

# Access and Participation plan “variations”

JIM DICKINSON | WONKHE SUs



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SU<sub>s</sub>



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# The what now

Office for  
Students

OfS

- Late last year when it announced the new Director for Fair Access and Participation, Michelle Donelan said there were to be two new focuses – raising attainment in schools, and getting on as well as getting in.
- John Blake was announced and has been “touring the studios” focussed on the schools engagement priority.
- OfS has now formally written to universities “inviting” (requiring, demanding) that they all apply to “vary” their Access and Participation Plans.
- As well as doing as OfS asks, this could present some opportunities to make current plans better from several perspectives.
- APPs were supposed to last from 2020-21 to 2024-25...



# The headlines...

- 15 March – reduced monitoring and no student submission
- New letter dropped 12<sup>th</sup> April “asking you to request variations to your plan for the 2023-24 academic year to address these priorities”
- By 31 July 2022 providers will need to have uploaded to the OfS portal:
  - an “accessible plan summary”
  - the varied access and participation plan
  - amended variations template (if the uni is making changes to its targets or investment plan if they represent a significant departure from the existing plan)

12 April 2022

Dear Accountable Officer

**For action: Variations to access and participation plans for 2023-24**

Following my appointment at the start of this year as Director for Fair Access and Participation, I have enjoyed getting to know staff, students and other colleagues from across the sector. In February this year, and in my letter to you of 15 March 2022 about access and participation monitoring of 2020-21 plans, I set out my priorities for access and participation for the next four years. These are listed again in Annex A to this letter.

I am writing now to all providers with an access and participation plan asking you to request variations to your plan for the 2023-24 academic year to address these priorities. The deadline for submitting your request is **31 July 2022**.

**What we are asking you to do**

We are asking you to request variations to your current access and participation plan to address the four priorities set out in paragraph 5 of Annex A to this letter. By 31 July 2022 you will need to have uploaded to the OfS portal, in relation to your plan for academic year 2023-24:

- an accessible plan summary
- your varied access and participation plan
- an amended variations template (if you are making changes to your targets and investment plan or changes to your fee levels if they represent a significant departure from your existing plan).

When you have done this, please email [app\\_process@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:app_process@officeforstudents.org.uk), also by 31 July, outlining and explaining the changes you have requested.

**How to submit a variation request**

The annexes to this letter explain how to prepare and submit your variation request:

- Annex A contains information on the new priorities and how we expect you may respond to them in your request to vary your access and participation plan.
- Annex B contains guidance on the new access and participation plan summary we are asking all providers to complete, including a template and exemplar of a fictional completed template. The plan summary should contain information from your existing plan and your variation request.
- Annex C explains how to submit your request to vary your plan through the OfS portal.

**Timescales**

From **1 May 2022** you will be able to access a pre-populated variations template containing your target and investment plan and fee information from the OfS portal. You will also find a link to the plan summary template.

The deadline for uploading your variation request to the OfS portal is **31 July 2022**, although we would encourage you to submit it earlier than this if you can.

We will aim to assess, review and consider variation requests within 12 weeks following submission.

If you have any questions about the information in this letter and annexes, please contact [app.providerregulation@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:app.providerregulation@officeforstudents.org.uk).

Yours sincerely

John Blake  
Director for Fair Access and Participation

# How might this go?

- There's a WP working group meeting in late May. It's an hour. A sabb sits on it. It will sign off work already done that only addresses the specific things a provider has been told to address.
- You meet early doors to influence changes, arguing on issues like student financial support, SU delivery of aspects of the plan, student involvement in evaluation, B3/TEF issues like belonging, and anything you recommended in your APP evaluation last year.



# What's being asked?

## Four new priorities:

- **Priority A:** Make access and participation plans more accessible in a way that prospective and current students, their parents and other stakeholders can easily understand.
- **Priority B:** Develop, enhance and expand their partnerships with schools and other local and national organisations, to help raise the pre-16 attainment of young people from underrepresented groups across England.
- **Priority C:** Set out how access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups leads to successful participation on high quality courses and good graduate outcomes.
- **Priority D:** Seek to develop more diverse pathways into and through higher education through expansion of flexible Level 4 and 5 courses and degree apprenticeships.



# And underpinning that

- An expectation that providers will significantly increase the volume and quality of evaluation across their access and participation activity.
- It is vital that the sector generates and publishes rigorous and objective evidence of what works and what does not work in raising school attainment, improving access to and student success in higher education, and securing good graduate outcomes.
- As providers further develop their evaluation strategies they should consider how they intend recording, publishing and sharing their evaluation activity and findings, working with the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) and others, to maximise understanding of what works (and what does not) across the sector.





# This is “phase two” ...



...but time is of the essence...

- Phase one: monitoring of access and participation plans for the academic year 2020-21.
- Phase two: 2022 calendar year, variations to take effect in the 2023-24 academic year.
  - During spring and summer 2022, the OfS will work with providers, schools, students, third sector organisations and other bodies to develop our proposed approach to full implementation of the access and participation reforms from 2023 onwards, including renegotiation of all providers' access and participation plans to cover the period 2024-25 to 2027-28.
- Phase three: During autumn 2022, delivery of the full suite of reforms to access and participation, including the re-focusing of access and participation plans. February 2023, revised Regulatory notice 1 setting out expectations for new access and participation plans from all providers to cover the four year period 2024-25 to 2027-28.

# What's not there

- Anything explicit on extra curricular
- Two frames:
  - Its role in supporting the outcomes that are measured
  - Its role in supporting better outcomes generally like social capital, confidence etc
  - Growing evidence base – but message not yet “through” to OfS
  - Lots of opportunities to meet JB, interact, lobby, write, etc



# A: Accessible access and participation plans

## A new summary!

- What an access and participation plan is and a link to the provider's full access and participation plan.
- Key points – summarising contextual information, key challenges and the main areas of focus in the access and participation plan.
- Fees charged – setting out maximum fees for full-time and part-time students and including a link where readers can find further fee information.
- Financial help available – setting out any financial support available to students and the eligibility criteria.
- Information for students – describing how information on fees and financial support is made available to students.
- The aims – setting out the main focus of access and participation work, aims and measurable objectives in the access and participation plan.
- Action being taken to achieve aims – summarising the key strategic measures being taken to achieve strategic aims, objectives and targets set out in the access and participation plan. Student participation – setting out how students have and will be involved in the planning, monitoring, evaluation and delivery of access and participation work.
- Evaluation – setting out how the work is evidence-informed and how activities will be evaluated for impact on aims and objectives.
- Contact details for readers who want to make contact for further information





# But also...

- Students, parents or others with an interest in equal opportunities may have little or no knowledge of access and participation or the regulations which govern it. The style and tone of the summary should be accessible, clear and simple, and should not assume what the reader will know.
- Obviously the next thing will be for a draft to be tested on... students! Especially beneficiary groups in the plan!
- This ought to be something the union is supported/funded to do?





Use	Rather than
start	commence
use	utilise
show	demonstrate
main	predominant
most	the majority of
the main way to	the primary means of
we discussed	we had a discussion
we must	it is a requirement that we
concluded	came to the conclusion
grow	grow in size
indicates	indicative of
based on	on the basis of

Acronym	Our suggestions
APP	We suggest you avoid using 'APP'. Either spell out 'access and participation plan' or refer to 'our plan' or 'the plan'.
'POLAR' or 'POLAR quintiles' or 'POLAR Q1'	This is a statistical measure to inform access and participation policy. It may not mean very much to a general reader. Explain that it is a measure which classifies local areas into five groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of young people who enter higher education.
IMD	As with POLAR, don't assume readers will know what this is. Spell out 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' and explain that it measures relative deprivation for small areas.
FSM	Spell out that this refers to 'free school meals' and that it is used as a measure of deprivation.
HEI	We suggest you avoid this acronym and the term 'higher education institution'. Try to use more commonly used terms like 'university', 'college' or 'professional school'.
FEC	Avoid this acronym and avoid the term 'further education college'. Use the term 'college'.
UG	Use 'undergraduate'.

Acronym	Our suggestions
PG	Use 'postgraduate'.
FT	Use 'full-time'.
PT	Use 'part-time'.
BAME	Research by the Race Disparity Unit suggested the acronyms BAME and BME were not well understood. Universities and colleges will have their own style guides, but we encourage you to refer to specific ethnic groups instead (e.g. 'Black', 'West Indian', 'Chinese', 'Asian').
TASO	Don't assume that readers will know what TASO is or means. Explain that it is an independent hub for higher education professionals to access research, toolkits and evaluation guidance to eliminate equality gaps.
TEF	Explain that the TEF is a national exercise to assess excellence in higher education teaching.

### Examples of jargon and bureaucracy

We have drawn out, by way of example, a list of terms and titles which you should either avoid or explain in the summary:

- 'Theory of change'
- 'deficit model'
- 'Student Protection Plan'
- 'monitoring provider impact reports'
- 'Programme and Evaluation Design Framework'
- 'Academic Board'
- 'HE Student Engagement Policy'
- 'College Student Council'
- 'Corporation board'
- 'Access and Participation Committee'

## Priority 2: Partnerships with schools to raise attainment

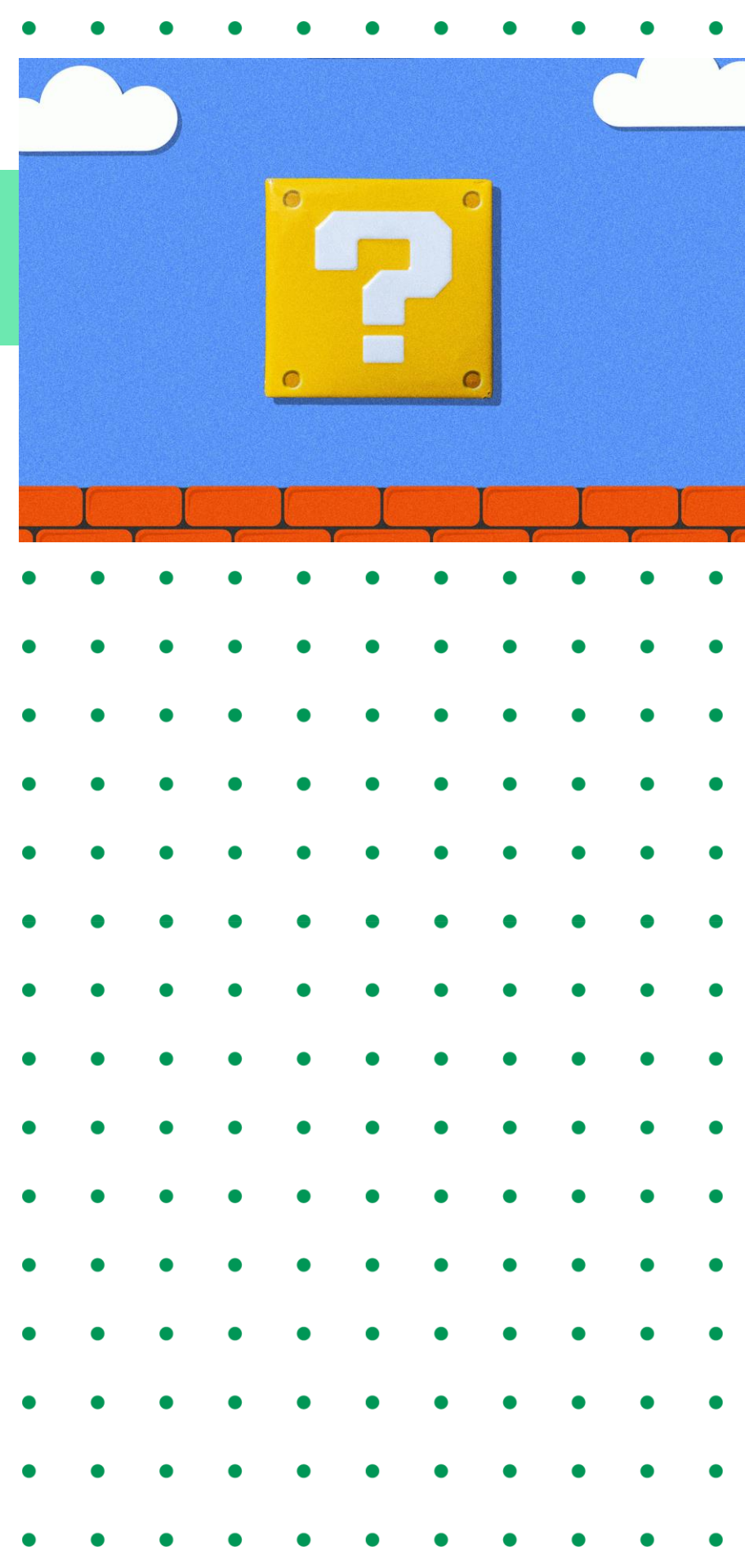
- The nature of the engagement providers have with schools will likely be diverse and the OfS does not intend prescribing what higher education/school relationships should look like or what type of activity should be delivered.
- However, providers will be expected to set out how the activity they describe will contribute to raising attainment in schools. Some providers' plans already include information on how they work with schools, particularly in the delivery of outreach. These providers might therefore consider how their existing relationships would be developed and enhanced to more explicitly deliver raising attainment activity as well as how they might expand the number of schools they partner with.
- Other providers may be engaging with schools but have not included this activity in their plans because their main equality of opportunity challenges are in the student success and progression stages of the lifecycle rather than in access. These providers should therefore consider submitting a variation that details the work they are currently undertaking and, again, how they may enhance and expand what they do to further deliver against this priority.
- All providers should consider how they can work collaboratively, including through the Uni Connect partnerships.





# Schools?

- Is there a volunteering (or student staff) project in this that SU could lead or be involved in – maybe with tutoring?
- Could a group of SUs collaborate as part of wider collaboration efforts?
- Could academic societies play a role around some subject areas?



## Access to higher education leads to successful participation

- This is the “getting on” bit
- The OfS will ensure that its regulation of access and participation and quality and standards is mutually reinforcing. Our future approach to access and participation plans will complement our approach to regulating student outcomes, the Teaching Excellence Framework and constructing student outcome and experience indicators (currently subject to consultation).
- We will set out how this interplay between access and participation and quality should be reflected in access and participation plans from 2024-25.
- However, providers are encouraged, as part of the variation request they submit, to set out how they ensure that their students from underrepresented groups are supported to successfully participate on their courses and achieve good quality outcomes.





# Getting on

- Could ignore that, but
- B3 metrics?
- TEF metrics?
  - Getting to Y2 – belonging
  - Completing – confidence
  - Getting a job – skills
- Very unwise to leave until 2024
- B3 needs an excuse and plan, TEF needs a plan



# And so...

- A smart university already looking at B3 and the TEF will be thinking about variations to the APP that show the work it will intensify/prioritise on students getting on as well as getting on
- A smart university will analyse its target WP groups and ask – when they get in, do they get on?
- A smart SU will be central to the process of involving those students and delivering projects that deliver their belonging, confidence and skills



# Example...

- Imagine your nursing school delivers a lot of WP and mature students – but also has a high attrition rate
- The SU could be proposing a project that is focussed on belonging, find and fix of O&M issues, and placement support
- Establishes a baseline on perceptions now (social activity, loneliness, confidence to raise a complaint) and pledges to turn it around



# Example...

- University analysis shows that WP students – esp those from low income backgrounds – fail at the final hurdle. Why?
- SU proposes a new buddy scheme focussed on recruiting and training recent and new graduates who will support final year students with completion, job hunting and PG study choices





# Getting on

- Getting hold of the data is key – how is the university doing against the current plan? Where are the weaknesses? What could help?
- Convening some creativity and student-led interventions might be good for the SU and actually good for the students involved!



## D: Develop more flexible and diverse provision

- Anything that isn't three-year, full-time, on – campus degree programmes
  - Degree apprenticeships?
  - Level 4 and 5 quals?
  - Accelerated degrees?
- Intervening on belonging, confidence and skills but in ways that are not “get them to come to freshers fair” is key



# Student financial support

- Moderately out of fashion
- Suddenly very important
- For example: The £1,000 Fibchester bursary
- What if the APP offered it to any family earning under £15k – but neither the £15k nor the £1,000 was uprated in the plan for inflation
- Suddenly inflation and fiscal drag matters! Now not just in 2023!
- See briefing and blog on the site





# Loops back to...

- You need to ensure that students are active partners in developing, implementing and evaluating your access, success and progression work.
- Providers are expected to demonstrate that the methods by which they evaluate the impact of their access, success and progression activities and financial support are appropriately robust and focused on impact in terms of demonstrable changes in behaviour (such as improved access, continuation, attainment, progression to postgraduate study and graduate employment) rather than, for example, solely gathering opinions from students.





# Involvement...

- You must include details of the following in your access and participation plan:
  - how you have provided your students with the opportunity to express their views about the content of your plan before it was submitted for approval and what steps you took as a result
  - how you will involve students in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the access and participation plan
  - how you will ensure that students from a range of backgrounds are included in your consultation on and delivery of your plan.
- It is important that students have meaningful and informative opportunities to feed into your plan. We would normally expect you to collaborate with your student union or student representatives, though we recognise there are other ways of engaging with your students.
- We encourage student unions and student representatives to comment on their consultation and involvement in the provider's access and participation work.

# And so you could be arguing for

- Rapid and deep understanding over the financial situation facing students
- Ways the SU could convene or facilitate some of the “getting on” work if supported through £££ and data
- Ways the SU should be supported to facilitate evaluation and input work (again if supported through £££ and data)

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