



Annex A: Delivering equality, diversity and inclusion at the OfS, 2018-22

What we set out to do

1. An inaugural equality and diversity statement, objectives, and set of principles¹ were approved by the OfS board in July 2018.² This statement contained our equality objectives and priorities for 2018-2022. It also constituted our fulfilment of the specific duties of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).
2. Objectives 1 to 5 described our priorities in terms of having regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, and the fostering of good relations between different people in respect of higher education providers and students. Objectives six to eight describe our internally-focused priorities and how we planned to support our colleagues to embed equality matters across the OfS.
3. An action plan for 2018-2022 was developed alongside the statement and objectives, which provided operational detail on how work was to be delivered. The action plan was updated annually; it gave transparent and clear information on progress against our equality objectives and priorities, and clearly articulated how this work fits within OfS's wider activities.
4. Since 2018 we have also developed and implemented our 'making inclusive decisions' (MIDs) process, the process we use to consider equality matters in our work. Considering equality matters through the MID process is one of the ways we record how we have had due regard to the PSED in our work: we normally expect a MID to be completed when planning significant projects or developing new policy. We have recently reviewed the MID process to improve its effectiveness across the OfS.

Assessing our progress and performance

5. This report summarises progress made on delivering our equality objectives during the 2018-22 period and includes the 2021-22 progress report. Annual reports on progress were submitted to the Board in 2018-19,³ 2019-20,⁴ and 2020-21.⁵ The following sections will briefly summarise delivery of the 2018-22 objectives: they are focused on highlights and key

¹ See [ofs-eandd-statement-and-objectives.pdf \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

² See [Board paper \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

³ See [\[Title\] \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ See [bd-2020-july-61-annual-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-report-2019-2020.pdf \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ See [Equality and Diversity Report 2020-21 \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

achievements which characterise our work in particular areas as well as drawing out particular activities and outcomes to note from the 2021-22 operating year.

6. We have delivered against the 2018-22 Equality and Diversity objectives and priorities. We have developed processes for meeting our regulatory and legal responsibilities, most notably through development and delivery of our access and participation plan cycle and through our work to regulate quality and standards. We have established robust and comprehensive evidence and insight into equality issues across the sector through our data dashboards, bank of effective practice examples and commissioned TASO and Uni Connect. We have also delivered projects in response to specific sector challenges: including, but not limited to, mental health, harassment and sexual misconduct, and coronavirus. The project work has served to highlight areas requiring increased focus, which have transitioned into wider policy areas – most notably in relation to mental health and tackling harassment and sexual misconduct.
7. We have established several committees who exist to oversee and further our regulatory work. We seek to have diverse representation across these committees whilst maintaining high standards and observing all legal obligations. We do this by trying to remove any barriers to applications to achieve a wider and more diverse recruitment pool. Work in this area has included targeted advertising, inclusion of text encouraging applicants from underrepresented groups to apply, and identifying relevant networks and other channels through which we can reach specific audiences.

Quality and standards

8. The mutually reinforcing relationship between quality and standards and equality of opportunity is fundamental to OfS's work, and our work during 2018-22 was characterised by establishment of this regulatory relationship. Through our regulation of quality we ensure that all students, whatever their background and characteristics, can have confidence that they will receive a high quality higher education and positive outcomes. Our regulation sets minimum requirements to protect all students from low quality courses and which enable us to act where we are concerned our requirements are not being met. At the same time, our regulation of access and participation enables us to take action to reduce gaps in equality of opportunity between students from underrepresented groups and other students, before, during and beyond their time in higher education.
9. We have undertaken a programme of consultation, including linked consultations in January 2022 on regulating student outcomes, the construction of indicators to show providers' performance and the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).⁶ Through these consultations we are setting out an approach to regulation that would set minimum expectations for all students and would enable us to act where any group of students is being left behind. Our proposed new approach to TEF would mean that providers will be incentivised to deliver excellent teaching and learning for all their groups of students and, if they do not, this will affect their ability to achieve the highest ratings. At the same time, we continue to take steps through our regulation of access and participation to reduce the gaps in equality of opportunity between students from underrepresented groups and other students, before, during and beyond their time in higher education. Our approach is designed to ensure that our

⁶ Available at [Changes to our approach - Office for Students](#)

regulation of quality and standards, and of equality of opportunity, are mutually reinforcing for the benefit of students.

10. In considering the equality impact of these new conditions, we concluded that interventions are expected to have a positive impact on students by securing minimum requirements for quality and standards for all student groups, while our broader approach to regulation means that we have regard to the impact of interventions on all student groups in deciding whether to take regulatory action.
11. We are currently recruiting for members of the TEF panel, which is the OfS committee that will take decisions about ratings under the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework scheme. We have sought to draw on experience from other OfS committee recruitment exercises mentioned above.

Case Study 1: Student Engagement

The OfS published its student engagement strategy in 2020, and a refresh in 2022 to account for the impact of coronavirus and to align with the OfS's new 2022-2025 strategy.⁷ The student engagement strategy emphasises the importance of engaging all students, including those whose voices are often unheard, in our regulation of the higher education sector. Our student panel advises our board and senior management team on what the OfS should prioritise and works with our student engagement team to shape and support the delivery of student engagement.⁸

As part of effective communication of our role and work to students, we have created student-facing guides on key areas of our work. This includes the role of the OfS,⁹ how to make notifications,¹⁰ and other strategic priorities.¹¹

Coronavirus pandemic

12. The coronavirus pandemic had both an immediate impact on current students – for example, differing levels of access to digital resources – and a longer-term impact through the effect of lockdown on learning for the most and least advantaged pupils, and the most and least prosperous parts of the country.
13. We undertook a significant portfolio of work in response: revising reporting requirements, enabling providers to refocus their funding to support groups of vulnerable students, and

⁷ See [Student engagement strategy - Office for Students](#)

⁸ See [Our student panel - Office for Students](#)

⁹ See [Students' union guide to the Office for Students](#)

¹⁰ See [Office for Students notifications - Office for Students](#)

¹¹ See [Student guide to tackling harassment, hate and sexual misconduct' \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

exploring both the short- and long-term impact of the pandemic through our monitoring of access and participation plans and sector-wide data.

14. We also worked with universities, colleges and other stakeholders to produce a series of briefing notes on the steps providers were taking to support their students during the coronavirus pandemic.¹² The notes did not represent regulatory advice or guidance – their focus was on sharing ideas and responses, and signposting to further information.
15. In November 2021 providers were asked to report on the pandemic’s impact on delivery of access and participation work, and we assessed information submitted by over 240 providers to understand the impact of these changes.¹³ There is a continued need to respond to the impact of coronavirus: greater calls on hardship funding, recognition of learning loss, increased demand for mental health services, and developments in digital learning and teaching.

Case Study 2: Responsive regulation

In July 2023 we imposed a time-limited ongoing condition of registration to protect the stability and integrity of the English higher education sector during the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic: Condition Z3: Temporary provisions for sector stability and integrity. This condition addressed providers’ offer-making practices for UK-domiciled students and certain advertising and marketing activities. More specifically, it identified unconditional offers in a range of circumstances as having a material negative effect on the stability and integrity of the English higher education sector. Making false or misleading statements about other higher education providers was also considered to have such an effect. Condition Z3 therefore prohibited this conduct.¹⁴

We considered equality matters in relation to this work, which concluded overall the amended condition would have a neutral impact on students with protected characteristics, and other vulnerable learners.¹⁵ Mitigation activity identified and implemented as part of this analysis was primarily focused on reducing Condition Z3’s scope to provide clarity and address risks, for example permitting offer-making practices that were designed to support access and participation (such as contextual offers) whilst expressly prohibiting others (such as ‘conditional unconditional’ offers that require an applicant to make a provider their first or only choice).

Case Study 3: Rapid and responsive funding: Student Space

¹² Available at [Briefing notes - Office for Students](#)

¹³ Available at [APP monitoring outcomes 2019-20 \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ See [equality-impact-assessment-condition-z3.pdf \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ See [equality-impact-assessment-condition-z3.pdf \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)

With the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, we funded the charity Student Minds to develop an online platform, Student Space, to provide expert information and advice to support students across England and Wales through the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁶

This online platform includes a range of educational and wellbeing materials on issues like online learning, making friends and socialising, managing loneliness and loss. It also signposts to health resources and support services available within higher education providers in England and Wales. Student Space also provides specific resources tailored to specific groups, including Black students, Muslim students, Punjabi students, trans students, and students affected by specific mental health difficulties.

Evaluation of the support provided by Student Space showed that the platform was a valuable extra resource for students' mental health, and offered a high quality, rapid response to a crisis when it was set up in 2020.¹⁷

Access and participation

16. Between 2018-22 we have developed an access and participation plan cycle, including development of a comprehensive underpinning dataset. As well as maintaining a focus on activities to support delivery against key performance targets, this work has responded to changes such as an increased focus on student mental health and wellbeing and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with the accompanying exacerbation of existing inequalities.
17. We have also built a comprehensive library of evidence to support our understanding of the challenges experienced by those with some protected characteristics or from under-represented groups.¹⁸ Qualitative insights are complemented by our datasets: the dashboard provides a sector-level picture of the differences in access and participation across the student lifecycle, as well as information at individual provider level to support understanding of progress on equality of student opportunity. This analytical work and datasets are critical to our effective regulation of access and participation and in enabling providers to understand their own performance.
18. As part of our work to secure and embed more effective evaluation in access and participation we invested in a new 'what works' centre, the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO). TASO conducts research and evaluation, grows evaluation capabilities and enables providers to make evidence-informed decisions about what access and participation interventions might work for their communities and students. Current activities cover four key themes: effectiveness of widening participation outreach, gaps in the student experience, what works for employment and employability and what works for mental health and disability. TASO have recently published a report outlining what works to tackle student mental health issues.¹⁹

¹⁶ See [Home \(studentspace.org.uk\)](https://studentspace.org.uk)

¹⁷ See [Evaluation \(studentspace.org.uk\)](https://studentspace.org.uk)

¹⁸ Available at [Effective practice in access and participation - Office for Students](#)

¹⁹ Available at [TASO launches new mental health report - TASO](#)

An independent mid-term evaluation of our TASO investment showed that it is well aligned with the needs of the sector and the OfS, with priority themes set to address the evidence gap in access and participation.²⁰

19. Uni Connect brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college. Phase three of the Uni Connect programme began in academic year 2021-22 (a transitional year) and will run through to the end of academic year 2024-25. From 2022-23, the programme will have a new focus on providing the infrastructure that supports attainment raising in schools and the programme's aims are to:
 - a. Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
 - b. Equip young people from underrepresented groups to make an informed choice about their options in relation to the full range of routes into and through higher education and to minimise the barriers they may face when choosing the option that will unlock their potential, including barriers relating to academic attainment.
 - c. Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage with higher education outreach, enable schools to engage with attainment-raising activity, and address outreach 'cold spots' for underrepresented groups.
 - d. Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.
20. An independent review of the impact of evidence submitted by Uni Connect was published in March 2022.²¹ Despite the impact of COVID, a high volume of good quality evidence was submitted, and positive long-, medium- and short-term impacts were identified.

Data analysis and measurement of performance

21. Our annual access and participation dataset provides an overview of patterns in access and participation across the student lifecycle at both sector and provider levels. This helps us to monitor the progress of universities and colleges towards delivering their plans and commitments. Our March 2022 summary of key findings from the data offers a useful snapshot of the key gaps in access, continuation and attainment at a sector level for different student

²⁰ See [Evaluating the delivery of the OfS investment in TASO \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](https://officeforstudents.org.uk)

²¹ Available at [Third independent review of evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships - Office for Students](#)

characteristics.²² Our key performance measures show a steady reduction in gaps across several identified measures relating to students' access, progression and outcomes.²³

- a. In 2020-21, there was a gap of 26.8 percentage points between the most and least represented groups; the overall participation gap has reduced steadily in recent years.
- b. In 2020-21, there was a gap of 18.5 percentage points between the most and least represented groups at high-tariff providers; the participation gap at higher-tariff providers has reduced steadily in recent years, and the participation ratio has continued to decline.
- c. For entrants in 2019-20, there was a difference of 3.7 percentage points between the non-continuation rates of the most and the least represented groups; the gap in non-continuation dropped from 4.5 percentage points in 2018-19 to 3.7 percentage points in 2019-20.
- d. In 2020-21, there was a difference of 17.4 percentage points between the proportion of white and black students getting a 1st or 2:1; the gap in degree outcomes has been falling but remains large.
- e. In 2020-21, there was a difference of 1.1 percentage points between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled students getting a 1st or 2:1; this gap has reduced every year since 2016-17.

22. As official statistics, our equality, diversity and student characteristics data present the proportion and numbers of students in higher education by age at entry, disability (broad and detailed), Participation of local areas (POLAR4), ethnicity (broad and detailed), sex, deprivation (Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles), eligibility for free school meals at Key Stage 4, gender identity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, parental higher education, care experience, Household Residual Income (HRI), estrangement, socioeconomic background, tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) and associations between characteristics of students (ABCS) access quintiles.²⁴

23. In Autumn 2022 we plan on expanding our equality, diversity and student characteristics data to include outcomes statistics such as progression rates, in addition to student numbers. Where the data allows, outcomes statistics will be produced for all the characteristics listed above, at various levels of study.

Case Study 4: Widening participation in postgraduate research

Persistent inequalities exist throughout higher education for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students. Some of the inequalities that are present – such as the current gap (2020-21) in degree outcomes (1st or 2:1) between white students and black students of 17.4

²² Available at [Findings from the data - Office for Students](#)

²³ Available at [Participation performance measures - Office for Students](#)

²⁴ These are not all protected characteristics, but represent a range of indicators relating to EDI characteristics.

percentage points – are likely to contribute to the underrepresentation of black, Asian and minority ethnic students in postgraduate research (PGR) students.²⁵

To address this gap, working in partnership with Research England (RE) the OfS launched a joint funding competition for project proposals to improve access and participation for BAME groups in PGR study in the English higher education sector.²⁶ In November 2021 we awarded nearly £8 million in funding to support thirteen projects that will attempt to tackle persistent inequalities that create barriers for BAME students to access and take part in PGR study.

We have appointed Kings College London and the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) to evaluate how effective the overall programme and projects are at achieving their aims and priorities. An expert panel and steering group were also appointed via competitive process to help the programme achieve its aims. The expert panel was appointed to support final funding decisions, and the steering group will guide and support the programme in the long term.

Case Study 5: Disabled Students Commission

The Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) is an independent and strategic group, funded by the OfS and managed by Advance HE, that advises, informs and influences higher education providers to improve support for disabled students.²⁷ The DSC identifies and promotes approaches which work well for disabled students, such as more inclusive curricula, restructuring support for students, and enhancing learning and teaching environments.

It publishes an annual report detailing the DSC's achievements over the past year, including the impact of the advice and guidance that has been published and a rapid review of evidence from the sector relating to disabled students' experiences.²⁸ The DSC was an influential advocate for disabled students' rights and needs during the coronavirus pandemic, producing guidance notes aimed at universities and colleges to highlight the support required both during and after periods of lockdown and remote learning.²⁹

²⁵ The OfS has published equality and diversity data that can be filtered by postgraduate levels of study: see www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/equality-and-diversity/equality-and-diversity-data/.

²⁶ See [Funding programme to improve access and participation for black, Asian and minority ethnic students in postgraduate research - Office for Students](#)

²⁷ See [Disabled Students' Commission - Office for Students](#)

²⁸ Available at [Disabled Students' Commission | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#)

²⁹ Available at [Disabled Students' Commission | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#)

Case Study 6: Rich and comprehensive data

The OfS established a data strategy which emphasises the importance of comprehensive and timely data to support our regulatory responsibilities.³⁰ We produce data-driven analysis of key trends in higher education through our insight briefs,³¹ a variety of data dashboards, and insight into key sector elements. As well as providing a rich insight into the sector, this data also helps us to monitor the progress of universities and colleges towards delivering their access and participation plans and commitments.

We updated our data quality framework in November 2020 to allow us to publish more data using student characteristics.³² The framework allows us to objectively look for new sources of data and assess their quality and whether we can consider them useable. It was through the framework that we have been able to publish difference in outcomes by additional protected characteristics such as sexual orientation.³³

Student mental health

24. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the mental health and wellbeing of students. The number of students declaring a mental health condition has increased significantly in the past ten years, with many more students expected to have not declared their condition to their university or college.³⁴ The proportion of undergraduate entrants reporting a mental health condition has risen by 3.7 percentage points since 2010-11, from 0.7 per cent to 4.4 per cent in 2020-21.³⁵ This rate of increase is more than any other disability type.
25. Whilst the OfS does not impose regulatory requirements in relation to providers' mental health support for students, over the past four years we have undertaken a substantial programme of work to support an effective response across the higher education sector. We have carried out work in a range of areas:
 - a. The OfS's challenge and funding competition programmes have leveraged over £20 million of funding, enabling universities, colleges and partners across the country to develop collaborative and innovative projects to improve student mental health outcomes.³⁶ We have commissioned independent evaluations of these two funding

³⁰ See [Office for Students data strategy 2018 to 2021 - Office for Students](#)

³¹ Available at [Data and analysis - Office for Students](#)

³² Available at [Annex A - Differences in student outcomes – further characteristics \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

³³ Available at [Annex E - Differences in student outcomes – further characteristics \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

³⁴ Available at <https://www.ucas.com/file/513961/download?token=wAaKRniC>

³⁵ Available at [Equality, diversity and student characteristics data \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#)

³⁶ See [What we're doing - Office for Students](#)

competitions to understand the impact of these programmes, and share the practice and lessons learned with the sector.

- b. We have provided funding and support to specialist organisations to deliver specific projects. For example, Student Minds has developed a University Mental Health Charter, which provides a set of evidence-informed principles to support universities to adopt a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing.³⁷ Student Minds has also developed Student Space (see case study 3), an online platform to support students' mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.

26. We have produced and published a range of resources to support universities and colleges in the development of their work to in student mental health, including:

- a. An insight brief and accompanying analysis exploring the differential outcomes for students with a declared mental health condition, with other characteristics,³⁸
- b. A mental health briefing note looking at the ways universities and colleges supported the mental health needs of their students during the coronavirus pandemic and signposting to sources of advice,

27. Case studies demonstrating some of the ways universities and colleges support the mental health needs of their students during the coronavirus pandemic. We have engaged with and supported work carried out by others in the sector, including joining UUK's Mental Health in HE Advisory Group which is shaping and supporting UUK's programme of work to improve mental health in universities.

28. Since 2021, key elements of work have included:

- a. Funding awarded to support the Student Minds online platform until the end of July 2022. We have commissioned an external consultant to conduct a strategic review of the current programme to inform future monitoring and evaluation activity.
- b. We have commissioned TASO to lead on the delivery of a national programme to identify and evaluate existing evidence of what is working to support student mental health in the English higher education sector, and then to mobilise this evidence effectively.³⁹ A key output, due to be published in summer 2023, will be an online hub of evaluated mental health activity.

³⁷ See <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html>

³⁸ See [Mental health: Are all students being properly supported? - Office for Students](#)

³⁹ See [TASO to lead work to develop 'what works' resources of student mental health support - Office for Students](#)

- c. We have funded 10 projects through the Mental Health Challenge Competition.⁴⁰ An interim evaluation report,⁴¹ published in August 2021, demonstrated the effectiveness of the programme in promoting early interventions, support and transitions. A final report will be published in autumn 2022.
- d. In October 2020 we launched the Mental Health Funding Competition, securing funding from the Department for Health and Social Care (£1 million) and Department for Education (£2 million) for 18 projects to pilot innovative and intersectional approaches to targeting student mental health support.⁴² The successful projects were announced in August 2021,⁴³ with over £3 million in co-investment from universities, colleges and partner organisations.

29. Suicide prevention remains a priority for universities and colleges and for the OfS. In September 2021 we published a briefing exploring the issue, based on the advice from the Suicide Safer Universities guidance, bringing together a range of resources, and presenting examples from providers detailing how they have developed their approaches to suicide prevention.⁴⁴

Harassment and sexual misconduct

30. We know that harassment and sexual misconduct is a significant issue in higher education. Full-time students are more likely to experience sexual assault and domestic abuse than those in any other occupational group,⁴⁵ and nearly a quarter of ethnic minority students experience racial harassment on campus.⁴⁶ This is also an area of student and wider public interest. There is particular attention on sexual misconduct and violence against women following the murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa and the thousands of testimonies from victim-survivors of sexual misconduct in education on the website 'Everyone's Invited'. The Black Lives Matter movement has led to a heightened awareness of the prevalence and impact of racial harassment. This has made combatting harassment and sexual misconduct an increasing priority for the OfS, students and providers.

⁴⁰ Available at [Improving mental health outcomes - Office for Students](#)

⁴¹ See [Evaluation of the Mental Health Challenge Competition: Interim report to the Office for Students - Office for Students](#)

⁴² See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/funding-for-providers/mental-health-funding-competition-using-innovation-and-intersectional-approaches/.

⁴³ See [Mental Health Funding Competition: Using innovation and intersectional approaches to target mental health support for students - Office for Students](#)

⁴⁴ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/suicide-prevention/.

⁴⁵ Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/natureofsexualassaultbyraporpenetrationenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>

⁴⁶ Available at <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/inquiries-and-investigations/racial-harassment-higher-education-our-inquiry>

31. Our work in this area has focused on three areas

- a. Providing a consistent set of standards through our statement of expectations (published in April 2021) to support universities and colleges to develop and implement effective systems, policies and processes to prevent and respond to incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct.⁴⁷
- b. Working with a range of partners to develop and share sector-wide effective practice, guidance and resources.⁴⁸
- c. Providing funding for higher education providers to develop practical and innovative approaches and solutions. Our catalyst student safeguarding programme awarded 4.7million over 119 projects between 2017 and 2019 to incentivise change and encourage solutions to ensure the best possible outcomes for students: evaluation by Advance HE in 2020 showed the positive impact of this work across the sector.⁴⁹

32. Responding to guidance from the former Secretary of State, in November 2021 we drew up a list of OfS-registered higher education providers that have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism, having validated our understanding by contact with providers.⁵⁰ The list was published alongside case studies and resources to support providers in tackling antisemitism. In January 2022 we joined a summit convened by the Minister and the Secretary of State on antisemitism in the sector, and drew attention to the fact that our statement of expectations extends to antisemitic harassment.

Case Study 7: Statement of expectations

The statement of expectations provides a framework for providers to address all forms of harassment and sexual misconduct.⁵¹ It was developed through engagement with sector and specialist groups, and drawing from existing evidence and initiatives from across the higher education sector including:

- a) Evidence set out in 'Changing the Culture' published by Universities UK in 2016, 2018 and 2019, as well as its recent work on tackling racial harassment in higher education
- b) Evaluation conducted by AdvanceHE of the OfS's 119 Safeguarding Catalyst projects
- c) Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) inquiry into racial harassment in higher education, published in October 2019

⁴⁷ See [Statement of expectations - Office for Students](#)

⁴⁸ See [Resources for higher education providers - Office for Students](#)

⁴⁹ See [Evaluation - Office for Students](#)

⁵⁰ Available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/tackling-antisemitism/ and <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/>.

⁵¹ See [Statement of expectations - Office for Students](#)

d) Work with higher education providers and consideration of notifications we have received about individual registered providers

e) Academic research and practice

The statement was published in April 2021. We are currently evaluating how universities and colleges have responded to its publication, working with students and students' unions to understand if the statement has made things better for them. We have appointed SUMs Consulting to evaluate the impact of the statement and how it has driven change. We will consider options for connecting the statement directly to our conditions of registration if the evaluation suggests insufficient progress has been made.

Progression outcomes

33. We are aware that some students with protected characteristics (relating to disability,⁵² ethnicity,⁵³ age⁵⁴) and those who come from underrepresented groups have, historically, experienced outcomes that are worse than their peers who do not share those characteristics.⁵⁵ We have set out above the work we have done through our quality and standards regulation to deliver our commitment to ensuring that all students benefit from positive outcomes from their higher education. We have also delivered work directed towards the chances of all students to progress into further study or professional or managerial employment.
34. Our work in this area has focused on developing insight and understanding of skills gaps and challenges, and then delivering work to address those gaps. Insight briefings on how geographical disparities affect students and graduates,⁵⁶ mature students,⁵⁷ and degree apprenticeships,⁵⁸ provide detailed insight into the experiences of particular groups, as does data such as Projected completion and employment from entrant data (Proceed).⁵⁹
35. We also manage initiatives aimed at encouraging providers to deliver skills development and opportunities that develop the types of skills that will enable all graduates to gain meaningful employment throughout their working lives, and which are in line with government priorities and broader industrial needs. This includes funding postgraduate conversion courses in data science and artificial intelligence, developing and delivering the higher education short course

⁵² See [How do student outcomes vary by disability status? - Office for Students](#)

⁵³ See [How do student outcomes vary by ethnicity? - Office for Students](#)

⁵⁴ See [How do student outcomes vary by age? - Office for Students](#)

⁵⁵ Available at [Differences in student outcomes - Office for Students](#)

⁵⁶ See <https://officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/place-matters-inequality-employment-and-the-role-of-higher-education/>

⁵⁷ See <https://officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/improving-opportunity-and-choice-for-mature-students/>

⁵⁸ See <https://officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/degree-apprenticeships-a-viable-alternative/>

⁵⁹ See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/proceed-updated-methodology-and-results/.

trial ahead of the anticipated roll out of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE),⁶⁰ a £5.6 million portfolio of support for improving outcomes for local graduates,⁶¹ and ongoing support for degree apprenticeships,⁶² and the Institute of Coding.⁶³ This work to facilitate more choice, opportunity and flexibility for all students across the sector will increase the accessibility of higher education for all students regardless of background.

36. The OfS and Research England are providing £10 million of funding to 20 higher education providers to explore the impact of student involvement in knowledge exchange.⁶⁴ This will help us gather evidence on the student benefits of knowledge exchange, share good practice across the sector, and improve future knowledge exchange activities.

37. We are also conducting a range of work to support national skills development. 22 universities and colleges have been awarded a total of £2 million of funding to develop short courses in higher education. These courses are designed to enable flexible learning and to help students develop skills needed by employers and the economy. These courses form part of a pathway towards the delivery of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE), with pilot short courses to run from the 2022-23 academic year. Learning from the programme will help inform future LLE policy development.

Case Study 8: Postgraduate conversion courses in data science and AI

In April 2020, following investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, we announced £13.5 million funding through to March 2023 to support 28 providers (including 11 as part of an Institute of Coding consortium) to develop postgraduate conversion courses in artificial intelligence and data science. £10 million of this funding will provide 1,000 scholarships worth £10,000 each to students from groups traditionally underrepresented on these courses, with a particular focus on black students, women and disabled students. The projects are supported by a national branding and marketing campaign to build awareness of the opportunities among these groups.

Data from June 2021 showed that nearly half (46 per cent) of the total UK students are women, compared with 27 per cent on computing postgraduate taught masters courses previously 23 per cent are black students (12 per cent) and 20 per cent are disabled (16 per cent).⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See [Higher education short course trial - Office for Students](#)

⁶¹ See [Improving outcomes for local graduates - Office for Students](#)

⁶² Available at [Degree apprenticeships | Get the right skills for you - Office for Students](#)

⁶³ Available at [Institute of Coding - Office for Students](#)

⁶⁴ See [Knowledge exchange funding competition - Office for Students](#)

⁶⁵ See [New analysis shows big boost in numbers of women enrolling on AI and data science courses - Office for Students](#)

Case Study 9: Improving outcomes for local graduates

In 2019 we awarded £5.6 million to 16 projects based in universities and colleges across England to boost opportunities for graduates who seek work close to home, with projects running from May 2019 – September 2022. These projects are focused on developing employment opportunities through work-related training, the development of links with local employers, supporting the transition into graduate employment, and infrastructure.

The projects are addressing one or more of the following priorities:

- a) improving employment outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic students and those with disabilities
- b) improving graduate outcomes for mature students or part-time students who plan to remain in their local area for study and post-study work
- c) addressing place-based skills gaps by ensuring graduates are well prepared to succeed in local industries.

We are working with the projects to identify and share effective practice.

38. Work over the previous four years represents considerable impact and progress. However, despite these achievements gaps remain – across access, participation and outcomes. This work provides solid foundations on which to build the next stage of the OfS's work.