Office for Students

Annual fee information collection guidance

Reference OfS 2020.41

General enquiries to: AFI@officeforstudents.org.uk

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Introduction

1. Any higher education provider holding an access and participation plan must annually return information on the fees it charges to students. This document describes how providers must return this information.

2. The Office for Students (OfS) must collect and publish information on the maximum fees chargeable by a provider to new students starting courses in 2021-22, in accordance with section 11 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).

3. Maximum tuition fees in England are prescribed by the Secretary of State for Education in regulations made under HERA. The basic and higher fee caps prescribed in this way differ by course type, and according to a provider's regulatory status as recorded in the OfS Register of higher education providers. Under the terms and conditions of its access and participation plan (APP), a provider may choose to set its maximum fees at a level equivalent to or below these prescribed fee caps.

4. The data provided in the annual fee information return will be used to ensure that regulated course fees do not exceed the fee caps[1] set by the government, in accordance with HERA. Information must be supplied for each different type of course offered by the provider. As information on a provider's maximum fees chargeable is an important component of its APP approval, this information will also be used to ensure that fee levels remain consistent with its APP commitments. Significant departures from fee levels as previously approved within the APP will inform the OfS in monitoring compliance with registration condition A1.

5. This data will be published by the OfS before the end of the 2020 calendar year. Examples of the OfS's publication of this data for previous academic years can be found on the OfS website.[2]

Who needs to submit annual fee information

6. Access and participation plans should relate to the cohorts of students the higher education provider will register in the five years from the point when the plan commences. This would be the maximum duration of a plan. The initial approval of a plan would be for a period of one year. Approval will then automatically roll over each subsequent year for a maximum of four years, unless the OfS expressly notifies a provider in writing that a new plan needs to be submitted for approval. This collection is only relevant for higher education providers that hold an access and participation that commenced in 2020-21, and that have not applied for new plan to commence in 2021-22.

7. If a provider is seeking to submit a new APP, this data return **does not** need to be completed as the relevant fee limit information is collected by a separate return. If you wish to submit a

[1] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/.

[2] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-plan-data/fee-limits-data/.

new APP, please see Regulatory notice 1 for further information.[3] If you wish to discuss whether a new APP is needed, please contact the OfS access and participation team at app@officeforstudents.org.uk.

What information needs to be submitted

8. Course fees applicable for the 2020-21 academic year were collected in providers' submissions for APPs to commence in 2020-21. This return only intends to capture updates to this previously submitted information, and the annual fee information workbook will be pre-filled with 2020-21 course fees that were submitted in the approved APP covering this period. We anticipate that this pre-filled information will simplify the process of providers returning accurate and comprehensive 2021-22 fee information.

9. If there have been **no changes to the maximum course fees**, and the pre-filled information will remain applicable to the 2021-22 academic year, providers will need to:

   a. Check the pre-filled course fees thoroughly for accuracy and completeness.

   b. Confirm whether the fee applies to new entrants in 2021-22, continuing students or both.

   c. Complete the contact details and sign-off sheets, and upload the data.

10. If there have been **changes to maximum course** fees, such that some or all of the prefilled information will no longer be applicable to the 2021-22 academic year, providers will need to:

    a. Amend the pre-filled course fees data as necessary.

    b. Confirm whether the fee applies to new entrants in 2021-22, continuing students or both.

    c. Review the changes and the wider workbook thoroughly for accuracy and completeness.

    d. Complete the contact details and sign-off sheets, and upload the data.

11. The data must be signed off and submitted to the OfS even if there have been no changes to course fees.

Submission deadline

12. Annual fee information return workbooks will be available to providers in September 2020. These must be completed and submitted via the OfS portal by **27 October 2020**. This data will be published by the OfS before the end of the 2020 calendar year.

[3] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/.

Completing the return

How to complete the return

13. The annual fee information workbook can be accessed via the OfS portal (https://extranet.officeforstudents.org.uk/data) in September 2020. Please note that before you can access the workbook, the OfS portal user administrator at your provider will need to grant you access. Further information on how to use the portal and the role of the user administrator can be found on the OfS website.[4]

14. Table A lists the tables in the annual fee information return. The fee information in Tables 2 and 3 will pre-filled based on your previous APP. This information will be accurate as of 10 September 2020. These can be amended to reflect any changes to fee limits since the submission of your APP.

Table A: Worksheets in the annual fee information workbook

Name of worksheet	Description	Action
Cover sheet	This sheet provides information on the return and whether each of the subsequent sheets are valid.	Automatically filled. Providers may submit notes on each of the tables using the free text box on this sheet.
Contact details	This sheet contains Table 1. Providers must submit the names and contact details of two people who can be contacted to discuss the information provided.	Provider to complete.
Full-time fees	This sheet contains Table 2. It will contain fee information for full-time courses submitted in the provider's previous access and participation plan.	Provider to review pre-filled information, complete column H and amend other information where necessary.
Part-time fees	This sheet contains Table 3. It will contain fee information for part-time courses submitted in the provider's previous access and participation plan.	Provider to review pre-filled information, complete column H and amend other information where necessary
Sign off	This sheet should be used to confirm that the return is correct.	The accountable officer must confirm that all the information provided has been internally validated and the information has been signed off and approved as correct.

15. More detailed information about filling in the return can be found in Annex A.

[4] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/supplying-data/submitting-data-through-the-ofs-portal/.

16. When you are satisfied that the survey is complete and accurate, you should upload it to the OfS portal.

17. Once your return has been successfully uploaded, you will have access to a results package. This will contain tables detailing the differences between your submission and the fee limits from the pre-filled information.

18. The results package should be reviewed for inconsistencies. In particular, the return will not be valid if the sign-off has not approved changes that have been made. This will be clear in the results package.

Which courses should be included?

19. The courses included in this data return should cover 'Qualifying persons' on 'qualifying courses', which are prescribed by regulations made under HERA. The current regulations are the Higher Education (Fee Limit Condition) (England) Regulations 2017 (SI 2017/1189).

    a. **Qualifying students** currently include most home and EU students, but exclude students from outside the EU. They are defined in Regulations 4 to 6 of the Higher Education (Fee Limit Condition) (England) Regulations 2017.

    b. **Qualifying courses** include most undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher training courses, but exclude other postgraduate courses. They are listed as designated courses in the Higher Education (Fee Limit Condition) (England) Regulations 2017.

20. Qualifying students on qualifying courses that are part of any subcontractual arrangements a provider may have with other higher education providers are included within this definition.

Basic and maximum fee levels

21. The basic and higher fee caps are prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations made under HERA and may change from time to time, e.g. each year. For reference, these fee caps are normally published on the OfS website,[5] but it is the responsibility of a provider to ensure that it is aware of changes in the law affecting the fee caps.[6]

22. For the purpose of this return, the workbook will only validate against the prescribed fee limits on the basis that a provider holds a Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) award (e.g. a higher fee amount of £9,250 for full-time students, rather than £9,000). For providers that do not currently hold a TEF award, the original access and participation plan will have validated fee information returned against the lower fee limits without the TEF uplift. It is not expected that providers will change the pre-filled information to include the TEF uplift if they do not currently hold a TEF award.

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[5] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/.

[6] If a provider wishes to make any variations to the fees charged to students as a result of changes to the fee caps, it will need to ensure that such variations (and the processes and communications relating to them) comply with consumer protection law and regulatory requirements.

Assessment process

23. After you have submitted your annual fee information, you should review the results package available on the OfS portal for validation errors.

24. Your completed annual fee information return will be reviewed by OfS officers to confirm that course fees do not exceed the relevant prescribed fee caps. It is expected that OfS officers will only contact you if the maximum fee levels reported would exceed the prescribed fee caps and result in a potential fee breach, or if there are errors in your return.

25. The data submitted in this return will be published by the OfS before the end of the 2020 calendar year. At the time of publication, the OfS will make a 2021-22 fee summary table available to you via the OfS portal in PDF format. In accordance with Regulatory notice 1, providers will be expected to publish this fee summary on their websites alongside their APP (which already contains the equivalent fee summary table describing 2020-21 fee levels).[7]

[7] See paragraphs 39 and 159 of www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/.

Annex A: Guidance on completing the annual fee information return

Table 1: Fair processing notice and contact details

Actions

Providers must submit the names and contact details of two people who can be contacted to discuss the information provided in the annual fee information return.

- The main contact must be the accountable officer. This will be pre-populated from our records.
- The alternative contact should be the lead on the annual fee information return.

Table 2: Full-time fees

1. The basic and higher fee caps are prescribed by the Secretary of State in regulations made under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and may change from time to time, e.g. each year. For reference, these fee caps are normally published on the Office for Students (OfS) website,[8] but it is the responsibility of the provider to ensure that it is aware of changes in the law affecting the fee caps.

2. The data in his table has been pre-populated based on the provider's previous access and participation plan (APP). Column H must be completed for all courses; the remaining information must be reviewed and amended where necessary.

Actions

Providers must ensure that they include all course types that will run in the 2021-22 academic year. The data return **does not** need to include all years covered by the previous APP.

Providers must include all qualifying students on qualifying courses that will be studying at the provider.

Providers must not account for fee waivers in this table.

3. In column C, select a course type from the drop-down list:

   - First degree

[8] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/.

- Foundation degree
- Foundation year/Year 0
- HNC/HND
- CertHE/DipHE
- Postgraduate ITT
- Accelerated degree
- Sandwich year
- Erasmus and overseas study year
- Other.

4. Where different fees are being charged for the same course type, enter each course fee in a different row.
5. Use the additional information column (D) to distinguish between fee levels for the same course type. The information you enter in these tables will be published. Descriptions must be free of abbreviations and technical language so that potential students and the wider public can understand it easily.
6. Use column E to identify whether the course is delivered through a subcontractual arrangement. Populate column F with the sub-contractual partner's UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN). Column G will auto-populate based on the UKPRN. If there are courses taught at the provider on behalf of another organisation as part of a sub-contractual agreement, these do not need to be entered in this table. These courses will be recorded in the lead provider's annual fee information return.
7. Enter the fees for all full-time courses in column I. This should include courses charged below the basic fee cap.. Any course fees that are below the basic fee will be highlighted in blue.
8. In column H, providers should use the drop-down list to indicate whether this fee applies to:
   a. Only students who are starting the course in 2021-22 (new entrants only).
   b. Only students who have already started on the course and will be continuing on the course in 2021-22 (continuing students only).
   c. All students on the course, regardless of whether they are new entrants or continuing students (all students).
9. When completing these tables, providers should start from the pre-filled 2020-21 course fee information listed for each course type delivered in that year, and consider any amendments or additions that are necessary to reflect the courses to be offered in 2021-22. The OfS needs to report information where providers have different fees for each course type. Providers may have more than one fee against a single course type because:

- they charge different fees depending on subject, faculty, location or some other variable
- they have increased fees year on year for entrants; for example, they may have first year students paying one fee, second year students paying another, third year student paying yet another fee and so on.

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10. If a particular course type is not entered, the OfS will assume that this course type is not run at the provider, and the provider will not be able to charge above the basic fee for this course type.

Table 3: Part-time fees

Actions

For the purposes of this table, the OfS only needs to know the fees for a provider's part-time qualifying courses by course type. Providers do not need to disaggregate between different intensities of study. Providers only need to record courses where they charge part-time students above the basic fee level.

Providers must not account for fee waivers in this table.

11. The data in his table has been pre-populated based on the provider's previous access and participation plan. Column H must be completed for all courses, otherwise the information must be reviewed and amended where necessary.
12. For part-time students, the full-time equivalent (FTE) fee means the fee per 120 credits (equivalent to a full year of study), or fee for the duration of the programme if fewer than 120 credits. The FTE course fee is not regulated for part-time courses, but this information will enable the OfS to understand a provider's part-time fee structure.
13. Providers should refer to the OfS website for current fee regulations regarding part-time students.
14. In column C, providers should list all courses for which a part-time fee will be charged. Use the additional information column (D) to distinguish between fee levels for the same course type. The information providers enter in these tables will be published. Descriptions must be free of abbreviations and technical language so that potential students and the wider public can understand it easily.
15. Use column E to indicate where part-time provision is delivered by a subcontracted partner. The provider that delivers the provision does not have to enter anything in this column. Populate column F with the sub-contractual partner's UKPRN. Column G will auto-populate based on the UKPRN.
16. In column H, providers should use the drop-down list to indicate whether this fee applies to:

    a. Only students who are starting the course in 2021-22 (new entrants only).

b. Only students who have already started on the course and will be continuing on the course in 2021-22 (continuing students only).

c. All students on the course, regardless of whether they are new entrants or continuing students (all students).

17. If a provider is unclear whether it will have any part-time students paying more than the basic fee, the OfS recommends that it includes course type and fee information in Table 3, to avoid having to seek approval retrospectively. This might apply, for example, where a part-time student took more modules in a year than was typical, or because they switched from full-time to part-time due to extenuating circumstances.

18. Validation and sign-off

Actions

The accountable officer must confirm that all the information provided has been internally validated and the information has been signed off and approved as correct.

19. Each fee information document must be approved by the provider's accountable officer.

20. Providers must confirm that their governing body has approved the plan by using the drop-down in cell G10.

21. The drop-down in cell D12 must be selected based on whether or not any changes have been made to the pre-filled information on Tables 2 and 3. If this has been selected incorrectly, this will be flagged in the results package available after submission.

22. It is up to each provider to determine its own process for checking the accuracy of the information it provides. This could be through internal audit, a report to the head of the institution, a governors' group or a steering committee. All information is subject to audit and all providers must ensure that the way information is validated meets internal audit requirements.