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25 February 2022

Dear Accountable Officer

## Monitoring of 2020-21 student hardship funding allocations

I am writing to you about monitoring of student hardship funding allocated to your provider for the academic year 2020-21.

In April 2021, the Department for Education asked the Office for Students (OfS) to distribute £15 million of additional hardship funding for the academic year 2020-21 to providers.<sup>1</sup> My letter of 30 April 2021 set out your provider's allocation<sup>2</sup> and the associated terms and conditions, in particular that:

- the funding could not be used to meet providers' own costs
- the funding had to be distributed to students facing hardship from 1 April 2021 and within the academic year, with all funding committed by 31 July 2021
- we would recover any funding not used in the time available for the purposes intended.

In the letter, we noted that we intended to monitor providers' use of this funding through existing reporting mechanisms. However, we are required to provide specific assurances to Parliament that the funding was spent in accordance with its terms and conditions.

We have prepared a template for this exercise, which can be downloaded from the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' area of the OfS portal. Further information on how to do this can be found in Annex A. Once completed, the monitoring template should be uploaded to the same section of the portal **by 1700 on Friday 25 March 2022**.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/guidance-from-government/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/guidance-from-government/).

<sup>2</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-hardship-funding-monitoring-and-additional-allocation/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/student-hardship-funding-monitoring-and-additional-allocation/).

On the template we have confirmed the student hardship funding we allocated to your provider for the 2020-21 academic year. We are asking you to:

- confirm the total hardship funding distributed by your provider to higher education students by 31 July 2021 in line with the relevant terms and conditions
- confirm any hardship funding not distributed by 31 July 2021 and therefore to be repaid
- briefly explain the reason for any unspent funding and the processes that your provider has used to ensure that it has distributed the funding in accordance with our terms and conditions.

If you do not confirm that the funding has been spent in accordance with the terms and conditions, we will contact you separately to discuss this, as the funding will need to be repaid to the OfS.

Please note that this exercise is only concerned with monitoring the funding distributed in April 2021. We are not looking for further assurances over how you have distributed the student hardship allocations first announced in December 2020 and February 2021 for use in the 2020-21 financial year. These were subject to a previous monitoring exercise and we require no further information on their use.

### **Further information**

If you have any questions about either of the issues raised in this letter, please email [recurrentgrant@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:recurrentgrant@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Yours sincerely,

**Nolan Smith**

Director of Resources and Finance

## **Annex A: Downloading and submitting the monitoring form**

This annex gives guidance on how to access the Office for Students (OfS) portal to download your monitoring form and how you should submit the completed return. Some common issues are also listed.

### **Assigning yourself to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' portal survey area**

To access your student hardship funding monitoring form, you will need to download it from the OfS portal: <https://extranet.officeforstudents.org.uk/Data/>.

You will need to be a registered user of the OfS portal to be assigned to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area, from which you will download your monitoring form.

If you have not registered on the OfS portal before, you will need to ask the nominated OfS portal user administrator at your provider to create an account for you. Each person who requires access to the student hardship funding monitoring form will need to be registered with their own account.

You will need to be assigned to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey 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 '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area.

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 are not registered and do not know who your user administrator is, please contact [portal@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:portal@officeforstudents.org.uk).

### **Common issues with accessing the portal**

#### **I cannot log in to the OfS portal**

If you receive an error message while trying to log in, you may be entering the wrong email address or password, or your account may be locked. Ensure that the email address you are using is correct, and then request a new password. You will be sent a new password, which you will be asked to change when you log in. You can also ask your user administrator to reset your password.

If this new password does not grant you access, it is likely that your account is locked. Contact your user administrator, who can unlock your account for you. It is advisable that you also request a password change at the same time. If you or your user administrator have any problems, please contact [portal@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:portal@officeforstudents.org.uk).

#### **The '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area has not appeared on my login page even after I have been assigned to it**

Once you have been assigned to a survey, you may need to log out and then log back into the portal for the survey to appear under 'Home'.

## Downloading your student hardship funding monitoring form

Once you have been assigned to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area, log in to the OfS portal and you will see a link for the student hardship funding monitoring form under the 'Home' section. This link will take you to the monitoring form.

To download the form, click on the 'Download' button. You will receive a zipped file, which will contain your monitoring form. You may need to unzip the file before accessing the workbook. You may also need to click on 'Enable editing' on the yellow banner if it appears on your screen when you open your workbook. You can download this empty workbook as many times as required.

Save the workbook to a memorable location on your computer. If there are any issues with downloading your workbook, please contact us at [portal@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:portal@officeforstudents.org.uk).

## Completing your monitoring form

The monitoring form is provided as an Excel workbook with the file extension '.xlsx'. You should not attempt to alter the format of the worksheets by adding or deleting columns or rows. Only cells where data is required should be edited. The workbook is protected to ensure that the data submitted is accurate and is only entered into the relevant cells. Worksheets contain information critical to accurate loading of the data; it is essential that this is preserved. We will refuse to accept any workbooks that have been unprotected or tampered with.

We recommend that you do not copy and paste data into your workbook, as this can cause formatting issues. If you wish to copy and paste data, ensure that you use the 'Paste values' option instead. This will not copy the formatting of the data you are pasting and will preserve the formatting of the workbook.

## Uploading your monitoring form

Once you have completed the monitoring form (note that the workbook has two sheets), you will need to submit the workbook to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area on the OfS portal. You should ensure that:

- your workbook has not been saved so that zero values are displayed as blanks
- links to other spreadsheets are removed
- only one worksheet is selected when the completed workbook is uploaded
- the workbook is **not** zipped.

Otherwise the workbook may not upload successfully.

Submit the workbook as follows:

- a. Navigate to the '2020-21 student hardship funding monitoring' survey area on the OfS portal.
- b. Click on the 'Upload' button.

- c. Browse for your monitoring form which is saved in your memorable location.
- d. Click 'Upload'.
- e. The workbook may take some time to upload if the portal is busy. The page will automatically refresh to show if your file is waiting to be processed, being processed or has completed successfully.
- f. Check below the status bar for the log of your submission. The 'Outcome' will display as a 'Success' if there are no issues with the uploaded workbook.
- g. Check the 'Comments' to see if your workbook is valid and has successfully uploaded. See below for a description of some of the messages that may appear.

Once you have successfully submitted your workbook, check the results package by clicking on the 'Results' button. The results package contains the workbook that you have submitted, which has now been processed.

Completed workbooks can be uploaded any number of times until the deadline for submissions, when we will take the latest uploaded version as the final version for submission.

## **Common issues while uploading the monitoring form**

### **My workbook contains validation errors**

The monitoring form includes a number of validation checks. Please check your form carefully and complete the sign-off fields on the 'Sign-off' sheet before uploading it. You will still be able to upload your workbook if it is invalid, but we will **not** accept it as a submission.

### **The 'Comments' section of the portal shows errors and no results package is generated**

Your workbook has failed to process. There can be many reasons for the workbook not processing correctly. One common error is that the file has been zipped. Before uploading, please ensure that the file is not zipped as this will make it more likely to process successfully. A second common error is a change in the file extension of the workbook; it must end with '.xlsx'. If you have unprotected the workbook in any way, this may also cause the upload to fail.

### **My colleague has uploaded a monitoring form but I cannot view the results package**

The results package can only be downloaded and viewed from the same OfS portal account that uploaded that particular workbook. In order to view the results package for a specific workbook, you will need to upload the same workbook using your own portal account.