



Office for
Students



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The OfS strategy roadmap: 2025 to 2030

**Striving to deliver exemplary regulation
in the interests of students**

The Office for Students strategy roadmap: 2025 to 2030

This document sets out the main areas of work we plan to deliver to realise our strategic goals. Building on our strategy, it is intended to provide students, higher education institutions and other stakeholders with a clear view of our current thinking about how our attitudes will translate into practical steps over the five-year strategic period.¹

In publishing this roadmap, we recognise that as the world around us changes, our approach may need to change, too. It flows from our current assessment of the risks and opportunities likely to shape the higher education sector over the coming years and outlines how we plan to protect students' interests within that context, taking into account the policy direction set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills white paper.² We remain alert to the need for agility and flexibility should this assessment change.

The attitudes at the centre of our strategy will drive delivery of all our strategic goals in the interests of students. They are infused through everything we do and will determine how we discharge our responsibilities over the next five years. All four attitudes are relevant to all areas of our work. To illustrate how individual attitudes will drive and shape our work, we indicate where a particular activity will exemplify certain attitudes, using the coloured, hexagonal markers set out below. Our published performance measures will assess how consistently and effectively we embody these attitudes in and through our work, ensuring they set the standard to which we hold ourselves and against which our success can be judged by others.

¹ In this document we use 'institutions' to refer to what our regulatory framework calls 'higher education providers' or 'providers'. These include universities, colleges, conservatoires and other higher education providers.

² DfE, DWP and SDIT, Post-16 education and skills white paper, 20 October 2025, see [Post-16 education and skills white paper - GOV.UK](#).



Ambitious for all students from all backgrounds

Every student – regardless of their background, circumstances or pathway – should have the opportunity to benefit from high quality higher education that meets their needs and equips them to succeed. **We will be relentlessly focused on securing positive higher education experiences for all students**, informed by a sharper understanding of students' priorities and concerns. We will help drive improvement across the sector, recognising that while much provision is already excellent, there is room to improve further. And we will hold institutions to account when they fall short.



Collaborative in pursuit of our priorities and in our stewardship of the sector

We will deliver our work in collaboration with students and the institutions we regulate. Accepting there will be issues on which we disagree, we will cultivate relationships based on mutual respect, confidence and trust. We will work with student bodies, sector agencies and other partners that share responsibility for stewardship of this important sector to support a cohesive regulatory environment and foster a thriving ecosystem equipped to create opportunity and drive growth.



Vigilant about safeguarding public money and student fees

We intervene where we have concerns that public money is not being used as intended while working to ensure that in return for their investments of time, money and hard work, students benefit from high quality higher education experiences, in line with what they were promised. We will strengthen our focus on governance, recognising the critical role of effective leadership in securing positive outcomes for students and taxpayers. And we will mobilise the diversity, talents and commitment of Office for Students (OfS) staff to deliver efficient, effective and impactful regulation, ensuring value for the taxpayers and institutions that fund our work.



Vocal that higher education is a force for good, for individuals, communities and the country

We will champion the many benefits of higher education for society, culture and the economy and regulate in a way that enables universities and colleges to drive growth, create opportunity, champion free expression and support a flourishing society. **We will identify and celebrate achievements**, helping institutions to learn from and build on the success of others, alongside highlighting concerns, empowering universities and colleges to drive positive change.

Our strategic goals

The sections that follow describe the core activities we plan to deliver to realise the strategic goals set out on page 10 of our strategy. Goals are grouped into three areas: quality, student experience and support, and sector resilience; with equality of opportunity interwoven throughout everything that we do.

Quality

1. Students receive a high quality education that has a significant and enduring positive impact on their lives and careers, delivered by institutions that continue to improve the quality of their courses.
2. Prospective students have a range of high quality options and are well equipped to exercise informed choice about what, where, when and how they study.

Student experience and support

3. Students receive the higher education experiences they were promised.
4. Students benefit from rich and rewarding wider environments that help them to make the most of their time in higher education.

Sector resilience

5. A financially resilient sector delivers high quality higher education and student choice in the context of constrained finances.
6. Effectively governed institutions successfully navigate an environment of increased financial and strategic risk, enabling students to reap the benefits of higher education while giving taxpayers confidence that public funding is used appropriately.





Students assume their higher education will be high quality, and most provision in the higher education sector in England is already excellent. But where quality falls short, the risks to students are significant.

Student surveys consistently find that a significant minority of students are dissatisfied with core parts of their academic experiences, and while student outcomes are strong in aggregate, examples of poor continuation and completion rates can be identified across different modes and levels of study, in different subject areas, and for students with different characteristics.

Looking to the future, digital technology and artificial intelligence will precipitate potentially transformative shifts in teaching, learning and assessment, accentuated by a demand for lifelong learning and the changing skills needs of the economy. These changes will create opportunities to exploit, but also challenges to navigate, as we seek to ensure that universities and colleges can play their full role as drivers of growth.

Where provision is already high quality, we know that many institutions want to improve further. As they embark on improvement, they will face headwinds and difficult decisions. We will work with the institutions we regulate to promote high quality education for all students in the face of countervailing pressures.



1. Students receive a high quality education that has a significant and enduring positive impact on their lives and careers, delivered by institutions that continue to improve the quality of their courses.



Building on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), we will develop an integrated approach to quality assessment that drives continuous improvement across the higher education sector, benefiting more students at a greater number of institutions. We will do this in collaboration with students, institutions and sector experts. Where necessary, we will pursue investigation and enforcement, using the full range of our powers to protect students from provision that falls below the requirements set out in our conditions of registration.



Equality will remain central to our approach to regulating quality. Quality assessments will continue to hold institutions to account for the experiences and outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and groups underrepresented in higher education.



We will protect and promote freedom of speech and academic freedom, including by reporting on the outcomes of free speech complaints, supporting institutions to safeguard the robust exchange of ideas that provides essential underpinning for a high quality education.



We will celebrate and share examples of excellence wherever we find them, helping institutions to learn from what works well, and communicate openly about the risks to quality we identify.



2. Prospective students have a range of high quality options and are well equipped to exercise informed choice about what, where, when and how they study.



Guided by a deeper understanding of the factors that shape students' decision making, we will support informed choice by ensuring timely access to clear, reliable information. We will be particularly concerned to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups have the information they need to make decisions that work for them.



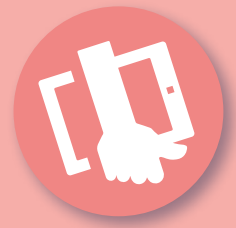
We will continue to work with institutions to extend the benefits of higher education to more students, whatever their background and wherever they live. We will expect institutions to leverage regional partnerships in the development and execution of evidence-led plans that support students with the ability and desire to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.



We will regulate in a way that allows higher education to play a central role as a driver of economic growth, supporting an environment conducive to innovation in the interests of students. We will deliver our core regulatory functions in a timely and rigorous way and work with Skills England to assess the extent to which higher education options align with national and regional skills needs.



Student experience and support



Higher education should be a rich, rewarding environment, extending beyond lectures, labs and assessments. Feeling part of a community that supports their learning and their wellbeing, and values their voice, is part of what enables many students to thrive.

While most students have high quality experiences, not all students benefit in the ways they expect. Unclear or unfair contractual terms, extra charges and misleading information can compromise students' experiences of, and ability to engage in, higher education. Factors such as the rising cost of living and increased reporting of mental health conditions, meanwhile, suggest that the student experience is becoming more challenging. The effect of these challenges falls disproportionately on those with fewer economic and social resources to draw on in response.

Institutions should be innovative and bold in their work to deliver positive student experiences. We acknowledge, however, that the sector's response to these issues needs to be considered in the context of constrained finances, wider pressures on public services and the diverse needs and priorities of the students different institutions teach. We will deploy non-regulatory approaches where issues that matter to students supplement our regulatory scope, working collaboratively to support institutions in meeting students' needs.



3. Students receive the higher education experiences they were promised.



We will gather and analyse data and insights from students, institutions and others to improve our understanding of the extent to which students' reasonable expectations are being met in relation to their academic experiences and the support they receive.



We will empower students to understand and more effectively exercise their rights as consumers, while also promoting greater awareness among institutions of their obligations to students under consumer law.



We will strengthen our regulatory requirements to better protect students from unfair treatment and work with government to secure the powers we need to further champion students' interests.

4. Students benefit from rich and rewarding wider environments that help them to make the most of their time in higher education.



A strengthened understanding of students' experiences and concerns will underpin all our activity. We will seek students' perspectives to develop our understanding of the changing barriers they face as they seek to make the most of their education, and share what we learn with institutions, government, media and other stakeholders.



We will continue to work with institutions to reduce risks to equality of opportunity, recognising that the overall experience of higher education is becoming more challenging and many of those challenges are particularly acute for certain student groups. We will expect institutions to develop and execute evidence-led plans to support students from all backgrounds and to evaluate the impact of their interventions.



We will highlight areas of concern or interest that may not be subject to direct regulation but which students tell us matter to them, enabling institutions and others to respond proactively, and share examples of what's working well. We will seek to enhance institutions' capacity and capability to meet students' needs by working with sector agencies and other partners.



We will regulate to prevent harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education and to ensure that institutions respond effectively when incidents occur.

Sector resilience



A resilient higher education sector is essential to delivering high quality education and maintaining meaningful student choice, as well as ensuring long-term value for students and the public.

Many institutions are facing financial challenges and may need to consider major changes to their operating models to prevent financial risks from crystallising. The decline in the real-terms value of income from UK students and increased reliance on fee income from international students, together with inflationary and economic pressures, have created complex challenges for institutions to navigate that are unlikely to abate in the short term.

As risk in the operating environment increases, institutions will need different capabilities to manage the challenging circumstances they face. We will ensure that institutions seeking registration are equipped to navigate these circumstances, alongside strengthening our focus on good governance more broadly, recognising that effective leadership is essential to the responsible stewardship of public funding in the interests of students and taxpayers.



5. A financially resilient sector delivers high quality higher education and student choice in the context of constrained finances.



We will maintain an up-to-date assessment of financial risk at both institution and sector level, informed by predictive and lead indicators. We will improve our approach to data collection and look for opportunities to reduce the number of data requests we make, while continuing to obtain the information we need.



We will communicate our conclusions as appropriate, helping institutions to understand their own position while also supporting a shared view of the sector's financial health and other aspects of performance. We will challenge institutions where we have concerns that they may not have credible plans in place to manage the financial risks they face.



We will work with institutions to improve planning for potential closures, normalising conversations about preparedness. We will require institutions facing a material risk of closure to have credible and deliverable plans to minimise disruption for students and we will continue to work with government to address the gaps in the system that mean that students cannot be adequately protected if their institution can no longer operate.



We will monitor and communicate the impact of financial pressures on student choice, as institutions make difficult decisions about the size and shape of their provision. As part of this, we will identify potential risks to the supply of critical skills at a regional and national level.



6. Effectively governed institutions successfully navigate an environment of increased financial and strategic risk, enabling students to reap the benefits of higher education while giving taxpayers confidence that public funding is used appropriately.



We will strengthen our oversight of governance to ensure institutions are accountable and public funding is used appropriately. We will concentrate monitoring and compliance activity where risks to students and taxpayers are most acute.



We will ensure that tests for institutions seeking registration effectively identify those not yet ready to enter the regulated system, and that our regulation of established institutions can facilitate swift action wherever management and governance issues arise.



We will work with institutions and sector agencies to identify and address barriers to strengthened governance more broadly. We will consider an enhanced focus on good governance as a means of ensuring that institutions effectively discharge their responsibilities to students, including in relation to the issues that students tell us matter most to them. Should institutions fail to strengthen their governance sufficiently, we will consider regulatory intervention.



We will increase the regulatory requirements placed on institutions engaged in significant partnership activity and consider further changes should other forms of high-risk activity emerge. We will continue to work with the Department for Education and Student Loans Company (SLC) to mitigate risks to SLC funding where possible and work with government on legislative solutions that would stop the flow of public money where we have concerns about its intended use.



How we will regulate

As we strive to deliver exemplary regulation in the interests of students, we will seek to continually improve, guided by the attitudes at the centre of our strategy.

We will continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our systems and processes, with a focus on delivering our core services in a robust and timely way, ensuring value for the taxpayers and institutions that fund our work.

We will strive to minimise regulatory burden, prioritising improvements to our use of data and intelligence to support a streamlined approach. We will work with other regulators and agencies to synthesise data and avoid duplication, embedding the principle 'collect once, use many times'. And we will consider our approach and our impact in the context of the wider economy, mindful of the need to weigh the benefits of regulation against the burden imposed.

With students' interests driving our strategy, we will make sure our systems and approaches to student engagement are working well and embed students' perspectives in our work. We will continue to improve our relationships with institutions and with the sector more broadly, increasing opportunities for discussion, debate and feedback.

And we will keep learning as we go, continually evaluating our progress and looking to other regulators to inform our thinking as we seek ways to improve.

Accountability and transparency

We will routinely publish key performance measures that track how consistently and effectively we embody strategy attitudes in and through our work, supporting accountability and transparency.

We will refresh our operational measures, strengthening transparency around the delivery of core regulatory activity, and publish the results of an annual survey designed to help us understand what the heads of regulated institutions think we are doing well, and what could be improved.

We will report annually on our student engagement and insight gathering, explaining how students' priorities and concerns have shaped our work.

Our Annual report and accounts will continue to provide further information about our performance, including in relation to the management of key risks.





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