

15 March 2022

Dear Accountable Officer

Monitoring of access and participation plans for 2020-21

I am writing to you to set out our approach to monitoring your access and participation plan for the 2020-21 academic year.

Approach to monitoring

To reduce burden on providers and ensure that our monitoring is risk-based and proportionate:

- You will **not** be expected to submit a monitoring return in 2022 in respect of your access and participation plan for the 2020-21 academic year (see Annex A).
- Students and student bodies will **not** be asked to submit a voluntary independent student submission.
- We will **not** generate standardised impact reports for you to publish.

As part of the monitoring process, we will review the following information to determine whether individual providers are making sufficient progress in the delivery of their plans:

- The updated access and participation data dashboard to assess providers' progress against the milestones and targets in their plans.
- Access and participation expenditure information in their annual financial returns for those providers that submit them to us.
- Other information we hold.

If we conclude that your provider is making sufficient progress, we will not send a monitoring outcome letter to you. We will, however, inform you by email that the monitoring process is complete.

If we determine that your provider is not making sufficient progress, we may contact you for further information. You may also receive a letter setting out any remaining concerns the OfS has and highlighting where we expect improved performance.

The monitoring process will take place over the spring and summer 2022. Of course, we expect providers will want to undertake internal monitoring of their plans for their own purposes. We will continue to review our approach to monitoring of access and participation plans to ensure our monitoring is effective and proportionate.

Access and participation plans from 2023-24

In April 2022, I will write to all providers with access and participation plans asking them to request a variation to their plans for 2023-24 to address the priorities I outlined during the OfS event on 8 February.¹ These priorities include:

- a. Strategic engagement with schools and other organisations to help raise the attainment of young people from underrepresented groups across England.
- b. Development of more diverse pathways into and through higher education through expansion of flexible Level 4 and 5 courses and degree apprenticeships.
- c. Access for students from underrepresented student groups that leads to successful participation on high quality courses and good graduate outcomes.
- d. More robust evidence of what works through a renewed focus on independent evaluation.
- e. Accessible plans so that prospective students, their parents and other stakeholders can easily understand what providers will do.

The significant reduction in burden on providers created by the approach taken to monitoring this year will allow providers the space and capacity to respond to these priorities in 2022. Further advice on the variation process will be sent to providers in April.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter, please contact a&pproviderregulation@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

John Blake
Director for Fair Access and Participation
Direct line 0117 931 7448
John.blake@officeforstudents.org.uk

¹ See: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/next-steps-in-access-and-participation/.

Annex A: General ongoing condition of registration F3: Provision of information to the Office for Students (OfS)

On 20 July 2021, we wrote to providers to set out information about deadlines for data returns required during the 2021-22 academic year.² Annex A of that letter gave notice under ‘general ongoing condition of registration F3: Provision of information to the Office for Students’ of the information we expected providers to provide to the OfS and the deadlines for the 2021-22 access and participation monitoring return.

The original deadline for submission of 2020-21 access and participation plan monitoring returns set out in the F3 notice was Friday 8 April 2022. Given the subsequent decision of the OfS not to require monitoring returns from providers, we will not take regulatory action in respect of this element of the F3 notice.

² See: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/deadlines-and-requirements-for-2021-22-data-returns-and-annual-financial-return-2022/.