

Office for
Students



Regulatory advice 6

How to prepare your access and participation plan

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Introduction

1. This regulatory advice sets out effective practice advice for providers of higher education in England on how to prepare an access and participation plan. It replaces the version published on 28 February 2018 (OfS 2018.06). Providers will need an access and participation plan if they are registered in the Approved (fee cap) category of the register and wish to charge fees above the basic amount for qualifying students on qualifying courses.
2. The aim of this advice is to support you in creating a clear and effective access and participation plan and in developing and delivering a credible strategy. It is important that you read this advice alongside 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance', which sets out what you need to include in your plan¹.
3. You should also consider this advice alongside:
 - Your own existing knowledge and research in effective practice in access and participation
 - Any previous feedback we have given you on your previous access and participation plans, Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and wider registration conditions², including any current conditions or requirements we have set for you
 - The effective practice information on our website³, which includes detailed information on student groups across the student lifecycle where there are equality gaps, and effective practice topics. You will also be invited to attend a range of briefing events that will provide more detail on our requirements.
4. Where effective practice has been identified over and above the minimum required for approval of a plan, providers that adopt these practices are likely to be judged to be at a lower risk of a future breach. Providers may present alternative approaches if these are coupled with a credible rationale.
5. The advice is issued by the Director for Fair Access and Participation, on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS), under section 35 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), which relates to the identification of good practice and giving advice about such practice to registered higher education providers.
6. The OfS's primary aim is to ensure that English higher education is delivering positive outcomes for students – past, present, and future. In delivering this aim, our ambition is that all

¹ Regulatory notices form part of the regulatory framework and provide additional information about the OfS's regulatory requirements. Regulatory advice publications aim to help providers understand and meet our requirements; they do not constitute part of the regulatory framework. Regulatory notice 1 is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/

² For information on all conditions of registration, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

students, from all backgrounds, should have equal opportunities to access and succeed in higher education, and to achieve successful and rewarding careers. Through sector level regulation, we share evidence and examples of effective and innovative practice.

Our new approach to regulating access and participation

7. In our 'New approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education'⁴, published in December 2018, we have stated an ambition that future generations should have equal opportunities to access and succeed in higher education, and to achieve successful and rewarding careers. This is necessarily a long-term goal, but we are clear that to achieve it, the higher education sector needs to make significant progress over the five-year period for which the next round of access and participation plans (APPs) will operate, through to 2024-25.
8. In light of this, we have set the following targets for the higher education sector, and for ourselves, which we have reflected in our key performance measures (KPMs):
 - To eliminate the gap in entry rates at higher-tariff providers between the most and least represented groups (Participation of Local Areas (POLAR)⁵ quintiles 5 and 1 respectively) by 2038-39.
 - For 18- and 19-year-olds, our target is to reduce the gap in participation between the most and least represented groups from a ratio of 5:1 to a ratio of 3:1 by 2024-25⁶.
 - We will publish our targets for older students entering higher-tariff providers in spring 2019.
 - To eliminate the unexplained gap in non-continuation between most and least represented groups by 2024-25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors⁷) by 2030-31.
 - To eliminate the unexplained gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between white students and black students by 2024-25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030-31.
 - To eliminate the gap in degree outcomes (1sts or 2:1s) between disabled students and non-disabled students by 2024-25.
9. These measures are intended to set our ambitions in a small number of areas where we believe progress is most needed. They are not, though, the only issues and measures on

⁴ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/

⁶ For 18- and 19-year-olds, our target is to reduce the gap in participation between the most and least represented groups from a quintile 5:quintile 1 ratio of 5.1:1 in 2016-17 to a ratio of 2.8:1 by 2024-25. This means decreasing the gap between quintile 5 and quintile 1 from 10.2 per cent in 2016-17 to 8.9 per cent by 2024-25.

⁷ For an explanation of what we mean by 'structural' and 'unexplained' factors, see the glossary at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/

which we expect higher education providers to focus through their access and participation plans, as is clear from our guidance below. We also aim to improve practice across the sector alongside these outcomes-based measures.

10. The advice is presented in two parts. **Part I** provides a step-by-step guide to help you create your plan. It includes advice on how to:
 - Assess your performance effectively in relation to access and participation
 - Develop your strategic aims, objectives and targets
 - Develop the strategic measures you will put in place to achieve your strategic aims, objectives and targets
 - Outline your investment.

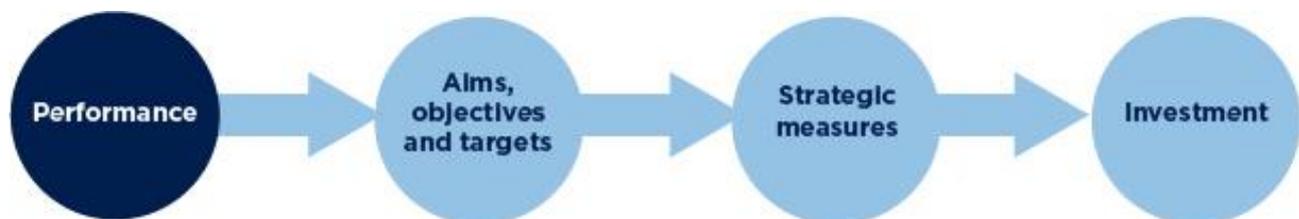
11. **Part II** is a reference guide to support you in developing and delivering a credible strategy to deliver the specifics in your plan. It includes information on some of the strategic measures and approaches that we expect you to consider when developing your access and participation plan. These include:
 - A whole provider strategic approach, incorporating the whole student lifecycle
 - Evaluating your approach
 - Aligning your access and participation strategy and your equality, diversity and inclusion strategy
 - Student engagement and partnership
 - Collaboration, including strategic relationships with schools and employers.

Part I: A step-by-step guide to creating your access and participation plan

12. To create your access and participation plan, you can follow these four steps:

- A. **Assess your performance effectively in relation to access and participation**
- B. **Develop your strategic aims, objectives and targets**
- C. **Develop the strategic measures you will put in place to achieve your strategic aims, objectives and targets**
- D. **Outline your investment.**

A. How to assess your performance



13. This section outlines how to assess your performance effectively in relation to access and participation. An effective assessment will then inform your strategic aims, objectives and targets which in turn will determine the strategic measures and investment necessary to deliver them, underpinned by robust evaluation.

14. Your access and participation plan must include an assessment of your current performance across the whole student lifecycle⁸. To produce a credible assessment of performance, we advise providers to take the following steps:

- **Step 1:** Obtain data on groups identified as being underrepresented in higher education. As a minimum this should include all of the groups specified in paragraph 15 below.
- **Step 2:** For each group, at each stage of the lifecycle, describe your **gaps** in absolute terms. Your assessment should include examination of subgroups and intersections of disadvantage, where appropriate.
- **Step 3:** Describe your performance relative to your context.

⁸ The three stages of the whole student lifecycle are access, success and progression. More information is provided in Part II of this guidance.

15. As outlined in 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance'⁹, we have particular concerns where national data indicates there are significant sector-wide, or sub-sector, gaps in equality of opportunity at different stages of the student lifecycle for particular groups. This includes students who share the following characteristics:
- Those living in areas of low higher education participation, or from lower household income or lower socioeconomic status groups
 - Those from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups
 - Mature students
 - Those with disability status
 - Care leavers.
16. Therefore, we expect **all** providers to assess their performance for **each** of these groups for **each** stage of the student lifecycle.
17. In addition, you may also include in your assessment a wider set of student groups where national data indicates there are particular equality gaps and support needs that can be addressed in an access and participation plan. These groups include:
- Carers
 - People estranged from their families
 - People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
 - Refugees
 - Children from military families.
18. We often refer collectively to the groups in paragraphs 15 and 17 as underrepresented. For more detailed information on each of these underrepresented groups, including data and evidence, see the effective practice section of our website¹⁰.

Step 1: Obtain data on groups identified as being underrepresented in higher education

Using the OfS access and participation dataset

19. Alongside the publication of Regulatory Notice 1 and this effective practice advice, we have made available to providers an access and participation dataset which we expect you to use as part of your assessment of performance. Both national and provider specific data on underrepresentation are available through the dataset. This data will be made publicly

⁹ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/

¹⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

available on the OfS website in spring 2019. **Your access to the dataset in advance of this publication is strictly for your own operational and data quality assurance purposes.**

20. The main dashboard shows gaps in access and participation for the following groups at each stage of the student lifecycle:
- a. **Participation of Local Areas (POLAR)¹¹ classification** – gap between the most and least represented groups (quintiles 5 and 1 respectively)
 - b. **Ethnicity** – gap between white and black, Asian and minority ethnic students
 - c. **Age** – gap between young students (under 21 on entry) and mature students (21 and over on entry)
 - d. **Disability** – gap between disabled and non-disabled students.
21. The dataset also includes additional data tables which allow users to explore and understand a wider range of characteristics in more granular detail. The dataset will evolve over time to include an extended range of characteristics. The OfS is actively exploring the use of free school meal and household income data as well as the development of intersectional measures of equality.

Using other sources

22. You may also find it helpful to consider:
- a. Other national and local data sources to further understand your performance across the student lifecycle. Published sources may include, but are not limited to:
 - Student and graduate destinations data¹² published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
 - Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) national and provider-level data
 - Tracking data, including that provided by tracking services such as the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) and UCAS Strobe
 - Student Loans Company data
 - Department for Education (DfE) destination measures, including (but not limited to) longitudinal education outcomes (LEO) data¹³ and data on schools performance¹⁴

¹¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/

¹² [The Graduate Outcomes](http://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/) record replaced the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey with the first data collection point in December 2018. The first data to be published from this record will be available in spring 2020. See www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/

¹³ See www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-higher-education-graduate-employment-and-earnings

¹⁴ See www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/

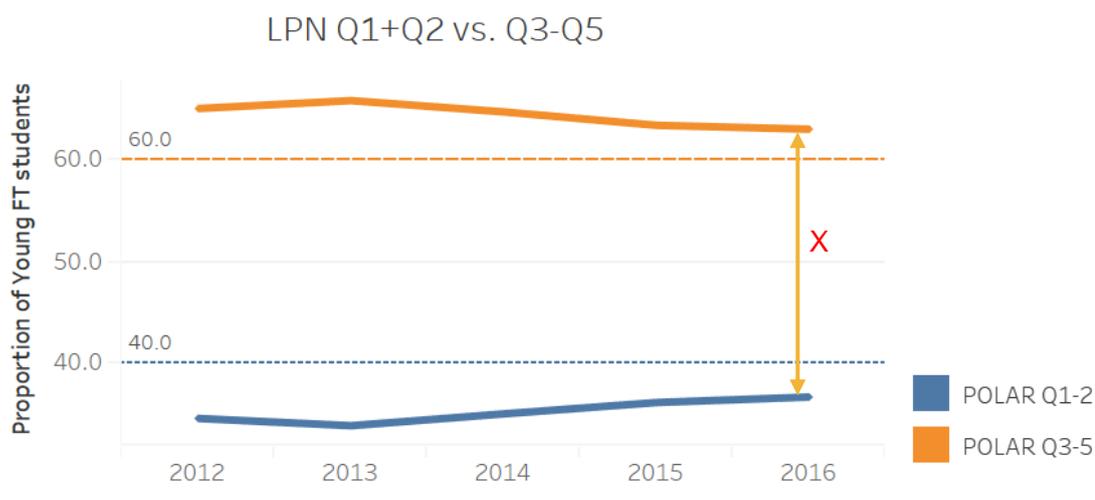
- Information relating to apprentices, for example from your own records and quarterly reports published by the ESFA
 - Office for National Statistics population, labour force and other statistics.
- b. Your own data, including data relating to the transparency information condition (Condition F1)¹⁵, and Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) metrics data. You should note that our focus is on absolute gaps in outcomes for different groups over several years, rather than benchmarked outcomes for this purpose. You may also find it helpful to refer to data relevant to particular courses, including data on underrepresented groups in particular industries or sectors
 - c. Local authorities data, for example to supplement your own provider data in relation to care leavers
 - d. Data and evidence from Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) related to skills needs
 - e. National, regional, and subject level data, and academic evidence to highlight groups which are underrepresented in higher education to place your performance in context.
23. When considering these different sources of data, we recommend you remain alert to issues of consistency in the coverage and definitions of the populations or outcomes being reported.

Step 2: For each group, at each stage of the lifecycle, describe your gaps in absolute terms. This should also include examination of sub-groups and intersections of disadvantage

24. When analysing the data you must consider absolute gaps in performance between underrepresented groups and their peers which suggest there is not equality of opportunity. We expect you to look at performance over a period of several years. You will want to understand whether the gaps are increasing or decreasing and where your progress is accelerating or slowing.

¹⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-8-guidance-for-providers-about-condition-of-registration-f1-transparency-information/

Figure 1: Example graph demonstrating the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups at a provider



In Figure 1, X demonstrates the gap between POLAR4 Q1-2 (the least represented groups) and POLAR4 Q3-5 (the most represented groups). In this case, the provider's performance is almost representative of the general population and the gap has decreased over time. The provider may therefore choose to place greater emphasis in their plan on other characteristics or stages of the lifecycle.

25. Some of the factors that contribute to the non-continuation and attainment gaps are structural, such as entry qualification, subject of study, age of students, and the provider at which a student studies. Our ultimate aim is to work with the sector to eliminate all gaps for underrepresented groups. As part of your analysis of performance, you may wish to explore the extent to which the gaps in your provider can be explained by some of the factors mentioned in order to work toward developing approaches to eliminate those gaps. Your analysis may also establish any gaps that are unexplained – those which are not attributed to structural factors.

Progression to employment or further study

26. Overall, providers' self-assessments of performance in their 2019-20 access and participation plans were weaker, and more limited, in relation to progression to employment and further study than for the other stages of the student lifecycle.
27. We therefore encourage you to consider all aspects of data related to the progression stage of the student lifecycle. In particular, we expect your assessment of performance in relation to progression to include analysis of the proportion of graduates who enter highly skilled roles in addition to whether graduates are in employment or further study.
28. Your self-assessment of performance may also consider:
 - Where graduates go when they leave higher education in order to understand graduate mobility and what barriers this may present to experiencing the best possible outcomes
 - The longer-term destinations of graduates to understand their pathways into and through employment.

Disaggregating groups of students

29. We will expect you to disaggregate underrepresented groups to an appropriate level to understand more fully the extent of any underrepresentation. For example, to demonstrate a more thorough understanding of BAME students, where appropriate you should consider individual minority ethnic groups separately rather than as a homogeneous group.
30. Similarly, where appropriate you should consider disability categories separately. At a minimum, we expect you to disaggregate disabled students into those with mental ill health, specific learning difficulties and physical impairments in your assessment of performance.

Intersections of disadvantage

31. To fully understand where to target your efforts in your access and participation plan, you should examine how multiple dimensions of disadvantage intersect at your provider. This may include consideration of the intersections between underrepresented groups and the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010¹⁶. We refer to this as intersections of disadvantage, or intersectional analysis.
32. Individuals' identities and social positions are shaped by multiple factors. It is important therefore that you examine these multiple factors to understand disadvantage as well as single factors. Intersectional approaches provide an understanding of issues that is closer to the experiences of particular groups, and so allow you to develop effective strategies to deliver these¹⁷.
33. Students may experience multiple barriers to higher education, and therefore appear in more than one underrepresented group. A 2018 report by UCAS on its multiple equality measure demonstrates how underrepresentation, in terms of entry into higher education, is inherently multidimensional in nature, and that accordingly, measures which consider only a single dimension of disadvantage can, when used in isolation, miss certain groups who are most and least likely to enter higher education¹⁸. Similarly, a recent report from NEON¹⁹ discusses the underrepresentation of white males from low participation neighbourhoods in higher education highlighting that a focus on ethnicity alone fails to identify disadvantage.
34. It is also important to consider the whole student lifecycle when considering intersections of disadvantage – including the continuation, attainment and progression of students from underrepresented groups – as this can compound students' experiences of disadvantage.

¹⁶ The protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and pregnancy and maternity.

¹⁷ See [AdvanceHE](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/intersectional-approaches-equality-diversity/) website for further information on intersectional approaches to equality and diversity:

¹⁸ See www.ucas.com/file/190241/download?token=TrHwfBmw (PDF)

¹⁹ See www.educationopportunities.co.uk/news/new-report-shows-differences-in-white-working-class-students-going-to-university-by-higher-education-provider/

Example: In its assessment of performance in their 2019-20 access and participation plan, one provider conducted intersectional analysis at all stages of the student lifecycle, including to consider the combined effect of age, deprivation and ethnicity on continuation, the combined effect of ethnicity and deprivation on rates of attaining 1sts and 2:1s and the combined effect of deprivation and ethnicity on employment rates.

35. In addition, there are clear links between mental health and success and progression in higher education, which are referenced in a number of reports. The Mental Health Foundation has highlighted that people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) are at higher risk of experiencing poor mental health²⁰. A Universities UK report indicates that being first in family to attend university has been identified as a risk factor for poor mental health among students²¹. A report published by the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics and Political Science also highlights that young people with a mental health condition are more likely to experience difficulties in their future employment²². A Unite Students study²³ showed that two-thirds of those in the study with a declared mental health condition thought about dropping out of higher education compared to one-third of those who did not have a declared mental health condition.
36. In your access and participation plan, you may choose to present information about intersections of disadvantage, and your broader assessment of performance, using tables, graphs and charts. A bar chart may be helpful to highlight those groups usually hidden by data.

Small student numbers

37. You may find your intersectional or disaggregated analysis is limited by small student numbers. In these instances, we advise giving general consideration to whether students may face more than one barrier to access and participation or face multiple dimensions of disadvantage. This might include gathering information and data in different ways, for example through focus groups or other qualitative analysis.
38. Access and participation plans should not include information which makes individuals identifiable. Where the numbers of students with particular characteristics are too small to inform your assessment, you may choose to use a rolling average of three to five years of data to ensure that data is more robust and that individuals cannot be identified. However, where this is not possible or inappropriate, we expect you to summarise where this is the case. In these circumstances we recommend using qualitative analysis, regional or national statistics, or academic evidence, to assess the gaps and barriers in your context.

²⁰ Available at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-lgbt-people

²¹ See www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/minding-our-future

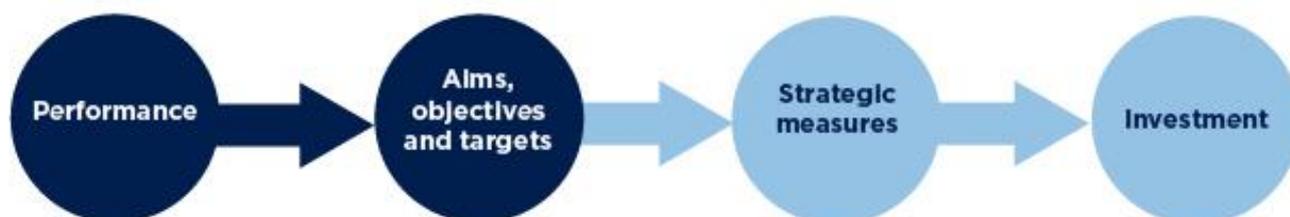
²² See www.pssru.ac.uk/pub/5160/ (PDF)

²³ See www.unite-group.co.uk/studentresilience

Step 3: Describe your performance relative to your context

39. Once you have analysed your absolute performance you should set out in your access and participation plan how this relates to your own context. You should consider how your past trends and future trajectories compare with those of the wider sector, for example using sector-wide data and peer group comparisons. Further information on peer group and historical comparisons is provided in **Section B** below.

B. Setting your strategic aims, objectives and targets



40. This section provides guidance on approaches to establishing your aims and objectives for access and participation, and setting your targets.
41. Your access and participation plan must clearly set out your strategic aims and objectives for addressing the gaps in access and participation, which reflect the areas for development identified in your assessment of performance, the changes you aim to achieve and the timescales for doing so. To set credible aims, objectives and targets, we advise providers take the following steps:
- **Step 1:** Identify your strategic aims for your access and participation plan
 - **Step 2:** Establish measurable objectives for each aim
 - **Step 3:** Set ambitious, clearly defined, outcomes-based targets that directly reflect your strategic aims and objectives.

Step 1: Identify your strategic aims for your access and participation plan

42. As outlined in Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance, we expect your aims and objectives in your access and participation plan to summarise your target groups and the level of ambition identified as a result of your assessment of performance. This must include which underrepresented groups you will target, and at what stage of the student lifecycle: access, success (continuation or attainment) and/or progression to employment or further study. Your aims and objectives may be set over a period of more than the five years of the plan. They must then be directly reflected into more specific and measurable targets set over the five years of the plan.

Example: As a result of its assessment of performance, including intersectional analysis described in paragraph 34, one provider prioritised BAME students; in particular black students, mature students, disabled students, and students from the most deprived areas. The provider's intersectional analysis enabled it to identify important issues in relation to ethnicity, age and deprivation and develop specific aims, objectives and targets which considered the intersections between these groups.

43. We expect your aims and objectives to be stretching and ambitious, and to cover those areas where you have identified the biggest gaps where you can have the greatest impact relative to your context.
44. We expect those providers where the gaps are widest for access, success and progression to set the most ambitious targets in those areas and to contribute most to national priorities.
45. We will use the access and participation dataset to gain an understanding of what gaps we feel you should be addressing, and we may want to discuss with you any significant gaps that are not being addressed.
46. We recognise that if you are a small and specialist provider, or a provider without a track record of access and participation work in higher education, you may find it impractical to cover every gap you have identified. You may therefore want to consider how to focus your resources so that there is maximum impact on students where you have identified the biggest gaps. Where you are choosing not to address a material gap you have identified in your assessment of performance, you must provide an explanation.
47. You may use historical and peer comparisons, within England and with other countries, to understand what has been achieved in the past and by others. It may help you to reflect on how to set more ambitious and challenging aims, objectives and targets that will support stronger progress. This must take into account the ambitions we are expecting the sector to deliver during the next five years.
48. **Historical comparisons** involve looking at trends over time. The measures included in the OfS access and participation dataset provide data over a five-year period. However, it may also be appropriate to look back over a longer period in many cases.
49. **Peer comparisons** involve looking at the progress peers in England and in other countries have made in similar areas, over time. For example, you could consider:
 - Other higher education providers with a similar demographic, location, or course offer. This could be done using the data available in the OfS access and participation dataset; or by looking at other providers' previous access and participation plans or access agreement monitoring returns
 - Industry data or businesses that have developed targets to diversify their staff profile
 - Local authorities, which may be looking to support access to higher education, or employment rates for underrepresented groups

- Local schools and colleges that may have targets relating to improving attainment, and access to higher education
- International data.

Step 2: Set measurable objectives for each aim

50. You should set measurable objectives for each of the aims you have identified in Step 1. Each objective should specify what you want to achieve and by when to set ambitions over the medium and long term. You can then add context to your initial aims and objectives. You may want to consider the anticipated impact of activities and the lead-in time for new activities. You may be able to use research and evaluation conducted by academics and other providers to understand the impact you might expect to see. You may also consider other factors that you feel may have impact on your progress, such as expansion plans, including opening of new campuses.
51. We recently published our targets relating to four of our key performance measures for access and participation. These are set out in paragraph 8 above. We have stated an ambition that future generations should have equal opportunities to access and succeed in higher education, and to achieve successful and rewarding careers. This is necessarily long term, but to achieve it the sector needs to make significant progress in the medium term.
52. Some aims will have long-term objectives; for example, our ambition to eliminate gaps in entry rates is set over a longer period of time.
53. For other aims, such as those related to non-continuation and degree attainment between different groups of students, evidence has shown that some providers have already made significant progress in closing unexplained gaps in these areas, and so we have set our ambition to eliminate the unexplained gaps over a shorter period of time.
54. These measures are intended to set our ambitions in a small number of areas where we believe progress is most needed. They are not, though, the only issues and measures on which we expect providers to focus through their access and participation plans, as is clear from our guidance.
55. In setting realistic timescales to achieve your aims and objectives, you may want to consider:
 - How long before interventions will take effect
 - Whether progress is in your control or relies on other parts of the system
 - Whether factors contributing to the gap are structural, for example entry qualifications, subject of study, age of student.

Step 3: Set ambitious, clearly defined, outcomes-based targets that directly reflect your strategic aims and objectives

56. As part of your access and participation plan, you must set ambitious, clearly-defined outcomes-based targets that directly relate to the strategic aims and objectives you identified in Steps 1 and 2. You should refer to Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan

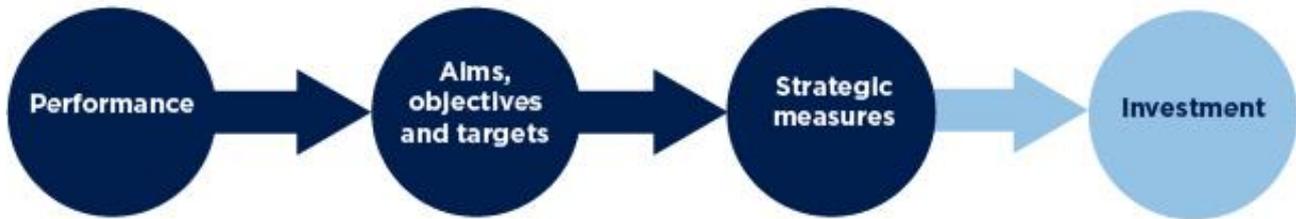
guidance to understand our expectations of providers when setting your targets, including how they should take account of the national key performance measures set by the OfS.

57. We expect the aims, objectives and targets identified to secure continuous improvement in outcomes for students by reducing the gaps in access, success and progression for underrepresented groups. If you are already demonstrating equality of opportunity for an underrepresented group in one of the targets relating to OfS KPMs, this may mean maintaining your performance to contribute to continuous improvement nationally, while demonstrating improvements in other areas.
58. We expect your aims, objectives and targets to be stretching and would not expect to approve access and participation plans that are insufficiently ambitious. We encourage providers to be more ambitious with their aims, objectives and targets and to put in place reasonable steps to achieve these, rather than proposing low targets in the first instance. In judging whether providers take reasonable steps to implement their plans, we will take into account measures that may be needed to avoid disadvantaging students from groups close to, but not within, the target groups. This would apply, for example, to students from quintile 3 areas in relation to a target focused on POLAR quintiles 1 and 2.

Collaborative targets

59. Collaborative targets can be an effective way of securing commitment from partners in a collaborative arrangement, and help you to demonstrate the progress being made towards shared goals.
60. We encourage collaborative targets being set in partnership with other providers to address national, regional and local priorities. For example, this may be a target across particular types of providers (such as high tariff or specialist providers), or a regional or geographical target. Our investment in the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is intended to support collaborative approaches to access and participation at a local level. We encourage providers to consider how their collaborative targets could align with and support NCOP partnership activity in their locality.
61. Where collaborative targets are with other providers who are also submitting an access and participation plan you may look at ensuring those targets feature in both plans, and have consistent wording so they can be identified.

C. Developing your strategic measures– delivering your strategic aims, objectives and targets



62. The following section provides guidance on how to outline in your access and participation plan the strategic measures you will put in place to achieve the aims, objectives and targets detailed in your plan. We advise that you consider the following steps:

- **Step 1:** What to include in your strategy
- **Step 2:** How to use evidence to inform your strategy
- **Step 3:** How to develop your evaluation approach.

63. You should also refer to the more detailed guidance on strategic measures in **Part II**.

Step 1: What to include in your strategy

64. You may include your approach to all or some of the strategic measures detailed below and in Part II of this guidance. How you use these measures will contribute to our assessment of the credibility of your plan. We expect the strategy you adopt to reflect your provider's size, context and mission.

65. For each strategic measure, we expect you to state clearly how any examples provided are linked to your aims and objectives. For example, you must demonstrate clear links between your strategy and the aims and objectives you outlined earlier, including target groups and the relevant stages of the lifecycle.

66. Where your assessment of performance shows fair access for students from underrepresented groups, but continuation, attainment and/or progression rates for these students are low, we encourage you to deliver appropriate and proportionate measures to address this, based on the evidence in the assessment of performance.

67. As part of your access and participation plan, we encourage you to include a diagram such as a logic or outcomes chain, to provide a visual overview of how your activities will support and deliver the strategy you have set out in the rest of your plan.

Logic or outcomes chain diagram

A logic or outcomes chain is a diagram associated with 'theory of change'. A theory of change is a tool that allows you to describe the need you are trying to address, the changes you want to make (your outcomes), and what you plan to do (your activities). It can help you improve your strategy, measurement, communication and partnership working.

Recent research commissioned by the OfS into the evaluation of outreach interventions for under-16-year-olds, found that following a theory of change is a common approach among third sector organisations, but is currently much less common in higher education providers. As described by Harries et al. (2014, p.5):

'Theory of change is actually a very simple concept. Throughout our work and personal lives we have aims, objectives and ideas about how to achieve our goals, but we rarely take the time to think these through, articulate and scrutinise them. All a theory of change process does is to make these assumptions explicit and therefore more testable'.

68. Outcomes chains help to identify where there might be causal links, and identify which activities are linked to which outcomes. An outcomes chain encourages you to think more about how and why change occurs. Your diagram may include:

- **Aims:** to reflect the priorities identified through your assessment of performance, as well as considering the national priorities identified by the OfS.
- **Outcomes:** to identify the outcomes you wish to influence to achieve your aims, informed by the evidence you have used to help identify the factors and barriers to equality of opportunity that you wish to address. This should include intermediate outcomes as well as overall outcomes.
- **Measurements:** to outline some of the measurements you will use to evaluate the success of your activities and initiatives.
- **Inputs:** to outline some of the activities that will contribute to achieving your desired outcomes.

Step 2: Using evidence to inform your strategy

69. We expect access and participation activities to be designed and developed using evidence. This may be from academic research and evaluations of practice, including evidence obtained from formative and summative evaluation.

70. This evidence should result in your activities having clear objectives and achievable outcome measures. If there are no clear objectives for an activity you should consider if it is appropriate to run. Your outcomes chain and theory of change or logic model may be useful in designing a programme that is informed by evidence and has clear outcomes – including intermediate outcomes that help to understand if you are on track to meet your overall goals. We also encourage you to understand why projects may fail to meet their goals and what learning can be taken forward to inform future activities.

71. We have developed standards of evidence that categorise different types of knowledge to help you understand which type of evidence is appropriate and most useful to inform your programme design²⁴.

Targeting financial support

72. Providers currently invest significant sums of money into financial support for students. Therefore we expect you to have a clear rationale for what your financial support is trying to achieve and detail on who the support is targeting. Research suggests that financial support is less effective as a tool for attracting students into higher education and may be more appropriate where the primary aim is to reduce non-continuation rates and attainment²⁵. It may be helpful to have a theory of change for your financial support, and measurable objectives. It may be beneficial to check your rationale with students.

73. Given the diversity of financial support provision, the most suitable available evidence to inform your financial support investment decisions is likely to be generated through robust evaluation of current provision in your own context. More information on evaluating financial support can be found in Part II on page 35.

Step 3: How to develop your evaluation of your activities

74. You must be able to demonstrate which interventions (in which contexts, and to which learners) work well, and learn from what is not working so well.

75. Access and participation evaluation involves assessing and making judgements about how your activities contribute to eliminating inequality across the lifecycle. Developing high quality evaluation is essential to driving improvements. Further, effective evaluation should ensure that any activity is not causing harm to target groups and is providing the most benefit.

76. A rigorous evaluation strategy is one that is proportionate and appropriate to the activity and the provider, with appropriate data collection methods and skills and experience to support a robust evaluation design. Evaluation should be embedded into programme design and sets out clearly what you aim to find out and what changes you want to measure.

Evaluation self-assessment tool

77. We expect providers to undertake a self-assessment of their approach to evaluation and this will support the development of a strong theory of change. We have developed a self-assessment tool that you may find helpful to use. You can download the tool, and guidance on how to complete it, on the OfS website²⁶. It is a five point framework to support you to develop your evaluation strategy. It encourages providers to reflect upon where they are now in terms of:

²⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-self-assessment-toolkit/

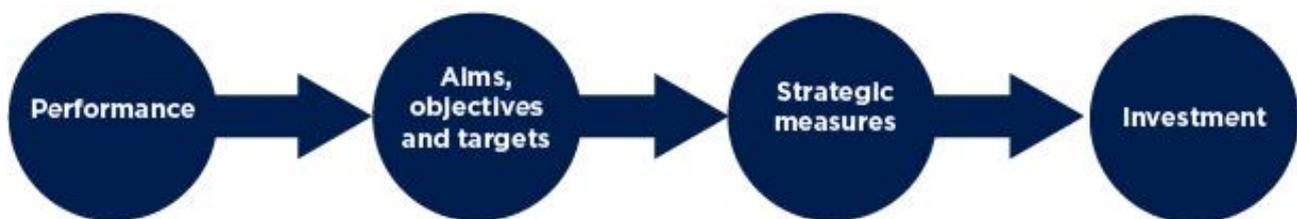
²⁵ See <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112320/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/impact-of-financial-support/>

²⁶ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/standards-of-evidence-and-self-assessment-toolkit/

- The **strategic context** for evaluation
- How evaluation and evidence shape current **programme design**
- The current quality and rigour of **evaluation design**
- The current quality and rigour of **evaluation implementation**
- How **learning** from evidence and insight from evaluation shape improvements.

78. This self-assessment process enables you to assess the strength of your current approach as a basis for planning ongoing improvements. Further information on undertaking a self-assessment is available in **Part II** of this advice.

D. Investment



79. As part of your access and participation plan, you will have completed your assessment of performance, set the aims and objectives you want to achieve, and provided some detail on your strategy for how you plan to achieve those. The next step is to provide an estimate of the investment you aim to deliver on that strategy to support this.
80. The investment you tell us about must only relate to the work delivered to support underrepresented groups, and is designed and targeted to address the gaps you identified in your assessment of performance.
81. Your investment must be disaggregated into:
- Access
 - Financial support
 - Evaluation and research.
82. As outlined in our consultation response²⁷, you will not be asked to report on investment on success and progression as it is difficult to meaningfully disaggregate spend in these areas on underrepresented groups, from wider spend, and can work against inclusive approaches. However, as outlined in 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance', you should ensure that you understand your investment across the student lifecycle to:

²⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/

- a. assure yourself that your investment in all aspects of access, success and progression is sufficient to ensure your plan is credible
 - b. robustly evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the investments you make across the lifecycle
 - c. respond to OfS enhanced monitoring or specific conditions of registration requirements
 - d. respond to revised reporting requirements on investment should the OfS determine, through evaluation, that the decision not to collect information on investment in success and progression is detrimental to its strategy.
83. There are no set expectations on the amount of money you may invest. Our focus will be on the outcomes you achieve and the level of ambition you set, rather than inputs in the form of investment. However, we will scrutinise closely any provider that wants to spend less and for the first time conduct sample or targeted audits of the commitments made.
84. When establishing your levels of investment, you may want to follow these four steps:
- **Step 1:** Understand what investment to include
 - **Step 2:** Outline investment in access
 - **Step 3:** Outline investment in financial support
 - **Step 4:** Outline investment in evaluation and research.

Step 1: Understand what investment to include

85. You should refer to 'Regulatory notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance' for details of what you must include in your plan related to investment.
86. The following types of investment may be included in your access and participation plan:
- The direct costs of delivering activities, including:
 - relevant staffing (payroll costs of staff time spent on planning, delivering, access activities; monitoring and evaluating access and participation activities; research into access and participation)
 - remuneration costs of access and participation work undertaken by student ambassadors, student unions or alumni that are funded by the institution
 - access and participation staff learning and development
 - travel and other logistic costs of access and participation project delivery
 - outsourced research and evaluation projects, including work to identify and develop equality and diversity protected characteristics of access and participation activities
 - subscription and membership costs

- The indirect/support costs of access activity, including:
 - payroll costs of academic staff time apportioned to access and participation work
 - infrastructure costs apportioned to strategic projects
 - the direct costs of delivering financial support.

Step 2: Outline investment in access

87. You must provide a forecast of the investment you will make in activities and measures to support equal access to higher education for underrepresented groups. This should reflect the strategy you have set out in your access and participation plan.
88. In the context of an access and participation plan, access investment specifically relates to work targeted to potential students, their families and communities before making choices about entry to higher education. It includes:
- Outreach work with schools, young people, adults with no prior experience of higher education, communities and disabled people
 - Strategic relationships with schools (strategic partnerships between schools and higher education providers such as sponsoring of an academy, federation or trust, university technical college or free school).
89. For the purpose of allocating costs, access investment includes:
- Activities wholly or substantially directed at addressing gaps in equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups
 - Your annual share of collaborative outreach activity with one or more partner institutions or other bodies
 - Your annual share of student and staff directed costs
 - Costs of gathering and analysing contextual admissions data²⁸
 - Infrastructure costs committed to strategic/sustained access projects
 - Support for outreach and related activity delivered through the collaborative infrastructure of NCOP, where these costs have not been met by OfS programme funding.
90. Of your total access investment, you must provide a breakdown of the sources of funding for your access investment. You will need to categorise funding by the following categories:
- Higher fee income

²⁸ Further information on contextual admissions is available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

- Other funding including OfS funding (but excluding NCOP), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources/partners.

Costs associated with sponsoring an academy or setting up a new free school

91. We expect that most of the costs of setting up or sponsoring a school would be provided by the DfE rather than being incurred directly by higher education providers. For setting up new schools, this will include a project development grant to support the project before it opens and a post-opening grant to support the school in its early years as it builds to capacity. In addition, ESFA will manage the process and provide capital funding for suitable accommodation for the school. For school sponsorship, funding depends on the phase of the school and level of challenge²⁹.
92. Additional costs incurred by higher education providers in setting up or sponsoring a school (such as the higher education provider's staff time) can be counted where this contributes to your work to raise attainment and support access for those from groups underrepresented in higher education. We recognise that it may be difficult to disaggregate higher education access investment within your work to set up or sponsor a school and appreciate that you may need to use estimates. If you do so, ensure your estimate is based on a clear rationale relating to the proportion of spend benefiting those from underrepresented groups. Ongoing costs such as for outreach activity, teachers continuing professional development, or access to university or college facilities, may also be counted where they meet our broader guidance on access and participation plan countable investment. If you are unsure whether a cost is countable, contact us to discuss further at app@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Costs associated with establishing higher and degree level apprenticeships

93. If you offer, or are looking to develop your offering of, degree apprenticeships, you may include the cost of access activities for underrepresented groups to those courses within your access investment. More information on higher and degree level apprenticeships is available on our effective practice webpages³⁰.
94. You should not include the cost of establishing and developing the course, unless it is specifically being done to address barriers to higher education for underrepresented groups. Where this is the case, we would expect you to include a proportion of the cost based on the estimated take-up by underrepresented groups.

Costs associated with using contextual information

95. If you choose to use contextual information, or are already using it, we are happy for you to tell us about this in your access and participation plan and to include any extra costs involved in your access investment predictions.

²⁹ For more details, see the DfE website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsored-academies-funding-guidance-for-sponsors

³⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

Collaborative investment

96. You may count your investment on collaborative outreach and related activity as part of your access investment. This includes investment on set-up costs such as building the networks required to ensure the effectiveness of collaborative activity.
97. Funding that you receive from NCOP partnerships should not be counted in your access and participation plan investment.

Subscriptions and memberships

98. Investment on subscriptions to networks or services that support your access and participation plan can be included in your investment. This might include, for example, membership of collaborative networks or subscribing to academic journals focused on access and participation, where this is not already available across the provider.

Step 3: Outline investment in financial support

99. You must only include investment on financial support directed at underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. Your financial support must be tightly targeted at these students, and be provided to address specific barriers you know to exist for underrepresented groups.
100. As with all investment, if you are investing a significant amount of money in financial support, we expect you to provide strong evidence of the impact on disadvantaged and underrepresented students. You may use your own resources to support other students as you see fit (for example, to recognise outstanding academic, sporting or musical achievement), but this must not be recorded as financial support in the context of your access and participation plan.
101. A proportion of your investment on general financial support, which is open to all students, may be included where you have introduced financial support to address a specific barrier for underrepresented students. Where this is the case, you must explain your rationale and the evidence used to inform this decision within your access and participation plan. You may use the data you have available to identify the proportion of students receiving such financial support from an underrepresented group. You must provide detail of the proportion of the cost you have included and how this was calculated within your access and participation plan.
102. Of your total financial investment, you must provide a breakdown of the sources of funding for your access investment. We expect you to categorise funding by the following categories:
 - Higher fee income
 - Other funding including OfS funding (but excluding NCOP), other public funding and funding from other sources such as philanthropic giving and private sector sources/partners.

Predicting the cost of financial support

103. If your investment in financial support varies depending on the proportion of students you have from a low-income background, you may use the data on the household income of your previous cohorts of students to predict your likely level of total investment in financial support.

If you do not have such data, the Student Loans Company (SLC)³¹ can provide you with data showing the proportions of your students that fall into different household income bands.

104. Similarly, if you offer financial support to all eligible students from other underrepresented groups, you may use data from previous cohorts to provide a prediction of how much financial support you are likely to invest.

Step 4: Outline investment in evaluation and research

Costs associated with monitoring and evaluation

105. We would like to have a greater understanding of the investment that providers are making in evaluation and research. This may include costs such as:

- Relevant staffing (payroll costs of staff time spent on monitoring and evaluating access and participation activities, research into access and participation)
- Relevant training and development of staff in evaluation and research skills
- Payroll costs of academic staff time apportioned to evaluation or research into access and participation
- Costs of gathering and analysing data
- Subscriptions to tracking services
- Funding relevant PhDs, and other research projects
- Subscriptions to appropriate journals and academic societies.

106. We are not asking you to record your investment in success or progression activities as part of your access and participation plan. However, you may record the cost of evaluating and researching **all** stages of the student lifecycle within your evaluation and research investment.

107. We recognise that monitoring and evaluation will at times be built into the cost of your activities. Where this is the case, you should estimate the proportion of resources dedicated to monitoring and evaluation, such as staff time, and record it within the 'Evaluation and research investment' field. Where these are access activities, you will need to deduct that proportion from the total included in your access investment to avoid double-counting.

³¹ See www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/

Part II: Effective practice advice on developing and delivering a successful strategy

108. Part II of this guidance provides advice on the approaches that we expect you to consider when developing and delivering a successful strategy. It aims to help you to identify and learn from the evidence on effective practice that we will continue to gather and share as part of our commitment to drive continuous improvement across the higher education sector.

109. We provide advice on cross cutting themes and approaches which we expect all providers to consider:

- Taking whole provider strategic and student lifecycle approaches
- Evaluating your approach
- Aligning your access and participation strategies with other relevant strategies within your provider, including: learning and teaching strategies; equality, diversity and inclusion; student wellbeing and safeguarding; and business and community engagement
- Collaboration, including strategic relationships with schools and work with employers
- Effective student engagement.

110. In addition to this guidance, we are also providing more in-depth content on our website. This includes detailed information on student groups where there are equality gaps, and effective practice³² across key topics including:

- Contextual admissions
- Flexible learning
- Information, advice and guidance
- Financial support
- Continuation and attainment
- Strategic relationships with schools and raising attainment
- Employability
- Work experience
- Progression to postgraduate study.

111. We refer to these topics throughout this document. We will continue to update and expand the information available on our website and welcome any suggestions for sources or evidence of

³² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/. We will continue to update our effective practice webpages; therefore some of these topics may be available after the publication of this advice.

effective practice. We will expect you to refer to and use this information as you continue to develop and then deliver on your strategy.

Whole provider strategic approach

Summary

112. Key features of the whole provider strategic approach in the context of access and participation include the following:

- A full student lifecycle approach is adopted which extends from pre-entry support, to on-course success, to post-graduation progression. In many cases this starts with supporting potential learners from primary age upwards, and includes pre-entry outreach, admissions, transition, learning and teaching, student engagement and support and access to postgraduate study and/or employment
- Staff from across the provider are actively involved, with access and participation valued as integral to their roles
- Students representing the breadth of the student population, are engaged in formulating, supporting and evaluating access and participation across the provider
- A clear organisational-wide commitment, including leadership from senior management and governing bodies, to access and participation. This commitment is backed up with clearly defined target groups and expected outcomes that are shaped by evidence and aligned with other core strategies, for example those relating to equality, diversity and inclusion; learning and teaching; and business and community engagement.

Why is this important?

113. Effective practice indicates that targets are more likely to be achieved when the strategy is enacted at all levels of your organisation through a whole provider strategic approach.

Effective approaches

114. The quality of your students' higher education experiences will be affected by your organisation's structures and functions, academic, pastoral and social. With the successful participation and attainment of your students depending on a wide range of factors and experiences, it is important that you take a holistic approach to supporting your students' success. Therefore, effective practice would include consideration of practices across the organisation so that success is supported across academic departments, student services and other departments, as appropriate. This should include engaging colleagues who are not necessarily access and participation specialists such as academics, student support services, senior management, careers services, library services, knowledge exchange professionals and administrative staff.

115. Reflecting a whole provider approach, we expect you to consider how broader activity across your provider, including collaboration and strategic relationships with employers and third sector bodies, can help you to meet your targets and improve outcomes. For example, if you are eligible to receive Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF), you may want to consider

how activities within your HEIF strategy can help with the delivery of your access and participation targets as part of your plan. This might include enterprise-related initiatives, including innovation hubs, enterprise modules across the curriculum and business mentors, as well as activities to enhance the contribution that students and graduates can make to their local area and region which can enhance the employability of students and improve successful progression to employment or further study. Further information on enhancing employability is included on our effective practice webpages³³. More information on HEIF strategies, including some examples of activities, is available on the Research England website³⁴.

116. Developing different types of provision may also be an effective way of demonstrating a whole provider approach as well as an example of collaboration. For example, those providers who have taken a strategic decision to either consider, develop or are already delivering higher level and degree apprenticeships provision.

Degree apprenticeships are apprenticeships that combine study at degree (Level 6) or masters (Level 7) level with on the job training. Training is delivered by higher education providers and training costs are funded by government and employers. The apprentice receives a wage from their employer and incurs no tuition fees. A form of flexible provision, an apprenticeship may include day release, block release and distance learning models. Apprentices apply to the employer, not via UCAS or the higher education provider.

In our evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund (DADF) we found there were multiple benefits to providers including: strengthening links with employers and generating a new source of income; offering programmes designed to meet employer needs thereby increasing the likelihood of highly skilled employment for students; developing programmes and links with accredited professional bodies; expanding the range of programmes on offer to wider (and potentially more diverse) pool of prospective students.

Further information on the benefits of offering degree apprenticeships are available on the effective practice webpages of our website³⁵.

117. A whole provider strategic approach can also support you in aligning your access and participation, learning and teaching, equality and diversity, accommodation, and student welfare and wellbeing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their delivery. In your access and participation plan, we encourage you to include details of how you will develop and enhance a structure and culture of access and participation across your organisation.
118. We expect you to include reference to a range of targeted activity to support student wellbeing and issues of mental ill health, inclusive curriculum, digital solutions, building design or student

³³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

³⁴ See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/the-higher-education-innovation-fund-heif/>

³⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

engagement. Universities UK has produced a holistic strategy to drive a step change in support for student mental health that could inform your own approach³⁶.

119. Underrepresented students are at increased risk of being negatively affected by provider or course closure. Ensuring that there is alignment between Student Protection Plans³⁷ and your access and participation plan will help to realise a vision to ensure a sustainable and integrated strategy.

Inclusive practice

An inclusive practice approach goes beyond activities and events available generally or promoted to your whole student body and means you take active steps to ensure that different groups of students have the opportunity to benefit equally. Inclusive practice aims to ensure all students with a sense of belonging at their provider. It may require changing structures and cultural practices across your provider.

Co-designing approaches with students enables them to meaningfully engage in their own higher education experience. In developing these approaches you should engage with the group(s) of students who are identified through evidence as most likely to experience differential outcomes. This will ensure that approaches are fit for purpose and will have the best possible impact. These approaches should also be cognisant of and complement broader strategies that support student mental health and the safeguarding of students with particular characteristics, both of which have an impact on the sense of belonging and inclusion for students at their higher education provider.

A report from the Disabled Students' Sector Leadership Group, to consider how higher education providers can develop their approach to supporting disabled students in light of changes to the Disabled Students Allowance, highlighted the importance of adopting inclusive teaching and practice which 'recognises and values the diversity of the student body and works with them to enhance and optimise the learning experience for all'³⁸. It outlines key areas in which inclusive practice will benefit higher education providers, including helping to tackle some of the issues around differential outcomes for students from particular underrepresented groups, cost saving – because, as the report says, 'students who thrive are less costly' – and reputational enhancement.

Through your evaluation of your targeted and inclusive activities and support measures, you will want to see a more significant positive impact for the underrepresented groups you have identified as having the largest differential outcomes, compared with other groups benefiting from this intervention. This will demonstrate that you are making progress in reducing

³⁶ See www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/stepchange

³⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/student-protection/student-protection-plans/

³⁸ See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/587221/Inclusive_Teaching_and_Learning_in_Higher_Education_as_a_route_to-excellence.pdf (PDF)

disparities in outcomes between student groups. More information on inclusive practice will be available in our A-Z guide³⁹.

Further information

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) commissioned research 'Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation' (October 2017):

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112311/https://www.offa.org.uk/eqp/whole-institution-approach/>

Universities UK (UUK)'s whole university approach framework

(www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/whole-university-approach.aspx) is designed to address the rise of negative mental health and wellbeing issues facing students and staff (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/whole-university-approach.aspx) (September 2017)

AdvanceHE has published a number of resources relating to the creation of an inclusive higher education environment. These include guidance on creating an accessible campus (www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/inclusive-environment/), and support to develop an inclusive curriculum (www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/inclusive-curriculum-design-higher-education)

The **National Union of Students** has published a report 'Homes fit for study' informed by students' experiences of housing: www.nus.org.uk/HomesFitforStudy

JISC has produced guidance for providers to create inclusive digital environments (August 2015): www.jisc.ac.uk/full-guide/enhancing-the-digital-student-experience

What works wellbeing - evidence and resources about what works in relation to wellbeing: <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/#>

Student Minds – UK-wide student mental health charity <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>

UUK good practice guide - student mental wellbeing in higher education www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mwbhe-award#guide

Minding our Future – starting a conversation about the support of student mental health www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/minding-our-future

Whole student lifecycle – access, success and progression

Summary

120. The three stages of the whole student lifecycle are access, success and progression. This reflects the key stages of the journey that students will travel through as they consider, apply

³⁹ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

for, participate in and move on from higher education. Activities, and therefore outcomes of those activities, often span some or all of these stages, which are briefly described below:

- a. **Access** – relates to outreach with schools, prior attainment activities, work with employers, other education providers and regional skills associations. Strategic relationships and collaboration are important considerations for this lifecycle stage.
- b. **Success** – relates to addressing the barriers that prevent underrepresented students from continuing and therefore succeeding in higher education. It is concerned with supporting students to continue their studies and eliminating gaps in attainment between different groups of students that cannot be attributed to prior attainment or otherwise explained. Approaches and activities related to success would include work to develop inclusive curricula, learning, teaching and assessment and must be viewed in the wider context of a positive student experience, taking into account broader work on student mental health and wellbeing and approaches to safeguarding.
- c. **Progression** – relates to how graduates are prepared for and supported through graduation as they progress into employment or study. The full benefits of higher education are not realised only by enrolling on and completing a course, but through successful progression into employment or further study. Approaches related to progression include employability, work experience opportunities and progression routes to further study or research. As with success, approaches and activities related to progression must be viewed in the wider context of a positive student experience, taking into account broader work on student mental health and wellbeing and approaches to safeguarding.

Why is this important?

121. Effective and evidence-led practice shows that taking an holistic approach to the student lifecycle supports students to gain a positive student experience. We recognise that many approaches and activities span all aspects of the full student lifecycle, particularly across success and progression. We also recognise that some underrepresented groups may face particular challenges at all stages of the lifecycle, while others may experience barriers at a particular stage. Some groups of students in higher education do not have the same chance as others to succeed in their studies and go on to a graduate-level job or further study. Data also shows us that there are gaps in equality of opportunity in success and progression of students of particular ethnicities; disabled students; students from areas of low higher education participation, low household income and/or low socioeconomic status, and mature students. Our work on degree and employment outcomes highlights statistically significant differences between student groups, even when accounting for other background characteristics of students.
122. Your assessment of performance and subsequent identification of targets may highlight specific issues for particular groups of students (or applicants) at different stages of the lifecycle and your plan must identify at which stage of the lifecycle you are prioritising support for the student groups you have identified.

Effective approaches

123. Strategic relationships as part of collaboration play an important role within the **access** stage of the student lifecycle. This includes collaborating with schools, employers and third sector organisations to explore routes into and through higher education. We provide further advice within the **Collaborations** section below. Making use of contextual admissions has become established as a robust way for providers to identify and secure the entry of students with potential from underrepresented groups. We have developed a guide to contextual admissions which is available on our effective practice webpages⁴⁰.
124. As with the other stages of the student lifecycle, different groups of students face different barriers to their **success** in higher education. There are identified differential outcomes, both in terms of non-continuation and attainment, for students with different characteristics. Therefore, it is important that you develop your understanding of the specific obstacles faced by different groups of students at your organisation using your own data and analysis. To help you to tackle these obstacles, HEFCE funded the £7.5 million Addressing Barriers to Student Success⁴¹ programme. The programme covers a broad range of areas across the success and progression stages of the student lifecycle including: inclusive and active teaching and learning practices; well-being for students; progression to postgraduate study; and graduate employability. You can find out more about the projects on our website⁴². Universities UK and the National Union of Students' forthcoming report, 'Addressing the BME student attainment gap at UK universities', recommends the adoption of a framework approach through: improving access to (and understanding of) attainment gap data; increasing the opportunities for students and staff to talk about race, racism and the attainment gap, and ensuring that leadership teams and curricula are inclusive and representative of the student body. It states that, for university-wide culture change, this work must be underpinned with student partnerships and a commitment from senior teams to lead by example in embedding a strategic institutional commitment to removing racial inequities. We have developed further guidance on effective approaches to tackling continuation and attainment which is available in the A-Z guide⁴³.
125. Activities related to the **progression** of students can span the full student lifecycle and reflect the whole provider strategic approach which is explained in more detail in the whole provider approach section below. We have developed further guidance on approaches to improving employability in our A-Z guide⁴⁴. This also has information on effective approaches related to work experience, including understanding the barriers that some students may face in

⁴⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

⁴¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/

⁴² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/what-are-the-projects/

⁴³ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

⁴⁴ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

accessing and gaining work experience that will improve their employability and employment outcomes. We are working with UKRI, including Research England, to identify the barriers to progression into postgraduate study and research for underrepresented groups, and will set out our plans in this area during 2019. We welcome any sources or evidence of effective practice in this area.

Evaluating your approach

Summary

126. Developing high quality evaluation is essential to driving improvements and for ensuring that any activity is providing the most benefit and not causing harm to target groups. We provide additional information below on conducting a self-assessment of your approach to evaluation, evaluating financial support and accessing higher education data.

Effective approaches

Evaluation self-assessment tool

Strategic context

127. We encourage you to undertake evaluation as part of a whole provider strategic approach to access and participation. You may outline the strategic context for your evaluation plan, including any necessary support and skills that are being drawn upon from across your organisation. You may also reference planned participation in collaborative networks and engagement with students.

Programme design

128. Good programme design has an evaluation plan established at the start. Building effective evaluation into your access and participation strategy is best achieved if your objectives are clearly and comprehensively defined and informed by high quality evidence. These should then be matched to specific indicators against which outcomes can be measured.

Designing evaluation

129. At the start of your evaluation development you must establish which activities or elements therein can be evaluated credibly and reliably. Undertaking an evaluability assessment⁴⁵ may be one way of determining what elements to focus on.

130. Once you have determined what you can evaluate credibly and reliably, it is important to ensure that your evaluation approach and methods of data collection and analysis are appropriate to the types of questions you are asking and align with the objectives of your evaluation.

131. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative evidence is essential to fully understanding the impact of your activities. We encourage your evaluation design to embrace a range of

⁴⁵ For advice, see www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/evaluability_assessment

appropriate methods and approaches⁴⁶ that can enable you to gain insights into how your interventions are working and the impact they are having.

132. When designing your evaluation you may wish to consider:

- Potential barriers to your preferred approach
- If you have the expertise available to conduct this evaluation properly
- If you need to collaborate to make this evaluation work well
- What approach makes most sense given practical constraints
- Exploring counterfactuals, i.e. what would happen to your target groups if you did nothing
- How big the evaluation should be
- The number of participants needed to help you get the insights you need
- The number of years you want to run the evaluation for
- Whether comparison groups are appropriate
- What happens if you are running a small programme
- What kinds of data are needed for the chosen approach and what method you will use to collect data, when to collect it and how and how data can be stored securely
- Whether you are undertaking impact and outcome evaluation or a process evaluation, or economic evaluation
- How you will share the findings of your evaluation, both internally and externally.

Evaluation implementation

133. When carrying out your evaluation we expect you to consider what processes and arrangements⁴⁷ need to be set up to ensure the relevant data can be collected, stored and analysed appropriately. This needs to include necessary ethical, safeguarding, legal and risk considerations.

134. Working in partnership to deliver your evaluation can be beneficial in terms of cost and knowledge sharing. For example, you may be able to work together with another higher education provider, or a school you have a partnership with, and share analysis and reporting.

⁴⁶ For advice, see www.betterevaluation.org/en/approaches

⁴⁷ See the Information Commissioner's Office website for resources and support: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/resources-and-support/>

135. We encourage you to consider carefully how you can respond to interim or process evaluations rapidly to work towards your access and participation targets.

Learning

136. You will want to understand whether your activities are having the impact that you intended. Effective evaluation is about learning how you can improve your practice and work towards eliminating inequality across the student lifecycle.

137. When analysing findings and forming conclusions you should refer back to the aims and objectives of your activities. What were you trying to understand? What were the research questions you set out to answer?

138. We encourage you to create and sustain mechanisms for learning and reflection as part of your evaluation strategy. For example, developing theory of change will help you to understand your access and participation activities and the evaluation practice which underpins it.

Evaluating financial support

139. We do not advise whether it is appropriate for providers to invest in financial support provision or how much should be invested. Further information on financial support approaches is available on the effective practice section of our website⁴⁸. You are expected to take a robust approach to your financial support evaluation, though what is considered appropriately robust will vary depending on your context. Providers with significant access and participation investment in financial support should be led by a range of evidence that examines both student outcome behaviour changes (such as continuation, degree attainment, graduate outcomes), and student experiences of how financial support affects their outcomes.

140. Three evaluation tools⁴⁹ are available to support you in evidencing the impact of your financial support. We strongly encourage use of these tools, which were developed and piloted by experts, using cognitive testing to improve their robustness. Alternative methods may be used, if you can provide evidence that your methods are similarly or more robust.

141. The three evaluation tools are:

- **Statistical tool:** a framework for statistical analysis
- **Survey tool:** a set of survey questions
- **Interview tool:** a semi-structured interview framework.

142. A HESA data release is available to subscribers which is designed for the statistical analysis tool, though it is possible for any provider to compile their own dataset. Those with around 300 to 800 annual financial support recipients can combine their data from multiple years. Providers with under 300 bursary recipients annually will not have large enough cohorts for the

⁴⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

⁴⁹ The evaluation tools can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/using-evidence-and-evaluation-to-improve-outcomes/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/

statistical analysis so it would be appropriate to focus on the survey and interview tools and/or developing their own quantitative analysis.

143. The statistical analysis will inform **whether** your financial support appears effective in equalising student success and progression outcomes. This analysis should be interpreted alongside findings from the survey and interview tools, which will explore **how** and **why** student experiences of financial support affect their outcomes.
144. It is likely you will need to draw on a variety of staff and expertise within your organisation to complete an effective evaluation, interpret the findings, and make strategic decisions informed by your new evidence. We advise you to use multiple years' data to inform decisions in maintaining or changing your financial support, and continue to evaluate to understand the effects of any changes you make or that occur in the environment. We recommend that these evaluation tools are incorporated into your wider evaluation strategy and used to inform your access and participation delivery.
145. Your access and participation plan may detail:
- Who your financial support is targeted at and what it is trying to achieve
 - The method(s) used to conduct your financial support evaluation
 - The findings of evaluation you have already conducted
 - What you learnt and how you plan to change your financial support as a result
 - How you plan to continue to evaluate your financial support in the future.

Sharing evidence generated from evaluation

We strongly recommend that providers use and contribute to the evidence and impact exchange⁵⁰ throughout the delivery of their access and participation plans. The exchange will use evidence and evaluation to understand and show how higher education contributes to social justice and mobility. Providers can also contribute to other knowledge sharing and peer-review mechanisms, for example, the innovative practice sections of the Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning journal⁵¹ or International Studies in Widening Participation⁵², as well as engaging with other organisations such as the Society for Research in Higher Education⁵³, British Educational Research Association⁵⁴, and the Centre for Global Higher Education⁵⁵.

Accessing higher education data to inform evaluation

146. You will need to access data for a number of purposes, such as:

- assessing your performance
- setting your targets
- identifying and targeting your access and participation activities
- using contextual information in your admissions processes
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of your programmes.

The sources for this data will vary and you will need to understand and plan how you access the appropriate data at the right time to achieve your objectives.

147. We are providing the access and participation dataset⁵⁶ to help with your assessment of performance and setting your targets. However, you will need to access other sources of data for targeting, contextual admissions and evaluation. Where possible, we have included the source of data, made suggestions for where you can access the data, or indicated that you will need to collect your own internal data.

⁵⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/using-evidence-to-improve-access-and-participation-outcomes/evidence-and-impact-exchange/

⁵¹ Available at www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll

⁵² Available at <https://novaajs.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/index>

⁵³ Available at www.srhe.ac.uk/

⁵⁴ Available at www.bera.ac.uk/

⁵⁵ Available at www.researchcghe.org/

⁵⁶ The dataset will be made publicly available on the OfS website in spring 2019. Providers will have access to their own data in advance of this publication strictly for operational and data quality assurance purposes.

148. We will be working together with the DfE, and other bodies such as HESA, UCAS and the tracking bodies, to continue to identify how providers can use education data to support evidence-informed approaches to improving higher education access. This includes our research into higher education tracking services, working with the DfE to improve use of school performance tables for more effective targeting⁵⁷, and working with UCAS to expand the provision of contextual data and information in the application process including the provision of individual-level Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) data.

Further information

Topic briefing on financial support (February 2018): www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-financial-support/

Office for Fair Access (OFFA) project 'Understanding the impact of institutional financial support' (December 2016): www.offa.org.uk/egp/impact-of-financial-support/

OfS Financial support evaluation toolkit: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/using-evidence-to-improve-access-and-participation-outcomes/financial-support-evaluation-toolkit/

OfS Evaluation of outreach interventions for under-16s: research and resources to support you to design, carry out and interpret evidence from evaluations of outreach for younger learners: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/using-evidence-and-evaluation-to-improve-outcomes/evaluation-of-outreach-interventions-for-under-16s/

Evaluation resources for those involved in NCOP: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/resources-for-partnerships/ (login required)

The Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit>

The Education Endowment Foundation: evidence summaries: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/>

Better Evaluation has a range of resources on evaluation: www.betterevaluation.org/

OFFA: Evaluation of outreach for young people who are first in their family to go to higher education: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112348tf_/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/

OFFA: Evaluation of outreach activity for mature learners with low or no prior qualifications (July 2017):

⁵⁷ The DfE will be introducing a new school and college accountability measure in 16 to 18 performance tables from 2019. This will focus on progression from Level 3 courses to higher education at Level 4 and above (including degrees, higher technical courses and higher apprenticeships).

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112343/https://www.offa.org.uk/eqp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/>

The What Works? Student Retention and Success programme final report includes lots of insight and evidence regarding evaluation of retention and success activities:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-student-success-strategies-institutional-change> (2017)

Equality, diversity and inclusion – aligning your access and participation and equality strategies

Summary

149. Your plan must include evidence that you have paid due regard to equality and diversity in designing your access and participation plan, as is your responsibility under the Equality Act 2010. We expect this would comprise a description of how equality and diversity and access and participation strategies align within your provider.

Why is this important?

150. While our definition of underrepresented groups does not explicitly include all the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010, many protected characteristics interlink with groups that are underrepresented in higher education, such as disability, ethnicity, and age (mature students). Again, we expect you to undertake an intersectional analysis of your access and participation target groups.

151. For example, given that activities targeted at those from lower socioeconomic groups and low participation neighbourhoods count towards your access and participation plan investment, this may provide an opportunity for you to meet both your equality objectives and access and participation plan targets. This could include financial support packages for disabled students, retention activity targeted at LGBT students, or activities to address the unequal outcomes between different ethnic groups.

152. If you need further help developing priorities and activities, you may wish to contact an external organisation such as AdvanceHE⁵⁸, which advises subscribing providers on equality and diversity, learning and teaching, and leadership and governance issues.

153. It will be particularly important to ensure alignment between your equality and diversity strategy and your access and participation strategy where you have separate teams working in these areas. This reflects a whole provider strategic approach as set out above.

Impact on those with protected characteristics

154. An equality impact assessment is a useful tool through which to understand how your plans and activities might impact, either positively or negatively, on people who share protected characteristics. The process encourages data analysis and consultation with affected groups to understand the barriers they might face and how you can mitigate these or further promote

⁵⁸ See www.advance-he.ac.uk/

equality for different groups through your activities. There is no set way to conduct an equality impact assessment. As these assessments are an established and credible tool for demonstrating due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty⁵⁹, most providers will have an established process and documentation.

155. There are other factors related to student welfare or safeguarding which – for affected students – are likely to adversely affect their success and progression. For example, a National Union of Students (NUS) report has highlighted that LGBT students are more likely to consider leaving higher education than their heterosexual peers and a 2014 survey found that 51 per cent of trans students ‘seriously considered dropping out’⁶⁰. The same report cited harassment, bullying and the feeling of not fitting in as contributing factors. There are links here to students from groups underrepresented in higher education and strong links to students with protected characteristics (e.g. sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or belief, and ethnicity). These factors include:

- Mental ill health (which may or may not meet the definition of disability, but which may still impact on students’ access, success and progression)
- Hate crime or harassment related to identity, including ethnicity and sexual orientation
- Sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

156. You may wish to consider whether these issues lie behind any of your observed gaps or are compounding the disadvantage we know that some groups of students experience. It may be helpful to consider them across the whole student lifecycle alongside your wider access and participation or equality and diversity strategies. We would encourage providers to consider how they collaborate with other providers and third sector organisations to develop the evidence base and share effective practice.

Further information

Government guidance on the Equality Act 2010: www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s state of the national review of equality and human rights in Britain, ‘Is Britain Fairer?’ (October 2018):

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/britain-fairer-2018

The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s list of protected characteristics:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-faqs

The Equality Challenge Unit’s Equality in higher education: statistical report (September 2018): www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2018/

Innovations in Equality and Diversity: HEFCE-funded evaluation of sector-leading and innovative practice, resulting in a searchable repository of case studies:

⁵⁹ See www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/governance-and-policies/equality-impact-assessment/

⁶⁰ Available at www.nus.org.uk/en/lifestyle/beyond-the-straight-and-narrow/

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319120542/http://s.hefce.ac.uk/s/search.html?collection=innovations-equality-diversity>

A report from the Equality Challenge Unit (April 2017):

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115611/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/reports/year/2017/edpractice/>

UUK's report, Changing the Culture – Report of the UUK Taskforce examining violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students (October 2016):

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-final-report.aspx

UUK Changing the Culture: One Year On – an assessment of strategies to tackle sexual misconduct, hate crime and harassment affecting university students (March 2018):

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/changing-the-culture-one-year-on.aspx

Evaluation of Safeguarding Students HEFCE Catalyst Fund projects (September 2018):

www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/evaluation-of-safeguarding-students-catalyst-fund-projects/

NUS Education beyond the straight and narrow: LGBT students' experience in higher education (May 2014): www.nus.org.uk/global/lgbt-research.pdf

Student engagement and partnership

Summary

157. Collaboration between providers and their students should be mutually and reciprocally beneficial. You should be informed by the experiences of underrepresented students, and can improve their strategy and activities based on this understanding. Involvement in provider activities can also contribute to students making positive changes to their higher education experiences. The 'What works? Student retention & success programme' (2017)⁶¹ research report shows that students who are engaged with activities at their provider felt a greater sense of belonging and connection to the provider, and that this may contribute to improved retention and success.

Why is this important?

158. We have made clear in our regulatory framework⁶² that we will engage with students to ensure that their voice is heard. Student engagement is also a requirement of the public interest governance principles for all registered providers.

⁶¹ Available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/retention/what-works

⁶² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/

159. Student engagement is important for providers to understand the experiences of specific groups at different stages in the student lifecycle. By seeking input from students from a range of backgrounds, you are better positioned to put effective mechanisms in place to address the specific barriers and gaps in outcomes.

Effective approaches

160. Good practice in student engagement may include:

- Collaborating with your students union or association to ensure there are transparent mechanisms for student representation
- Providing a variety of opportunities and channels for student input and feedback, as well as clear processes for recognising and disseminating where student contributions have impacted. Where student feedback has not been or cannot be implemented, you are encouraged to consider how the rationale and decision-making process can be most effectively communicated
- Including student representative on decision-making panels and actively collaborating with them in the preparation of papers and meeting content
- Ensuring safeguarding and welfare concerns, particularly related to mental health, are at the forefront of discussions with students, and that any approach to these issues are reflective of the whole provider strategic approach.

161. When implementing student engagement strategies, it is important to ensure that engagement is meaningful. Part of this is taking action to help students understand the context of access and participation so they are able to make informed contributions. This can be done by:

- Providing student representatives with appropriate training and support for their roles, so they are able to make informed and meaningful contributions. This could also include specific training, for example on how to interpret data
- Providing materials for meetings in a format that is accessible to students
- Communicating throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes by providing feedback at each stage about what changes have been made as a result of the student voice.

162. It is also important to consider how you can include students from a diverse range of backgrounds in the design, implementation and evaluation of your plan. This can be challenging due to issues such as 'self-selection' or 'highly engaged' students being more likely to participate in consultation activities. We know, for example, that in some providers mature students can experience isolation and disconnection from other students and that participating in ambassadorial roles can help to encourage a greater sense of belonging, in line with a whole provider strategic approach. We expect providers to demonstrate how they are ensuring the student voice of any targeted groups in their strategy are being captured in their engagement processes.

163. The report 'Breaking down the barriers to student opportunities and youth social action'⁶³, published by Universities UK and the NUS, examines reasons why students do not participate in volunteering opportunities and provides suggestions on how to encourage students to engage with these activities. The barriers to engaging students identified in this report can be applied more widely to increase engagement in access and participation activities.
164. In describing student engagement and involvement in your access and participation plan, you should be clear about the opportunities you have provided for sufficient engagement from students' unions, associations and representative bodies and the students directly.
165. The Addressing Barriers to Student Success programme⁶⁴ has funded a project to support student ambassadors from certain student groups.

Example: One provider has a diversity and inclusion student ambassador project led by a higher education provider that adopts a co-production model to bring staff and students together to take action to promote wellbeing and improve outcomes for BME students and those from low socioeconomic groups. Working in partnership with the provider's students' union, two further higher education providers and their students' union and guild, the approach aims to increase academic attainment, improve students' sense of belonging, engagement, wellbeing, interpersonal skills and the ability to confidently tackle discriminatory behaviour by creating safe spaces, building supportive networks and empowering students to safely challenge racism and other forms of discrimination. Student ambassadors receive training and support to undertake activities that promote inclusive learning environments. They also benefit from the development of a 'Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Online Platform' and an 'Active Bystander Intervention'.

166. We encourage students' unions and representatives to comment on how they have been consulted with and involved in their provider's access and participation work. This can take the form of an annex to the plan or as a separate submission. You should provide assistance and advice to your students' union and representatives on how to submit information through the access and participation plan process.
167. We are particularly interested in the student perspective on:
- How students (including students' unions or other representative bodies) have been consulted and engaged during the development of the access and participation plan
 - How students (including students' unions or other representative bodies) have been consulted and engaged during the implementation and evaluation of the access and participation plan

⁶³ Available at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/student-opportunities-and-youth-social-action.aspx

⁶⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/

- How students from underrepresented groups are specifically supported to meaningfully contribute to and participate in wider student engagement
- After looking at the access and participation dataset and your own assessment of performance, what areas your students' union feels you should focus on and whether they think your ambition is sufficient.

168. We encourage student representatives to be critical friends to their provider in relation to access and participation.⁶⁵

Collaboration, including strategic relationships with schools and employers

Summary

169. Collaboration between providers and other stakeholders is an important element of delivering access and participation activity across the student lifecycle. It can play a vital role in helping you to draw in broader expertise and support towards your strategic aims, and accelerate progress towards your targets.

170. Collaborative activity may include developing strategic relationships with schools and colleges, employers and third sector organisations, as well as other HE providers, regional and national associations and groups. This activity may be enabled and evidenced through OfS or other publicly-funded work to deliver common outcomes - for example, NCOP, Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund (DADF), and the Addressing Barriers to Student Success (ABSS) programme. Further guidance on developing collaborative targets and outcomes in your access and participation plan is provided below.

Why is this important?

171. Working collaboratively enables you to employ expertise which may not be available at your provider and can support you in the design, delivery and evaluation of interventions. This can include working with other functions or organisations that have specific expertise or focus, such as research and evaluation departments, or external organisations, such as schools or NHS trusts. Collaborative activity can deliver significant benefits in terms of increased coverage and co-ordination, and avoiding duplication.

172. At the access stage of the student lifecycle, collaboration between providers and other stakeholders – particularly schools, colleges and the third sector – can be an important way of delivering sustained engagement with schools and ensuring students receive high quality, impartial advice and guidance relating to higher education.

173. This stage of the lifecycle is also important when collaborating with employers to develop strategic relationships and activity to help deliver regional and national skills needs, open up routes to those already in work to access the benefits of higher education – either reskilling or

⁶⁵ See our information on student engagement and consultation at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/student-engagement-and-consultation/

upskilling – and assist employers to meet their own targets to increase the diversity of their workforce at all levels of their organisation.

174. There is a vital role for higher education, other education providers and employers to work in partnership to provide integrated pathways for skills development. Research commissioned by Universities UK states that collaborations between higher education, further education and employers are ‘vital for developing new talent to ensure a future skills pipeline but also for upskilling and reskilling the current workforce in response to changing skills needs’⁶⁶.
175. Providers should consider working with third sector organisations to understand and support retention for specific student groups that may have particular needs. Additionally, continued collaboration with professional, statutory and representative bodies (PSRBs) and employers can support the progression of underrepresented students to graduate employment or further study, ensuring they are equipped with the skills to meet employer demands and thereby maximising employment outcomes.

Effective approaches

176. You should set out your commitment and approach to collaborative working in your access and participation plan. You should also include clear information on the collaborative partnerships you have in place, or that are in development, and the organisations and networks with which you have formal collaborations. You should explore collaborative targets that can deliver common outcomes across programmes and projects.
177. Collaboration is important across the whole student lifecycle and we encourage you to learn from the work of others, adopt and adapt tried and tested activity, and to innovate. This is one of the ways a provider can demonstrate continuous improvement in developing their activities.
178. Collaborative access activity might include working in partnership with other providers, and third sector organisations to:
- Explain the value of higher education to potential students from underrepresented groups from primary school upwards
 - Deliver activity that supports pupil attainment in schools
 - Deliver high-quality, impartial higher education-related advice and guidance in order to ensure that young people and adult learners are well informed when choosing qualifications and subjects for GCSE or equivalent and beyond.
179. Our effective practice webpages⁶⁷ provides further information, including information sources, on relationships with schools as well as activities related to raising attainment.
180. You should also consider how you can engage collaboratively with the work of NCOP partnerships so that you are developing activities and programmes through your access and participation plan that complement and support the programme according to your broader

⁶⁶ Available at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/Routes-to-high-level-skills.aspx

⁶⁷ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/

targeting criteria for underrepresented groups. This includes contributing to the ambitions of the NCOP outreach hubs in supporting schools and colleges to access higher education outreach and providing a platform for wider collaboration.

181. Our ABSS programme demonstrates how collaborative approaches between providers can help to address issues at the success stage of the student lifecycle. One project focuses on tackling differential achievement, by developing practical activities and resources that will support students at risk of leaving or not achieving their potential. This was an example of collaboration between four higher education providers.
182. You may find it useful to collaborate with specialist organisations, to support delivery of effective mental health support to further support students to continue in their studies. You may also find it useful to engage with local authorities to support your provision for students who have experienced care. We strongly encourage collaboration with organisations such as the NHS and other local agencies and authorities in addressing issues of safeguarding and welfare of students.
183. Your collaborative activity may include working with employers, LEPs and other education providers to identify skills gaps and develop flexible and responsive provision for those already in the workplace who may be looking to upskill or reskill. For example, delivering apprenticeships can provide opportunities for collaboration and the development of multiple strategic relationships beyond schools. A recent evaluation of projects funded through the HEFCE-led DADF shows that social mobility was a significant motivation for providers in diversifying their provision into apprenticeships with participants involved in two clear streams of activities:
 - Awareness raising in schools and colleges that these apprenticeships offer another pathway for students to achieve a higher education qualification, without debt, that leads to excellent outcomes
 - Establishing partnerships with employers looking to upskill and reskill their existing workforce, thereby raising adult attainment levels.
184. Some projects funded through the DADF worked with local NCOP teams to set up and promote degree apprenticeships. Another project saw providers collaborating to deliver Level 2 English and maths provision so that prior qualifications were not a barrier to existing employees looking to upskill.
185. Collaborating with employers should span the full student lifecycle – from encouraging prospective students (who may already be in work) to consider higher education; supporting students to succeed in their studies; and to helping them to achieve the best possible outcomes when they enter the jobs market or embark upon further study. Working with employers throughout the lifecycle helps to improve a student’s employability with the aim of optimising their employment outcomes. Employer links can open up opportunities for students to gain invaluable work experience. They can also include engaging employers to run taster days, mentoring programmes, employer-led competitions, as well as supporting student enterprise and entrepreneurial activity, and cohabiting innovation spaces and hubs. Further

information on effective practice in employability and work experience is included in our A-Z guide⁶⁸.

186. Providers should consider how they work through all stages of the student lifecycle with PSRBs. The Shadbolt and Wakeham reviews⁶⁹ considered the employment outcomes of computer sciences and science, technology, engineering and maths graduates. They highlighted the importance of providers working closely with PSRBs on activities from access to progression, to promote and highlight pathways into the professions and particular industries. As part of its 'Education for Engineering' programme, the Royal Academy of Engineering is working to make the engineering profession more inclusive, particularly to BAME graduates who are significantly less likely to work in engineering compared to white graduates.
187. Most providers include collaborative activity and targets in their access and participation plans and we strongly encourage you to consider doing so where this can bring benefits. We will take your collaborative efforts that contribute to national priorities into account when assessing your progress in achieving the collaborative targets you have set yourself.
188. In order to measure the impact of your activity effectively, you should consider the use of higher education tracking services. These services will track students who have taken part in access activities in schools and colleges, and record their achievement in higher education. Several different services are available, often built on collaborative models which offer economies of scale by providing access to data, analysis and research to support targeting, monitoring and evaluation of outreach activities. Use of tracking can support you to improve the impact of your access and participation activity, particularly in relation to effective targeting for access interventions and enhancing evaluation practice.

How to integrate access and participation activities being paid for by other public funding

189. Your institution may receive funding from other sources that you can use to support the activities set out in your strategy plan. Funding from the OfS (excluding NCOP), other public funding and funding from other sources can be included in the targets and investment plan where this relates to access, financial support and research and evaluation. We would like to be able to consider your strategic plan as a whole, so where activities are paid for by public funding and contribute towards achieving your targets we want you to describe how this work is integrated into your strategic plan. Below, there is a list of common sources of public funding and also guidance on what you might want to consider when describing this work.
190. We are particularly interested in understanding the relationship between the activity set out through your access and participation plan and:

- **NCOP** – see below for further information.

⁶⁸ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/a-to-z-of-effective-practice-in-access-and-participation/

⁶⁹ See www.gov.uk/government/collections/graduate-employment-and-accreditation-in-stem-independent-reviews

- **The government’s 12 opportunity areas and Opportunity North East:**
 - The government is supporting tailored interventions in 12 Opportunity Areas across the country that experience significant challenges in social mobility⁷⁰. In addition, in October 2018, the government launched a £24 million programme for the North East to improve opportunities for young people in the region⁷¹. In your access and participation plan, we encourage you to:
 - i. consider what more you can do to target these areas
 - ii. ensure that the work being done through your access and participation plan (locally, regionally or nationally) complements other work taking place
 - iii. use these opportunities to further broaden your range of collaborative partners – for example, with employers and third-sector organisations.
- **HEIF⁷²:** You may include information about how any activity funded through HEIF is supporting your access and participation work.
- **DADF:** You may include information about how any activity funded through the DADF is supporting your access and participation work.
- **ABSS⁷³:** You may include information about how any activity funded through the ABSS programme is supporting your access and participation work.
- **Other OfS funding:** You may include information about how any activity linked to other OfS funding, including the recently launched **OfS Challenge Competition⁷⁴** and ongoing projects funded through HEFCE’s **Catalyst programme** is supporting your access and participation work.
- **Student Premium funding:** We expect you to include information on how any activity funded through OfS student premium funding is supporting your access and participation work.
- **University Mental Health Charter** (in development with Student Minds)⁷⁵
 - The OfS and the DfE are supporting Student Minds to develop a Charter for student mental health. This will be undertaken in partnership with UUK, NUS and

⁷⁰ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

⁷¹ See www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-launches-24-million-programme-for-north-east

⁷² See <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/the-higher-education-innovation-fund-heif/>

⁷³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/addressing-barriers-to-student-success-programme/

⁷⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/funding-for-providers/ofs-challenge-competitions/

⁷⁵ See <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html>

AMOSSHE (the Student Services Organisation), with funding for the development phase from the UPP Foundation.

- The Charter will recognise and reward those institutions that demonstrate good practice, make student and staff mental health a provider-wide priority and deliver improved student mental health and wellbeing outcomes.
- You may include information about how you are working with Student Minds to develop the Charter and/or information about how you are working to deliver the aims of the Charter.

191. When describing how funding from these sources aligns with or complements your other activities, you may want to think about:

- a. How are you using these activities to set collaborative targets across multiple stakeholders and how are they delivering on common outcomes?
- b. What stages of the lifecycle and your target groups are these activities helping to address?
- c. How will these activities help you to achieve your aims and objectives and to meet your targets?
- d. How does this activity leverage funding to enable you to be more ambitious and/or to make better and quicker progress?
- e. What effective practice in collaboration to meet collaborative aims, objectives and targets can you highlight?

National Collaborative Outreach Programme

The **National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)** was established in 2017 with the aim of rapidly boosting higher education participation for those from underrepresented groups, with a focus on the geographical areas where this work can have the most impact. In addition, it has established a collaborative infrastructure for providers to work with each other and with schools and colleges and thereby establish greater coherence and efficiency for higher education outreach.

Phase two of NCOP, which commences in academic year 2019-20, will see continued investment in targeted outreach with young people in Year 9 upwards in defined geographic areas. In an expanded remit the programme will also support local collaborative partnerships, known as outreach hubs, who between them will provide cross-England coverage. This is intended to support ongoing, sustainable, local collaboration to help schools and colleges access higher education outreach and provide a platform for wider collaboration, including joined up careers advice.

The collaborative infrastructure supported by the NCOP is intended to complement and add value to the work that providers undertake through their access and participation plans, in particular work that is best delivered in collaboration. Providers involved in NCOP should ensure that the work of their NCOP partnerships is embedded in their wider access and

participation strategy. We encourage providers to include targets for collaborative activity, supported by the NCOP infrastructure, within their access and participation plans.

The OfS has agreed, in principle, to provide funding to support NCOP during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Our ambition is to ensure that the outreach hubs infrastructure is available to support collaborative activity set out in this round of access and participation plans.

192. We expect you to consider how NCOP can feature within your access and participation strategy.
193. Additionally it is important that you continue to support and grow activities and programmes through your access and participation plan that complement NCOP according to your broader targeting criteria for underrepresented groups, age groups and areas that do not fall within NCOP targeted outreach criteria.
194. Where collaborative targets are with other providers who are also submitting an access and participation plan, you may look at ensuring those targets feature in both plans, and have consistent wording so they can be identified.
195. You must include information in your access and participation plan on:
- a. How you will support the delivery of collaborative activity through the local infrastructure of the NCOP, if appropriate
 - b. How you will utilise the local infrastructure of NCOP to deliver on your collaborative goals, if appropriate
 - c. How the work delivered through NCOP will complement the work being delivered through your access and participation plan
 - d. How you will ensure underrepresented groups in need of support are not missed, such as geographical areas and age ranges not targeted through NCOP activities.

Further information

National Collaborative Outreach Programme information:

www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/national-collaborative-outreach-programme-ncop/

The International Centre for Guidance Studies and The Progression Trust's practitioner toolkit on partnerships (June 2014): www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/he-outreach-widen-participation-toolkits-practitioners-partnership

HEFCE outreach resource pool:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319114312/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/aboutrp/>

DfE guidance on setting up school and university partnerships:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/setting-up-school-partnerships

Topic briefing 'Raising attainment in schools and colleges for widening participation' (December 2017): www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/using-evidence-and-evaluation-to-improve-outcomes/

The School-University Partnerships Initiative report, School-university partnerships: fulfilling the potential (2014)

The Education Endowment Foundation summarises academic research about student attainment and draws attention to high potential education interventions: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>

OfS Catalyst project on student safeguarding: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-safety-and-wellbeing/what-are-we-doing/

The DfE publishes information about:

- sponsoring an academy: www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy
- setting up a free school: www.gov.uk/set-up-free-school

Abbreviations

ABSS	Addressing Barriers to Student Success
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
DADF	Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund
DfE	Department for Education
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education
EIX	Evidence and Impact Exchange
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
FTE	Full time equivalent
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIF	Higher Education Innovation Funding
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act (2017)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
KPM	Key performance measure
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MEM	Multiple Equality Measure
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NUS	National Union of Students
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas (classification)
PSRBs	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
SLC	Student Loans Company
TEF	Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UUK	Universities UK



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