This document sets out the information we need from institutions for the monitoring of access agreements and the Student Opportunity allocation

The deadline to submit your monitoring return is noon on Wednesday 18 January 2017

How to complete your 2015-16 monitoring return

Access agreements and Student Opportunity allocation

offa
office for fair access

HIGHER EDUCATION *hefce*
FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

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How to complete your 2015-16 monitoring return

Access agreements and Student Opportunity allocation

To	Heads of higher education institutions in England
	Heads of further education colleges in England
Of interest to those responsible for	Implementation of access agreements, widening participation, Heads of Finance
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Introduction

What this document is about

1. This document sets out the information that the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) need from institutions for monitoring of access agreements and the Student Opportunity allocation (SOA).

2. Institutions that had an OFFA-approved access agreement **and** SOA in 2015-16 should follow **all** the guidance in this document about what to submit and how to do so. Institutions that did not have an access agreement but had an SOA and had more than 100 full-time equivalent (FTE) directly HEFCE-funded student numbers need only submit **some** of this information. HEFCE will contact these institutions separately with detailed instructions.

Deadline for action

3. All monitoring returns must be submitted via the HEFCE extranet at https://data.hefce.ac.uk by noon on **Wednesday 18 January 2017**.

Why do we ask you to do this?

4. There is a statutory requirement for institutions with access agreements to report to OFFA on the extent to which they have met the obligations set out in those agreements, and on the progress they have made against their milestones and targets.

5. For institutions in receipt of the SOA, it is a condition under the Memorandum of assurance and accountability between HEFCE and institutions to submit a monitoring return so that we can ensure that the funds are accounted for and being used appropriately.

6. OFFA and HEFCE will use the information from the monitoring returns to conduct a sector level analysis about the overall investment in widening participation (WP) activity, and how much of this was funded from your OFFA access agreement and how much from the HEFCE SOA in 2015-16. Setting out your total expenditure on access, student success, progression and hardship enables you to demonstrate the breadth of your work in these areas, and helps us to understand how your access agreement expenditure and SOA fit within your overall WP investment. The evidence submitted in this return supports our understanding of the impact of these investments.

What has changed since the previous monitoring return?

7. We have made some changes to our process and return this year that reflect strategic priorities and help to improve our data collection and analysis. We have limited these changes to ensure greater consistency in the process and in the data collected. We have consulted with members of OFFA's Access Agreement Reference Group to help ensure that administrative burden is minimised.

8. A glossary of key terms used in this guidance is published on the OFFA website (https://www.offa.org.uk/glossary); this glossary is relevant for all institutions completing a monitoring return, including institutions without an access agreement.

Access agreement monitoring

9. Following feedback from the Access Agreement Reference Group we have removed the HESA performance indicators (formerly Table 7) from within the monitoring return. These individualised tables are now available as a separate downloadable file from the HEFCE extranet.

10. We have included a new table in our monitoring which focuses on institutions' work in raising attainment in schools (Table 9c). This reflects the Government's increased focus on the role of universities and colleges in working with and raising attainment in schools, as set out in both its letter of guidance to the Director of Fair Access and the HEFCE grant letter earlier this year, as well as its more recent consultation '*Schools that Work for Everyone*'. The information provided will support our understanding of current work, which may help to inform the development of future policies.

11. While still a vital area of focus, so as not to over-burden institutions, we have removed the questions we asked in last year's return on your 'best example' of evaluation of activity (Table 9). The information provided in the 2014-15 monitoring returns was valuable and has helped build our understanding of evaluation across the sector, allowing us to champion examples of effective practice and better support institutions to develop and refine their activities. This question may be readdressed in future years to enable us to understand the long-term development of evaluation practices.

12.   In the table focused on equality and diversity (Table 11), we have refined and restructured some of the questions to ensure that we can carry out better qualitative analysis of institutions' responses. This improved analysis will allow us to better support institutions with information about effective practice.

13.   We have also made other small changes to the monitoring tables to make them more user-friendly.

Higher education legislation

14.   The Government's White Paper *Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice* published in May 2016 sets out the Government's plans to reform the higher education and research system and to legislate for the establishment of the Office for Students (OfS) as the new regulator for all higher education providers from April 2018. The OfS will bring together the shared WP agenda of HEFCE and OFFA and will assume the responsibility for all spending on access and participation.

15.   Prior to the establishment of the OfS, HEFCE and OFFA will continue to conduct their business as usual and the evidence we are seeking in this monitoring guidance is central to this. You should therefore complete the return as usual. OFFA will issue access agreement guidance for 2018-19 early in 2017 and HEFCE has announced reforms to the SOA[1] which will take effect from 2017-18. HEFCE and OFFA will work with Government, students, the sector and others to ensure a smooth transition as the reforms are implemented.

Partnership arrangements

16.   For partnership arrangements, any requirement to submit a monitoring return falls:

a.   **In a validation arrangement**, on the institution making available and teaching the course, and with which the student will have the full contractual relationship for the provision of education.

b.   **In a sub-contractual arrangement**, on the institution that makes the course available and with which the student will have the full contractual relationship for the provision of education. Any other institution that was contracted by the first to provide (some of) the teaching on the course would not require an access agreement relating to that course, although it will be the responsibility of the first institution to ensure that its own access agreement is fully adhered to.

c.   **For joint courses**, on all the higher education providers in England within the partnership that together have responsibility for the provision of educational services to the student.

What do you need to do now?

17.   Download the tables you need to fill in from the HEFCE extranet at https://data.hefce.ac.uk. The monitoring return will be available to download from mid-November. We will email institutional contacts to tell you when it is available.

18.   Complete all relevant parts of your monitoring return, checking it carefully against this guidance. If in doubt, ask us for clarification (for contact details, see the front of this document). Detailed guidance on filling in the return is given in this document; there are also prompts on the tables themselves.

19.   Further instructions on how to submit your monitoring return using the HEFCE extranet are available in paragraphs 130-131. For your reference, PDF copies of the monitoring return tables are available to download alongside this document at www.offa.org.uk/publications.

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[1]   HEFCE circular letter 27/2016: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/

Table-by-table guide to completing your monitoring return

Table 1

Full-time courses: fee levels and student numbers

Action

20. In Table 1, please record the fees you charged to full-time students in 2015-16 and how many students were charged this fee, broken down by year of entry. Include all course fees, both above and below the basic fee levels. Where you have different fee levels for different courses, set these out at each different fee level – for example, by degree type where you have different charges for first degrees and sub-degrees, or by subject or faculty groupings.

21. Where fees have been increased by inflation, please make a note of this in column E. This will assist us during the monitoring process.

22. Include all regulated home/EU full-time undergraduates studying at your institution in 2015-16, including initial teacher training (ITT) and undergraduate social work students.

23. Table 1 represents a 'snapshot' of the students paying a fee in the 2015-16 academic year, so should not normally include large numbers of students on courses which started in 2011-12 or earlier, unless you have substantial numbers of students on five-year courses.

24. Where students have not completed a full year or programme of study and therefore not paid full fees but have paid some fees in 2015-16, count these students in Table 1 against the full fee course line, but use Table 2b to record any negative adjustments to fee income above the basic level. (Please see the notes for Table 2 for details of how to record these.)

Explanatory notes for Table 1

25. The 'fee income above the basic fee per student' column in Table 1 is calculated for you automatically when you enter fee levels, and is equal to the higher fee charged minus the basic fee. For example, if you charged the maximum fee of £9,000 for current system, full-time students in 2015-16, the 'fee income above the basic fee per student' is £3,000 (£9,000-£6,000). Table 2 provides totals for the number of full-time students and fee income above the basic fee, using the information you have recorded in Table 1.

Fees to exclude

26. The following should **not** be recorded in Table 1:

- fee income from courses and persons **not** covered by the Higher Education Act 2004, such as students not eligible for student support on the basis that they were eligible to apply for a healthcare bursary

- students studying a course which leads to a qualification equivalent to or lower than one they already hold ('ELQ' students)

- students who were no longer studying in 2015-16

- students studying part-time (these are included in Table 2).

Do not account for any fee waivers that you gave to students – these will be recorded in Table 4.

Sub-contractual arrangements

27. In a sub-contractual ('franchise') arrangement, franchiser institutions are responsible for reporting on their franchised courses. For franchised courses, please type the name and UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN) of the franchise partner. If you are a further education college (FEC) that has courses franchised from a higher education institution (HEI), do not include these courses in your return as these will be recorded in the HEI's return.

Table 2

Student numbers and fee income

Action

28.   In Table 2a, please record the number of fee-regulated part-time students you had at your institution in 2015-16, and how many of these students were charged a fee above the basic rate of £4,500.

29.   In Table 2b, please record the amount of higher fee income received from part-time students who were charged over the basic fee in 2015-16. For example, if a student paid £5,000 in 2014-15, the higher fee income is £500 (i.e. £5,000-£4,500).

30.   In Table 2b, please record any negative adjustments to higher fee income, and briefly explain this adjustment in the commentary box in Table 2c. You should use this table where the formulas in Table 1 mean that the total higher fee income figures provided in Table 2b are not accurate. For example, if a full-time student paying the maximum fee of £9,000 withdrew and paid fees of £8,000, you would include them in your student count in Table 1 but also record a negative adjustment in Table 2c of £1,000. You only need to record negative adjustments for the purposes of calculating higher fee income, so where students withdrew and paid fees below the basic rate (e.g. current system full-time students paying fees below £6,000 in 2015-16) do not record these students in Table 1 or Table 2b.

31.   In Table 2c, please tell us if the total number of students (full and part-time) charged above the basic fee in 2015-16 has substantially changed from the revised predictions for 2015-16 made in your 2016-17 access agreement resource plan. Where the number of students charged above the basic fee is more than 20 per cent above or below your predictions, please provide an explanation in the commentary box.

Explanatory notes for Table 2

32.   Fees for the following students are not regulated, and should not be included:

- pre-2012 part-time entrants

- students studying at an intensity of less than 25 per cent full-time equivalent

- students studying a course which leads to a qualification equivalent to or lower than one they already hold.

33.   If you have provided fee waivers to students, please do not use the negative adjustments in Table 2c to account for these. You should record fee waivers in Table 4.

Table 3

Widening participation activity expenditure and hardship expenditure

Action

34.   In Table 3a, please record your institution's expenditure on access, student success and progression activity in 2015-16 from all funding sources, using the categories provided. This will enable us to collect consistent information across the sector to assess and understand the areas in which investment in WP is being made, across each stage of the student lifecycle.

35.   Please also indicate how much of your access, student success and progression activity expenditure in 2015-16 was funded from your access agreement and how much from the HEFCE SOA.

36.   In Table 3b, please report your expenditure on supporting students experiencing financial hardship from all funding sources. Please indicate how much of your hardship expenditure was funded from your access agreement and how much from your HEFCE SOA in 2015-16. Please indicate the total number of students receiving hardship funds.

37.   Please ensure that your total 'of which uses HEFCE SOA' figure in Table 3c does not exceed the total HEFCE SOA provided to you for 2015-16; this figure is provided above Table 3a.

38.   In Table 3d, please report all expenditure on WP activity that was delivered collaboratively. By collaborative activity, we do not just mean collaboration between providers of higher education. We would normally expect collaborative activity to include a number of partners rather than being between a single HEI and schools, colleges or other stakeholders receiving outreach, but collaboration could be formed in a number of ways, for example between an HEI and several further education colleges, other higher education providers, employers, third sector organisations, schools, colleges, training providers, or local authorities.

Explanatory notes for Table 3

39.   The expenditure you report on access, student success, progression and hardship under your access agreement should only relate to funds committed from higher fee income and other new and additional (post-2006) sources of funding. It should relate to:

- WP activities that started after the introduction of variable fees in 2006 ('additional' activities)

- expenditure on activities that you previously funded through other means where these funding streams have been reduced or discontinued

- expenditure from new and additional sources other than fee income, e.g. charitable donations.

40.   You may include relevant staffing and overhead costs. Do not apply full economic costing.

41.   Please do not include any funding allocated to you under the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs) as this funding will be monitored separately.

42.   We appreciate that much of the work that you do to improve student success and progression, such as retention, attainment and employability, will be embedded in your teaching and learning practices. Similarly access, student success and progression are embedded in the core activities of many institutions, so it may be difficult to disaggregate WP expenditure[2] into the categories and apportion spending against your access agreement and the SOA. We appreciate that you may need to use estimates; if you do so, please ensure they are as accurate as possible.

43.   While most institutions will be undertaking activity covering all of the categories, we understand that some, in particular smaller institutions, may not carry out work that falls under every category.

Examples of activities in each category

44.   Examples of activities that would belong in each category include (but are not limited to):

Access activity (Table 3a)

a.   **Outreach work with schools and young people**

Mentoring programmes with schools and young people; summer schools, campus visits, taster days and masterclasses; compact programmes and progression agreements with schools and colleges; work with looked-after children and care leavers.

b.   **Outreach work with communities and adults**

Taster days and visits for adults; community projects; progression agreements aimed at adults progressing from further education; work with employers aimed at progressing adults into higher education.

c.   **Outreach work with disabled students**

Mentoring programmes with disabled students; summer schools, campus visits, taster days and masterclasses; compact programmes and progression agreements aimed at disabled students progressing from further education.

d.   **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.

[2.] For further support on disaggregating spending, please see the OFFA website: https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/disaggregating-access-success-progression-expenditure/

e. **WP staffing and administration (access activity)**

Staffing costs for WP units that cannot be allocated to directly delivering an outreach activity, such as monitoring costs; partnership support costs in relation to outreach activities.

Student success activity (Table 3a)

a. **Support for current students (academic and pastoral)**

Activity to improve retention and equality of outcomes for different groups; induction and transition programmes; provision of study skills; student services expenditure for the benefit of WP target groups (for instance on financial or mental health advisers); peer mentoring programmes; developing inclusive curricula and learning resources.

b. **Support for disabled students**

Provision of advice and support to disabled students; developing accessible learning resources and inclusive learning and teaching environments.

c. **WP staffing and administration (student success activity)**

Staffing costs for WP units that cannot be allocated to directly delivering a student success activity, such as monitoring costs; partnership support costs in relation to student success activities.

Progression activity (Table 3a)

a. **Support for progression from higher education into employment or postgraduate study**

Support with internships for students from WP target groups; mentoring programmes designed to facilitate entry into employment or postgraduate study.

b. **Support for progression of disabled students**

Support with internships for disabled students; provision of advice and support to help disabled students into employment or postgraduate study.

c. **WP staffing and administration (progression activity)**

Staffing costs for WP units that cannot be allocated to directly delivering progression activity, such as monitoring costs; partnership support costs in relation to progression activities.

Hardship expenditure (Table 3b)

a. **Support for students in hardship**

Provision of information, advice and guidance for students with ongoing financial problems; financial support for students in unexpected hardship that might impact on their participation in higher education in the form of grants or loans for general living costs such as rent, food, and utility; and course-related costs such as childcare costs, books, materials, and travel.

b. **WP staffing and administration (hardship)**

Staffing costs for WP units that cannot be allocated to directly delivering a hardship activity, such as monitoring costs; admin support costs in relation to finance activities such as making payments.

Using the WP staffing and administration category

45.   Examples of expenditure under 'WP staffing and administration' include (but are not limited to):

- non-staffing costs of running central WP units and departments

- staff development costs for staff in such units and departments

- costs related to supporting collaborative partnerships

- costs of evaluation and monitoring activity.

46.   Where possible, record expenditure on staff working directly on a particular access, student success, progression activity and hardship against the appropriate category. You should only record expenditure under WP staffing and administration where the activity cannot be allocated to other categories. This will enable us to understand the expenditure on staff which cannot be attributed to an expenditure category.

47. This may mean that costs for some members of staff are split between different categories where some but not all of their work involves directly delivering particular activities. In these circumstances, please judge the percentage of staff time allocated to activities.

Provision for disabled students

48. We would normally expect all institutions to report expenditure on enhancing provision for disabled students. If this work is delivered separately from other WP work in your institution, in terms of staffing and infrastructure, please collect the relevant information for this monitoring return. This will enable us to gain a full picture of all WP expenditure.

Activities spanning multiple categories

49. If you have undertaken activities that could fall under more than one of the pre-determined categories (such as an outreach programme that targets both young people and adults), please make a judgement on which category is most appropriate and ensure that the activity is consistently placed under this category in future monitoring returns. The activity must not be double-counted.

Table 4

Expenditure on financial support

50. The data you provide in this table will help us to monitor that you have met your commitments to individual students.

51. We will publish the number of students receiving institutional financial support through access agreements at individual institutions in our monitoring outcomes report, alongside the proportion of higher fee-paying students this number represents. It is therefore important to base your estimates on a reasonable methodology. We may indicate in the monitoring outcomes report where figures are based on estimates rather than known.

We will give you data to help you complete Table 4

52. As in previous years, we will send you Student Loans Company (SLC) income distribution data for your institution to help you complete Table 4. This data will be available via the HEFCE extranet from mid-November. This will set out the numbers and proportions of (UK domiciled) old and current system students at your institution who applied for state finance in 2015-16, broken down by household income bands as set out in paragraph 56.

53. If your institution subscribes to the full administrative service offered by the Higher Education Bursary and Scholarship Scheme (HEBSS), we will also tell you how many bursary holders your institution has paid through HEBSS, and your overall HEBSS expenditure. Again, this will be broken down by household income bands.

Table 4a

Expenditure on financial support for under-represented groups

Actions

54. Please state your actual expenditure between 1 August 2015 and 31 July 2016 on financial support for old and current system students from the under-represented groups listed in OFFA's online glossary (https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/target-groups/).

55. Record your expenditure by the following types:

i. Bursaries, scholarships and 'in-kind' support (for example, discounts on accommodation or other institutional services such as providing laptops for students).

ii. Fee waivers (including free/discounted foundation years).

56. Split your expenditure into the student categories listed in the return, and only record expenditure on financial support for these students:

i. Students with a household residual income up to £25,000

ii.   Students from other under-represented groups. Only include students in this category when either:

- household income is unknown and you can't make estimates, or

- household income is between £25,001 and £42,620 (current system students) or £50,706 (old system students) or

- household income is above £42,620 (current system students) or above £50,706 (old system students), but the student was from another disadvantaged group.

Explanatory notes for Table 4a

57.   Where possible, please record financial support expenditure by the income group of the beneficiary (e.g. those with a household income of less than £25,000), rather than as 'students from other under-represented groups'.

58.   If you do not know the beneficiary's household income, if your institution provides financial support awarded on other measures of under-representation that are countable by OFFA, or if you award financial support regardless of a student's income, you may still be able to make estimates. Use the SLC income distribution data to work out the proportion of students who are likely to fall into each income group. For example, if you award financial support to students who are care leavers, you may not have information on household income, but you may still be able to estimate expenditure for each category. You may need to apply a weighting if your experience indicates that beneficiaries are unlikely to be evenly distributed across the different categories.

59.   Where figures are based on estimates, declare this in your monitoring return and briefly explain your calculations.

Expenditure to include

60.   Franchiser institutions should include financial support for students on their franchised courses.

Expenditure to exclude

61.   The following should not be included in Table 4a:

- expenditure on financial support for students with residual household incomes above £42,620 (current system students) or £50,706 (old system students) who aren't from an under-represented group

- any payments reported to OFFA in previous monitoring returns – you should only count expenditure in the year in which the benefit was received

- expenditure that is not awarded directly to students in order to provide a financial benefit, for example expenditure on the overall improvement of services for students and broader retention measures

- ring-fenced funding received from the Government

- expenditure on historical bursaries and scholarships where funding was established before the introduction of variable fees and has continued and which are not funded through higher fee income or an institution's own fundraising

- expenditure to students not covered under the Higher Education Act 2004, such as students not eligible for student support on the basis that they were eligible to apply for a healthcare bursary.

Table 4b

Number of current system students receiving financial support, by under-represented group

financial support. Please check these to ensure they are in line with your expectations. The proportions should not exceed 100 per cent.

Table 4c

Student choice expenditure for 2015-16 entrants

Explanatory notes for Table 4c

69.   A number of institutions offer students a choice about the form in which they receive financial support – for example, between a fee waiver and a cash bursary. OFFA may contact you to find out more about the choices that students made.

Table 5

Access agreement expenditure summary

prediction, explain the broad reasons for this difference in the text boxes provided (e.g. you should provide this explanation if your prediction was £100,000 and your actual spend was lower than £90,000 or higher than £120,000).

Table 6

Overall investment in widening participation activity and financial support

Action

72. Table 6 populates automatically, based on the data you have provided in previous tables. It summarises your institution-level expenditure on WP activity and financial support, including through OFFA-approved access agreements and the HEFCE SOA. It shows the institution-level data that we will include in our monitoring outcomes report for institutions with access agreements. Please check that the figures shown are in line with your expectations.

Table 7

Access agreement milestones and targets

Action

73. Please report on progress against the targets and milestones for 2015-16 as set out in your 2016-17 access agreement, or targets that have been added to subsequent agreements:

- statistical milestones/targets relating to your applicants, entrants or student body – for example, those based on HESA, UCAS or similar data that you use to measure the outcomes of your WP work

- other milestones and targets – for example those relating to outreach activity, lifelong learning, or institutional management and mission.

74. For each of your statistical milestones/targets, you should:

- provide milestone figures showing your progress against the target. If it is not possible to record a figure for 2015-16 (e.g. if Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) performance indicator data has not yet been published), please include performance data prior to this wherever possible, e.g. for academic years 2011-12 to 2014-15)

- indicate if it is a collaborative target or not. By collaborative targets, we mean those that include many stakeholders rather than those between a single higher education provider and schools, colleges or other stakeholders receiving outreach. However, collaboration could be formed in a number of ways, for example between one HEI and several FECs, other higher education providers, employers, third sector organisations, schools, colleges, training providers or local authorities.

- select a statement that clearly reflects your actual progress against each milestone, from the available classifications. In discussion with the Access Agreement Reference Group, we have refined and included additional performance summaries to support you in better reflecting progress made against your targets to date:

    i. **Overall target met/exceeded (target year reached).** Only use this category if:

        a. the target year has been reached (i.e. is 2015-16 or earlier)

        and

        b. you have met or exceeded the target.

    ii. **Overall target met/exceeded (target achieved earlier than anticipated).** Only use this category if:

        a. the target year has not yet been reached (i.e. is 2016-17 or later)

and

b.   you have met or exceeded the target

iii.   **Yearly milestone met – on course to meet overall target.** Only use this category if:

a.   the target year is a future year (i.e. is 2016-17 or later)

and

b.   you are on course to meet the target

and

c.   you have met or exceeded the 2015-16 milestone.

iv.   **Progress made – but less than anticipated.** Only use this category if:

a.   your performance has improved relative to the baseline

and

b.   your performance is below the 2015-16 milestone you set.

v.   **No progress made against baseline data to date.** Use this category if you have not made meaningful progress relative to your baseline data.

vi.   **Long-term trend shows negative performance.** Use this category if your 2015-16 performance is below the level set out in the baseline.

vii.   **Target discontinued.** Use this category for prefilled targets that have been removed or superseded (e.g. targets using POLAR2 methodology).

75.   For your convenience, Tables 7a and b are pre-populated with the milestones and targets you included in your 2016-17 access agreement resource plan. As many of these targets were updated in 2016-17 we have not pre-populated the yearly milestones data. Where possible, please enter yearly milestone data from the baseline year onwards to support our understanding of the long-term progress made.

76.   Where you have a target from your 2015-16 access agreement which you did not include in your 2016-17 access agreement and therefore does not appear in the pre-populated rows of the table, you may enter this target on a separate row, where appropriate. Do not delete any of the prefilled data in order to enter a revised target and do not add a revised target over the top of a removed target, even if it is similar.

77.   To aid our analysis of the sector's progress, please complete the columns relating to lifecycle stage (e.g. access, student success, progression to employment or further study, or a multiple of these) and main target type. We recognise that some targets will address multiple dimensions of disadvantage and therefore will apply to multiple target types; we have included the option to select 'multiple'.

Explanatory notes for Table 7

78.   This is a self-assessment of your institution's progress against its targets and milestones. The classifications provided should clearly reflect your actual position for each target. Where you do not have data for 2015-16 (for example, HESA non-continuation targets), you should select a performance summary that reflects the trend of the yearly milestones inputted.

79.   If the progress description you select for a target does not match the performance suggested by the data, we will contact you to discuss this and you may need to revise and resubmit the monitoring return. Please follow the directions in paragraph 74 to select appropriate categories. If you are unsure about how to classify your performance in a particular area, please contact your institution's policy adviser in OFFA to clarify this.

80.   We recognise that you might meet all your financial commitments and access plans under your access agreement but not achieve your targets and milestones. When we are analysing your progress,

we will consider whether you have met your commitments and if you have made progress towards your milestones. We will also take into account any contextual information you provide in Table 8, as well as the position of the higher education sector as a whole.

81.   We ask for yearly milestones back to 2011-12 because we are interested in long-term trends. However, we recognise that you may not be able to populate all of these if you do not have data for those years.

Table 8

Commentary on progress against access agreement targets and milestones

Action
82.   Please use Table 8 to:

- comment on your overall progress made against the targets

- set your progress in some context, for example to explain how it may have been influenced by external factors such as changes to government policy (e.g. changes to Disabled Students' Allowance)

- comment on the key factors that have led to successful outcomes

- provide any explanations where you have not met targets or where progress has been less than anticipated, and where appropriate, set out the action you have taken to improve in these areas.

Please limit this commentary to a maximum of 1,000 words.

83.   We may contact you to gain a better understanding of the situation if the information you give us is not sufficient to allow us to gauge your progress.

84.   As in previous years, we will publish your commentary on our website, alongside the data in Table 7 and the HESA performance indicator data for your institution, which we have included in your extranet package. You can see what was published last year at www.offa.org.uk/institutions-self-assessments-commentaries-results/.

Table 9

Evaluation, evidence and impact

Action
85.   Please use Table 9 to provide a brief commentary on your evaluation activities for 2015-16, including:

- an assessment of your approach to evaluating your access, student success and progression activities and programmes over the past year (Table 9a)

- an assessment of the types of activities you used in your evaluation in 2015-16, using Kirkpatrick's evaluation model (Table 9b).

86.   Please also provide an example of the impact of your work in 2015-16 to raise attainment in schools, including the outcomes of this work and evaluation activity where possible (Table 9c).

Explanatory notes for Table 9
87.   For 2015-16 access agreements, we asked institutions to provide an overview of how you would evaluate the measures in your agreement, following OFFA's guidance that well-designed evaluation is crucial to making further progress and ensuring long-term value for money. Table 9 provides you with an opportunity to set out the work you have done in this area.

88.   Please note that we are interested in evaluation of your work rather than simply how you monitored your practice; the definition we have used is from the HEFCE/Progression Trust toolkits for practitioners: (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evaluation_3rd.pdf):

- Monitoring is the collection and analysis of data during a project and the comparison of this data against the targets and plans made for WP. Monitoring is part of project management, and helps to ensure cost-effectiveness and project progress.

- Evaluation is about making an assessment of the effectiveness and impact of what has been done. Data gathered for monitoring purposes is often utilised as part of evaluations, but the aims of the two activities are different.

89.   While our expectation is that you will work towards embedding evaluation and effective monitoring throughout your plans, we understand that different institutions' evaluation strategies will be at different stages. The information provided in Table 9a will help us to understand more about this at a sector-wide level, and how we can offer further support to institutions in this area as well as providing us with an understanding of the developments in this area for individual institutions.

90.   The information you provide in Table 9b will give us a clearer picture of the levels of impact institutions are gaining from their evaluation work. We use Kirkpatrick's evaluation model as a framework for this. For more information on Kirkpatrick's model, and other useful information on evaluation methods, we recommend the series of toolkits available from www.heacademy.ac.uk/retention-archives. They draw on resources created by Aimhigher and the Lifelong Learning Networks while reflecting the current climate.

Table 9c

Raising attainment in schools

91.   The information you provide in Table 9c will help us build an understanding of the impact of your activities and programmes to raise attainment in schools and champion examples of effective practice. The aim of this table is to support our understanding of the work currently being carried out in this area and the information you provide will not form part of our monitoring assessment.

92.   We are looking for examples of raising attainment in schools rather than raising aspiration to participate in higher education. Examples of programmes include, but are not limited to, those aimed at:

- improvement against pupils' expected levels of progress between Key Stage (KS) 2, KS3, KS4 and/or KS5

- improvement against pupils' expected levels of progress within an academic year

- closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged groups (e.g. those in receipt of free school meals) and the general school population

- increasing the percentage of pupils achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE/English Baccalaureate.

93.   Please set out, for one example:

- the aim(s) of the activity or programme – this can be for any age range of pupils (e.g. improving reading levels for 7-year-olds, improving pupils' expected level of progress at the end of KS4)

- what the activity or programme involved (e.g. number of participants, length and intensity of activity or programme, type of activities etc.)

- the outcomes and impact of the activity or programme (e.g. evidence of improved attainment rates; behavioural change in participants). Was the aim(s) of the activity or programme achieved?

- how you evaluated the activity or programme (e.g. the methods you used: a programme of observations and interviews; tracking changes in attainment rates for participants etc.)

- how the results of the evaluation have informed practice (e.g. better targeting of participants; refinement of the programme; scaling-up of activity).

94.   When reporting on findings from evaluation, please concentrate on providing evidence of **impact** from the work. For example, you might include evidence of: improved school or participant attainment in Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications; improved progress between key stages. If you do not yet have such evidence of longer-term impact, you should briefly discuss how you plan to put in place processes to collect it in future.

95.   Please note that while evidence from pre- and post-event questionnaires is essential for institutions in planning, its use is more limited in demonstrating impact, particularly when used for one-off events. We would encourage institutions to use a range of evaluative methods, both qualitative and quantitative, to demonstrate the impact of your work to raise attainment in schools.

FECs' work in raising attainment at schools

96.   We understand that for many FECs, WP can often be based more on internal progression than on raising attainment at external institutions. However, we are interested in understanding the specific contribution that FECs make to WP through raising attainment at schools and how these relationships work. If you carry out work with schools, please provide information in this table. However, if you do not conduct any external attainment-raising work, we would like to understand how you support improving attainment of WP students who progress internally.

Table 10

Financial support: evaluation, evidence and impact

Action
97.   In Table 10a, select the statement which most closely reflects your approach to evaluating your financial support for 2015-16. If you selected option (e), please provide details of how you evaluated.

98.   Please select option (f) only if you have recorded no spend on financial support in Table 4.

99.   In Table 10b, we are keen to understand more about how you have evaluated your financial support, and how any results of this have influenced your financial support schemes.

100. This question relates to evaluation carried out in 2015-16; should you wish to provide a similar example to that in your 2014-15 monitoring return, please ensure the example is sufficiently updated with developments made in the past year.

Explanatory notes for Table 10
101. A high proportion of the sector's access agreement expenditure is currently spent on financial support, so OFFA is focusing on analysing, understanding and sharing evidence around its impact. Your monitoring return will contribute to the body of evidence in this area.

102. Table 10b provides an opportunity for you to highlight your best example of how you have used evaluation of your financial support schemes to inform your approach.

103. In last year's monitoring return, we collected and analysed detailed information about institutions' evaluation practice. The responses we received were valuable, and have informed our evidence and good practice work over the past year (for example, in the development of our Understanding the impact of institutional financial support project). In the 2014-15 monitoring returns, fewer than half of institutions

(45 per cent) reported that they had evaluated their financial support by analysing the impact on behaviour. In the 2015-16 monitoring return, we are interested in understanding the developments in evaluation of financial support over the past year.

104. Please set out for one example:

- the specific evaluation question you were seeking to answer – what were you trying to understand? (e.g. 'To what extent did our £1,000 cash bursary improve the attainment levels of recipients?'). To understand the impact of your scheme, this evaluation question should be linked to the success criteria of the programme you were running (e.g. to what extent did your programme achieve its aims?)

- how you evaluated the activity or programme (e.g. the methods you used; a programme of observations and interviews; tracking changes in retention rates for participants etc.)

- your key findings and evidence of impact (e.g. evidence of improved retention rates; behavioural change in participants)

- how the results of the evaluation have informed practice (e.g. better targeting of participants; refinement of the programme; scaling up/ scaling down of activity).

105. You might also point to instances where you have decided to undertake a particular financial support package as a result of evidence from evaluation collected elsewhere or at a national level.

106. When discussing findings from evaluation, please do not extensively describe the details of the programme, numbers of participants etc.; rather, concentrate on the evidence of impact from the work.

107. When reporting on findings from evaluation, please concentrate on providing evidence of long-term impact, such as:

- the improved attainment of participants

- evidence of long-term impact on attitudes and aspirations

- the tracking of participants to higher education.

Table 11

Equality and diversity activity

Action

108. Please complete Table 11a to indicate where you have a specific, targeted activity or programme aimed at people with particular protected characteristics and people from other target groups. For each, please specify whether you have specific access, student success or progression activities for them, or whether these apply to multiple stages of the student lifecycle. We will use this information to contribute to our mapping of activity in the sector, and help identify areas of effective practice in universities and colleges.

109. If your institution has broad access programmes targeting multiple groups, or mainstreamed student success/progression activities, you may find that you do not have much to record in the grid. This is not a concern for us and we will not look unfavourably on your institution as a result.

110. In Table 11a, please only indicate activities or programmes that are aimed at particular groups, rather than wider activity which incidentally happens to include those groups. For example, if an outreach scheme is targeted at low-income, mature students, you should select 'age', even though some number of students with additional protected characteristics (e.g. mature pregnant learners, mature LGBT learners, etc.) may also benefit from the activity. As another example, if you have a general programme for raising degree attainment, this should not be included in the grid; however, a specific targeted project to improve attainment for black and minority ethnic (BME) students should be.

111. If you would like to outline the groups covered by broad, non-specific, or mainstreamed work over the lifecycle which does not fit into Table 11a, you can list these in the optional comments box below Table 11a.

112. Following feedback from institutions and discussions with the Access Agreement Reference Group, we have updated Table 11a to allow you to include a brief description of the work you carry out in each of these areas. We are looking for headline information about the activities you carry out to understand the nature and scope of the work specifically targeted at these groups of students. Each box is limited to 200 words; we ask that you provide only top-level information such as:

- specific target group (e.g. low-income, mature students)

- types of activities (e.g. weekly, face-to-face mentoring throughout the first year)

- aim(s) of the programme (e.g. improve retention rates of mature students from a low income background).

113. In Table 11b, select the statement which most closely reflects your approach to evaluating your activities or programmes in your access agreement by protected characteristics for 2015-16.

114. In Table 11c, please give an example of an access agreement-supported programme that supports people with disabilities. Examples can be from any part of the student lifecycle (e.g. access, student success or progression or multiple stages). Please do not use examples of financial support, as these were covered in Table 10. Your example can be from a specific, targeted programme (such as one indicated in the grid in Table 11a), or from evaluation of the impact of a broader/mainstreamed programme on a particular group.

Explanatory notes for Table 11

115. We want to understand how institutions are investing in equality and diversity activity to address issues impacting on students with specific protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010. This will help to inform our policy and enable us to highlight effective practice in this area.

116. Although Table 11a is focused on programmes directed at specific groups, this should not be viewed as a criticism of broader programmes or embedded support for different groups. The optional comments box below Table 11a allows you to set out the groups covered by your broader programmes if you wish.

117. The information gathered in last year's monitoring return had a broad focus on the evaluation of an activity or programme that supported people with protected characteristics. With recent changes to the DSA and an increased government focus on how institutions provide support for people with disabilities, as set out in the letter of guidance to the Director of Fair Access, we have refined the focus of Table 11c. In this table we are interested in examples of activity in 2015-16 that attracted and supported the success of students with disabilities, and how activity in your access agreement helped you meet your equality and diversity requirements for all students.

118. The structure of Table 11c mirrors that of Table 9c. Please see paragraph 93 for details of how to complete this for an example your activity or programmes for disabled students.

Additional information downloadable from HEFCE extranet – HESA performance indicators

Action (for HEIs only)

119. For HEIs, a separate document will be provided in your extranet package; this table will be pre-populated with your institution's HESA performance indicator (PI) data[3]. You may wish to check these figures.

120. No trend data is currently available for FECs[4], so there will be no data in the tables. No action is required of FECs.

Explanatory notes

121. For HEIs, we have provided data from the following HESA tables to give a context for your institution's overall performance on access and student success:

- HESA Table 1b – the percentage of young, full-time undergraduate entrants from state school, from National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) 4-7 and from low participation neighbourhoods

- HESA Table 2b – the percentage of all part-time entrants from low participation neighbourhoods

- HESA Table 3a – the percentage of all entrants no longer in higher education following year of entry

- HESA Table 3b – the percentage of entrants from low participation neighbourhoods no longer in higher education following year of entry.

122. We have also included the location-adjusted benchmark, and a '+' or '-' marker to establish how well an HEI is performing in the higher education sector. This is the same marker that is used in the published HESA PI tables.

123. The data on low participation neighbourhoods is based on POLAR3 data. Please note that the information provided is the latest published data (up to 2014-15 entrance and 2013-14 for non-continuation). HESA is due to publish the 2015-16 data for entrants in February 2017 and 2014-15 data for non-continuation in March 2017.

[3.] More information about the HESA PIs is available at www.hesa.ac.uk/pi.

[4.] FECs may wish to see HEFCE 2013/18, *Higher education indicators for further education colleges: Overview of trends for the widening participation, non-continuation and employment indicators*, which shows the profile of students from low participation neighbourhoods for young full-time higher education entrants registered at FECs in 2010-11 and the non-continuation indicators for FECs in 2009-10. This publication is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/.

How to submit your return

Where to find your return template

124. The tables for you to fill will be available to download from the extranet at https://data.hefce.ac.uk from mid-November. Sample tables are available for information only alongside this document at www.offa.org.uk/publications.

125. In order to download the tables, you will need a 'group key' (a code that ensures you can access the correct tables for your institution). OFFA and HEFCE will send your group key to you directly following the publication of this guidance.

126. Alongside the templates, we will also send step by step instructions on using the extranet. If you have any technical queries relating to the use of the extranet, please contact Andrew Cook for OFFA queries (e-mail: analysis@offa.org.uk, tel: 0117 931 7171) or Matt Brind for SOA queries (e-mail: m.brind@hefce.ac.uk, tel: 0117 931 7278).

Validating your monitoring return

127. Each completed part of your monitoring return must be approved by an appropriate senior manager before submission, to ensure that the information is validated independently by someone other than the person responsible for compiling the return. For example, approval could be received from your Vice-Chancellor/Principal, Deputy or Pro Vice-Chancellor or Finance Director. Please state who has approved this monitoring return in the final section of your workbook.

128. It is up to each institution to determine its own process for checking the accuracy of the information it provides. This could be through internal audit, a report to the head of the institution, a governors' group or a steering committee. All information is subject to audit (see paragraphs 143-144) and you should ensure that the way you validate your information meets your own internal audit requirements.

129. We do not require you to submit a signed paper copy.

Submitting your return

130. Submit your completed monitoring return via the HEFCE extranet https://data.hefce.ac.uk by noon on **Wednesday 18 January 2017**.

131. If you have any technical queries relating to the use of the HEFCE extranet please use the contact details in paragraph 126.

Returning your monitoring templates on time
Your access agreement and SOA monitoring return

132. It is a statutory obligation to report on progress with your access agreement and it is important to submit your return by the deadline. If your return is late we cannot guarantee that we will be able to include your data in OFFA's monitoring outcomes report. Providing accurate data to report on progress against your access agreement is a statutory requirement, and the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education can impose sanctions where these requirements have not been met.

133. If your access agreement monitoring return needs to be approved at a meeting of your governing body or other relevant committee after the deadline of 18 January 2017, you may submit a draft electronic copy of your monitoring return with a request for a limited extension to the deadline for your final version.

134. Tables 3a and 3b of this return will collect the monitoring information HEFCE needs and completion of these tables by the deadline date will fulfil your obligation for the receipt of SOA under the Memorandum of assurance and accountability between HEFCE and institutions.

What happens once you have submitted your form

How to tell your return has been submitted successfully

135. When you have successfully uploaded your return, you will see an automated message on the extranet confirming that your return has uploaded successfully.

We will collect and share some information centrally

136. In order to inform our monitoring, OFFA will use information from the SLC on the number of students from lower-income backgrounds at each institution. We will also use sector data from HESA, UCAS and others to monitor progress across the sector and identify any emerging patterns over time.

137. OFFA and HEFCE will work together closely in assessing returns and, where relevant, may share information with other partners, such as the Department for Education (DfE).

We may need to contact you for further information

138. We may need to ask you for further information about your return if, for example, some of the information or data:

- is unclear

- does not seem to make sense from our knowledge of your access agreement and SOA or your institution

- is inconsistent with centrally collected data.

Use of and access to personal data

139. OFFA and HEFCE collect personal information through the monitoring return submission and as part of follow up discussions. The information you provide includes individuals' names, job titles, place of employment, work email addresses and telephone numbers. The information is used for the purpose of contacting people to discuss information provided on the monitoring return and to improve engagement with institutions through seeking feedback.

140. All personal information will be protected and not shared outside OFFA and HEFCE unless you give consent to do so.

141. You have the right to request a copy of the information that we hold about you. A small charge for this service will apply and we will need to verify your identity before providing your personal information. Details of how to request a copy of some of all of your personal information from OFFA are available at https://www.offa.org.uk/about/requests-for-information/ and from HEFCE are available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/contact/inforequest/dpa/.

142. We want to make sure that your personal information is accurate and up-to-date. You may ask us to correct or remove information you think is inaccurate.

We may audit your monitoring return

143. OFFA reserves the right to request an independent audit review of the access agreement element of your monitoring return which may assess how you are delivering progress towards your access agreement commitments.

144. Similarly, HEFCE reserves the right to audit participating institutions in respect of the SOA.

Some of the results of the monitoring process will be published

145. OFFA and HEFCE will publish reports on the outcomes of access agreements and SOA monitoring by mid-2017. This will include the amount spent on access, student success, progression and hardship, the proportions of fee income spent on institutional financial support through access agreements, and the proportion of students receiving an award at each institution.

146. OFFA will publish your institution's report on your progress against targets and milestones on its website.

How the Freedom of Information Act affects monitoring returns

147. OFFA and HEFCE are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which gives the public a right to know what information we hold and to access this information. We have a responsibility to decide whether the information in individual monitoring returns should be disclosed on request, or treated in confidence. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances and where the information is covered by one of the exemptions outlined in the legislation.

148. Individual monitoring returns will not be treated as information provided in confidence expect in special circumstances. If you consider any part of your return to contain information provided in confidence please alert us to this and the reasons why.

149. Where we consider it to be appropriate and practicable, we will seek the institution's views before disclosing information in response to an FOI request.

150. Further information about the Freedom of Information Act is available at https://ico.org.uk.

How the information will be used

151. The data gathered through the monitoring process supports a number of important functions within OFFA and HEFCE. These are outlined below.

152. OFFA will use your return to:

- assess whether you have broadly met the commitments set out in your agreement. Where you have not done so, OFFA will expect to see a reasonable explanation and/or appropriate review and re-adjustment of plans

- improve its understanding of trends in access agreement expenditure and outcomes across the sector

- gather examples and evidence for our topic-focused online resources, and other projects to support and inform the sector about effective practice

- look at the progress you have made towards your targets and milestones, with a greater focus on trends rather than single data points. If the trend indicated by your monitoring return shows that you are making limited progress or regressing, OFFA may wish to talk to you about this further, if we are not already in dialogue

- take into account your current performance, and whether your access agreement plans are sufficiently addressing any areas of concern, when considering your next access agreement.

153. OFFA will use qualitative data analysis software to help analyse monitoring returns. This will enable us to gain a more meaningful understanding of the work being done across the sector, and to provide more in-depth analysis on institutions' approaches.

154. OFFA and HEFCE will use your return to improve our understanding of:

- institutional expenditure on WP activity, including how institutions bring diverse groups of students into higher education and support them through their study to achieve successful outcomes. We will look at the impact of this expenditure and how institutions are evaluating it, and the wider evidence available on the impact of WP activity and funding. This will help us continue to build our evidence base on what works best to improve fair access and student success

- how your expenditure under your access agreement and HEFCE SOA fit within the wider context of your total spend.

155. HEFCE will use the WP activity expenditure data to understand the activity institutions are engaged in, the cost of this activity and how the SOA is used towards funding these activities. This data will be an essential element of the outcomes framework currently under development through which the higher education sector will be able to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its student opportunity activity.

156. OFFA and HEFCE will also use information from monitoring returns to inform our continuing dialogue with institutions.