

Office for
Students



Access and participation plan monitoring

Guidance for completing the
2019-20 monitoring return

Reference OfS 2020.53

General enquiries to: app@officeforstudents.org.uk

Enquiries about a specific plan to: regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk

Publication date 26 November 2020

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Introduction

1. Higher education providers with an approved access and participation plan (APP) covering academic year 2019-20 must provide information to the OfS on the progress they are making towards the targets and commitments set out in their plan. This document describes how to complete the documents required for submission. You should read this document before submitting any of the required files.
2. The information relating to the provisions of the plans submitted in the monitoring return, alongside investment information submitted in the provider's annual financial return,¹ will be used to generate an impact report.² You are expected to publish the information contained in your impact report and our intention has been to minimise burden by providing a standard report; however, you may choose to present the information in a different format if you wish.
3. In addition to the provider monitoring return, students will have the opportunity to submit an independent student submission. We would encourage you to work with your student body to support them to complete this submission. For more information please see our student submission guidance.³
4. Providers must ensure that personal data is processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. This includes ensuring that no personal information is submitted and no students can be identifiable from the data reported.

Who needs to complete the monitoring return?

5. Higher education providers with an approved access and participation plan covering the academic year 2019-20 must complete the monitoring return.

Submission deadline

6. Pre-populated monitoring return templates will be released to providers on the OfS provider portal in early 2021 and we will confirm with providers' accountable officers and APP contacts by email when the templates are available to download. Providers are required to submit their 2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring return via the OfS portal by **16 April 2021**.
7. Once a student representative has been nominated, they will be contacted by email with the relevant information on how to complete the student submission. Student submissions are also due on **16 April 2021**.

¹ For more information about the annual financial return, see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-for-financial-monitoring-returns/.

² Our intention to generate impact reports for publication was detailed in the APP consultation outcomes publication: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/a-new-approach-to-regulating-access-and-participation-in-english-higher-education-consultation-outcomes/.

³ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/student-submissions/.

8. Where relevant,⁴ providers are required to submit investment information via the annual financial return according to the timetable set out in our guidance.⁵ Providers who are required to make this return were advised of the deadline that applied in their circumstances by email to their accountable officer on 3 August 2020.⁶
9. We have provided non-interactive copies of the 2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring return template, impact report template and student submission documents on the OfS website,⁷ to download for reference. Please note that you should not submit these documents, as we will provide bespoke, pre-populated versions for providers to download, complete and submit.

Completing the return

How to find the templates

Accessing the portal area

10. To download the templates and submit your return, you will need access to the 'Access and participation monitoring 2019-20' area on the OfS portal (<https://extranet.officeforstudents.org.uk/Data>). Each portal user will need to be granted access to this area to download the templates and submit the return.
11. If you have not registered on the OfS portal before, you will need to ask the nominated portal user administrator at your provider to create an account for you. Each person who requires access to the 2019-20 monitoring return will need to be registered with their own account.
12. You will need to be assigned to the 'Access and participation monitoring 2019-20' area by the nominated OfS portal user administrator at your provider. The user administrator can find guidance on how to add portal users to portal areas on the main portal login page. If you are the user administrator, you will still need to assign yourself to the 'Access and participation monitoring 2019-20' area.
13. If you do not know who your user administrator is, you can view the user administrators at your provider by logging onto the OfS portal. Select 'My account' towards the right-hand side of the yellow banner, and then click 'Activate an access key'. The names and contact details of the user administrators at your provider will be at the top of the page. If you do not have a OfS portal account and do not know who your user administrator is, please contact portal@officeforstudents.org.uk.

⁴ Financial monitoring returns apply to providers that are registered with the OfS in either the Approved or Approved (fee cap) category of the OfS Register. However, where a provider is a further education college or a sixth form college under the primary regulation of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), it is not required to submit this financial data to the OfS.

⁵ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-for-financial-monitoring-returns/.

⁶ Any provider registered with the OfS after 3 August 2020 and required to make this return was advised of the deadline that applied in their circumstances following confirmation of their registration.

⁷ Available on our APP monitoring webpages at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/.

Navigating the access and participation monitoring 2019-20 portal area

14. Once you have been granted access by the nominated OfS portal user administrator at your provider, the 'Access and participation monitoring 2019-20' area will be visible to you on the portal homepage. From this area you will be able to access two separate pages. These will allow you to:
 - Access the area to download your bespoke Word template, and submit your 2019-20 monitoring return (you will need to submit this as a Word document; other formats will not be accepted without prior arrangement with the OfS by contacting appdata@officeforstudents.org.uk)
 - Access the area to download and submit your supplementary information Excel document.

Data accuracy and validation

15. The accuracy of submitted data is the responsibility of each provider. The return of inaccurate data to the OfS may affect our judgement about a provider's ability to continue to comply with its conditions of registration.
16. You must check that you have entered the data into the fields and tables correctly to ensure that you are returning accurate data. The supplementary information Excel document contains several validation checks for each table to help identify errors or discrepancies. These validation checks include, for example, ensuring that all mandatory cells in a row are completed and that you have provided confirmation that the return has been signed off by your accountable officer. You should review these validation checks once you have populated your supporting information workbook. When a supporting information workbook is uploaded to the portal, a results package will be available to download if the submission is successful. You should review the results package, including the validation checks within it, to ensure there are no errors or discrepancies in the submitted data. In addition to validation checks, credibility checks on the Excel template will also alert you if potentially conflicting information is entered. Note it is not mandatory to pass credibility checks in order to complete submission; however, providers should be aware of these and acknowledge them where possible.
17. Enquiries about these validation checks should be directed to appdata@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Submitting the required files

18. This return will not be subject to data verification, but validation checks in the workbook must be reviewed by the provider before submission (see paragraphs 15 and 16 for guidance on data accuracy and validation).
19. The monitoring return should be approved and signed off by the provider's accountable officer. This is the person, normally the head of the provider, who reports to the OfS on behalf of the provider and ensures compliance with conditions of OfS registration, including by signing off returns such as this one.
20. You may also wish to upload supporting documentation in respect of commitments highlighted in the 2020-21 APP approval letter that would be undertaken in 2019-20 to ensure that certain provisions in the 2020-21 plan would be met.

How to complete the templates

Downloading the templates

21. There are two templates to download and complete:
 - a. The monitoring return in Word format
 - b. The supporting information document in Excel format.
22. You should start with the Word document and refer to the supporting information Excel document when directed.

Completing the templates

23. You should not attempt to alter the format of the templates. Text should only be entered in the relevant text field boxes of the document, and worksheets should not be altered by adding or deleting columns or rows. Only cells where data is required should be edited. The templates are protected to ensure that the validation checks are robust and data is only entered in the relevant places. Worksheets contain information critical to accurate loading of the data; it is essential that this is preserved. The templates should not be unprotected by any unofficial macro downloaded from the internet, or otherwise. We will refuse to accept any documents which have been unprotected or tampered with. If you would like to view a PDF version of the templates, these are available on the OfS website; however, you must not use these sample tables as the final submission.
24. If you wish to copy and paste data within the supporting information workbook, you must ensure that you use the 'paste values' option. This will not copy the formatting of the data being pasted and will preserve the formatting of the workbook.

Step by step guide

Contact details

25. Please read the introductory information and the OfS privacy notice on the front page of the template.
26. The contact details of the accountable officer have been prepopulated using the contact details stored on the OfS's contact system. Please fill in the alternative contact column with the details of the person primarily responsible for completing the monitoring return. If we need to clarify any of the information returned to us or request further information, these two people will be contacted in the first instance.

Ambition and strategy

27. The purpose of this section is to provide context for the monitoring return by setting out your overall ambition related to closing equality gaps for underrepresented students as described in your 2019-20 plan.
28. In this section, please enter the overall ambition described in your 2019-20 access and participation plan. For most providers this information can be found in the 'ambitions and strategy' section of the plan. Information may include key statements about your context, your mission, your commitments towards underrepresented students as a whole or key target groups and lifecycle stages.
29. You do not need to include the whole 'ambitions and strategy' section of the plan, only the key excerpts which will provide an overview of your context. This section will be included in the impact report so should be understandable as a standalone, brief summary of the ambition and strategy as described in your 2019-20 plan.
30. Where necessary, you may make minor text changes for the purpose of summarising, so long as these changes do not change the meaning or ambition of the 2019-20 APP. You should not include any new or additional information that is not in your published 2019-20 plan. Doing so may delay assessment of your monitoring return. If the OfS finds there to be any discrepancies between this section and the original 2019-20 APP, please note that the plan is the enforceable document and will be referred to instead of this summary section.

Progress against targets

Please refer to the supporting information Excel document to complete this section.

Cover page

31. The cover page on the supporting information Excel document will provide a visual indicator of whether the tables in each tab have been completed. You may enter a short comment in the table if there are any issues you wish to report.

Self-assessment of targets

32. The purpose of Table 2 is for you to report progress against milestones using the latest available data and provide further information to the OfS if expected progress has not been made. Expected progress is defined as your actual performance on a target meeting or exceeding the projected milestone for a target. If you have met the relevant milestone for a target, no further information on that target will be required.
33. Table 2 is split into two sections:
 - a. Statistical targets and milestones – this relates to Table 8a of your 2019-20 resource plan and the targets will usually be numerical
 - b. Other milestones and targets – this relates to Table 8b of your 2019-20 resource plan, and the targets may be a mixture of numerical and non-numerical.
34. Columns C-P are pre-populated using the information submitted in the 2019-20 access and participation plan, including the projected milestones. These columns cannot be edited.
35. Columns Q and R have been pre-populated using the observed unit of measurement and direction of the target. Column Q indicates the unit of the target and column R indicates the direction of the target. For example, for a target where you are aiming to increase a percentage of something over time, column Q should read 'percentage' and column R should read 'increasing'.
36. In column S you should use the drop-down to select which year of data you are reporting on in column T. This should be the most recent year for which data is available on that target.
37. Column T should only be completed if the target is numerical. You should enter your actual performance on the target. Only numbers will be accepted in this column. If the target is non-numerical, you do not need to complete this column and should move on to column U.
38. Column U should be completed with your own assessment of what level of progress you are making on the target. There is a drop-down to choose from the following options:
 - a. Expected progress. This means that you are meeting or exceeding the milestone for that target.
 - b. Limited progress. This means that you have made some progress, but you have not made enough progress to achieve the milestone.
 - c. No progress. This means that you have not made any progress to meet the milestone.
39. When you are making expected progress on a target, no further action is required and columns V to X will remain grey. You should not write anything in the greyed-out cells.
40. For each target where you have not made expected progress (limited progress), please complete columns V-X with as much detail as you feel relevant to the question:
 - a. Column V should include details of how you have met the commitments in your 2019-20 plan related to this target. This may include specific commitments related to this target, such as targeted activities, or it may include details of how you have met general

commitments related to data analysis, a whole-provider approach, student consultation and engagement, investment or monitoring and evaluation for example.

- b. Column W should include details of any additional steps you have already taken to improve progress against this target. For example, if your monitoring activities identified slower than expected progress against this target mid-year, have you put any remedial actions in place? If your activities were disrupted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, did you explore any alternative options or invest resource elsewhere?
- c. Column X should include steps and actions you are planning to take in the future to resume expected progress on this target. This information will be collated and used to generate a summary of actions in the published impact report.

41. When writing about the targets you have not met, you may also reference general commitments, where appropriate:

- a. Whole-provider approach
- b. Student consultation
- c. Evaluation strategy
- d. Monitoring progress against the delivery of the plan
- e. Investment
- f. Data commitments.

42. The information in columns V-X will be used to determine whether you have taken all reasonable steps to comply with the provision of your plan. If the OfS is concerned that you have not taken all reasonable steps, on the basis of the information you have provided, we will contact you to establish further evidence of compliance.

43. Column Y is an optional commentary column for you to complete if you wish to note anything further on a target that you feel would not be best captured under any of the other columns.

Investment information

This section applies only to further education colleges who do not submit a financial return to the OfS.

Please refer to the supporting information Excel document to complete this section.

44. This table will only be available in the template if it applies to you. For providers who return their financial information to the OfS, this information has already been collected in the annual financial return; therefore the table will not be shown in the workbook template. If you are a further education college and included this expenditure in your 2019-20 annual financial return

to the ESFA you will need to complete this table but you should enter the same figures that you reported in your annual financial return.

45. Your predicted spend from your 2019-20 resource plan is pre-populated in Column D.

46. You must accurately report your actual spend in column E, in relation to:

- a. Access, success and progression investment – expenditure in the financial year on activities and measures that support the ambitions set out in an access and participation plan, where they relate to access to higher education,
- b. Financial support – expenditure provided to underrepresented or disadvantaged students in the financial year (such as bursaries, scholarships, etc.).⁸ This should only include expenditure on financial support directed at underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.
- c. Support for disabled students in the financial year, which can include, but is not limited to, the disabled students' premium. This excludes expenditure included in the two categories above.

47. The difference will automatically calculate in column F.

The impact of coronavirus on the delivery of 2019-20 access and participation plans

This section will not be published in the impact report.

48. This section is intended for information gathering on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the delivery of 2019-20 access and participation plans.

49. The questions in this section ask about the delivery of activity and outcomes in the current year and the effect on students from underrepresented groups. We do not require you to provide the full detail of all activities undertaken in relation to these questions – a summary is acceptable. The exception to this is the question 'Are you making any new commitments in relation to the above areas?'. Please provide full details of any new commitments you are making.

Forward look: 2020-21 onwards access and participation plans

This section will not be published in the impact report.

The impact of coronavirus on the delivery of 2020-21 onwards access and participation plans

50. The questions in this section are intended for information gathering on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the delivery of 2020-21 onwards plans.

⁸ Annex B of Regulatory notice 1 issued for 2019-20 plans describes what should be included in these figures and can be found at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/.

51. The questions in this section ask about the delivery of activity and outcomes relating to the 2020-21 onwards plans and your engagement with students on these issues. We do not require you to provide the full detail of all activities undertaken in relation to these questions – a summary is acceptable. The exception to this is the question ‘Are you making any new commitments?’. Please provide full details of any new commitments you are making and consider whether you may need to submit a request to vary your 2020-21 plan.⁹ You do not need to repeat any new commitments that you have outlined in the 2019-20 section unless they are to continue in 2020-21 and are not currently part of your 2020-21 plan.

Progress against key commitments in the 2020-21 onwards plan

52. Where you made commitments in your 2020-21 plan to undertake activity during the 2019-20 academic year to ensure you are able to meet certain of the provisions of that plan, the approval letter from the OfS would have highlighted those commitments and required a report on progress made to deliver them. If you were asked to submit that information in January 2021, you should, instead, include this information in this section of the monitoring return.

53. If you wish to upload further documents in support of this requirement, you will be able to do so at the same time as uploading the monitoring return documents to the portal (see paragraph 20).

Confirmation and sign-off

54. This monitoring return must be signed off by your provider’s accountable officer. This is the person, normally the head of the provider, who reports to the OfS on behalf of the provider and ensures compliance with conditions of OfS registration, including by signing off returns such as this one.

55. Please complete the two questions regarding student engagement. We expect that you will involve students in the monitoring of the plan and we strongly encourage this to be achieved by supporting student representatives to complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission (detailed in paragraph 3).

56. Please confirm the sign-off by writing the accountable officer’s name and position in the box provided.

57. As with all OfS regulation, any submissions to the OfS are ultimately made on behalf of the provider governing body. The monitoring return should be explicitly approved and signed off by the provider’s accountable officer, but we do not require explicit assurance of approval by the governing body.

⁹ Providers may, at any time after a plan has been approved, apply to the Director for Fair Access and Participation for approval of a variation of that plan. A variation of a plan includes any change to a provider’s approved access and participation plan. Further information is available in Regulatory notice 1, paragraphs 55-59.

Provider impact report

59. The OfS will prepare a standard, individual report as a PDF document for you which brings together the information you have submitted in your monitoring return with information on investment included in your financial statements. Only information relevant to the delivery of the provisions of your 2019-20 access and participation plan will be included in the published impact report. This means that the impact report will not include information submitted in respect of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic or the information you have submitted that was required in the approval letter for your 2020-21 plan. We expect you will publish the information contained in your impact report and our intention has been to minimise burden by providing a standard report; however, you may choose to present the information in a different format if you wish.
60. We have provided a template version of the impact report for publication, on the OfS website.¹⁰
61. The impact report summarises the information provided in the templates, namely:
- a. your ambition and strategy
 - b. your progress against targets set out in the 2019-20 access and participation plan
 - c. investment information
 - d. a collation of the actions you have committed to taking to get back on track with meeting target milestones, where applicable, in the form of an action plan.
62. The information is presented in the same sequence as set out in the monitoring return, although some information is condensed for accessibility, such as an abridged version of the Table 2: Self-assessment of targets.
63. The action plan section of the impact report automatically pulls together the information you provided for the 'What steps will you take in the future...?' question in relation to targets you did not meet. This provides a streamlined view of all the areas in which you are committing to new actions.

¹⁰ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plan-monitoring/impact-reports/.



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