work area	Description
Risk-based approach	<p>We will ensure that the investigations and enforcement we undertake will be risk-based</p> <p>We will ensure that the information we collect from providers will be risk-based</p>
New approach to access and participation plans	<p>When developing our proposals for our new approach to access and participation plans, we will seek opportunities to reduce burden (especially for small and specialist providers) and, through consultation, will invite suggestions about how to achieve this</p>
Provider engagement	<p>We will continue to engage with providers to understand the impact of our regulation and to challenge any unnecessary bureaucracy they have developed</p>
Exempt charities	<p>We will fulfil our responsibilities as the principal regulator for those higher education providers in England that are exempt charities, and for exempt charities that are closely connected with them¹²</p>
Data burden	<p>We will publish final policy decisions following our consultation on data burden</p> <p>We will work to improve the way providers can submit data and information to us</p>



¹² An exempt charity is not directly regulated by the Charity Commission and instead has a principal regulator, thereby avoiding duplicate regulatory burden.

Regulatory operations

What we will do in 2022-23

We will continue to operate and improve the core regulatory processes that enable both the OfS and the English higher education system to function. These operations underpin our ambitions for quality and standards and equality of opportunity.

Work area	Description
Regulatory operations	<p>We will increase our capacity to carry out investigatory and enforcement work, including through visits to individual providers</p> <p>We will consider applications from providers seeking to register with the OfS</p> <p>We will monitor registered providers' compliance with our conditions of registration, responding to reportable events and notifications</p> <p>We will consider applications from registered providers to gain degree awarding powers or use 'university' in their name</p> <p>We will monitor higher education providers' compliance with the Prevent duty</p> <p>We will improve the way we deliver our regulatory operations, including recording information and managing cases</p>



Operations

What we will do in 2022-23

We will run effective operations that enable us to deliver our work, and seek to improve these operations over the year.

Work area	Description
Data operations	<p>We will oversee the Designated Data Body in its role, including taking forward the outcomes of the Data Futures consultation</p> <p>We will publish equality, diversity and student characteristics data and update our access and participation data dashboard</p> <p>We will create, refine and expand our ‘associations between characteristics of students’ (ABCS) data analysis</p>
Efficiency and effectiveness	<p>We will expand our ability to evaluate and learn from our regulatory activities</p> <p>We will publish the annual OfS value for money review, focusing on efficient, effective and economic use of our resources</p>
Student engagement	<p>We will continue to implement our student engagement strategy, involving students’ perspectives in our work</p> <p>We will regularly convene our student panel, and support panel members to shape our policy development</p> <p>We will develop training for student representatives to engage with our regulatory processes</p> <p>We will continue to poll students regularly to inform our policy development</p>
Communications and events	<p>We will continue to produce Insight briefs, our annual review and events addressing current issues in higher education</p> <p>We will update our published measures of success to align with our new strategy</p> <p>We will continue to improve our website, including the accessibility of our regulatory advice and notices</p>



© The Office for Students copyright 2022

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/