Advance Alpha notification from the Data Futures Programme Board

Dear Contact,

During the pandemic the teams at HESA and Jisc have continued to work to develop the necessary technology and coding manuals for Data Futures. While the burden review in England will examine the frequency of data collection, Statutory Customers in all nations have confirmed their intention to move ahead with the technology and data model change elements of the project.

The Data Futures Programme Board, made up of HESA, Jisc, Statutory Customer and provider representatives, agrees that Alpha activity is a critical phase for the success of the Data Futures programme. After careful consideration of the challenges facing the sector, we have concluded that we should continue with an Alpha pilot. In coming to this conclusion, the project team has sought to design the Alpha pilot in such a way as to minimise the input needed from providers, take account of current working arrangements, and maximise the benefits for the project.

The technology phase of Data Futures is now at a stage where further user input from providers is required to deliver an optimum user experience.

The Alpha phase of Data Futures represents the last point at which significant changes to the design of the system and workflow can be made. Provider input is essential to ensure that we are building a system that works for providers. We are now inviting expressions of interest for the Alpha phase of the Data Futures programme and a communication is also being sent to
operational contacts at your organisation. We are looking for a representative group to reflect the four nations’ requirements as well as the diversity of providers.

Please find below a copy of the text we are sending to operational colleagues. The expression of interest survey link is only available in the operational email as we only require one application per organisation, but wanted to provide this for information.

**Data Futures Alpha phase**

Since the announcements on reducing regulatory burden by the DfE and OfS in September 2020, we have continued working with Jisc as our delivery partner on the HESA Data Platform (HDP) and the associated data model.

We recently released v1.7.0 of the Data Futures coding manual and we continue to work towards transition in the academic year 2022/23. We have also recently released an updated module for e-learning to support v1.7.0 of the coding manual.

We are now inviting expressions of interest for the Alpha phase; further information and details on how to apply are available below.

**Alpha requirements**

The Alpha phase will run between May and August 2021, preceded by training and preparations during April. We are exploring how to structure the approach and how we can potentially extend testing and provider input after August 2021 until December 2021. The deadline to submit your expression of interest is Tuesday 6 April.

The Alpha group will include providers and statutory customers. We are planning for up to 10 days’ interaction and feedback activity spanning May and August 2021. The Alpha phase will be conducted online, engaging with you via Microsoft Teams to hold workshops, one-to-one meetings, and e-learning.

The Alpha phase will take place largely in the form of moderated usability testing, to explore the HESA Data Platform (HDP), to understand how the HDP works, and validate the future system development roadmap. We will provide participants with supporting test files and the coding manual.
We aim to organise Alpha in bite-sized chunks where appropriate, underpinned by Alpha Agreements designed to be flexible in terms of dates and tasks.

During Alpha you will have a chance to:

- Work on the end-to-end solution using test files that we will prepare for you and real data (if available and agreed at during a later stage of the Alpha timeline) entered by you via the Data Entry Tool or generated by your own systems.
- Engage with the model, guidance and rules including automated checks, managing tolerances, and raising issues.
- Give usability input for consideration in the development process and enable bugs and errors to be identified.
- Test the model and user input on the rules and guidance to inform future work on rules and guidance.
- Support work on the approach to data migration that will support transition year quality assurance.

The Liaison team will be available throughout this phase to offer guidance and support.

**Alpha phase: expression of interest**

The deadline for expressions of interest is Tuesday 6 April.

Successful applicants will be informed by Monday 12 April.

**Alpha Q&A session and further information**

Ahead of the submission deadline, we are hosting an Alpha Q&A session, on Friday 19 March, from 10-11am. This is available to pre-book now.

Please send any advance questions to liaison@hesa.ac.uk so we can cover as much as possible during the session.

At the session we will:

- Run through our plans and the Alpha timeline in more detail.
- Introduce the e-learning programme and upcoming modules.
• Answer any questions you may have.

Register for Alpha Q&A 19 March 2021, 10-11am

More information is available on the Alpha phase webpage on the website. We will communicate when further content is available.

We have included copies of this email and the email sent to operational contacts on the Alpha phase page.

Thank you and we look forward to working with you.

Paul Clark

Chief Executive, HESA, on behalf of the Data Futures Programme Board

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