

Office for
Students



Student submissions for the monitoring of 2019-20 access and participation plans

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Enquiries to app@officeforstudents.org.uk

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Introduction

This guidance explains how students can complete a report on the progress their university or college has made in delivering its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

The student submission forms part of the way the Office for Students monitors access and participation plans at the universities and colleges it regulates.¹ Access and participation plan regulation is part of the wider OfS approach to university and college regulation.²

Who should read this guide?

This introduction is aimed at any student who is considering taking part in the student submission at their university or college as part of the Office for Students' (OfS) monitoring of 2019-20 access and participation plans.

If you would like to take part, the first step to completing a student submission is to nominate a student representative. This individual will coordinate and submit the final report.

See 'Nominate a representative' (below)

What is the student submission?

The Office for Students regulates universities and colleges in England. As part of our work we aim to make sure that higher education is as fair and equal as it can be.

However, some groups of students don't have the same opportunities as others or are underrepresented³ in higher education. We have therefore developed a bold new approach to support access and participation in higher education.⁴

Access and participation plans⁵ set out how individual universities and colleges will improve equality of opportunity⁶ for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education. They include:

¹ More information about the outcomes of our consultation relating to our approach to access and participation in higher education can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/

² More information about our initial and general ongoing conditions of registration can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/

³ See Key definitions.

⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/our-approach-to-access-and-participation/

⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/

⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/help-tackle-inequality/

- your university or college’s ambition for change
- what it plans to do to achieve that change
- the targets it has set
- the investment it will make to deliver the plan.

To make sure these plans are delivered, we monitor universities and colleges on an annual basis.⁷ To gain a full picture of the performance of each university or college, we consider information from the university or college and its students.

This includes among other information:

a. **Monitoring return**

We ask all universities and colleges with an access and participation plan to submit a monitoring return. In this report, each university or college will tell us about the progress it has made in delivering its access and participation plan.

b. **Student submission**

The student submission is an independent and optional report which enables students to reflect and comment on progress made by their university or college in delivering its access and participation plan. It is very important that each university and college has ‘critical friends’ to help it achieve the aims in its access and participation plans, and we want students to be able to perform this role.

Why are student submissions important?

At the OfS, protecting and promoting equality of opportunity for students is at the heart of our work. We believe that through student submissions, we will be able to gain a better picture of the progress being made at universities and colleges.

We also believe that students are well placed to tell us about the experiences of underrepresented students, and whether their university or college is working with them effectively.

By completing a submission, students will make sure that their opinions and experiences, and the perspectives of their fellow students, are listened to and taken into account in any decisions we make about their university or college. In addition, working on a student submission will give students the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge which may serve them well in the future.

By the time they submit their report, we hope that the students who take part will have:

- developed an understanding of the equality gaps⁸ at their university or college

⁷ More information about our approach to monitoring access and participation plans can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/

⁸ See Key definitions.

- developed their understanding of the work their university or college is doing to improve access and participation
- acted as a ‘champion’ for their university or college in areas where it is performing well, and a ‘critical friend’ in areas where progress has been limited
- consulted with a diverse group of fellow students to find out more about their experiences, and advocated for them with their university or college.

Which access and participation plan should we be looking at to complete a student submission?

The focus of this guide is your university or college’s approved 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Access and participation plans cover most home (UK) and EU students⁹ on undergraduate courses, and those undertaking initial teacher training at a postgraduate level. They must be approved by the OfS Director for Fair Access and Participation, as set out in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).¹⁰

Please note that any commitments that your university or college made about the fees it charges or the financial support it gives to students outlined in the access and participation plan are specific to those who started their studies in the 2019-20 academic year.

Should we work with our university or college to complete a student submission?

The student submission is an independent and optional report written by students. However, we encourage you to have a conversation with your university or college while you are developing your submission. The university or college should be able to tell you about its progress in meeting the targets and commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan, and should support you to get the most out of taking part.

Who will submit the student submission to the OfS?

A nominated student representative will submit the student submission to the OfS. The nominated student representative will provide their contact details as part of the submission process. But the person taking the role of student representative does not mean that they are expected to write the entire submission.

⁹ More information about ‘qualifying students’ and ‘qualifying courses’ can be found in Regulatory Notice 1 (2018.03) at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/

¹⁰ See www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted

How will the information we provide be used?

We will consider your submission carefully alongside your university or college's monitoring return. This will inform our general approach to our regulation of access and participation plans.¹¹

In a small number of cases, we may come back to the student representative to clarify what has been said. This may happen if your student submission says something we are concerned about or differs greatly from the monitoring return submitted by your university or college.

Please note that we do not have a direct role in dealing with individual disputes between students and universities/colleges.¹²

Will the student submission be published?

Your student submission may be published by your university or college. Your university or college will ensure that your student submission and data is processed in a way that is consistent with data protection law.

Will universities and colleges be able to respond to the OfS on what students have said in the student submissions?

Yes, your university or college may provide a response to the OfS on what you have said in your student submission. This is why we encourage both students and universities or colleges to be open about what they have said in their reports.

Will you be asking about the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic in the student submission?

For the monitoring of 2019-20 access and participation plans, both the monitoring return (submitted by each university and college) and the student submission (submitted by students) will ask about how the coronavirus (COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on universities and colleges and its students. We are also interested to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the delivery of the plans. Completing this section of the student submission is entirely optional.

We are asking about the COVID-19 pandemic because we are aware that this may have disproportionately affected students from underrepresented groups and may also have impacted on the ability of universities and colleges to deliver access and participation plans. We need to gather this information to understand the impacts COVID-19 has had on specific groups, and to ensure that targets and commitments for underrepresented students remain on track in future years.

¹¹ More information about our approach to monitoring access and participation plans can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/

¹² For more information about how to raise individual disputes, please see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/complaints-and-notifications/making-a-complaint-to-a-higher-education-provider/

The rest of this guide

The rest of the information in this guide explains how students can develop and submit their student submission.

Find out more

- About the Office for Students
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/
- Tackling inequality in higher education video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=03U6ZLojiFk&feature=emb_title
- The OfS approach to access and participation
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/our-approach-to-access-and-participation/
- What are access and participation plans
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/
- Higher Education and Research Act 2017
www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted
- The OfS 'regulatory framework'
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/

1. Nominate a representative

The first stage of the process is to nominate a student representative, who will be the lead contact for the student submission.

The nominated individual will coordinate and submit the final report but they should work with their student body to canvas opinions and produce the student submission.

This means they should not work on their own but draw on the experience and help of a diverse range of students.

It is important that your university or college knows who your student representative is, so it can provide you with any information you need, and support you to get the most out of taking part.

The student representative can be:

- a staff member of the students' union or representative body, such as the president or vice-president
- a current student in any year of study.

Each university or college can **only nominate one representative**.

How to tell us who your representative is

Once you have nominated a student representative:

- Either the nominated individual or the university or college should email app@officeforstudents.org.uk to tell us who this will be.
- We will then send the student representative a link to the student submission survey.

2. Information gathering

Before you produce your submission, we recommend that you gather some information. We suggest that you:

1. Read your university or college's 2019-20 access and participation plan

You should read your university or college's 2019-20 access and participation plan. Most 2019-20 access and participation plans follow the same structure, with six main areas listed below:

- assessment of current performance
- ambition and strategy
- targets
- access, success and progression measures
- investment
- provision of information.

We suggest that you focus on the following areas and consider the extent to which your university or college has made progress against them:

- ambition and strategy
- targets
- access, success and progression measures.

Targets

The targets¹³ section outlines the milestones that your university or college aimed to hit in the year 2019-20. A copy of the targets is also available at the back of the plan. Targets should be focused on areas where your university or college has identified an equality gap¹⁴ in relation to access, success or progression. For example:

- Where a university or college has identified that more disabled students are dropping out than students with no known disability, you may see a target aiming to close the gap in continuation between disabled students and students with no known disability
- Where a university or college has identified that fewer black students are progressing into highly skilled employment or further study than white students, you may see a target aiming to close the gap in employment outcomes between black and white students.

Access, success and progression measures

The access, success and progression measures¹⁵ section of the plan outlines your university or college's planned activities for 2019-20 to support it in achieving its targets.

- To use the first example above, where a university or a college is aiming to close the gap in dropout rates (continuation) between disabled students and students with no known

¹³ See Key definitions.

¹⁴ See Key definitions.

¹⁵ See Key definitions.

disability, it might deliver activities such as specialist welfare and disability support, lecture capture to enable students to catch up on lectures if they are not able to attend in person, or an early arrival induction week to better support disabled students.

- To use the second example above, where a university or college is aiming to improve the employment outcomes of black students, it might offer activities aiming to connect students with role models in the alumni community, or deliver targeted careers events, interview workshops and CV clinics.

Working with other students

Your university or college may have made commitments to work with its students on the development and delivery of its plan. Information about student consultation¹⁶ and involvement can usually be found in the ambition and strategy section of the plan, and may include activities such as committing to creating a student advisory panel, involving students in curriculum design, or forming focus groups for each of the underrepresented groups.

2. Canvas opinions from a diverse range of students

In gathering information, you should aim to draw on the experiences of a diverse range of students.¹⁷ Ideally you should ask underrepresented¹⁸ groups and all year groups to participate.

Although the student representative submits the report, it should represent the experiences of the student community at their university or college.

To canvas the opinions of different students, you could approach your students' union if you have one. They may be able to help by contacting other students who want to take part.

If you do not have a students' union and you are struggling to get in touch with other students, you could ask the person responsible for your university or college's access and participation plan to put you in touch with other students. If you're not sure who this person is, you can email app@officeforstudents.org.uk and we can ask the person responsible to get in touch with you.

It may be useful to hold a focus group where several students can talk about your access and participation plan and give feedback. You may also put together a short survey and send this out to other students.

All the activities below can be delivered face-to-face. However, there may be circumstances which mean it is safer or more inclusive to conduct these virtually through video conferencing software such as 'Zoom' or 'Microsoft Teams'. Please consider which would be best for all students who want to take part.

Hints and tips for canvassing student opinions

Focus groups

Gather a group of students to talk about your university or college's progress. This will allow you to bounce ideas off one another and gain detailed feedback. You will be able to confirm or challenge

¹⁶ See Key definitions

¹⁷ See Key definitions

¹⁸ See Key definitions

each other's perceptions and think about what you want to write about in your submission. You could ask your students' union to help you arrange focus groups with a mix of students.

Remember:

- You will need someone to lead and structure the session (this might be you), to make sure everyone's voice is heard.
- If you want to include a diverse range of students, you will need to think about how you advertise these sessions. For example, can you contact student societies and networks and ask them to help you get the word out?
- You should have a clear idea of your goals for the session, and you will need to explain these at the beginning for those who attend.
- It would be helpful to share an agenda in advance so those taking part will have a chance to prepare. You might want to look at the questions you will be asked to answer in the student submission¹⁹ to help you decide on your agenda.
- You could also encourage those who plan to attend to read your university or college's 2019-20 access and participation plan, if they have the time.
- You may want to set some 'ground rules,' for example that those taking part shouldn't speak over each other and that everyone's contributions are equally important.
- Those taking part will feel more comfortable if they can introduce themselves at the start of the session.

Survey

Although surveys will allow you to reach more students, you may get less detailed feedback. But surveys do allow for anonymous feedback, which may encourage more students to get involved and to be honest with their responses. You could send out a survey as well as holding some focus groups. Remember:

- Have a goal in mind – what do you want to find out using the survey? We encourage you to ask questions based on what your university or college has said in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.
- Consider looking at the questions you'll be asked to answer as part of the submission²⁰ to help you decide what to put in the survey (particularly sections 3 and 4).
- As well as asking specific questions, you may gain more insight into student experiences if you also include a box asking for additional thoughts.
- Try to avoid jargon – the students you send the survey to will probably not have read this guidance or your university or college's access and participation plan.
- You will need time to read and consider the responses after the survey has been completed.

Drop-in sessions

You could share your university or college's access and participation plan with other students and run drop-in sessions to talk about this.

¹⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

²⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

These drop-in sessions could be held virtually, or you could book a room on campus and hold them face-to-face depending on the coronavirus restrictions in place at the time.

As with surveys and focus groups, it is important to have a clear goal for these sessions, and clearly advertise what they are for.

Lecture 'shoutouts'

This could be a good way of getting a wide range of students involved in this project. You could ask lecturers to briefly explain what an access and participation plan is, why it needs monitoring, and how students can get in touch with you if they want to be involved.

Social media 'shoutouts'

As with lecture 'shoutouts', using social media 'shoutouts' could be a good way to get the word out about this project. It is likely that there will be many social media pages connected to your university or college and students' union. You could get in touch with the person responsible for social media to ask if they would be willing to advertise the opportunity for students to get involved.

Informal conversations

You may wish to have more informal conversations with other students as this may lead to more honest feedback.

3. Talk to your university or college

Once you have canvassed the opinions of a diverse range of students, we encourage you to have a conversation with your university or college about its progress in meeting the targets and commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

This conversation is about being a ‘critical friend’, in order to identify successes and challenges and assist in resolving them. To be an effective critical friend you should both support and challenge in equal measure, ensuring that your challenges are helpful and constructive. The conversation you have should be open and honest, built on mutual respect and trust.

To organise the conversation, you should get in touch with the person responsible for your university or college’s access and participation plan. If you are unable to identify the most appropriate member of staff, you can email app@officeforstudents.org.uk and we can ask the person responsible for the access and participation at your university or college to get in touch with you.

We understand that you may find the idea of this conversation a bit daunting. That’s why we have provided a suggested conversation guide²¹ to help you structure the conversation. This reflects the questions we ask you to consider in your student submission.²²

Hints and tips for talking to your university or college

Choose the right place to conduct the conversation

If you can meet in person, make sure you meet somewhere neutral on campus. Having this conversation in the office of the member of staff you are meeting could be more daunting and make you feel less confident. Depending on the circumstances, it may be safest to meet over ‘Zoom’ or ‘Microsoft Teams’, rather than in person. Remember, although we encourage you to have a verbal conversation where possible, you can choose to conduct the conversation via email instead.

Preparation is key

It may be beneficial for both you and your university or college to send a copy of the questions you plan to ask before you meet. This will help your university or college to plan and consider its response, which could lead to a more focused discussion. Please feel free to adapt the conversation guide if you want to add or change questions.

Listen and try to understand

It is important to give your university or college the opportunity to tell you what it has and has not been able to do and explain why it may not have made expected progress in certain areas. Listen to what your university or college tells you, asking questions to enhance your understanding of

²¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

²² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

what is being said. Questions will help your understanding and help your university or college think more clearly.

Be constructive and not confrontational

Where weaknesses have been identified, ask questions, try to come up with solutions and work with your university or college to identify ways to improve practice and move forward.

Celebrate success

You are acting as a 'critical friend', so do not forget to be a friend! Acknowledge what has gone well and ask questions about this to identify exactly what led to the success, so that it can be built on in future.

Take your time and do not be afraid of silence

Silences can feel uncomfortable but often they give people the time and space needed to think about what they want to say. Do not feel like you have to speak during every silence.

Plan but don't script

By all means plan and make notes of the things you want to cover, but try not to write a complete script so that you can be flexible. You will probably get more out of the conversation this way.

Find strength in numbers

You might find it helpful to invite a couple of other students to the meeting. You certainly do not have to do this alone. You could divide up the responsibilities and ask a fellow student to take notes or ensure that all the relevant points are covered, while you focus on having the conversation.

4. Produce and submit your report

Once you have had the conversation with your university or college, you can choose to produce your student submission in several ways:

1. Written response (survey)

If you would like to complete your submission in writing, we have devised a survey to allow you to do this. View the survey questions.²³

2. A video/podcast/presentation

You may prefer to produce a video, podcast, or presentation as your student submission. We encourage you to structure your video/podcast/presentation using the questions in the survey and conversation guide.²⁴

Please submit your written responses or your video/podcast/presentation via the survey link sent to the student representative.

If you have any questions while you are producing your student submission, please contact us at app@officeforstudents.org.uk.

If you require any accessibility adjustments to enable you to access or complete the submission, please get in touch with us at app@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Hints and tips on producing your submission

If you are completing the written survey...

How much you write is up to you. However, we think that writing around 100-500 words per question will be enough to allow you to cover the relevant points.

Remember, you can pause your submission at any stage and come back to it later. If you want to do this, just click on 'save and continue'. You will receive a new link to your email which you can then use to continue working on the survey whenever you are ready.

Think about what you want to say before starting to fill in any answers. This will allow you to consider how to incorporate different student views into your responses.

²³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

²⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

If you are submitting a video, podcast or presentation...

We encourage you to use the questions on our website²⁵ as a guide about what to include. You could structure your submission in three parts, covering targets, activities and then student involvement.

If the file you are trying to upload is larger than 50MB, please email app@officeforstudents.org.uk to arrange an alternative upload method. The survey will only allow you to upload files that are 50MB or smaller.

Publication and data protection

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, please ensure that no personal information is submitted and no individual students can be identified from the data reported (including small numbers of less than five individuals).

Please contact app@officeforstudents.org.uk if you are unsure about whether you can include something in your submission.

Remember that your student submission may be published by your university or college. Your university or college should ensure that your student submission and data is processed in a way that is consistent with data protection law.

Be honest and provide evidence for your points

We would like your student submission to include honest reflections on the performance of your university or college in relation to its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

We recognise that this may include areas where you feel it has not performed as well as it could have. In these instances, we would encourage you to talk to your university or college about why you have concerns. You should try to back up what you have said with examples and evidence whenever possible.

Share all your thoughts

You will have an opportunity to share any additional comments you have, regardless of whether you submit the written survey or produce a video/podcast/presentation.

So, if you want to say something that doesn't quite fit into the structure outlined in the questions on our website, you will still be able to include this in your submission. Also, If the students you talk to have differing views about your university or college, feel free to say this in your answers, highlighting the different perspectives.

Work as a team

We recommend that you identify a couple of students to support you, to help you do the best possible job and ensure you are not overwhelmed.

²⁵ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/student-submissions-for-the-monitoring-of-2019-20-access-and-participation-plans/useful-tools/

What happens after you have completed your submission

When you have successfully completed your student submission, you will see a thank you message, confirming that you have completed the survey. If you do not see this message, please email app@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Your submission will then be carefully considered by the OfS alongside your university or college's monitoring return. In a small number of cases, we may come back to you to clarify what has been said. This may happen if your student submission says something we are concerned about or differs greatly from the monitoring return.

Once we have finished looking at your student submission, we will send this to your university or college, who may publish it alongside its own monitoring return.

Your university or college may be provided with the opportunity to respond to the OfS on what you have said in your submission. This is why we encourage both students and universities and colleges to be open about what they have said in their reports.

If you would like to follow up with us about your student submission in the future, please email app@officeforstudents.org.uk. There are also many other opportunities for you to get involved. If you would like to hear about the other work we do at the OfS, or you are interested in receiving regular updates about our work, find out more about how to get involved.²⁶

We really appreciate you taking the time to complete the student submission, and hope you have found this a positive experience. Your voice matters, and we are very grateful to you for using it to help us tackle inequality in higher education, for the benefit of both current and future students.

²⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/get-involved/

Key definitions

Access and participation plans

Access and participation plans set out how universities and colleges will improve equality of opportunity. They include:

- the ambitions for change held by the university or college
- what it plans to do to achieve that change
- the targets it has set
- the investment it will make to deliver the plan.

Access and participation plans must be approved by the OfS Director for Fair Access and Participation as set out in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).²⁷ We have published all approved plans.²⁸

Access and participation plan delivery, monitoring and evaluation

The OfS encourages universities and colleges to get students involved in the following areas:

- Access and participation plan delivery is the activities your university or college undertakes to fulfil the targets and commitments in its plan.
- Access and participation plan monitoring is how your university or college checks it is on track to deliver the targets and commitments set out in its plan. Plans should be monitored on an ongoing basis, and this should be led by senior staff at your university or college.

Access and participation plan evaluation is the work your university or college does to understand the impact of individual activities and how these can be improved to allow targets to be met more quickly.

Access and participation plan targets and commitments

Access and participation plans contain targets which set out each university or college's ambitions for addressing its equality gaps. They can be found at the back of your university or college's published access and participation plan.²⁹

In addition to setting targets, each university and college will have made other commitments in its access and participation plan. These may include, for example, commitments to undertake specific activities or consult students in particular ways.

²⁷ See www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted

²⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/search-for-access-and-participation-plans/#/AccessPlans/

²⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/search-for-access-and-participation-plans/#/AccessPlans/

Access, success and progression measures

Access, success and progression measures refer to the activities that each university and college undertook in 2019-20 to achieve its goals and contribute to the priorities the OfS has identified for access and participation:

- Access activities or 'measures' will seek to reduce gaps in access between student groups. This might include outreach work with young people and strategic relationships with schools.
- Continuation or attainment activities or 'measures' will seek to reduce gaps in continuation and attainment between student groups. This might include efforts to refresh curricula to be more inclusive, enhance personal tutoring support, or provide support for mental health and wellbeing.
- Progression activities or 'measures' will seek to reduce gaps in progression between student groups. This might include offering work-based learning, placements, or professional mentoring.

These activities would usually be aimed at specific underrepresented group(s) depending on the targets at the university or college.

Diverse range of students

Student submissions should incorporate views from a diverse range of students. This might include students from underrepresented groups, commuter students, part-time and full-time students. It should also include student views from different year groups.

Equality gaps

There are inequalities³⁰ between different groups in higher education. Some groups of people are less likely to achieve the qualifications needed to study in higher education and these gaps in achievement are apparent from a young age. There is also inequality between groups once they get into higher education where some people are more likely to do well than others, even when their prior academic performance is the same. We have set ambitious and long-term targets³¹ for universities and colleges to eliminate these equality gaps.

Monitoring return

This is the report that each university or college produces to provide a commentary on progress made in delivering its access and participation plan. We have published guidance for universities and colleges on how to complete the monitoring return.³²

³⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/our-approach-to-access-and-participation/the-challenge/

³¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/measures-of-our-success/participation-performance-measures/

³² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/monitoring-return-and-impact-report/

OfS access and participation plan monitoring

The OfS monitors each university and college to ensure it is making expected progress towards the targets and commitments in its plan. In addition, we also want to know if each university and college is taking all reasonable steps to comply with the provisions of the plan.

Student consultation

Universities and colleges are expected to demonstrate how students from a range of backgrounds have had the opportunity to express their views about the content of the access and participation plan before it was submitted for approval. Universities and colleges are also encouraged to involve students in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the plan. In plans, this activity is often referred to as student consultation. This may include activities such as committing to creating a student advisory panel, involving students in curriculum design, or forming focus groups for each of the underrepresented groups.

Student representative

The student representative will be the lead contact for the student submission. This person can be a staff member of the students' union or representative body, such as the president or vice-president. They can also be a current student in any year of study. Only one student representative can be nominated per university or college.

Although the student representative is the person responsible for coordinating and submitting the student submission, they are not expected to write the entire submission.

Student submission

The independent and optional report which enables students to reflect and comment on progress made by their university or college in delivering its access and participation plan.

Underrepresented students

Groups of students who share one or more of the following characteristics where data shows there are gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access, success or progression:

- students from geographical areas where participation in higher education is low – based on POLAR data³³
- students from a household with low income – below £25,000 per year
- students from areas where there are high levels of deprivation, or from low socioeconomic status backgrounds – this can relate to income, education and occupation, and is not based on the idea of 'social class'
- some black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students³⁴

³³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/

³⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-students/

- mature students³⁵ – those over the age of 21 when they enter higher education
- disabled students³⁶ – those who have declared at least one disability
- care leavers³⁷ – young people who have been ‘looked after’ for at least 13 weeks by a local authority at some point since they were 14 years old, and were in care on or after their sixteenth birthday.

There are also additional groups of students with particular equality gaps and support needs. Some universities and colleges also talk about these groups:

- carers³⁸
- people estranged from their families³⁹
- people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities⁴⁰
- refugees⁴¹
- children from military families.⁴²

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

³⁶ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/disabled-students/

³⁷ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/care-leavers/

³⁸ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/carers/

³⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/estranged-students/

⁴⁰ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-communities/

⁴¹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/refugees/

⁴² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/children-from-military-families/



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