



HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR THE UK

TO HELP INFORM THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO
THE HESA NATIONAL STATISTICS PRODUCT
HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR THE UK

Summary of Consultation Responses
November 2016

HESA



HESA
95 Promenade
Cheltenham
GL50 1HZ
E opendata@hesa.ac.uk
T +44 (0) 1242 255577
W www.hesa.ac.uk

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PURPOSE

To inform the proposed changes to the HESA National Statistics product *Higher Education Statistics for the UK*.

BACKGROUND

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics states:

Protocol 1 - User Engagement

Consult users before making changes that affect statistics (for example, to coverage, definitions or methods) or publications (point 7).

Consultations should be:

- **Informed** – by relevant central guidance on how consultations should be conducted; and by the views of user groups on the best means of obtaining views;
- **Efficient** – by balancing the importance of the issue and the likely impact of users' views against the time and resources available, so as to obtain good value for money from the consultation process; by liaising and co-ordinating with other producers to avoid duplication of effort and to minimise burdens; and by exploiting different methods of consultation;
- **Clear** – by describing the consultation, and expressing the issues, as simply and concisely as possible; and by publishing the timetable for each consultation; and
- **Responsive** – by publishing the records of decisions and actions following a consultation, together with explanations for them; and by publishing individual responses, unless anonymity is requested.

Since Higher Education Statistics for the UK is a National Statistics product, HESA has sought the views of users on a recent set of proposals for change through a consultation. The proposals for change were as follows:

- All data to be published free of charge on the HESA website www.hesa.ac.uk under a Creative Commons 4.0 license.
- Product content to be published on a phased basis through the year as each data update becomes available.
- Content based on 2015/16 Student data (main tables and introduction tables/text/charts) to be published in February 2017 at the same time as the HESA [Students in Higher Education](#) publication.
- Content based on 2015/16 Staff data to be published in February 2017 at the same time as the HESA [Staff in Higher Education](#) publication.

- Content based on 2015/16 Finance data to be published in April 2017 at the same time as the HESA [Finances of Higher Education Providers](#) publication.
- Content based on 2015/16 Destinations data to be published in July 2017 at the same time as the HESA [Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education](#) publication.
- Content based on data from external (non-HESA) sources to be published on the next scheduled HESA publication date after the external data's original release date.
- Phased publication of product content builds towards a complete collection matching previous years' editions.

The online consultation was published on 11 August 2016 and closed on 8 September 2016. The consultation was publicised via the HESA website and through email communications sent to all existing users of the product.

RESPONSES

Overall, 37 responses were received.

QUESTION 1: ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION STATISTICS FOR THE UK PUBLICATION?

97% of respondents confirmed they were happy with the proposed changes.

QUESTION 2: IF NOT, PLEASE EXPLAIN YOUR REASONS FOR THIS.

Three responses were received:

FEEDBACK	HESA'S RESPONSE
Clarification was sought on which variant of the Creative Commons 4.0 licence would be used: "The type of CC licence has implications on who can use the data and how it can be used, particularly for linked data projects and data mining."	At present we favour use of Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY SA). A final decision on this will be made shortly.
"The more data is available quickly and free, the better informed a public debate we can have and the more possible it will be for researchers to be responsive to that."	These two concerns relate to HESA's wider plans to publish more open data which are the subject of a separate Open Data consultation – the results of which, including HESA's response, will be published shortly. In the

<p>“While we are in principle in favour of open data as a concept, we have two primary concerns with the proposals as they stand to make HESA data open: That this will result in a loss of income stream for HESA, and therefore have a knock-on impact on institutional subscription rates; That data will be made more freely available to non-sector bodies who may have insufficient understanding or experience in the interpretation of that data, leading to misleading use of the data (eg. by the press).”</p>	<p>meantime HESA can confirm that the proposals to publish <i>Higher Education Statistics for the UK</i> as Open Data will have no effect whatsoever on the rates of subscription charged to HESA subscribers. With regard to the issue of possible misinterpretation, this product includes detailed definitional explanation for users. This should minimise the risk of misinterpretation; but HESA is always open to suggestions from interested parties as to how we can further improve contextual information published with data and statistics.</p>
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QUESTION 3: DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS ON HOW HESA CAN IMPROVE THIS PRODUCT?

Ten responses were received:

FEEDBACK	HESA'S RESPONSE
<p>“I'm all for more data being published freely, but would ask that HESA ensure that there is sufficient 'laymen' guidance for those accessing the data, outside of HE Planning Offices, or beyond those providing HESA data.”</p>	<p>As stated above, HESA publishes full definitions but would welcome further ideas from users as to how we can improve the supporting information - opendata@hesa.ac.uk</p>
<p>“I was wondering if HESA had considered moving away from proprietary formats (.xlsx). Switching to open formats would make importing HESA data into statistical analysis packages easier, and aid long-term preservation and accessibility of the data.”</p>	<p>HESA is indeed considering moving to use of non-proprietary formats. This will form part of our implementation of Open Data more widely and we will work with the Open Data Institute to explore options and determine the appropriate formats to maximise reuse of our statistics and data.</p>
<p>“Make it easier to look at e.g. all students with a protected characteristic or particular disability of all genders and all study modes.”</p>	<p>This issue appears to relate to the format of publication of the data. We are examining alternative formats and structures to enable more flexible reuse of data and maximise 'machine-readability' as part of our wider Open Data plans. However, it is unlikely that we will</p>

	be able to implement significant changes to structure in time for the 2017 publication of this product, so we will look to implement from the 2018 edition onwards.
“Can datasets be deposited in other repositories, and will information about how to cite the data, its preservation and indexing be included (if not already)? Will datasets have a DOI or other pervasive identifier?”	HESA will examine options for depositing data sets in other repositories. As described above, significant structural changes are unlikely for the 2017 edition but from the 2018 edition we aim to deliver data sets underlying this product in machine readable formats including appropriate identifiers.
“Use CC-BY-SA licence to encourage the manipulations of the data and its representations to be shared freely.”	This is indeed our preference.
“The navigation on the site is not the most useful - but the content is of high quality.”	This appears to be a comment on the HESA website which we have forwarded to our web team.
“Providing the data at the time it becomes available and free of charge seems to be a useful improvement.”	We are glad that you agree.
“We would like the tables that are available to the public to be made a bit more ‘Analyst’ friendly, as their format does not allow for quick analysis. Also, if historical data could be made available in a single file, instead of being separated by years, it would be most helpful.”	As mentioned above, we shall be looking to implement structural changes with underlying data sets from the 2018 edition onwards. These changes will aim to make the data more accessible and usable, supporting more flexible analysis including across data years.
“The proposals seem sensible. If we’re going to have to make in-year returns, why not make the data public asap afterwards to the public.”	We agree completely.
“As a user of this data I welcome the proposal to publish this earlier, and for free!”	Good to hear.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACTIONS

The consultation demonstrated a high level of support for the proposals and we shall therefore proceed in implementing them. Since the proposed changes continue to provide existing users with all the information they have been accustomed to using, but in an earlier timeframe, HESA will implement the changes from the 2017 edition of the product.

The first batch of content *from Higher Education Statistics for the UK* will therefore be published in February 2017, with the remaining batches published on the approximate schedule as indicated in the consultation proposals.

The additional suggestions for improvements provided by consultation respondents will be carefully considered for future editions of the product.

Any further suggestions or comments about this product should be sent to opendata@hesa.ac.uk



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