

Office for  
Students



# **Student information, advice and guidance**

**OfS strategy – summary of approach**

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# Introduction

As outlined within our Regulatory Framework, the OfS's approach to regulation puts informed student choice and institutional autonomy at its heart. It sees the dynamic of providers responding to informed student choice as the best mechanism for driving quality and improvement, creating the conditions for informed choice, competition. It will publish student outcomes and current and future employer needs as a way of informing student choice. It will incentivise focus on student outcomes, and support mechanisms that allow student transfer.

The OfS Student information, advice and guidance strategy has drawn on our stakeholder consultations to recommend practical next steps to improve the information, advice and guidance (IAG) available for students. Our work suggests there are gaps in the effectiveness of IAG for different groups of students and increasing concern about students' ability to make informed choices, either because the information is not available or clear enough, or there is a lack of adequate advice and guidance. In particular, we are concerned that when students, and their teachers and parents, have access to growing amounts of data, they don't have the support to make sense of what they are seeing.

## Aims

The key aims of our strategy are:

**Aim 1:** Identify gaps and opportunities for adding value to the current information available to students.

**Aim 2:** Ensure that provider websites provide accurate, high quality, accessible information that matters to students.

**Aim 3:** Create and maintain a partnership approach to the delivery of IAG, working with those providing information and advice to students to improve their impact.

**Aim 4:** Secure effective information, advice and guidance for all students in relation to career choices.

# **Aim 1: Identify gaps and opportunities for adding value to the current information available to students**

## **What we are seeking to address**

Our stakeholder consultation suggests that there is a lot of information available for students but there is a shortage of advice and guidance available both online and through advisers, schools and colleges to help students navigate the information.

Research continues to show that decision-making is complex and more information does not necessarily lead to better decisions, unless it is contextualised and personalised with advice and guidance.

The gaps in information extend into higher education. Our stakeholder feedback found that information available for students wishing to transfer early on is particularly poor. Feedback from students suggests that many have considered changing courses or provider at some point during their studies

## **Our approach**

- The OfS will improve the quality of information available to students. We will ensure students can access reliable and appropriate information to inform their decisions about whether to study for a higher education qualification and, if so, identify which provider and course is most likely to meet their needs and aspirations.
- We will ensure that good information, advice and guidance is available to students wishing to transfer between courses, providers and types of higher education provision through information provided on the new information resource and through provider information.
- Working with relevant partners we will ensure good quality, impartial, up-to-date information advice and guidance reflecting the full breadth of higher education provision is available to those advising students about their higher education options.

## **Aim 2: Ensure that provider websites provide accurate, high quality, accessible information that matters to students**

### **What we are seeking to address**

The responses to our recent consultation<sup>1</sup> highlighted the need to challenge providers on the information they provide. Feedback from higher education providers suggests that Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) compliance has sharpened the sector's focus, particularly amongst central marketing teams. This is reflected in the findings of the 2016 compliance review by the CMA.<sup>2</sup> However, clearer and more specific guidelines would be welcomed by some providers and by most students.

Moreover, a recent OfS review found that information on fees and additional course costs could be improved at many of the providers audited. Terms and conditions were not always easy to understand or find. Stakeholder engagement activity has also highlighted issues with the consistency and clarity of course information on provider websites.

### **Our approach**

We will work with the CMA to create clear, specific expectations for the information from providers, to include course information, scholarships and bursaries, which facilitates comparison between providers.

## **Aim 3: Create and maintain a partnership approach to the delivery of IAG, working with those providing information and advice to students to improve their impact**

### **What we are seeking to address**

Research and feedback from stakeholders suggest that students want to hear from their peers and to be able to discuss and engage on the topics relevant to them. They would particularly benefit from connecting with and talking to current students. Feedback from our consultation suggests that information sources such as league tables do not always fully reflect the diversity of the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/IAG\\_approach/](https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/IAG_approach/)

<sup>2</sup> See <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5791e595e5274a0da300019f/compliance-review-findings-higher-education-undergraduate-sector.pdf> [PDF]

## Our approach

- Using our convening power, we will consider what constitutes high quality IAG delivered to prospective students, undergraduates and graduates by all higher education providers, including benchmarking good practice through the creation of an IAG advisory group.
- We will explore with other popular information providers ways in which we can work together to improve the quality of presentation of their data and provide links that make it easier for students to understand their choices and the information they are seeing.

## Aim 4: Secure effective information, advice and guidance for all students in relation to career choices

### What we are seeking to address

There is evidence of skills gaps in the country, both nationally and regionally. Employers report not having the flow of highly skilled graduates that they need. Many students choose to go into higher education in order to enhance their career prospects, yet graduate outcomes for some students (and some providers) are sub-optimal. There is a strong and continuing correlation between graduate outcomes and socio-economic background.

### Our approach

- We will ensure there is coherent information, advice and guidance provided between schools, further education and higher education, and in relation to all post-18 education and training options.
- We will ensure that current and (as far as possible) future employer needs – nationally and locally, and in identified industries with skills shortages – inform IAG provision.
- We will ensure that all information, advice and guidance, including in relation to career choices, take account of all students – young and mature, from disadvantaged backgrounds, non-mobile, and with different equality characteristics (especially race and disability).

### Next steps

- Launch of the UK-wide replacement for Unistats – autumn 2019
- Revised guidance for providers – autumn 2019
- Convening of an IAG advisory group, comprising key partners and stakeholders: sector, students, UCAS, IAG providers – summer 2019



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