Regulatory Advice 8

Guidance for providers about condition of registration F1: transparency information

Contents

Introduction

1. This regulatory advice sets out guidance for higher education providers in England that are registered with the Office for Students (OfS). Section 9 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) requires the OfS to ensure that the ongoing conditions of registration for certain providers includes a transparency condition.

2. We will apply this mandatory condition to all registered providers prescribed by regulations to be approved by Parliament.

3. This guidance sets out what you must do once you are registered to comply with the ongoing condition of registration relating to transparency information. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the OfS's regulatory framework (OfS 2018.01) which sets out in full the approach that we will take to the regulation of providers. If there are any inconsistencies between the regulatory framework and this document then the regulatory framework will prevail.

What is the transparency information condition?

4. Our regulatory framework contains an ongoing condition of registration that applies to all registered providers:

> **Condition F1**: The provider must provide to the OfS, and publish, in the manner and form specified by the OfS, the transparency information set out in section 9 of HERA.

5. The transparency information means the information we request in relation to the following:

    a. The number of applications for admission on to higher education courses that the provider has received.

    b. The number of offers made by the provider in relation to those applications.

    c. The number of those offers accepted and the number of those who go on to register at the provider.

    d. The number of students who registered and went on to complete their course with the provider.

    e. The number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award, or a particular level of such an award, on completion of their course with the provider.

6. In each case, the information that we ask you to provide may include those numbers by reference to the following:

    a. The gender of the individuals to which they relate.

    b. Their ethnicity.

    c. Their socioeconomic background.

What do I have to do?

7. If you are applying to be registered by us, you should note that you will be required to submit and publish the transparency information listed above from the 2019-20 academic year[1] – this will apply to applicants and students on your undergraduate courses only (first degree and other undergraduate courses, and programmes such as apprenticeship programmes where these are higher education level, HNDs, foundation degrees and so on). We will undertake further work with students and providers in order to look at extending the transparency information to cover postgraduate applicants and students in future years.

8. As part of our work on access and participation, we will also consult on requiring additional transparency information and breakdowns of data by other student characteristics, such as disability and age.

9. If you are applying for registration, you will need to comply with the transparency information condition from 1 August 2019. Therefore, for 2019 only, you will need to submit to us and publish the required information in August 2019 about those applications, offers, acceptances and registrations[2] from students that applied to start their study with you in the 2018-19 academic year. You will also need to submit to us and publish the required information about the number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award or a particular level of such an award on completion of their course in the 2017-18 academic year. This will be the only year for which you will be required to submit and publish the required information in August.

10. After the submission and publication in August 2019, you will need to submit and publish the required information thereafter in April of each year. This means that in April 2020, you must publish, and supply to us, information on all the applications, offers, acceptances and starts for all courses starting between 1 August 2019 and 31 July 2020. This will ensure that you publish the information in the academic year to which it relates, whilst also allowing the majority of student intakes at different times during the academic year to be recorded. You must also publish and supply to us information on the number of those applicants who started their study with you in 2018-19 who completed their course by the end of the 2018-19 academic year (i.e. those completing after one year or less). You must also publish and supply information to us information on the number of **all** students (i.e. not limited to students that started their study with you in a particular academic year) who attained a particular degree or other academic award, or a particular level of such an award on completion of their course in the 2018-19 academic year.

11. We are aware that an April publication will result in some students that start their courses after March not being included in the data for that year. You will therefore submit and publish 'in-year' data and 'full-year' data. For example, you would publish data relating to those applying to and starting their study with you in 2019-20 as in-year data in April 2020. You would then update this with any further late starts and publish this as full-year data in April 2021. Tables 1 and 2 set out what you will need to submit and publish, and when you will need to do this. The requirements

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[1] We use the term 'academic year' to refer to the period from 1 August of one year to 31 July of the following year; so the 2019-20 academic year runs from 1 August 2019 to 31 July 2020. This applies irrespective of the start and end dates of your own academic year.

[2] We use the term 'registrations' to refer to those that have started their course of study with you.

set out in the tables will ensure that you will be able to include all of your students in the data that you submit and publish. We will keep the timing of publication under review to ensure that we optimise both the timeliness and completeness of the required information.

12. Table 1 sets out, in broad terms, the information you will need to submit and publish and when you would need to do this in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Table 2 illustrates how this would work across the first two academic years.

Table 1: Information requirements and publication points for transparency information relating to data for the 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years

Data required	Month and year of publication
Application, offer, acceptance and registration data for applicants who intended to start their course in the 2018-19 academic year	August 2019
The number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award or a particular level of such an award on completion of their course in the 2017-18 academic year*	August 2019
In-year application, offer, acceptance and registration data for applicants who intend to start their course in the 2019-20 academic year; and full-year application, offer, acceptance and registration data for those who started in the 2018-19 academic year	April 2020
Data on the number of those applicants who started their study with you in 2018-19 who completed their course by the end of the 2018-19 academic year (i.e. those completing after one year or less)**	April 2020
The number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award or a particular level of such an award on completion of their course in the 2018-19 academic year*	April 2020
In-year application, offer, acceptance and registration data for applicants who intend to start their course in the 2020-21 academic year; and full-year application, offer, acceptance and registration data for those who started in the 2019-20 academic year	April 2021
Data on the number of those applicants who started their study with you in 2018-19 who completed their course by the end of the 2019-20 academic year (i.e. those completing after two years or less). Data on those applicants who started their study with you in 2019-20 who completed their course by the end of the 2019-20 academic year (i.e. those completing after one year or less)	April 2021
The number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award or a particular level of such an award on completion of their course in the 2019-20 academic year*	April 2021

* You should provide data for the cohort of students who are completing their courses for the year in question rather than the cohort of students who are applying.

** You should provide data on students that have completed from the cohort of students who are applying for the year in question.

Table 2: Transparency information required to be published across the first two academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21

Data category	Published August 2019	Published April 2020	Published April 2021
In-year application, acceptance, offer and registration data	For students entering in academic year 2018-19	For students entering in academic year 2019-20	For students entering in academic year 2020-21
Full-year application, acceptance, offer and registration data		For students entering in academic year 2018-19	For students entering in academic year 2019-20
Full-year completion		For students who entered and completed in academic year 2018-19 (i.e. those completing after one year or less)	For students who entered and completed in academic year 2019-20 (i.e. those completing after one year or less) For students who entered and completed in academic year 2018-19 (i.e. those completing after two years)
Full-year attainment	For students completing in 2017-18	For all students completing in 2018-19	For all students completing in 2019-20

What does the terminology in the transparency information condition mean?

Application, offer and acceptance data

13. The way the condition has been worded in our regulatory framework means that you should adopt an applicant cohort approach in the provision of the required data in paragraph 5 (a-d) above. Taking an applicant cohort approach means that you will be reporting on the same set of applicants (all your home, i.e. UK domiciled) that have applied to start studying with you in the year in question for each of the requirements in set out in paragraph 5 (a-d) above.

14. You should ensure that you capture all applications from home (i.e. UK domiciled) students to study for a recognised, undergraduate higher education award. You should include students on apprenticeship programmes, where these are higher education level, as well as students studying HND, foundation degrees and other sub-degree programmes that lead to a full award rather than credit. You should also include students who have applied to foundation years where these are integrated into a full higher education qualification.

15. If you use UCAS for your students' applications, most of the application data for full-time undergraduate courses will be relatively accessible and straightforward to provide. However, you will need to collate data for all other applications which are made outside of the UCAS system. This includes, but is not limited to, part-time applications, direct full-time applications, apprenticeship starts, transfers in and those on programmes which allow direct progression from pre-higher education programmes onto higher education awards.

16. You may have sub-contractual arrangements with other providers. Those arrangements may include progression agreements from, for example, a foundation degree delivered by the delivery provider to an honours degree at the lead provider. Some of those agreements may offer guaranteed progression on successful completion of the foundation degree. In such cases, the point at which those students take up the option to continue onto the full degree programme is the point at which you should include them as new applicants. For other agreements which do not include guaranteed progression, the point at which such students are offered a place on the degree programme is the point at which you should consider there to be a new application. In cases where you have progression agreements with other providers, including those with their own degree or foundation degree awarding powers, you should record students progressing from one to the other as new applications.

17. We recognise that outside UCAS the point at which an enquiry becomes an application may not always be clear cut. In these cases you should record a query as an application at the point at which an offer is made. This would include offers made and accepted through the UCAS Clearing process.

18. For the purposes of the transparency condition, you should ensure that you capture all of your home (i.e. UK domiciled) applicants and students studying in the UK. If you are delivering awards in other countries, you do not need to include information on those applicants and students. You do not currently need to include information on EU and international applicants for the purposes of the transparency information condition. However, we will undertake further work, as part of our broader responsibilities for all students studying in English higher education

providers, to determine the most appropriate mechanism through which to collect relevant information on these students.

19. We will develop a template which will be available to you in autumn 2018 on which you can record all applications, offers and acceptances and which will generate the summary data for submission to us. The primary purpose of the template is to enable consistent recording of direct applications to providers, i.e. those applications that are outside of the UCAS system. However, we will design the template in such a way that it will allow you to transfer in your UCAS data to create a complete application, offer and acceptance data set. The template will ensure that we collect the correct demographic data and will ensure consistency of information across all providers.

20. For 2019 only, you will be expected to publish the information required by the transparency information condition in August 2019. As a consequence, you will need to provide the required information for those applications you received to start studying with you in the 2018-19 academic year. This will be the only year for which we will require an August publication.

21. The submission and publication of the required information thereafter will be in April of each year. You will publish information on all applications, offers, acceptances and starts for all undergraduate courses starting between 1 August and 31 July in that academic year. This means that in April 2020, you will submit and publish information for courses that start in the 2019-20 academic year. Therefore, you will need to report your application data as follows:

- applications made during the most recent application cycle for that year (i.e. for UCAS applications, the cycle which opens in September 2018 with a mid-January 2019 deadline for applications in the main system)

- applications made in previous cycles where entry was deferred until 2019-20

- within-year applications (for example, applications to nursing courses in November 2019 to start in January 2020).

22. We are aware that publishing data in April relating to that academic year will result in some applications not being captured due to later start dates. Therefore, this 'in-year' data should be complete up to the end of March. You will add your later, post-March applicants and publish your 'full-year' data the following April. This means that you will publish the in-year information relating to applications to start in 2019-20 in April 2020 and the full-year information for applications to start in 2019-20 in April 2021.

23. You will need to present the application data about your students broken down into full-time and part-time applicants and those on apprenticeship programmes, to ensure that data on completions are meaningful. You may wish to provide further breakdowns to reflect the varied nature of your applicant cohorts. However, we also need to ensure that information is presented in a consistent way across all providers. Therefore, we will undertake further work on the appropriate presentation of the information, as set out below.

Completion and attainment data

24. You will need to submit and publish data showing the number of students in the relevant applicant cohort who accepted offers, and completed their course with you. You should ensure

that you clearly distinguish between those applicants who accepted offers and those who both accepted offers and subsequently registered and started studying with you (this is to ensure that when presenting completion data, those applicants that accepted offers but did not subsequently start studying with you are not included). This does not include deferred entrants, who should be accounted for in the applicant cohort data for the year in which they registered and started studying with you. For non-UCAS applicants, you will be able to use the template referred to in paragraph 19 to record those who accepted, registered and started and those who accepted but did not start. This will enable non-starters from both non-UCAS and UCAS applications to be accounted for in the completion data extract to be delivered to you.

25. Higher education courses will vary in the length of time taken to complete. Generally, full-time undergraduate courses can vary from one to seven years to complete, with part-time courses taking significantly longer. It is also the case that students may take breaks in study, re-take a year or transfer to another provider.

26. In recognition of the complexities involved in reporting on completion for applicant cohorts, data will be required for the following:

    • those completed (part I)

    • those still studying (part II)

    • those no longer studying with you (part III)

    • those taking a break in study (part IV).

27. As much of the information relating to the status of student cohorts will be on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record or the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), we will deliver the necessary extracts to you to enable you to meet the requirements for completion data. You should note that it will not be possible to identify those students that may have formally transferred to another provider (although it will be possible to identify where students are still within the higher education system). Therefore, you should examine your data for part III in order to identify any formal transfers and report them separately.

28. The earliest that you could report completion data for an applicant cohort for the purposes of the condition would be April of the academic year following the academic year of entry. For example, applicants who start with you in autumn 2019 to undertake a one year course would typically be expected to complete in summer 2020. Therefore you would include those completions in the data you submit and publish in April 2021.

29. On receipt of your data, you should check to ensure parts I-IV above are accurately reflected.

30. With respect to the requirements for attainment data, it is not necessary for you to report this by the applicant cohort. This is because, unlike the other requirements, the attainment requirement relates to the number of students who attained a particular degree or other academic award, or a particular level of such an award, on completion of their course with the provider. Therefore, we will provide you with attainment information from the HESA student record or the ILR for the latest cohort for which it is available.

31. We recognise that higher education courses vary in length, and we also recognise that there are valid reasons why some students may take longer to complete their course than others.

Therefore, we will consider the last eight applicant cohorts for full-time students and the last 16 applicant cohorts for part-time students when compiling your completion and attainment data. This would mean that, for the purposes of the transparency information condition, the last point at which applicants who entered to study full-time in 2019-20 could be recorded in the completion and attainment data would be 2027-28. For those who entered to study part-time in 2019-20 the last recordable year would be 2035-36.

Breakdown by student characteristics

32. You will need to break down all of the information for UK students on applications, offers, acceptances, registrations, completions and attainment by the characteristics listed in the condition which are:

   a.   The gender of the individuals to which they relate.

   b.   Their ethnicity.

   c.   Their socioeconomic background.

33. You should put processes in place to split your application data by the characteristics specified. The template will include the relevant characteristics for your direct applicants, and, if you use the UCAS system, the UCAS data extract will provide the breakdowns for you. When reporting such data you need to minimise the risk of individuals being identified. You, we, UCAS and others will need to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation which will apply from 25 May 2018 with regard to data disclosures. We will issue further guidance on the disclosure controls that you should apply to your published transparency information in autumn 2018 alongside other guidance on presentation.

Socioeconomic background

34. Whilst gender and ethnicity can be reliably derived from application and administrative (HESA/ILR) data, in most cases, individualised measures of socioeconomic background are not as straightforward.

35. The national measure which seeks to indicate the socioeconomic status of individuals is the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), which was constructed to measure the employment relations and conditions of occupations. The classification ranges from higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations through to never worked and long-term unemployed. However, this measure proved to be so unreliable for higher education students – particularly young higher education students for whom the reliance was on parental occupation – that it was removed from the 2016 release of the UK Higher Education Performance Indicators.

36. In view of how quickly you will need to comply with the transparency information condition and the need to ensure that you can derive the information from the most readily available, reliable and robust data sources, we will base the breakdown for socioeconomic background on postcode measures such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation or Participation of Local Areas (POLAR). These measures will necessarily be proxies for socioeconomic background rather than direct measures, but you should be able to readily access postcode information for all applicants. We will use this postcode information to determine their background using these area-based measures of advantage and disadvantage.

Context

37. It is critical that the transparency information is published consistently across providers to allow for comparison but, equally, that there is sufficient context for the information to be meaningful.

38. In the spring and summer of 2018, we will work with students, schools, colleges and higher education providers to develop additional advice on how the information is to be presented on your website. This will include consideration of what additional information should be published to ensure that your transparency information is meaningful and is considered in the context in which you operate.

39. We will issue this additional advice on the presentation and contextualisation of the transparency information in autumn 2018. We will also publish the applicant template at this time. This will ensure that you are able to collect, submit to us and publish the required information from 2019-20.