

What is OfS and why does it matter?

The Office for Students and its role in English Higher Education

JIM DICKINSON, WONKHE SUs

BEN HUNT, STUDENT ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, OFS



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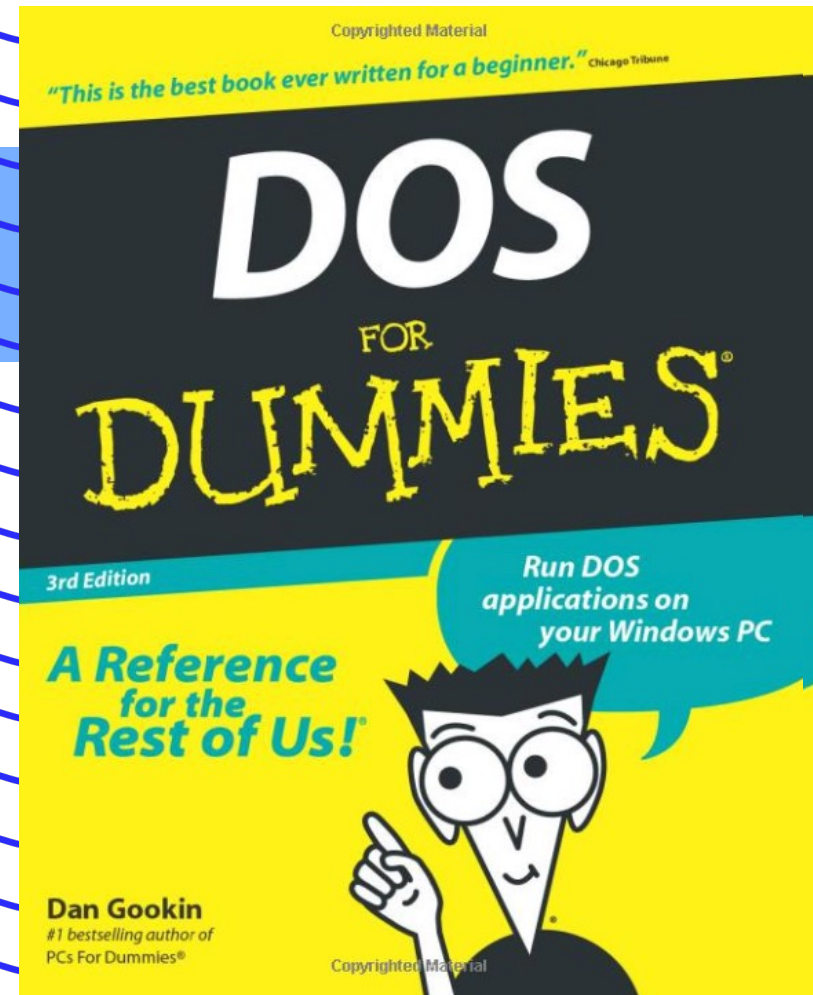
In the before times

- A funding council called HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) that exerted influence over universities by distributing funding
- A shift to (almost) full funding of teaching at universities directly by fees (vouchers) meant that looked out of date and ineffective
- Ongoing concerns about “provider capture” and need to respond to student and public concerns about quality of teaching, treatment of students, etc
- A new regulator is born via the Higher Education and Research Act 2017



The basics

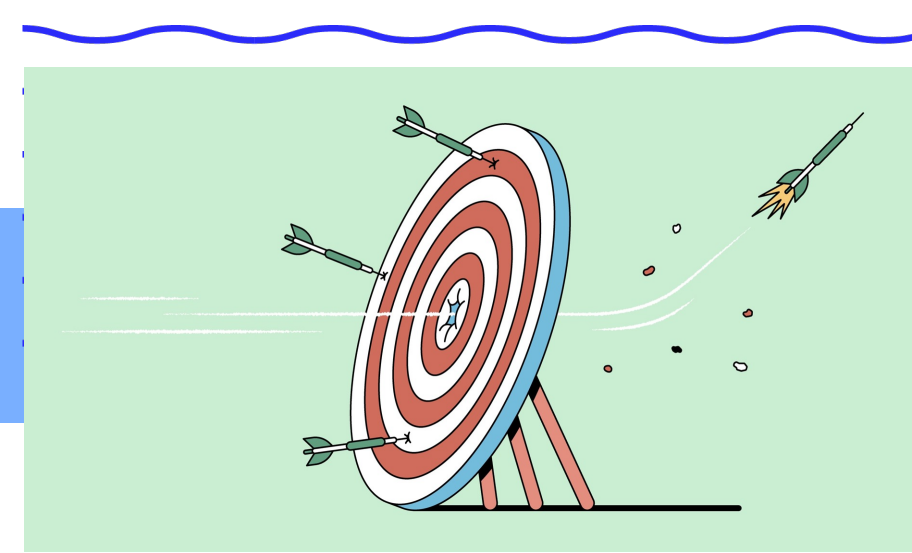
- The regulator for higher education in England.
- Aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.
- This includes prospective and current students who are:
 - undergraduates or postgraduates
 - UK-based or international
 - students studying full-time or part-time
 - those based on campus or learning at a distance.
- Not part of central government, but an independent public body that reports to Parliament through the Department for Education.



Aims...

Make sure that students:

- are helped to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education
- receive a high-quality academic experience
- have their interests protected while they study
- can progress to employment or further study, with qualifications that hold their value over time
- receive value for money.



Activities

- It regulates over 400 universities, colleges and other higher education providers, ensuring that each of them is meeting their obligations to students.
- This includes maintaining high quality teaching and ensuring the rights of students are protected.
- Providers must meet minimum requirements – what it calls “conditions of registration” – to register and stay registered with it.
- Its approach to regulation focuses on two areas of work:
 - quality and standards
 - equality of opportunity.
 - It also ensures that every university and college has effective governance arrangements in place.



It doesn't do...

Student accommodation

It does not regulate student housing and accommodation, whether this accommodation is owned by a university or college or is privately owned.

Research funding

Research funding is managed by UKRI

Admissions decisions

Individual decisions on whether to accept or decline applicants to higher education are made by the university or college an applicant has applied to.

Tuition fees

Decisions about the levels of student loans and finance are made by the Department for Education (DfE).

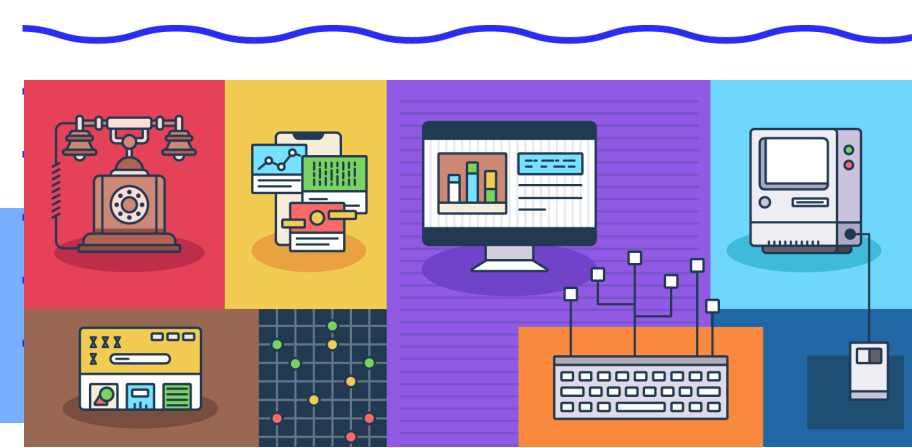


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Information

Useful for making choices in a market and holding providers to account

- runs Discover Uni - the official, authoritative source of information and guidance on higher education in the UK
- commissioning the National Student Survey, which collects the views of more than 450,000 students about their university or college and their course
- manages the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), which rates universities and colleges on how they provide value.
- working with the Higher Education Statistics Agency to publish information such as outcomes and employer needs



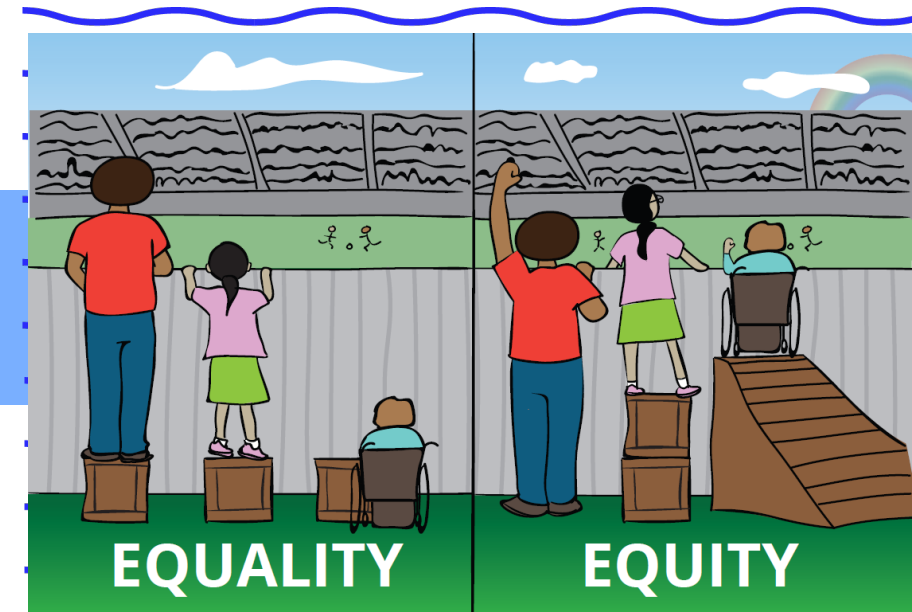
How it regulates

- It has a regulatory framework setting out conditions that providers have to meet to stay on the register of providers
- It takes a 'risk-based' approach to regulation, which means it focuses its attention on those universities or colleges that are most likely to breach the conditions of registration.
- For example, if your university is not making expected progress with the targets and commitments in its approved access and participation plan, it may consider further regulatory engagement or intervention.
- It collects information from the universities and colleges it regulates. This includes routine data collections on financial performance and what graduates do after they finish their course.
- It may also request information about a specific issue from a provider, or a student might inform it of an issue using our notifications process.
- If a breach of a condition is identified, OfS will consider the use of formal sanctions – monetary penalties, suspension, or deregistration.
- The regulatory framework provides a detailed account of our approach to regulation.



Equality of opportunity

- All students, from all backgrounds with the ability to study, should be supported to access, succeed and progress in higher education.
- Access to higher education is different for different student groups. Some students are less likely to achieve the qualifications they need to study higher education.
- There have also been inequalities between groups of students in higher education. Black students have, for example, on average been awarded fewer first-class degrees than their white counterparts.

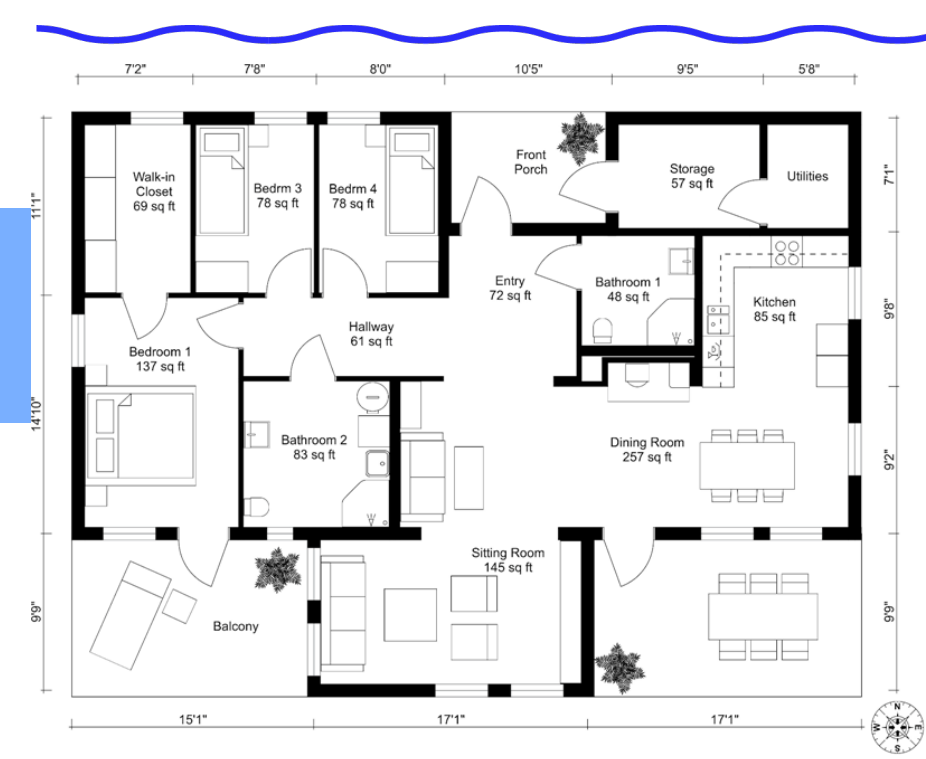


Access and participation

- The universities or colleges it regulates have to have an access and participation plan (or statement).
- Access and participation plans (APPs) set out how universities and colleges will help students from underrepresented groups to access university or college, have a good experience, get a good degree, and progress onto further study or graduate employment.
- This plan sets out targets for how students from underrepresented groups are supported to apply to and secure a place at a particular university, participate in their education, and go onto a fulfilling career when they graduate.

The plan covers:

- how students from underrepresented groups can access a particular university or college
- how a particular university or college supports students from underrepresented groups to have a positive experience while they study
- how a university or college supports students from underrepresented groups to progress to have a good career and enter employment.



Quality and standards

- Baseline: All providers and courses have to meet minimum definitions of quality and standards both for the provision itself and the outcomes generated
- The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework – the TEF – was introduced to encourage teaching excellence in higher education beyond the baseline.
- To receive a TEF award, UK universities and colleges must first meet the existing quality requirements. The TEF measures excellence beyond these requirements.
- OfS also protects students if their course, faculty or whole university or college closes. To do this it makes sure that every university or college it regulates has a student protection plan.
- OfS also checks that there are good governance arrangements in place for a university or college so that it can continue to operate effectively and support students' learning.
- And OfS ensures that universities or colleges comply with consumer law, which protects students' rights.

OfS listens to students

- Appoints a student representative to its main board
- Has a permanent student panel
- Seeks the input of students' unions and individual students
- Students involved in the TEF
- Liaises with NUS
- Surveys
- Notifications process



And there's more...

- Harassment and sexual misconduct
- Grade inflation
- UniConnect
- Prevent
- Skills and employment
- Provider funding
- Blended learning review

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