

HUBS Executive Committee Watching Briefs – November 2019

The HUBS Executive Committee have agreed that members of the committee would take on “Watching Briefs”. The aim of this initiative is to support Objective C2 in the HUBS Constitution:

“to enable input from the Heads and Subject Leads in the HE sector into policy formulation and responses for the Society and its Member Organisations”

The role of the brief holder is to:

- Take note of items of interest in the education policy update and science policy newsletter
- Subscribe to WonkHE, and keep up to date on developments
- Engage with relevant Royal Society of Biology staff member for their brief who will share relevant education policy updates, science policy newsletter and relevant consultation responses to inform the brief
- Consult with HUBS Executive Committee and wider HUBS members, if needed, to inform a HUBS viewpoint
- Engage with relevant consultation and inquiry responses, providing a HUBS view.

HUBS Executive Committee have identified the following briefs and current authors are:

Executive member with responsibility	Watching Brief	Page
Professor Steve Bevan sbevan@lincoln.ac.uk	Office for Students	1
Professor Steve Bevan sbevan@lincoln.ac.uk	Teaching Excellence Framework	2
Professor Steve Price stephen.price@ucl.ac.uk	Research Excellence Framework (REF2021)	3
Professor Hilary MacQueen h.a.macqueen@open.ac.uk	Knowledge Excellence Framework	6
Professor Gerry McKenna mckenna.gerry@rocketmail.com	Brexit	N/A ¹
Professor Jon Green j.r.green@bham.ac.uk	Degree apprenticeships	8
Professor Simon Guild Simon.Guild@glasgow.ac.uk	Scotland and Curriculum for Excellence	9
Dr Angela Priestman A.Priestman@staffs.ac.uk	International	12
Dr Debbie Bevitt debbie.bevitt@ncl.ac.uk	Inclusivity and widening participation	15

Consultation responses page for formal RSB positions and responses can be found at:

<https://www.rsb.org.uk/policy/consultations/consultation-responses>

HUBS members are encouraged to open dialogue directly with authors of briefs and copy all correspondence to consultation@rsb.org.uk

Briefs will be updated at regular intervals.

¹ Due to political uncertainty as a result of the general election campaign taking place in November 2019, no Brexit watching brief was submitted during this round.

Watching Brief – Office for Students

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You might feel that there is already a wealth of information available about Universities, from Institutional websites, through comparison sites and league tables from independent providers such as the Complete University Guide to those generated by broadsheet newspapers. Now we can add to the mix a new website from the OfS entitled ‘Discover Uni’ available at discoveruni.gov.uk.

Leaving aside the unfortunate name coinciding with a popular computer game that has also received its release this Autumn, Discover Uni offers Info and Advice and a Course Chooser for prospective students as well as small sections for parents and teachers. The site is in Beta testing as it makes plain on its front page, and the course chooser is rather basic at best – searching for ‘Biology’ as a course leads to identification of 456 courses from 78 providers and limited ability to refine these outcomes further. It is currently unclear whether this will prove to be a useful one-stop-shop for students or not.

In other actions, the OfS continues to position itself as the regulator rather than critical friend of Universities, overseeing a register of University providers; extending its focus on student protection and market exit; and of course building on student satisfaction through the NSS. The OfS is also continuing its focus on issues such as grade inflation, unconditional offers and student mental health; taking its remit to be the student’s champion seriously.

In line with its remit, the OfS now has its full regulatory powers in place as of August 2019 and has recently published its second year business plan. Setting out 24 work areas, the plan promises to step up work on regulatory interventions; as well as the concept of students being able to more effectively transfer between providers. Given the independence institutions maintain to set their own learning outcomes for students to complete a year of study, it will be interesting to watch whether this approach will lead to more streamlined benchmarking to facilitate transfer, or whether the devil will be in the detail.

Given the political weight behind the OfS, the looming general election, should it result in a change of government and therefore a different set of policies and priorities, particularly around funding and access for higher education, may also cause some turbulence to the best laid (business) plans of both the OfS and indeed individual institutions.

Watching Brief – Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework

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The Teaching Excellence Framework means many things to many people, going in and out of favour with changes in government. Originally envisaged as a measure of Teaching Excellence, it immediately caused controversy when it was decided not to assess teaching quality in awarding rankings. Proposals to devolve to the subject level appeared to be put on hold, and the sector has eyed the TEF warily while the review of Dame Shirley Pearce was being undertaken.

Deferred until 2021, subject level TEF was hoped to disappear quietly by many in the Sector, or fall foul of the Autumn spending review. Resurrection however came in the form of a new Secretary of State for Education – Gavin Williamson – who announced the following:

'I would like the OfS to publish subject level TEF in 2021. This should be alongside the implementation of a new TEF model to be developed following the publication of the government response to the Dame Shirley Pearce's Independent Review of TEF undertake under Section 26 of HERA 2017. This new model should ensure the TEF is seamlessly integrated into OFS's approach to the regulation of quality more broadly. To ensure that we do not lose momentum, I would also like the OfS to consider running a further provider level TEF assessment exercise with results to be published in 2020.'

It is unclear whether the new TEF model is part of, or separate to, the subject level TEF, given the use of the word 'alongside' in the statement. Similarly, the statement may put the OfS and QAA at odds with the use of the term 'regulation of quality'. TEF is a quality of teaching tool, not a quality assurance tool.

Given the lack of evidence that students consider TEF as part of their decision making process when selecting a University, many may wonder whether TEF is something that has any sort of future outside the rarefied atmosphere of Westminster. With the recently announced general election it is hard to imagine TEF is foremost in most students' minds, but it would perhaps be foolish to bet against a further resurrection in some form or another in the New Year.

Watching Brief – Research Excellence Framework, REF2021

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This brief summarises current information on two aspects of the REF, outputs and the Impact assessment.

All staff with a “significant responsibility for research” and being an independent researcher on the census date of 31st July 2020 are counted to calculate the total number of outputs to be submitted by a given institution to a given unit of assessment (UoA). A code of practice must be put in place by a given institution to identify which of its staff fall within or outside this category. This code of practice must be drafted, consulted upon and sent to the REF team by March 2020. It has been noted that there is potential for industrial action to delay this process, which will be more straight forward for some institutions over others, where it might pose a considerable burden.

The number of submitted outputs is defined as a minimum of 1 per staff member with a significant responsibility for research and a maximum of 5 with an average of 2.5 per FTE within the department. However, this can be reduced to 0 for an individual staff member if there has been a demonstrable impact of personal circumstances during the REF period that resulted in no REF returnable outputs being available for submission.

Outputs are generally not portable but if an eligible former member of staff generated an eligible output before they left the institution then this may be submitted in the pool of outputs for that institution and the new employing institution at the census date (see below).

“We will implement a transitional approach to the non-portability of outputs in REF 2021, whereby outputs may be submitted by both the institution employing the staff member on the census date and the originating institution where the staff member was previously employed as Category A eligible when the output was demonstrably generated. In recognition of the issues raised in the consultation responses relating to the date of acceptance as a suitable marker, the funding bodies have decided that for REF 2021 ‘demonstrably generated’ will be determined by the date when the output was first made publicly available.”

The REF guidance on outputs have added some flexibility to the open access requirements for a given output to be eligible for submission. This includes the ability of an institution to submit 5% of its outputs that do not comply with the open access restrictions. Outputs will be judged on the basis of their rigour, significance and originality and given a score of 1* to 4*. Impact factors of journals will not be used but citation data may be used by the UoA. Main

panel A has stated that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to UoAs 1-6 which fall under its remit. HUBS members may wish to note that this guidance differs to that of the other main panels.

Impact now more important- to 25% of the REF weighting. Number of impact case studies also changes. Minimum of 2 case studies for up to 15FTE submitted then 1 additional case study per 15FTE up to 105FTE then 1 additional case study for every 50FTE submitted (so a submission of 300FTE will require 12 impact case studies).

For Impact- the initial decisions document from September 2017 states:

“A key recommendation of the Stern review was to ensure the REF could better capture the multiple and diverse pathways and mechanisms through which impact arises from a body of work, and through which real benefits to the UK and wider world are delivered. This aim was widely supported by respondents to the consultation, and the funding bodies will seek to implement this in the exercise.”

Impacts will also be rated as 1* to 4* and the criteria for impact are of ‘reach and significance’.

Impact arising from public engagement. This has been made more explicitly approved as an impact in and of its own and not just as a demonstration of impact of a wider impact case study.

The **guidance on submitting impacts on teaching are widened** to include impacts **within**, as well as beyond, the submitting institution. Guidance on demonstrating evidence against the criteria for this type of impact have been submitted. Main panel A states its expectation that evidence for impact will include quantitative data. Main panel B explicitly makes mention of both qualitative as well as quantitative measures to demonstrate impact.

“a. Impacts will remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the associated research has been conducted.

b. Impacts should be underpinned by excellent research, with ‘excellent’ research continuing to mean the quality of the research is at least equivalent to two star.

c. The excellent research underpinning impact case studies must have been produced during the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 across all UOAs. This will apply to all case studies, including examples continued or developed from REF 2014. The impacts described in case studies must have occurred within the period from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020”

Main panel A- which includes most UoAs of relevance to HUBS members have stated explicitly that pedagogical research should be submitted to UoA23 (Education) and not to their UoAs (1-6). This is a key difference to main panel B (which includes Chemistry and Physics) where pedagogical research will be accepted to those sub-panels. However, impact case studies could include the results of pedagogical research where impact can be demonstrated, particularly in cases where practice has changed in the sector as a result of

the research. The exception is UoA3 which will allow pedagogical outputs to be submitted directly to them.

Important Update: November 2019

Owing to the clear difference in treatment of pedagogical research outputs between the Biosciences and the other Natural Sciences, HUBS and HUCBMS, with the authority of the RSB, wrote to the REF manager to express our strong disquiet (see appendix to this Watching Brief). To summarise the response, the REF manager indicated that pedagogical outputs could be submitted to UoAs in main panel A (for most of HUBS this would be UoA5) and these would be cross-referred to ***UoA23 if there was not sufficient expertise on the panel to be able to judge the outputs***. The REF manager indicated that in the current survey of submission intentions opened 30th September and closing 6th December 2019 HEIs could influence panel membership expertise by indicating whether pedagogical outputs would be submitted to the subpanels (e.g. UoA5). **We therefore recommend that HUBS members lobby to indicate in the survey that their institution will submit pedagogical outputs to UoA5.**

Watching Brief – The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

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The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) is a government proposal to monitor Knowledge Exchange activities within HEIs. It is an attempt to measure the third strand of HEIs' activities and will sit alongside REF and TEF. Ranking in the KEF will be linked to funding (HEIF in England and some other unspecified fund in the other nations). HEIF is planned to be £250 million in 2019/20.

Responses to the [consultation document](#) have now been received and the outcomes were published on August 22nd 2019 [here](#). The document summarises evidence that will inform the final decisions, which Research England expect to publish later in the year. It also includes comments from workshops held with the HEIs that put themselves forward to pilot the scheme. The first full iteration will start in January 2020. A concordat will be published and HEIs have to sign up to it to be KEF-eligible (it's unclear what consequences there will be for non-compliance). First KEF submissions will be in May 2020.

Some key points from the report are below:

Responses

Many HEIs have similar views (e.g. this is useful for internal benchmarking, but not for business; it is too narrow an assessment focused too heavily on monetary metrics) and had similar criticisms of specific metrics (e.g. lack of clarity on collaborative research, facilities income should be included, degree apprenticeships should be considered, local regeneration income too restricted by available funding, repeat business and longevity of partnerships should be considered, social enterprises missing).

Research England discussion and next steps (Report pp 42-43):

- Clustering is quasi-fixed now, but periodic re-clustering is likely
- Suggestions for new metrics will be considered as part of the ongoing HESA-led HE-BCI review, the outcomes of which will influence future iterations of KEF
- Institutions need to show student involvement in their KE activities
- Further modelling and analysis will take place before the metrics are finalised, focusing predominantly on:

- Robustness of evidence of in-kind contribution to collaborative research
- Feasibility of including grey literature in metrics of co-authorship with non-academic partners
- Research resource per spin-out (modify or remove)
- Exploring whether robust data exist for other measures of spin-out success in addition to external investment
- The inclusion of income from facilities and equipment as well as consultancy income
- Feasibility of including measures of investment in local growth and regeneration, as well as income received, to give a fuller picture of contribution to local growth
- Further investigation of proposals made (including report by National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement) on potential alternatives to the proposed metric for public and community engagement
- The content, structure and format of narrative templates will be reviewed
- The inclusion of an overarching institutional narrative will be considered
- HEIF will still be derived from HE-BCI returns, but RE will explore ways to use the KEF to inform funding in the longer term.

Watching Brief – Degree Apprenticeships

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The number and range of Standards for Degree Apprenticeships (DAs) is growing quickly, as are the number of programmes offered, however there are still relatively few Standards that are relevant to the Biosciences. Probably the most relevant one is the Laboratory Scientist (level 6), but there are several others at level 6 (Environmental Health Practitioner; Dietitian) and level 7 (Agriculture, Environmental & Animal Care; Bioinformatics Scientist; Health Scientist). Several Universities are offering degree apprenticeships (DAs) based on the Lab Scientist Standard and these can cover chemical and health sciences as well as life sciences. The programmes are either block-taught over 4 years, or can be based mainly on distance learning modules with several weeks spent in labs to cover the practical work. These DAs can also be offered to technicians within their own institution, allowing those institutions to upskill their staff and to spend their levy on this.

Earlier this year the QAA produced a 'Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement' (<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources>) and it describes the characteristics and distinctive features of apprenticeships in the UK.

UUK also recently published 'The Future Growth of Degree Apprenticeships'. This is based on commissioned research 'to identify lessons and key challenges from universities involved to date and make recommendations to help ensure the future successful development of DAs.' The report provides an outline of the findings of the research and can be found at:

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/downloads/FutureGrowthDegreeApprenticeships.pdf#search=degree%20apprenticeships>

Watching Brief – Scotland and Curriculum for Excellence

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The SNP's blinkered approach to Scotland's education crisis is unsustainable. New Statesman, November 8th, 2019

For Nicola Sturgeon the performance of Scotland's schools would be her top priority as First Minister. However, each new piece of data seems to present a fresh challenge to her pledge, because educational experts are starting to rebel, and because political opponents scent blood.

Few neutrals doubt the First Minister's good intentions. She is fond of saying that as a former state school pupil she is determined to give comprehensive kids the best possible chance in life. "If anybody decides to be a block to making sure we've got the best education system then they should be moved out of the way," she has said. "I'll be confrontational with anybody if it's about improving the educational experience of kids that come from the kinds of communities that I grew up in. Unfortunately, the facts are stubbornly refusing to conform to the rhetoric. The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), which underpins the SNP's approach to education, is plainly failing to have the positive impact that was intended. The latest blow came when Professor Jim Scott of Dundee University issued a report claiming that attainment among fourth-year pupils has dropped by at least a third in key attainment areas since the CfE was introduced in 2013. He also found the number of Higher (equivalent to A-Level) passes in the fifth year of secondary had fallen by 10 per cent in the past four years. Adding insult to injury, Professor Scott said that if the consequences of the CfE had been known when it first originated in 2006, the project would have been delayed or even cancelled.

Scottish universities 'oblivious' to extent of racial abuse. BBC News, 23rd October, 2019

Racial harassment is a "common experience" for staff and students at Scottish universities, according to a new report. The Equality and Human Rights Commission says some institutions are "oblivious" to how big the problem is. The commission warns that harassment can take many forms and can have a serious effect on its victims. Scottish universities have described the findings as "stark and challenging". The report says there are also examples of anti-English sentiment expressed at Scottish universities. However, the report contains few specific details of this and suggests that particular problem is more commonplace in

Wales. The experience of racial harassment was reported by a wide range of students and staff at universities across England, Scotland and Wales. Researchers heard from 571 staff and 845 students across the three nations. The figures suggest incidences of racial harassment are lower among students at Scottish universities than at institutions in England. However, the report says this may reflect the fact that England has a more ethnically-diverse student population. Rebecca Hilsenrath, chief executive at the EHRC, said: "We expect universities to be innovative environments that help us to grow as individuals and prepare us to be good citizens. "It is considerably disappointing to discover that, instead of being progressive and forward-thinking, they are living in the past and have failed to learn from history.

Glasgow University to pay £20m in slave trade reparations. Institution believed to be first British university to set up restorative justice scheme. Guardian, 23rd August, 2019

Glasgow University is to pay £20m in reparations to atone for its historical links to the transatlantic slave trade in what the University of West Indies has described as a "bold, historic" move. It signed an agreement with the University of the West Indies to fund a joint centre for development research, at a ceremony in Glasgow on Friday morning. Glasgow University discovered last year it had benefited financially from Scottish slave traders in the 18th and 19th centuries by between £16.7m and £198m in today's money. In what is thought to be the first attempt by a British university to set up a programme of restorative justice, it has pledged to raise £20m for the centre, chiefly in research grants and gifts. Other British universities, including Oxford and Bristol, have been the focus of protests over their ties to the slave trade and to powerful colonialists, such as Cecil Rhodes. In 2017, All Souls College at Oxford launched an annual scholarship for Caribbean students and paid a £100,000 grant to a college in Barbados, in recognition of its funding from Christopher Codrington, a wealthy slave owner who bequeathed £10,000 in 1710 to build a library that bears his name. The Glasgow agreement was first signed in Kingston, Jamaica, on 31 July. Prof Sir Hilary Beckles, the vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies, said it was a "bold, moral, historic step". Glasgow University played a key role in the abolitionist campaign of the era but until recently Scotland's profiteering from slavery, including from tobacco and cotton plantations, was largely ignored. One of its former rectors was Robert Cunninghame Graham, who spent two decades making his fortune as a plantation owner and slaver.

Universities to offer new paramedic degree from next year. STV News, 6th November, 2019

Five universities across Scotland are to deliver a new degree for potential paramedics to help improve patient care and boost training opportunities. The paramedic BSc degree will be available on a full or part-time basis and have an emphasis on support for patients with long-term and chronic conditions, mental health and minor illness. A first intake of students for the new course will begin in September 2020, with the current diploma in paramedic practice at the Scottish Ambulance Academy (SAA) continuing to run until 2021 Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Stirling and Robert Gordon University have been

running similar courses and will take on the new degree along with Queen Margaret University and the University of the West of Scotland. Pauline Howie, Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) chief executive, said: "We are absolutely delighted to work in partnership with these universities. "It is exciting to know they will be educating new generations of paramedics who will enter the workforce armed with the latest skills and trained to the highest standards. "These changes not only increase our capacity for training more paramedics, helping us meet predictions for future demands of patients, but they support the delivery of integrated health and social care. "The BSc in paramedic science will enhance the skills of our paramedics, allowing them to treat more patients with complex needs in and out of hospital environment.

Watching Brief – International

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This briefing paper provides a precis of news items relating to ‘International’ and of pertinence to UK Heads of Biological Science departments. Please note that this briefing is written in the run up to a UK national government election and consequently within an uncertain political environment. Whilst the UK exit from the EU remains a key issue for UK Universities and Heads, reference is made to Brexit only in terms of discussions concerning matters relating to the movement of students and staff.

In this briefing:

- UK government International Education Strategy; Global potential, Global growth
- New guidance for employers of international graduates
- Further changes to the post-study working visa for international students
- An ‘ERC’ equivalent for the UK
- Go International: Stand out update
- Climate emergency Universities response and call to action

UK government International Education Strategy; Global potential, Global growth

In March 2019, The UK Department for International Trade and the Department for Education published a policy paper outlining ideas and actions for a growth educational exports and international partnerships. The ambition is to increase the educational exports to £35 billion by 2030 (£23 billion by 2020) based on key actions and mirroring current business export strategies. Based on 8 key actions, it was stated that the growth will be supported by an International Education champion to spearhead activities, focused funding via the GREAT challenge fund, extending the post-study leave period for international students (see below) and changes to visa processes for international students. Providing a governmental framework which is to be chaired by the ministers for education and international trade will strengthen this policy and reference is made to a focus on data in relation to these activities and including evaluating impact. Key targets include the growth in international student numbers to 600,000 by 2030, sending a strong indication of welcome and focus on international students. This strategy has been welcomed by UK Universities.

New guidance for employers of international graduates

On 7th November 2019 Universities UK and Fragomen published their guidance for UK employers of international graduates. This 28-page guide provides clear step by step information on how to navigate the UKVI processes and provides checklists with guidance notes for employers considering their suitability as Tier 2 sponsors of skilled workers.

The focus is on growing globally competitive businesses through employment of the best international talent and skilled graduate workforce. It covers straightforward routes, sponsorship options, right to work checks and includes scenarios. A key message of the guidance is the continuum between education of the international students within the UK and their subsequent employment, particularly in areas of skills shortages, by UK businesses. It emphasises both the positive social and economic benefits to the UK economy of international students, £26 billion in economic contributions, and the establishment of lifelong links with the UK and its businesses as international student's progress through their careers here and then subsequently overseas.

Further changes to the post-study working visa for international students

In Sept 2019, the UK government issued plans for the extension of the post-study visa for international students, to operate from the 2020/2021 cohort. Post-study work opportunities, specifically for graduates in STEM subjects, aim to encouraged talented students to stay and work in their early careers within the UK, contributing to the UK plans for innovation and growth in the science and technology sectors. The Universities have campaigned for this change and welcome the plans to place the UK back at the top of destinations for talented international students who can then be provided to a wide range of employers who will benefit from the access to talented graduates and the lifelong links and networks that establish.

An 'ERC' for the UK

In August 2019, the government announced its plans to protect and bolster UK science and research following the UK withdrawal from the EU. Currently the UK universities successfully secure around 20% of the highly prestigious European Research Council (ERC) funds. These funds are the flagship component of the EU Horizon 2020 and will feature also in Horizon Europe, the \$100 billion research and innovation programme being drafted to succeed Horizon 2020. The government announcement indicated that they will, with their delivery partner, UKRI provide detail of how this fund will work. It is expected to offer equivalent systems and support for individuals, fellowships and staff exchanges currently covered by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and include high intensity grants for SMEs towards market-creating innovations. We anticipate further detail in 2020.

Go international: Stand out campaign update.

Previous briefings have reported on the UUK Go International: Stand Out campaign which aims to support more UK students to study abroad. Evidence shows significant benefit to employment prospects for all students engaging with an international study experience and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In a recent agreement detailed in a UUK press release, five organisations have pledged support to help more students study abroad through new scholarships, discounts on visa services, free places on development programmes and discounted accommodation overseas. Overall the campaign aims to achieve 13% of study abroad by UK UG by the end of 2020. Full details of all offers can be found on the website of [Universities UK](#)

[Universities declare climate emergency](#)

The [SDG \(sustainable development goal\) Accord](#) is a University and College sectors collective international response to the SDGS, organised through the EUAC – the Alliance for Sustainability leadership in Education. In July of 2019, University signatories issued a three-point plan to address the climate crisis. It refers to environmental and sustainability being embedded within curricula, campuses and in outreach and community engagement. It references the development of younger person's skills, knowledge and ability to respond to the climate crisis. It proposes commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. It calls for educational institutions to join governments in declaring a climate crisis and engaging in support for significant societal change. There are 87 institutions who have signed the accord to date. Increasingly UK universities are signatories and for the Biosciences, it represents an international movement that requires action.

Watching Brief - Inclusivity and widening participation

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In 2018 the Office for Students (OfS) published their Regulatory Framework (OfS 2018.01), including the key objective that “all students from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education”. To achieve this objective for students from underrepresented groups, OfS aimed to use the regulatory framework to “reduce the gaps between underrepresented groups and other groups in terms of access to, success within and progression from higher education”.

The framework therefore requires HE providers which intend to charge fees above the basic amount to submit an Access and Participation plan. These succeed the previous Access agreements, approved by the Office for Fair Access, although many Access agreements are still in effect, now monitored by OfS. The new five-year Access and Participation plan must set ambitious targets for reducing the gaps in access, success and progression for underrepresented groups, and define an action plan for achieving these. It must also explain how the plan will be resourced and how progress against the targets will be monitored. The following underrepresented groups were highlighted for action: students from areas of lower higher education participation, lower household income and/or lower socioeconomic status groups; some black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students and mature students.

September 2019 saw publication of the first five-year Access and Participation plans, for 42 universities, with further plans being published on a rolling basis as they are approved. The OfS is being robust in their warnings that progress against the targets will be closely monitored, with 31 of the initial 42 plans being targeted for “enhanced monitoring”.

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/>

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/highly-selective-universities-must-follow-through-on-promises-to-improve-access-regulator-warns/>

TUNDRA – a new metric for area-based participation

Area-based participation measures can be used to compare relative levels of participation in higher education across different geographical areas. In September 2019 OfS released a new experimental metric for area-based participation: TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area). TUNDRA differs from the familiar POLAR4 metrics in three key ways:

1. TUNDRA uses data-linking to track students from the GCSE (Key Stage 4) cohort at age 16 to participation in higher education at ages 18-19. POLAR4 does not use data-linking.
2. TUNDRA focuses on pupils in state-funded mainstream schools, excluding those pupils at independent schools, special schools and pupil referral units. POLAR4 includes all school types.
3. TUNDRA focuses on local areas within England, whereas POLAR4 is a UK-wide measure.

TUNDRA is (for now) a supplement to POLAR, not a replacement. Initial reactions suggest that TUNDRA is being generally well received by the sector and is a more robust measure than POLAR, though there is still room for improvement.

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/>

<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-cold-spot-on-the-tundra/>

<https://wideningparticipation.wordpress.com/2019/09/26/tundra-tracking-under-representation-by-area/>

Website and Mobile App Accessibility Regulations

Good accessibility to websites and apps is crucial to ensuring that all students can access online resources, without facing disability-related barriers. Accessibility standards for websites and apps for public sector bodies including universities are regulated by the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 and the deadlines for meeting accessibility standards are: 23 September 2019 for new websites (published after 23 Sept 2018), 23 September 2020 for existing websites (published before 23 Sept 2018) and 23 June 2021 for mobile apps.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/accessibility>

Universities sign up to Armed Forces Covenant

In April 2019 a joint letter from the Minister of State for Universities and Secretary of State for Defence urged UK universities to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant. This covenant aims to remove barriers to access public services, including higher education, faced by members of the armed services and their children.

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universities-urged-to-boost-support-for-armed-forces>