Information for Students

**Guidance for Partners**

**2021/22**

The purpose of this guidance is to support Partners in producing information for potential and current students as well as other stakeholders.

Requirements of both external bodies and UEA in terms of compliance are highlighted as well as good practice identified. This guidance is indicative. It is not intended to be exhaustive and does not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Partners should ensure they are familiar with the referenced sources of information. This guidance covers the following:

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# Information provision

The need for higher education (HE) providers to make clear and accurate information available to students and other audiences is highlighted by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, key stakeholder guidance and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). In this context, the Office for Students (OfS) in its Regulatory Framework [[1]](#footnote-1) states the importance of the provision of information on enabling students to make informed choices about higher education provision. The OfS have set a number of conditions of registration in ‘relation of information for students’ (Condition C) and provide self-assessment guidance on consumer protection law.

All sources of information are considered to be relevant from a hard copy prospectus or course brochure, through to webpages and social media.

## UK Quality Code

Each of the 12 themes of the revised UK Quality Code[[2]](#footnote-2) include a number of guiding principles on the provision of information to students, supplemented by further advice and guidance, outlining possible approaches of good practice.

## Good practice guidance

The UK funding bodies, jointly with the National Union of Students, Universities UK, GuildHE and the Association of Colleges, have published a guide to providing information to prospective undergraduate students[[3]](#footnote-3). The main focus of this guide is to help HE providers follow good practice in supplying easily accessible information for prospective students to use in their decisions about higher education study.

The OfS puts informed student choice at its heart and this guide can be used for providers to review the information that they provide through their websites and other channels, and to make improvements where appropriate.

## Consumer protection law

As a greater proportion of fees are paid by students, consumer protection law has become more relevant for HE providers. In this context, HE providers are effectively ‘traders’ and students, ‘consumers’. Students are seen to be in a weak consumer position as, for most, deciding what and where to study will be a ‘one-off’ decision.

There are three key areas of relevant legislation: Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPR); Consumer Contracts Regulations 2013 (CCR) and the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA) /Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 (UTCCR).

These relate to material information about the good or service, pre-contract information and terms and conditions.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has therefore published advice to help HE providers comply with their consumer law obligations. The advice includes a summary of requirements as well as more detailed advice. It also offers helpful examples of areas that may leave an HE provider open to challenge, such as misleading omissions or unfair terms. Partners should read the detailed advice from the CMA in full and, utilising their compliance checklist, make any necessary changes to ensure compliance with the law[[4]](#footnote-4).

The CMA have also published a 60-second summary of Higher Education Providers: Consumer Law[[5]](#footnote-5)

HE providers that do not meet their obligations may be in breach of consumer law and risk enforcement action. In some circumstances students may also have the right to take legal action against providers and/or seek redress. It should be noted that the CMA's views are not binding and only a court can determine, depending on the factual circumstances of the particular case, whether a breach of the law has occurred.

The CMA outlines three areas of focus for HE providers:

* Information provision: ensuring that students are given up front, clear, timely, accurate and comprehensive information
* Ensuring that terms and conditions between HE providers and students are fair
* Ensuring that HE providers’ complaint handling processes and practices are accessible, clear and fair to students

The first point relating to information provision is most relevant in the context of this guidance. However, for completeness these three areas are briefly covered in more detail below.

### Information provision

HE providers should ensure that prospective students are given the information they need in order to make informed decisions. Consumer protection law applies at each of the three main stages of interaction between an HE provider and prospective student:

* Stage 1: research and application stage – when the prospective student considers options for what and where to study, and then makes an application. Partners should ensure that they comply with the CPRs by providing students with the material information they need to make informed decisions.
* Stage 2: offer stage – when the prospective student decides whether to accept an offer of a place with an HE provider. Partners must provide prospective students with the information they need to make a decision, including the required pre-contract information, before students accept a formal offer of a place on the course.
* Stage 3: enrolment stage – when the student enrols with the HE provider. When prospective students enrol, Partners must ensure that they have provided the students with the information required under the CPRs and CCRs

From a CMA perspective, the information you present to prospective students may be considered material to the contract that you agree with students at the offer stage. HE providers must give students the information they need to make an informed decision before they apply. This information includes:

* course content and structure
* total costs of the course including tuition fees and any additional costs associated with the course, such as field trips, lab equipment or bench/studio fees
* terms and conditions, including any rules and regulations that students are bound by

Before, or at the latest when, offering a place to a student, you must tell them of any changes since they applied and give ‘pre-contract information’ which includes course information and costs, information on complaints handling, and any cancellation rights.

### Fair terms and conditions

Terms and conditions between HE providers and students should be fair. This includes:

* Your terms and conditions, including rules and regulations, should be clear and transparent.
* They should strike a fair balance between your rights and obligations and those of your students, for example, terms allowing you wide discretion to change important aspects of the course or fees may be unfair.
* You need to make sure that surprising or important terms are specifically brought to students’ attention.
* You will not be able to enforce terms and conditions which are unfair.

In January 2017, UEA was the focus of a CMA case[[6]](#footnote-6) and this is summarised below as a case study.

Concerns were raised by the CMA in August 2016 that UEA may not be fully compliant with consumer protection law. This related to the introduction of two new compulsory modules (30 credits each) into year 2 of a course. The concerns related to:

* The University considering this change as minor
* Not updating the course information on the external website in a timely manner
* Not proactively informing students and applicants to the change in a timely way.

As a result the University was requested by the CMA to provide further information about this issue. Further information requested included: the rationale and timing of the decision; copies of information provided to prospective students; relevant regulations, framework, rules, policies, terms and conditions and/or procedures; and evidence of communication and consultation with existing students.

The CMA found that the introduction of the compulsory module limited students’ choice of optional modules and that the University had not adequately informed prospective students who had received course offers about the changes.

In line with our terms and conditions at the time UEA regarded the changes as ‘minor’ and did not therefore consult existing students or inform offer holders immediately, as we would have done if we had considered the changes to be ‘substantial’. The University has updated our terms and conditions and undertaken to ensure that in future, we will treat the addition of a compulsory module to a course as a ‘substantial change’. UEA has also committed to making timely updates to its website of any substantial changes. This will ensure that anyone thinking about applying has access to up-to-date and accurate information.

### Complaint handling processes and practices

Complaint handling processes and practices should be accessible, clear and fair to students:

* You should ensure that your complaints processes are fair and transparent.
* You must inform students about your processes, including any right to escalate internally and to an external complaint scheme such as the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
* You should ensure your staff know and follow the processes.

## Support for Partners

UEA has reviewed our guidance, policies, processes and procedures to support Partners CMA compliance. For example, processes relating to institutional approval/review, course validation/re-validation and course modification have been reviewed to consider the applicant timeline.

Following the case study outlined in 1.3.2 the University has identified that the most effective way to avoid breaching CMA advice is to ensure a long lead-time for changes. Making changes which will not impact on current students or current applicants significantly reduces the risk. Partners are therefore advised to consider timeframes for major changes such as introduction of a compulsory module, removal of a compulsory module, significant reduction in optional modules, changes to credit structures, changes to assessment methods, changes to module content etc.

Where major changes are unavoidable, applicants who will be impacted need to be informed of the changes as soon as possible – even if changes are probable but not officially approved (consideration needs to be given to effective marketing and recruitment). Current students who will be impacted should be proactively consulted and agreement sought that they are happy to move on to the changed programme. They should have the option of continuing on the original advertised programme if they wish (consideration needs to be made for practicality and any outside body obligations). All course literature should be updated to reflect the changes as soon as possible. In particular any external websites should be updated immediately.

# Communicating information

HE providers have autonomy about the mechanisms used to produce information and the media they choose to communicate this information from a QAA perspective. It is therefore for Partners to determine the appropriate and preferred communication channels for their audiences. However, guidance (see section 1.2) is that ‘all information that you provide should be made accessible through your website’. Thus, whilst information may be provided through hard copy publications or via social media for example, your website should incorporate or link to all content.

Partners are responsible and accountable for the information they produce about the HE learning opportunities they offer. However, as a validating body, UEA is required to have effective oversight on the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to programmes that lead to a UEA award[[7]](#footnote-7).

Partners are therefore required to adhere to the Partners Publicity Policy (Appendix 1)

# Information checklist

The appended checklist (Appendix 2) is designed to support Partners in considering the provision of information to students and other stakeholders. The list has been compiled taking into account key documents discussed in this guidance.

It is anticipated that Partners will produce publically available information about themselves via their website. However the checklist doesn’t distinguish between the mechanisms or media Partners may use to publish information about themselves nor, in most cases, the intended audience.

Information relevant to the public will be of interest to prospective students. Prospective students will however need more detailed information to make informed decisions. Prospective students in turn may also wish to access information that is primarily targeted at current students. Conversely, information for prospective students will in part also be relevant for current students. Current students however will need a greater level of detail, with up to date information at the appropriate time.

Partners should therefore treat the checklist as a series of prompts to further consider their information provision, but recognise that not all points will be relevant for all audiences.

# Appendix 1 – Partners Publicity

**Policy for Partners**

Partners are responsible and accountable for the information they produce about the HE learning opportunities they offer. However, as a validating body, UEA is required to have effective oversight on the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to programmes that lead to a UEA award[[8]](#footnote-8).

Partners are therefore required to follow this policy when:

* publicising and providing information on all aspects of courses validated by UEA
* using the UEA logo and descriptors relating to their partnership with the University
* providing publically available information for stakeholders about UEA

This policy covers the widest interpretation of public information, publicity and promotional activity. This includes, but is not limited to, advertising, open days, websites, social media (web and mobile-based technologies), press releases and media interviews.

UEA will review publicity materials for compliance with this policy, and to support Partners to comply with wider regulatory requirements. However, these reviews are not intended to be exhaustive, nor replace Partners’ own monitoring processes.

## Publicity requirements

1. All publicity relating to UEA validated programmes must clearly state the nature of the relationship in a prominent position (see 3.1.2 for agreed descriptors).
2. Where Partners have collaborative arrangements with more than one awarding body they must ensure absolute clarity in relation to who validates which provision.
3. The UEA logo should be applied to all publicity that relates to UEA validated provision (see 3.1.1).
4. To ensure that details published by Partners about UEA courses are correct, Partners must submit a copy of their prospectus (or course literature). UEA will check the content for correct references to the University, use of the logo and UEA course related information.
5. All publicity which uses the UEA name or references UEA programmes, including open day publicity and news releases should be shared with the University prior to publication for approval.
6. Partners are responsible for monitoring their website content. Partners should ensure that any changes or corrections highlighted by UEA should be made to websites immediately.
7. Following institutional approval:
	1. new Partners, prior to initial course validation, may state ‘courses are subject to approval with UEA. UEA course approval will take place between [insert dates]’
	2. all Partners may use the following:
	* ‘a Partner College of the University of East Anglia’
	* ‘offer/provide higher education courses/programmes validated by UEA’
	* ‘approved to deliver higher education courses/programmes leading to a UEA award’
8. For new course proposals:
9. Courses must not be publicised unless approved in principle for publicity purposes by the University;
10. following approval in principle, courses should be clearly identified as ‘subject to approval with UEA’;
11. Only with formal agreement from the validation panel chair that conditions have been met, can courses be publicised as UEA validated programmes: ‘this course is awarded by the University of East Anglia’.
12. Partners must ensure there is no ambiguity with regard to the respective roles of the Partner and the University. The programme is delivered, owned and managed by the Partner – the award is made by the University.
13. UEA will undertake periodic reviews of Partners’ publicity materials relating to UEA validated programmes and the use of the University name. These are to ensure compliance with these guidelines and support the development of good practice. Feedback from these reviews must be acted upon promptly by the partner institution.
14. Should the University wish to use a Partner’s logo in any publicity, permission will be sought prior to publication.

### The UEA Brand

The University of East Anglia's logos, coat of arms, crest, shield, glint, the words "University of East Anglia", the initials "UEA" and other trademarks or distinguishing signs are owned by the University of East Anglia. The brand must be used consistently to maintain brand value, and enhance reputation, which will in turn improve recognition for our Partners and add value to their HE offer.

Partners are authorised to use the UEA logo in publicity materials which refer to the relationship between UEA and the partner or specifically relate to programmes leading to a UEA award.

The UEA logo should appear in black or white, whichever is in higher contrast to the background. The glint should always appear in one of UEA’s brand colours, not black, unless for monochrome use. The old blue logo should not be in use. The glint should not be used independent of the logo. UEA logos and brand guidelines are available from your Partnership Manager[[9]](#footnote-9).

### Agreed Descriptors

The following table outlines descriptors that should be used by Partners when describing their relationship with UEA, as well as those that are not approved.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Approved** | **Not approved** |
| University of East Anglia | University of East AngliaUEA[The] University | The UEA |
| UEA’s role | Validating body/universityAwarding body/university | Accrediting body/universitySponsoring body/university |
| Partners  | Partner institutionPartner CollegeAssociate College | College validated by UEA |
| UEA programmes at partner institutions | UEA validated programmeLeading to a UEA awardValidated by UEA | UEA programmeEndorsed by UEAIn partnership with UEAAccredited by UEA |



# Appendix 2 – Information for students checklist

**Information for the public**

* Is information on the mission, values and overall strategy for the delivery of HE provided?
* Are governance arrangements, corporate and strategic plans and annual reports available?
* Is an organisation structure chart provided?
* Is information on the composition of the student population provided (e.g. ethnicity, gender etc.)?
* Are your collaborative arrangements clear, i.e. where education is offered with others?

**General points**

* Is the information you produce timely, current, transparent, and focused on the needs of the intended audiences?
* Is information available and retrievable where intended audiences and information users can reasonably expect to find it?
* Does the format and delivery of information take account of the access requirements of a diverse audience?
* Does the information offer a fair and accurate reflection of the HE learning opportunities on offer?
* If you offer substantial part-time provision would it be helpful to provide separate information sources for full-time and part-time courses?
* Are you presenting prospective students with the information they need to make an informed choice about where and what to study?
* Is it clear what is expected of students when they study at HE level – and what they can expect from you?
* Is information linked together so students can easily navigate it; with clear, functional and easy to use links?
* Is the language you have used appropriate and does it avoid HE terminology or abbreviations that may be unfamiliar to prospective students?
* Is it clear where information provided is indicative and may be subject to change and/or if you have based this on what has happened in the past?
* Have you clearly explained the circumstances where changes might be made, and the notice period provided to students of any changes (without using a wide discretion to vary)?
* Do you have established methods/processes in place for reviewing and updating information as appropriate?
* Are policies about information and data included, signposting to information made publicly available (e.g. General Data Protection Regulation & Freedom of Information)
* Is contact information provided – for general enquiries and course specific enquiries?
* Would students know how to go about making a complaint if they had an issue with, for instance, the admissions process?

**Course overview (prospective and current students)**

* Is the award students will receive on successful completion of their course named, and is the full title used consistently and accurately?
* Is it clear that UEA is the awarding body/the course is validated by UEA?
* If institutional/course revalidation is due for renewal during students expected period of study is it clear what would happen should it not be renewed?
* Do you indicate the start and end date of the course as well as the length of courses for both full-time and part-time modes of study?
* Where work or study placements affect the length of the course, is it clear what the arrangements are for these?
* Is the location of study activities clear – particularly where you have a number of campus locations?
* If teaching is split across locations are transport options, responsibilities and any costs clear?
* Do you provide details of the likely location of work or study placements in the UK or abroad?
* Do you indicate where courses are accredited by a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB)
* Is it clear if accreditation requires renewal during the expected period of study and what the implication is for students who have already enrolled should it not be renewed?
* Do you include information about connections with industry, business and the professions, including links with PSRBs and employers?
* Are opportunities for work-based learning, study abroad and other international learning experiences described?
* Is an overview of likely opportunities to develop transferable skills provided?
* Do you give prospective students indicative information about how well the programme is performing, e.g. information about graduate destinations and student satisfaction?
* Do you have a clear policy process for informing students about when changes to courses do occur and is information on this readily accessible to users?

**Admissions and entry requirements (prospective students)**

* Are prospective students directed to the relevant application, selection, admission and registration/enrolment process, including routes other than UCAS where applicable?
* Is a link provided to the UCAS website?
* Are entry requirements for each course clearly set out (including details of other required prior experience where appropriate)?
* Do you distinguish between, qualification entry requirements and any specific acceptance criteria?
* Are processes for the recognition of prior learning for the purpose of meeting entry requirements or for other non-standard entry considerations described?
* Is it clear if applicants will be interviewed or have to write an admission essay, and what the process may involve?
* Are international students directed to any additional requirements (such as English language requirements) where appropriate?
* Have prospective students been given access to the regulations and terms and conditions that apply to them?

**Course/module structure and delivery (prospective and current students)**

* Is the purpose and key features of the course stated as succinctly as possible, with an overview of what will be studied in each year?
* Is it clear when the academic years starts and ends and how the academic year is organised, for example is the course based on terms or semesters?
* Has the structure of the course been explained, i.e. modules, credits, projects, weighting, contribution to final mark, etc.?
* Have you provided indicative timetable information for prospective students?
* Do students know when they can expect to receive their course timetable?
* Have you provided a list of compulsory module and potential optional modules?
* Is it clear if optional modules may not run and how they will be chosen?
* Is it clear whether the course, or part of it, is delivered, or available to be delivered, in another language?
* If there is information about a course that might be surprising to a student have you considered highlighting this to them?

**Teaching and learning (prospective and current students)**

* Have you provided an overview of teaching and learning activities, including methods of study, supervision, typical contact hours/workload and any differences between levels?
* Have you given indicative class sizes where possible?
* Is the importance and volume of independent learning required clear?
* Are students made aware of the learning resources and facilities available to enable and enhance their learning (e.g. library, VLE, laboratories, studios etc.)?
* Have you informed students about the general level of experience or status of the staff involved in delivery the different elements of the course?
* If some of the teaching will be undertaken by postgraduate students is this clear?
* Where staff profiles are used, is it clear that it is not guaranteed that certain individuals will take classes or deliver lectures?
* If teaching staff are named, is it clear the information is correct at the time of writing?
* Have you stated that staffing of modules is indicative where this is the case?
* Have you explained how and when students will be advised of any changes to modules or staff?

**Assessment and Feedback (prospective and current students)**

* Have you informed students about progression, including compulsory modules, pass marks and award classification requirements?
* Are all scenarios in relation to progression, i.e. what happens if…, for example, compulsory modules are not assessed as passed?
* Is your policy in terms of returning marked work and providing feedback provided?
* Have you provided an overview of formative and summative assessment, e.g. the types, frequency

**Costs and financial support (prospective and current students)**

* Have you provided clear information about the tuition fees students will be charged for the duration of the course and what they cover?
* Is information about other additional course related costs, e.g. costs associated with field trips or specialist equipment, provided?
* Have you provided information on accommodation and living costs and budgeting advice?
* Is the information on accommodation and living costs easily accessible via a link from course information?
* Do you provide information about bursaries, scholarships and any other financial support that may be available?

**Student facilities, support and representation (prospective and current students)**

* Is it clear what advice and support is available for students e.g. learning enhancement, counselling, accommodation, careers, childcare, welfare, etc.?
* Are students told where and how they can access this support?
* Have you outlined what sports, clubs and social or leisure activities are available on-site and in the local area?
* Have you given as much information as possible on the types of accommodation in and around the location of study (and its cost)?
* Where you have your own accommodation, is your policy for room allocation over the academic years of the course clear?
* Have you outlined the pastoral care arrangements in place, e.g. resident tutors?
* Is information provided on how equality of opportunity is achieved and how the diverse needs of students are met?
* Is information provided for students with disabilities?
* Are students aware of opportunities for student engagement and participation, such as course committees and representatives?
* Is information available about the Students’ Union with links to their own website where applicable?

**Detailed information (current students)**

* Have you provided programme and/or module level guides/handbooks?
* Do you bring information to the attention of current students at the appropriate time?
* Have you provided learning outcomes at the programme and module level
* Are curriculum details clear including options to be selected during the course, e.g. specialisation or PSRB requirements?
* Have students been provided with reading lists and information on how to access these resources?
* Have assessment details been provided, including content, timing, deadlines for submission, marking criteria, and arrangements for submission and return f marked work and giving feedback?
* Is it clear where to find and do you draw attention to the full set of relevant and applicable academic frameworks, regulations and procedures – such as good academic practice, extenuating circumstances, reassessment, appeals and complaints, and student conduct etc.
* Where alumni services are available, including careers advice, licence to practise information and opportunities for further study, have these been signposted?
* Have you drawn students’ attention to their rights and responsibilities?
* Are the processes for engaging with student clear, including how representatives are elected or selected?
* Are arrangements for gathering and responding to student feedback and internal surveys described?
* Do you make external examiners reports and other groups with student representation routinely available to relevant students?
* Do students know where to access their academic achievement records both during their study and when they complete or exit the programme before completion?
* Do you specific the length of time you will archive records of student achievement, and communicate you policies for maintaining such records?
1. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1406/ofs2018_01.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/2db81e6b-e4c7-4867-bc5d-ff67539d13e8/guide_to_providing_info_to_students.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428549/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411392/HE_providers_60ss.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/consumer-protection-review-of-higher-education#university-of-east-anglia-undertaking> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. QAA guidance on Partnerships <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/partnerships> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. QAA guidance on Partnerships <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/partnerships> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://my.uea.ac.uk/divisions/admissions-recruitment-marketing/marketing/guidance-and-support/brand-guidance> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)