

Office for
Students



Business plan 2019-20

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Enquiries to info@officeforstudents.org.uk

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Foreword

The Office for Students (OfS) is one-third of the way through its first, three-year, strategy. Already, we have made good progress.

In our first year we registered 337 providers, ensuring they met robust baseline thresholds for access and participation, quality and standards, and financial sustainability. We have developed our outcomes-focused approach to access and participation, and initiated programmes relating to student mental health, and local graduate-level employment. We raised awareness of the issues around unexplained grade inflation, and the making of unconditional offers. We continued to prioritise improving teaching quality through the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, and have worked towards better information for students by capturing the views of over 320,000 students in the 2018 National Student Survey.

But there is more to do. Our business plan is deliberately stretching as we continue to focus our energies towards achieving our objectives. It sets out what we intend to do in 2019-20 to make progress towards improvements in participation, student experience, positive outcomes, and value for money.

The plan is also designed to be flexible. We recognise that we work in a turbulent environment, and that in order to maintain a rigorous focus on what matters most for students we may need to flex what we do to respond appropriately to change. So while our ambition and objectives for students are set, every last detail of our activity is not. We ask that higher education providers be judged on the outcomes they achieve, and we will hold ourselves to the same standard. In 2019-20 we will be further refining how we measure our progress. We should also be judged on how efficiently and effectively we work.

We are ambitious for what students, higher education and ourselves as a regulator can achieve. We value diversity of people and providers, we aim to be open in our approach, and we are committed to learning – both for students and in our own work. We welcome feedback on our plan, both now and as it evolves. And, above all, we look forward to continuing to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.



Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Office for Students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicola Dandridge".

How the business plan works

The OfS business plan sets out the work we intend to do to achieve the objectives and outcomes set out in our strategy for 2018-2021. Within this document we have also listed the primary outputs for each strategic objective, as well as the key performance measures against which we will measure our own performance. You can learn more about the key performance measures and see our progress at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/.

The online version of the plan shows which areas of work link to each strategic outcome. This is available at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/our-business-plan/.

To provide feedback on the plan, contact info@officeforstudents.org.uk

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.

What we plan to do in 2019-20

Work area	Operational areas and projects
1. Influence significant positive change in participation through access and participation plans	Assess 2020-21 access and participation plans.
	Assess remaining 2019-20 access and participation plans.
	Monitor 2018-19 access agreements.
2. Support achievement of participation outcomes through targeted interventions	Complete implementation of Addressing Barriers to Student Success programme.
	Complete phase one and implement phase two of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme, including development of outreach hubs.
3. Facilitate greater and better use of evaluation, evidence and effective practice on access and participation	Implement evidence and evaluation strategy for access and participation, including strengthening assessment of evaluation in access and participation plans.
	Launch and oversee a 'what works' centre, Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education.
	Introduce a new set of activities to support the embedding of effective practice within providers.
	Improve the use of and access to higher education data to support targeting, admissions and evaluation.
	Commission research and undertake sector-wide engagement to improve support for students with disabilities.
	With Research England, design new metrics to measure the impact of knowledge exchange funding to inform future investment in skills.
	Share practice on strategic partnerships between schools and higher education providers to raise attainment and close the gaps between different learner groups.

Work area	Operational areas and projects
4. Provide information for prospective students to support their higher education choices	Create and maintain information, advice and guidance strategy and resources.
	Deliver the National Student Survey (NSS), and conduct development work on enhancing the NSS (extending to all years and other excluded groups).
	Develop a postgraduate survey.

Outputs	
Launch of the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education	May 2019
Effective practice web resource for providers, including data and analysis related to target groups	June 2019
National Student Survey results	July 2019
Launch of new information resource for students	September 2019
Access and participation plan impact report	November 2019

The outcomes we are aiming for, and key performance measures that will help us understand our progress	
Outcomes	Key performance measures
Access, success and progression are not limited by background and identity, and gaps are significantly reduced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gap in participation between the most and least represented groups Gap in participation at higher-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups Gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups Gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white students and black students Gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students.
All access and participation activity is underpinned by evidence and 'what works'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proportion of access and participation plans that contain robust evaluation methods, focused on impact and leading to improved practice Ratio of outcomes achieved through access and participation to money spent on access and participation.

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.

What we plan to do in 2019-20

Work area	Operational areas and projects
5. Facilitate registration of high quality providers	Run registration process.
	Review initial registration process.
6. Maintain consistent baseline requirements for registered providers	Establish and operate a system for monitoring and intervention of ongoing registration conditions.
	Establish and operate the approach to random sampling.
	Monitor and oversee the designated quality body's performance of statutory functions.
	Implement duty to monitor and report on financial sustainability of registered providers.
	Refine indicators to ensure that early signs of financial stress are identified and implement a range of approaches to respond to these.
7. Enable greater choice and competition by developing the new process for degree awarding powers and university title	Establish and operate degree awarding powers process.
	Establish and operate new university title process.
8. Encourage competition and choice in the student interest by reviewing and improving structural features of the sector	Review the admissions system to evaluate the extent to which it is operating in the interests of students.
	Establish and operate our approach to providing public information about higher education providers.
	Evaluate and report on the advice available to students about their rights as consumers.

Work area	Operational areas and projects
8. Encourage competition and choice in the student interest by reviewing and improving structural features of the sector (cont.)	Implement duty to monitor and report on student transfers.
	Introduce new quality arrangements for Level 6 and 7 apprenticeships delivered by unregistered providers.
	Review the validation system.
	Evaluate the incentives for unregistered providers.
9. Incentivise excellent teaching that leads to positive student outcomes	Conclude Year 4 of provider-level Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).
	Establish the future TEF process.
	Conclude the subject-level TEF pilot.
	Conclude legacy learning gain projects and determine a future approach.
10. Improve the student experience by developing and delivering a regulatory approach to student welfare, wellbeing and safeguarding	Implement a robust, risk-based and evidence-based approach to monitoring of the Prevent duty in the English higher education sector.
	Develop and deliver the OfS's sector regulatory role in relation to student welfare, wellbeing and safeguarding, including mental health and championing freedom of speech.
	Manage the Challenge Competition: Achieving a step change in mental health outcomes for all students.
11. Ensure EU and international students, postgraduate students, and students in transnational education, are equally supported	Review the impact of our regulatory activity on international students.
	Implement contingency planning for UK students studying in EU countries if Britain exits the EU without a deal.
	Establish and operate our approach to the regulation of transnational education.
	Review the impact of our regulatory activity on postgraduate students.
12. Design and implement systems and processes to protect students' interests when events have a material negative impact on their ability to continue to study on a course, at a campus or with a provider, or when there is a significant course closure	Develop and implement provider exit processes.
	Develop new guidance for providers on student protection plans.
	Support students in the event of industrial action.

Work area	Operational areas and projects
13. Support regulation by other organisations in the interests of students	Act as principal regulator for the higher education providers that are exempt charities.
	Implement Higher Education and Research Act section 63 information-sharing functions.
	Regulate providers with specific course designation.
	Support the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland.

Outputs	
Guidance for providers about authorisation and revocation of university title	April 2019
Initial notification to providers of funding for academic year 2019-20	May 2019
Year 4 TEF outcomes	June 2019
Report on evaluation of the quality of student protection plans; new guidance for providers	June 2019
Publish patterns of registration decisions and outcomes	July 2019
Guidance on variation and revocation of degree awarding powers	July 2019
New registration guidance for providers	July 2019
Reissue of guidance on public interest governance principles	July 2019
Guidance on monitoring and intervention	July 2019
Report on findings of subject-level TEF pilot	September 2019
Publication of the Education (Recognised Bodies) (England) Order and the Education (Listed Bodies) (England) Order	November 2019
Report on financial sustainability of the sector	March 2020

The outcomes we are aiming for, and the key performance measures that will help us understand our progress

Outcomes	Key performance measures
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of provision • Geographical changes in availability of particular type of higher education provision.
<p>Students have a positive experience of higher education and are highly satisfied with the quality of teaching, learning, wider experience and outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students responding positively to the NSS question on overall satisfaction • Postgraduate measure of student satisfaction.
<p>Students' knowledge and skills are improved during their higher education experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proxy measure for learning gain • The extent and impact of poor learning and teaching.
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact on students of course, campus or provider closure.

Objective

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.

What we plan to do in 2019-20

Work area	Operational areas and projects
14. Enhance graduate skills and employability	Develop a project to help identify current and future skills gaps.
	Provide advice to the Department for Education on the development of Level 4 and 5 technical routes.
	Manage Institute of Coding investment.
	With UK Research and Innovation, support the UK research talent pipeline through evidence and investment to improve diversity.
	Manage funding allocated through the Challenge Competition: Industrial strategy and skills – support for local students and graduates.
15. Support health education	Support the healthcare workforce through recruitment to health programmes.
	Implement interventions for vulnerable health provision.
16. Monitor and address unwarranted grade inflation	Establish and operate our approach to addressing unwarranted grade inflation.
	Analysis of degree classification trends.

Outputs

2019 analysis of degree classification trends

June 2019

The outcomes we are aiming for, and the key performance measures that will help us understand our progress

Outcomes	Key performance measures
<p>Graduates and postgraduates leave with the knowledge and skills that will contribute to their national and local economies and communities, and drive productivity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates in highly skilled or professional roles • Employers consider that graduates are equipped with the right skills and knowledge.
<p>Students' lives are improved and enriched by their time in higher education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate wellbeing.
<p>Qualifications hold their value over time, and students are able to use them long after leaving higher education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students achieving 1sts.

Objective

Value for money

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

What we plan to do in 2019-20

Work area	Operational areas and projects
17. Promote value for money for students	Implement our value for money strategy, coordinating work across the OfS.
	Publish new accounts direction and report on senior staff pay.

Outputs	
2019 accounts direction	May 2019
Value for money strategy	By December 2019
Report on senior staff pay	February 2020

The outcomes we are aiming for, and the key performance measures that will help us understand our progress	
Outcomes	Key performance measures
Higher education delivers value for money for students, graduates, taxpayers and employers, especially in the form of positive student outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Student and key stakeholder perceptions of value for money.

Objective

Efficiency and effectiveness

The OfS is an efficient and effective regulator.

What we plan to do in 2019-20

Work area	Operational areas and projects
18. Improve regulation through student engagement	Support the student panel to achieve impact on effective regulation.
	Develop and implement our student engagement strategy.
19. Monitor and reduce regulatory burden	Develop our approach to monitoring regulatory burden, including reporting for the Government Business Impact Target.
20. Ensure the OfS has access to high quality data to support its functions	Undertake data collection and data quality assurance.
	Undertake research and analysis to support effective regulation and public debate.
	Monitor and oversee the designated data body's performance of statutory functions and support a model of more timely data collection.
	Perform an annual review of data requirements.
21. Support achievement of OfS regulatory objectives by efficient and effective use of funding	Review the approach to OfS funding, including recurrent and capital teaching funding.
22. Communicate and engage with stakeholders to support the OfS regulatory objectives	Respond to the review of post-18 education and funding.
	Develop tools for understanding student and stakeholder perceptions.
	Provide a sector overview report.
	Deliver policy-focused events and insight briefs.
23. Monitor and improve equality and diversity at the OfS	Fulfil public sector equality and diversity requirements, and implement an internal equalities, diversity and inclusion plan.

Work area	Operational areas and projects
24. Continually improve the operation of OfS financial functions	Develop our strategy for demonstrating and improving the organisational value for money of the OfS.
	Develop systems and process for collecting registration fees.

We will also operate work areas that support our continuing efficiency and effectiveness, including:

- Enabling strategic delivery and improving organisational performance
- Staff development
- Legal
- Knowledge and information management
- Governance
- Facilities
- Information technology and systems
- Internal communications.

Outputs	
Regulatory notice setting out data requirements	July 2019
Business Impact Target report	July 2019
Report on progress towards achievement of the equality and diversity objectives; updated action plan	August 2019
Sector overview report	November 2019
Student engagement strategy, following consultation with students	January 2020
Annual OfS value for money report	March 2020

The outcomes we are aiming for, and the key performance measures that will help us understand our progress	
Outcomes	Key performance measures
The OfS is a well-managed and appropriately structured organisation, which supports and develops its staff to enable delivery of its objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key performance targets met • External survey of perceptions of the OfS • OfS staff survey results on the extent to which staff understand and feel they contribute towards the OfS's strategic objectives • OfS staff survey results on staff satisfaction • Ratio of performance against targets to annual spend.

Outcomes	Key performance measures
The OfS has the right systems and process infrastructure and resources to support delivery of its objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="675 230 1321 302">• The number of internal support function standards that are met.
Regulatory burden for providers is minimised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="675 403 1018 436">• Regulatory burden.



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