# Office for Fair Access: Guide to institutions’ self-assessments and commentaries for 2010-11 monitoring

## What are the self-assessments and commentaries?

Universities and colleges set targets and milestones for themselves in their access agreements. These targets must be agreed by OFFA (but OFFA does not itself set any targets).

As part of our monitoring process for 2010-11 access agreements we asked universities and colleges to:

* grade their progress against each target they set themselves in their agreements
* provide data showing their progress against targets for each academic year since 2006-07
* provide a commentary setting their access work in context, highlighting any particular challenges they had faced, and, if they had not made as much progress as wished, explaining the reasons for this.

The tables shown in the pdf document for each institution reproduce the information we received from the institution as part of its monitoring return. Therefore the tables reflect **institutions’ own analysis** **of their performance, not OFFA’s**.

## What is OFFA doing with the self-assessments and commentaries?

The self-assessments and commentaries inform our ongoing dialogue, at both institutional and sector level, about performance and what works best to widen access and improve retention and student success.

For further information about monitoring performance against milestones and targets, please see part four of OFFA publication 2012/05, Access agreement and widening participation strategic assessment monitoring: Outcomes for 2010-11.

## Guide to Table 1

Table 1 is split into two parts. Table 1a shows the progress made by the institution against the statistical targets/milestones it set itself in its 2010-11 access agreement. These statistical milestones/targets relate to the institution’s applicants, entrants or student body. Institutions often use their own internal data when setting such targets, but most institutions also use data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Ucas or another source.

Table 1b shows the other milestones and targets that the institution chose to include. These typically relate to outreach, lifelong learning or institutional mission and targets.

In some cases data is not given for 2010-11 because it was not available at the time the institution filled in the monitoring return. These instances are marked ‘N/A’ in the table.

Let’s now look at each of the columns in Table 1, using the return from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne as an example for illustration only.

### Table 1a

**Milestone/target type** The entries in this column describe the category the target fits into. So we can see in the example from Newcastle, the first target it has chosen relates to ‘NS-SEC (HESA Table T1a)’ – that is, the figure reported by the Higher Education Statistics Agency concerning what percentage of Newcastle University students are from National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications 4-7.

**Description** This column gives a more detailed description of the target. In our Newcastle example, the institution explains that its target is that 21 per cent of young entrants from the UK should be from NS-SEC groups 4-7 by academic year 2010-11.

**Baseline data** This is the starting point against which the institution is measuring its progress. It may be a whole number, a percentage, or a percentage expressed as a decimal, as in the Newcastle example (0.201 = 20.1 per cent).

**Baseline year** This is the academic year in which the baseline data was measured. If only a single year is given this will be the first year of the two calendar years in which the academic year falls, e.g. in the Newcastle example ‘2006’ represents 2006-07.

**Target** What the institution is aiming to achieve. Newcastle, we can see, has set itself a target to achieve 21 per cent young UK entrants from NS-SEC groups 4-7.

**Target year** The academic year by which the institution aims to achieve its target. If only a single year is given this will be the first year of the two calendar years in which the academic year falls, e.g. in the Newcastle example ‘2014’ would represent 2014-15.

**Progress to date** Data for each academic year 2006-07 to 2010-11. Likely to be expressed in the same format as the baseline data in column 3.

**Performance summary** The institution’s assessment of its performance. The entries in this column were chosen by the institution from a list of pre-determined categories. In the example of Newcastle’s first target, they have chosen ‘No progress made against baseline data’ because the 2010-11 data is the same as that for the baseline year. However, by looking at the ‘Progress to date’ columns which give the more detailed picture, we can see that in 2008-09 the university did in fact exceed its target, before dropping down again in the subsequent two years. This shows why it is important to look at performance over time rather than focus on the change in a single year. Newcastle has also given helpful context about this target in its institutional commentary (Table 3, see below). And from the rest of Table 1 we can see that Newcastle has met, exceeded or made good progress on nearly all its other targets.

### Table 1b

Now, if we look at Newcastle’s first target in Table 1b, we will see the same headings but this time relating to outreach activity and outcomes. The first target shows that Newcastle wishes to increases its strategic partnerships with schools and colleges to 114 such partnerships by the year 2014-15. Its performance summary shows it is on course to meet this target.

Targets around outreach activity and outcomes demonstrate the efforts and successes of institutions to raise aspirations and attainment levels well before application and entry to higher education. Much of this work benefits the sector generally and is not of sole benefit to the institution providing the activity. We consider this work critical to widening participation and fair access.

## Guide to Table 2

Table 2 gives a reminder of the institution’s progress against three HESA widening participation performance indicators. This data is not OFFA data and it is not new; it has been available from HESA for some time at [www.hesa.ac.uk/pi](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi).

The performance indicators shown in our example give information about the participation at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne of groups that are under-represented in higher education, relative to the population as a whole. Table 2 also shows whether Newcastle is above or below its location-adjusted benchmark (shown in italics). It is important to note that benchmarks change each year and, because they are averages, there will always be some institutions that are below the benchmark and some that are above it. Benchmarks are **not** targets. They enable comparisons to be made between institutions which are sufficiently alike to be compared (for example, they take account of the entry qualifications of students, the subjects they study, and the students’ age.)

For more information on HESA performance indicators and benchmarking, see [www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\_content&task=view&id=2074&Itemid=141](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2074&Itemid=141)

The indicators used are for young (that is, aged up to 20 when they start their course) full-time students only and show:

**State School (%)** The percentage of students who attended a school or college in the state sector.

**NS-SEC 4-7 [socio-economic class] (%)** The percentage of students who come from categories 4 to 7 of the National Statistics age-adjusted Socio-economic Classification. Note that in 2008-09, National Statistics changed the way it collects data on socio-economic background so it is not valid to compare NS-SEC between years before and after 2008-09; this is why the tables show ‘N/A’ in some places.

**Low participation neighbourhoods (young) (%)** The percentage of students who come from a neighbourhood in which there is low participation in higher education. Note that this was measured in different ways before and after 2006-07 so it is not valid to compare low participation data between years before and after 2006-07; this is why the tables show ‘N/A’ in some places.

Performance indicators for 2009-10 are used because the 2010-11 performance indicators were not yet published at the time universities and colleges filled in their monitoring returns.

Looking again at our example from the University of Newcastle, we can see that it is below its benchmark in all three categories, but that in 2009-10 it has improved both its performance against the widening participation performance indicators and has moved closer to its benchmarks. For example, it increased its percentage of state school pupils from 70 per cent in 2004-05 to 71.5 per cent in 2009-10, i.e. a 1.5 percentage point rise, shown in the final column ‘Five-year change (2004-05 to 2009-10)’. From the ‘Two-year change (2007-08 to 2009-10)’, we can see that 0.4 percentage points of this change occurred in the last two years.

## Guide to Table 3

Table 3 gives the institution’s commentary on the data it has reported. This allows the institution to put the bare data into context and to give more details.

In our example of the University of Newcastle, the university has chosen to give a general comment, and then greater detail on two particular targets.

* The university provides the context of the challenges it faces in recruiting from certain NS-SEC groups and points out that when we look at entrants from the North East of England, where most of its widening participation activity takes place, it is significantly exceeding its HESA benchmarks. This would not have been obvious to OFFA from the raw target data so it is useful for us to have it here so that we have a more detailed and meaningful picture when understanding the university’s progress. We can also see that the university has specific plans to address this issue from 2012 onwards.
* The university notes that its strategy for engaging with potential applicants with disabilities has not been as successful as it hoped, and that it therefore plans to review the strategy.
* Finally the university draws our attention to the good results it has achieved from its work recruiting from black and minority ethnic groups, and that it expects this to continue.