

Office for
Students



Systems, processes and oversight

July 2021

What we will cover today

- Higher education definition
- How we use the Learning Aims Search (LARS)
- Sub-contractual and collaborative provision
- Our expectation for data management and its oversight at providers
- Questions we may ask through an audit
- Good practice for systems and processes.

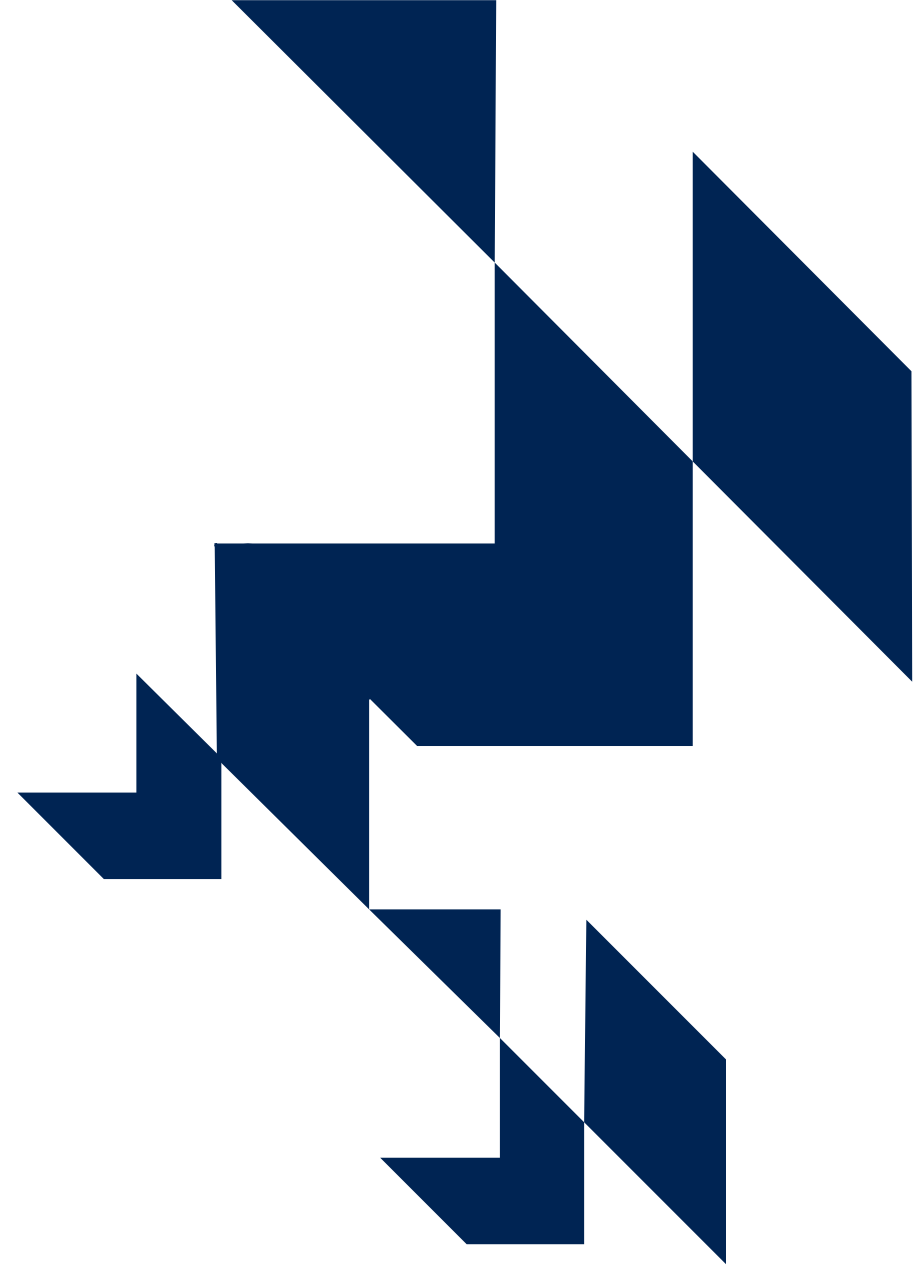
Supporting materials

Providers should refer to:

- The ILR specification
- The ILR Provider Support Manual
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) guidance for 2020-21: available at <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051/index>

Separate training covers the Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) data return.

Higher education definition and LARS



Definition of higher education for OfS purposes

- Anything Level 4 and above
- We only use the NotionalNVQLevelV2 field from the Learning Aims Search to determine it and not the England FE HE status or EngPrscID field.

Recognised higher education for OfS funding purposes

- A course that is designated under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011
- A 'course of higher education' as defined in Schedule 6 of the Education Reform Act 1988, other than one leading to a qualification in the Register of Regulated Qualifications
- Study for higher education credit may be included if the conditions in HESES19, Annex B, paragraph 2 are met.

Learning aims (LARS/Find a learning aim)

We use LARS to find and classify higher education and to flag which aims are recognised for OfS funding purposes.

Fields we use include:

- Learning Aim Ref
- Learning Aim Title
- Learning Aim Type
- Level - Notional NVQ Level V2
- UKPRN of awarding organisation
- Learn Direct Classification System (LDCS) codes.

Learning aims search (LARS)

Colleges should:

- Apply for a learning aim when they set up a course
 - Details of how can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/supplying-data/request-or-modify-a-learning-aim/
- Check values of LARS fields are correct for the aim.

Recording sub- contractual and collaborative provision



Sub-contractual relationships

Do include your sub-contracted-out students.

Do not include learners sub-contracted-in for provision at Level 4 or above from another further education college or registered OfS provider.

PartnerUKPRN and PCOLAB should be returned for sub-contracted-out students to show the partner delivering teaching and the proportion of the aim delivered by them.

Data quality for collaborative provision

Responsibility for data quality lies with the provider returning students.

Common issues:

- data for sub-contracted provision is of poor quality, with omissions and inaccuracies
- providers are unable to explain why field values have been returned
- necessary evidence to determine accurate field values is not available.

Data quality for collaborative provision

Responsibility for data quality lies with the provider returning students.

Good practice:

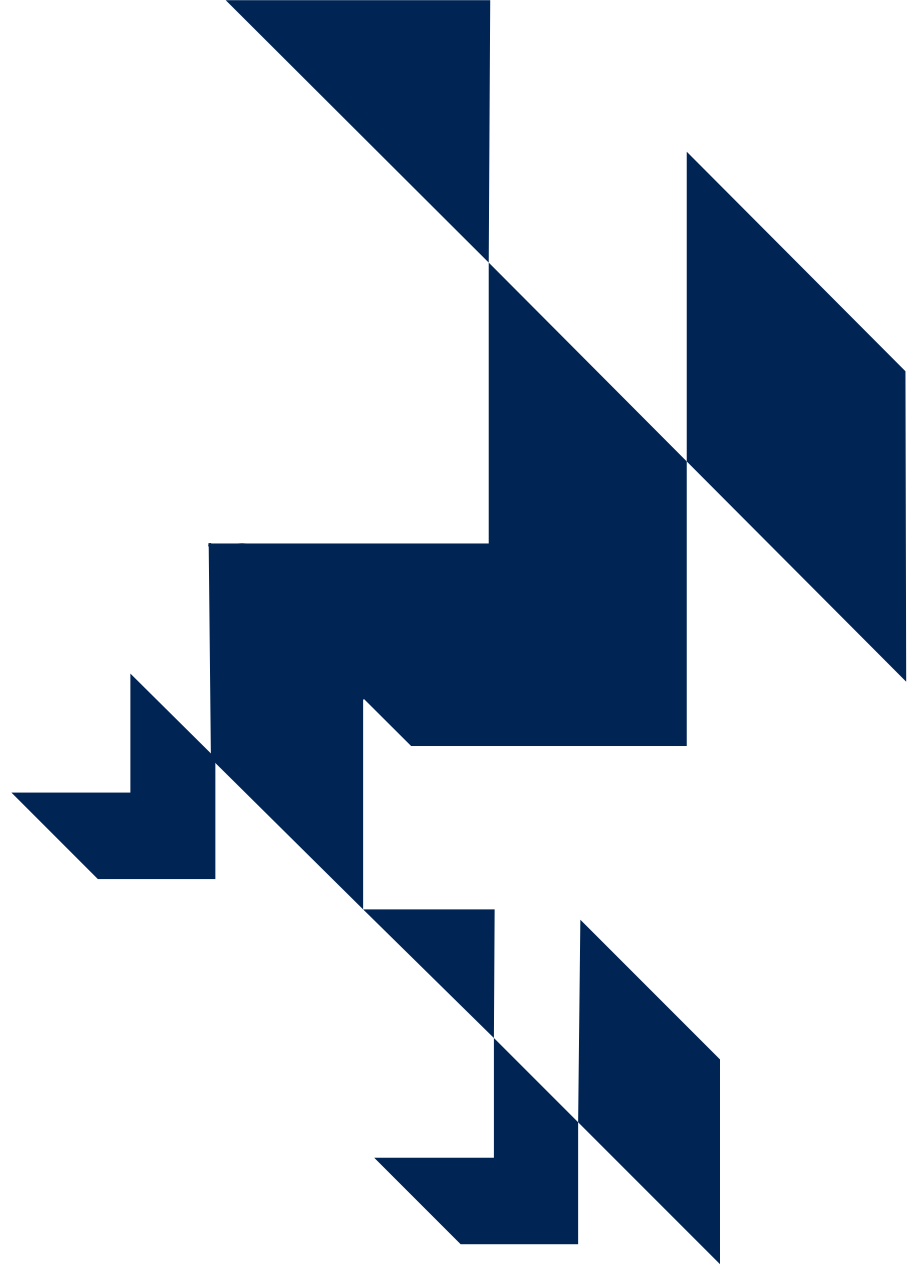
- processes for collecting and maintaining data are set out in partnership agreements, including the data to be collected, the method of collection and evidence requirements
- sufficient oversight of processes and checks of data to gain assurance that data from the teaching partner is reliable.

Systems and processes

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Expectations for data



The Office for Students' regulatory framework

The regulatory framework states how the OfS intends to perform its various functions, and provides guidance for registered higher education providers on the ongoing conditions of registration.

Conditions F3 and E2 are particularly relevant to the provision of high-quality higher education student data by colleges through the ILR.

Condition F3: Provision of information to the OfS

For the purpose of assisting the OfS in performing any function, or exercising any power, conferred on the OfS under any legislation, the governing body of a provider must:

- i. Provide the OfS, or a person nominated by the OfS, with such information as the OfS specifies at the time and in the manner and form specified.
- ii. Permit the OfS to verify, or arrange for the independent verification by a person nominated by the OfS of such information as the OfS specifies at the time and in the manner specified, and must notify the OfS of the outcome of any independent verification at the time and in the manner and form specified.

Condition F3: Provision of information to the OfS

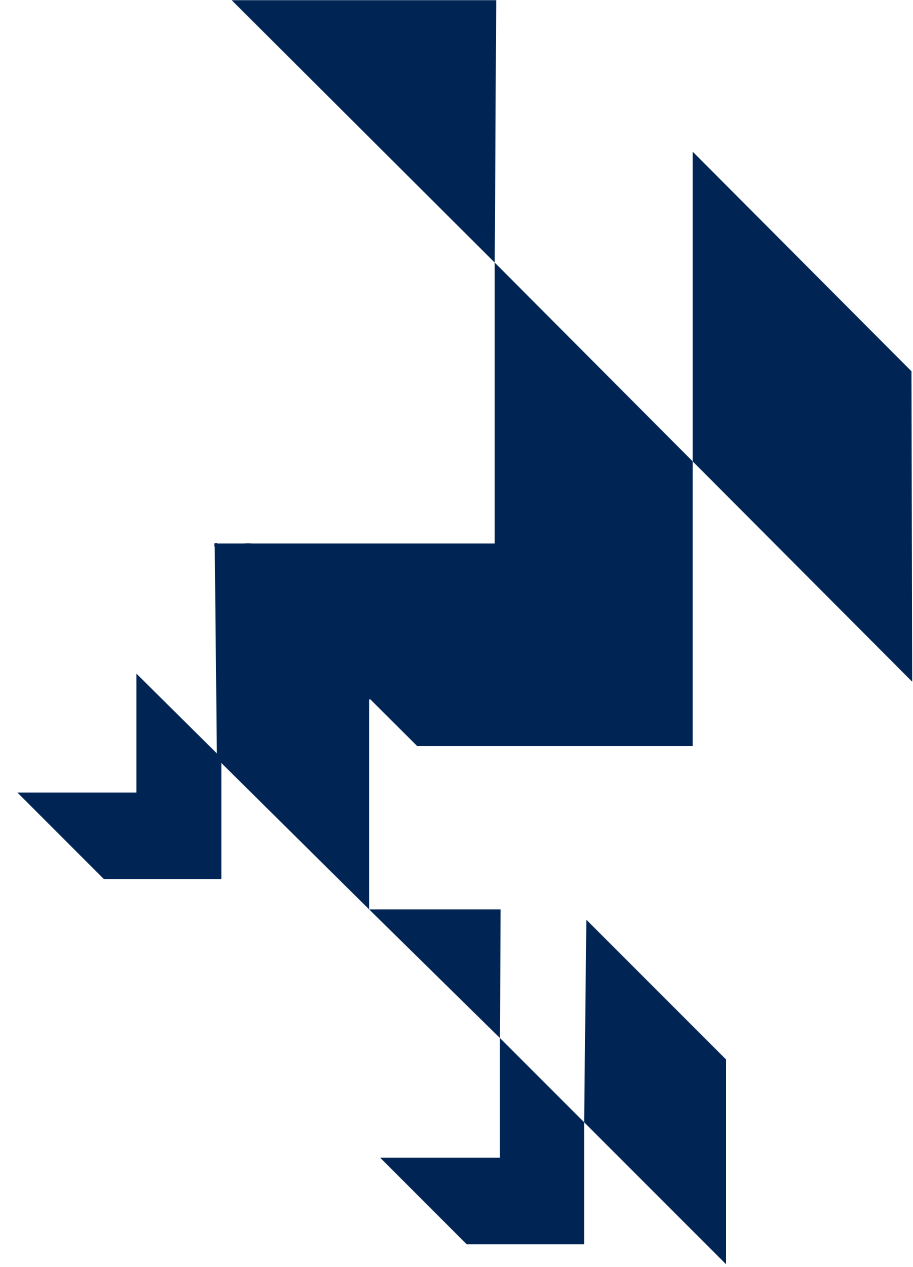
iii. Take such steps as the OfS reasonably requests to co-operate with any monitoring or investigation by the OfS, in particular, but not limited to, providing explanations or making available documents to the OfS or a person nominated by it or making available members of staff to meet with the OfS or a person nominated by it.

When assessing compliance with F3 the OfS will consider the quality, reliability and timeliness of information provided.

Condition E2: Management and governance

The provider must have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements to: [...] continue to comply with all conditions of its registration.

Systems and processes



Our expectations

- Systems and processes should be designed to obtain and return accurate data
- Staff involved in collection, inputting and maintaining data should be suitably trained
- Written documentation of processes is highly recommended
- Suitable evidence should be maintained
- Data for continuing students should be reviewed for accuracy
- Checks should be in place to identify errors
- The effectiveness of processes should be evaluated periodically.

Systems and processes should be designed to obtain and return accurate data

- A suitable student record system, or alternative secure method of capturing and maintaining student data, should be in place
- For each field the processes in place should be aimed at returning accurate data, in line with the field definition
- Adequate information should be gathered for this and suitable evidence reviewed
- Where possible validation checks should be used to avoid errors.

Staff involved in the collection, inputting and maintaining data should be suitably trained

- The person responsible for collating ILR data should have a good knowledge of the ILR requirements
- Data quality can be improved through a second individual, with knowledge of the requirements, checking the data
- Suitable training and guidance should be provided to other staff involved in collecting, inputting and maintaining data
- Data quality is often improved when the staff involved understand the use of data and the consequences of data error.

Written documentation of processes is highly recommended

- It may not be possible to have more than one individual able to collate and return ILR data
- Written documentation can:
 - reduce the risks of over-reliance on individuals
 - help ensure steps in the process are not missed
 - help ensure adequate checking takes place
 - help ensure lessons from the previous year are learnt.

Suitable evidence should be maintained

- Where supporting evidence is required the person reviewing this should be trained in this role and written guidance can be helpful
- The provider should be able to evidence that effective checks of evidence have taken place
- Data quality can be improved through evidence being copied and maintained and through double checking of this
- All evidence should be kept for five years from the submission of the data.

Data for continuing students should be reviewed for accuracy

- Providers should be able to evidence that continuing students have returned to study
- Re-enrolment processes should support updating of fields where these may change year on year (such as TTACCOM)
- Re-enrolment also provides an opportunity to recheck, and amend as needed, key field values such as ethnicity.

Checks should be in place to identify errors

- Data quality can be dramatically improved through effective checks
- Ideally an individual not involved in compiling the return should conduct checks
- People checking the data should have sufficient knowledge to carry out an effective review
- Where possible validation should be used to avoid errors
- Checks should be aimed at identifying data that is likely to be incorrect
- We strongly encourage providers to engage with the ILR verification process early and fully.

The effectiveness of processes should be evaluated periodically

- Given the importance of data quality the processes to obtain, maintain and return student data should be reviewed periodically
- Providers may wish to commission internal audits of ILR data, or similar external reviews of data quality
- Where errors in data are identified processes should be reviewed with a view to understanding how these have occurred and avoiding recurrence.

Data audit

- May explore any of these expectations
- Will often test the accuracy of data
- Where data errors are found we will expect providers to revise processes to avoid issues recurring.

Oversight

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Oversight by senior management and governors

- The level of oversight should be appropriate given the importance of data quality
- We would expect senior management and governors to have sufficient oversight to gain assurance over data quality. This may be achieved through:
 - sign-off of data by an appropriate senior person
 - periodic reviews of the systems and processes in place
 - routine reporting on activity to collate and return student data
 - exceptional reporting when issues are identified
 - internal audit or other external reviews of data quality considered by governors.

Data audit

- Will usually explore who is responsible for compiling returns and who has oversight of this process
- Will usually explore how senior managers and governors gain assurance that systems and processes are appropriate and that data is accurate
- Will usually consider if any sign off procedures are appropriate
- Where data errors are found we would expect appropriate oversight by governors of actions to address the identified issues.

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The logo for the Office for Students, featuring a dark blue square with a yellow square in the top right corner containing the letters 'OfS' in white.

OfS

Thank you for listening

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