FOREWORD

Data and information are HESAs core business. They have never been more important to higher education than they are now. Recent policy changes have introduced more competition into the sector, the UK-wide context of efficiency has put pressure on public funding, and there is greater interest in and scrutiny of higher education than ever before.

There is also a need to ensure that students, funders, taxpayers, and other stakeholders are well informed about higher education – which is, after all, a critical national asset for the UK.

GROWING APPETITE FOR DATA
The appetite for data is growing all the time. Equally, there are continuing advances in digital technology that underpin HESAs core activities – whether these relate to the collection of data from higher education providers (HEPs), providing faster and more accessible services to users, or developing advanced analytics. HESA is therefore influenced not just by changes to higher education policy, but also by developments affecting the worlds of digital and data.

This new Strategic Plan, covering the five-year period from 2016 to 2021, has been prepared against this fast-changing background. It seeks to ensure that HESA can continue to deliver efficient, high-quality data, information, and analytical services for its wide range of stakeholders, while navigating a period of substantial change.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE
While there are undoubtedly challenges in the current environment, there are also many opportunities. Over the next five years we plan to upgrade and modernise our data collection systems and processes, making them faster, less burdensome, and more timely. We will work with other organisations within and beyond the sector to build a more efficient and effective HE data infrastructure, accommodating an ever-growing number of providers. We will continuously improve our hosted data analytics services, and develop new products and services for our customers. We will seek to ensure that those making decisions on and about the HE sector have available to them the data they need, when they need it. And we will make as much of our core data as possible available as open data.

EFFICIENCY AND COLLABORATION
As an organisation, we will be seeking to reduce the costs of our operations, and increase our external income, to relieve pressure on subscriptions from HEPs, in line with challenges being faced across the sector. Part of our approach to this will involve seeking to work closely with other organisations, developing new partnerships and collaborations where it makes sense for us to do so.

We believe that this plan and the aims it sets out will ensure that UK higher education can continue to benefit from accurate, timely, high-quality, and comparable data and information – upgraded for the digital era.
COrporate strategy

Our strategy aims to ensure that we provide the right data to the right people at the right time. We want to make sure our data and information services can improve decision-making, increase efficiency, and promote public trust. We will do this by making our systems and services more efficient, agile, and responsive, by continuously developing our digital skills and services, by making our data and analytical expertise as widely available as possible, and by working in partnership with other organisations in the UK HE sector.

MISSION
Our mission is to support the advancement of UK higher education by collecting, analysing, and disseminating accurate and comprehensive statistical information in response to the needs of all those with an interest in its characteristics and a stake in its future.

VISION
Our aim is to be the analytical powerhouse for the UK HE sector, and the trusted source of national HE statistics and public information. We seek to provide flexible, efficient, high-quality data, information, and analytical services to meet user needs, to support better decision-making in higher education, to promote public trust and confidence, and to enhance the competitive strength of the UK HE sector.

By 2021...
1. We are collecting data in-year, and delivering it to statutory customers, institutions, and decision-makers regularly and frequently.
2. As much of our core data as possible is available as open data.
3. We have reduced the burden of data collection on institutions.
4. Our data is supplied to key decision-makers when they need it, in the form they need it.
5. We are working in formal partnerships, sharing services, if and where appropriate and developing new products and services with a range of organisations.
6. We are operating more efficiently, with more resources dedicated to high-value activities for our customers.
7. All our operations are run from the Cloud.

We have four strategic aims in support of this vision:

1. Upgrade the UK HE data infrastructure p5
2. Increase the usefulness of the data we collect p6
3. Enhance insight through analysis and dissemination p7
4. Operate efficiently p8
The demand for higher education data is increasing all the time. This demand is coming from a number of sources: from policy-makers and regulators, who need access to timely, high-quality data to support better decision-making and an increasingly data-driven regulatory system; from higher education providers, who need data to improve their services, operate efficiently, and compete effectively in the new marketplace; and from the wider public, who need data to underpin trust and confidence in the sector, to support their own decision-making, and to have an informed view on value for money.

At the same time, the UK HE sector is larger, more diverse, and more dynamic than it has ever been.

- There are more providers operating within it, offering a wider range of provision and activity.
- Providers’ finances are growing more complex, and institutions have more connections with business and with their local communities.
- Providers also now operate on a global stage, with international competitors and collaborations.

Capturing this activity requires significant upgrading to the data infrastructure which underpins the sector, and which was designed for a different, more stable, and more predictable era. This data infrastructure needs to become more flexible, adaptable, connected, and efficient. More data needs to be made open, and HE data needs to be linked more effectively both within the sector, and with data drawn from other areas. Data needs to be accessible on a more timely and efficient basis than at present, and the burden of data collection on the sector needs to be reduced.

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE
The HE sector does not operate in isolation. The worlds of data, digital service delivery, and technology are also changing fast. A radical shift is taking place in the volume, variety, and speed of data being produced – and this, combined with new technologies for storage, access, and analysis, defines the era of ‘big data’ in which we are now living. These developments are transforming all areas of our lives, including the public service, policy, and funding contexts within which HESA operates. HESA thus sits at the hub of transformative change both in data and in higher education, and has the opportunity to influence both.

As the sector’s data and information service, HESA will respond rapidly to these developments, upgrading its systems and services, and leading the transformation of the HE sector’s data infrastructure. This requires change and investment. However, this must be achieved against a background of continuing efficiency and austerity in public services, with ongoing downward pressure on finances.

There is increased scrutiny of the sector’s regulatory architecture, with questions rightly being asked around efficiency and value for money for providers. We are fully aware that more needs to be done with less, and that meeting our aspirations will involve further diversifying our income streams.

UNCERTAIN CONTEXT
As well as opportunities, there are risks and uncertainties in the current environment. These include: ongoing pressures on public funding, including changes to the structure of funding for HE; change and uncertainty in HE policy; increasing fragmentation within the devolved administrations of the UK; unpredictability in student demand; and the need to keep pace with very rapid developments in technology and digital services. All these factors, and others, affect HESA’s operating environment, and will thus influence its future strategy.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING
In conjunction with this strategic framework, we will be developing a series of Key Performance Indicators and outcome metrics that will be used to assess our performance. These will cover areas such as:

- Service delivery standards
- Reach and impact
- User satisfaction
- Financial performance
- Operational efficiency

We will publish regular reports on our performance via our website, and will be open and transparent in communicating with our stakeholders.
STRATEGIC AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

We will pursue the following four aims and activities in support of our overall strategy.
AIM 1: UPGRADE THE UK HE DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Rationalise our data collection systems and processes, and move to in-year data collection through the Data Futures programme
2. Establish sector-owned mechanisms for collective decision-making and scrutiny of UK HE data, with a mandate to reduce burden
3. Improve the speed, timeliness, and efficiency of our data collections and deliveries
4. Move our technology platform and data to the Cloud
5. Plan for the future of data collection and dissemination beyond 2019/20

DATA FUTURES

HESA’s Data Futures programme aims to deliver a modernised and more efficient approach to HE data. We are aiming to create a data infrastructure that will deliver more relevant, reliable, and timely information, and to do this in efficient ways that reduce the burden on providers.

We are currently focussing on developing detailed implementation plans for the programme and working towards an initial pilot in 2017/18, followed by a full roll out of the new system in 2019/20.

We have been engaging with providers to discuss Data Futures at conferences and workshops around the UK and we received a healthy response rate for our sector consultation, which indicated positive support for the Data Futures vision.

More about the programme can be found at www.hesa.ac.uk/datafutures
HESA: Corporate strategy 2016-2021

AIM 2: INCREASE THE USEFULNESS OF THE DATA WE COLLECT

1. Make as much of our core data as possible available as open data
2. Improve data capability in the UK HE sector
3. Develop common data specifications that can meet the needs of the widest group of users, while minimising burden
4. Regularly review our data collections to ensure proportionality and usefulness
5. Link HESA data with that of other HE sector and public sector data collectors and suppliers

OPEN DATA

HESA has long operated on principles of transparency and accessibility in data handling. We are now responding to the increasing focus on the value of open data in higher education, and its benefits for providers and other key users of data.

To help realise these benefits, HESA has been collaborating with others in the sector to support the development of open data practices: we have contributed to the Universities UK (UUK) open data workstream and associated events; we have also become a member of the Open Data Institute (ODI).

From this year we have commenced open data licensing of statistics published via our website. We have also adopted open licensing for some of our data products, such as this year’s Performance Indicators publication. This approach will be extended to other products over time, such as our Statistical First Releases.

Looking further ahead, we have developed a draft open data strategy. Emerging ideas in the strategy include:

- Making all current HESA statistics publications open and free of charge to users over the next five years
- Publishing key metadata in open and linked data formats
- Securing ODI certification

We are consulting on the detail of how best to implement our open data strategy and look forward to working collaboratively with the sector to help deliver the benefits of open data.
AIM 3: ENHANCE INSIGHT THROUGH ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION

HEIDI PLUS

Heidi Plus is our new, next generation business intelligence tool. It aims to support better business intelligence across the sector and make data-driven insights accessible to a wide range of staff, not just data professionals.

We built the service using the most up-to-date data exploration and analytics software in order to give users access to extensive and detailed HESA data sets and other sources of data about higher education. The interactive system gives providers the power to creatively analyse and generate insights from the data in a move that should significantly raise analytical capability within universities and save providers time and money by making it quick and easy for decision-makers to access the information they need.

Heidi Plus is freely available to all of HESA’s full subscribers, and on a subscription basis to other not-for-profit organisations. It is replacing our established Heidi service and was created as part of a joint business intelligence project between HESA and Jisc.

1. Continuously develop and improve our hosted analytics service, Heidi Plus
2. Develop new, bespoke products and services which meet the needs of users
3. Provide ‘policy-ready’ data, by ensuring that our data is accessible and available to policy-makers and decision-makers when they need it, in the form they need it
4. Improve understanding, confidence, and public trust in UK higher education through commentary, analysis, and visualisation

Heidi Plus can create a range of visualisations to bring new dimensions to data analysis.
COLLABORATION WITH JISC AND QAA

HESA has announced plans to explore increased collaboration and cost sharing with two other sector agencies – Jisc and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – through a new partnership to be known as the ‘M5 Group’.

We intend to explore options for working more closely together to develop better solutions to some of the long-term issues that are being faced by the UK HE sector.

It is our intention that the tripartite approach will provide a greater pool of resources aimed at improving services. We look forward to updating the sector on the future of the partnership as we develop our plans.

Paul Clark, Paul Feldman, Chief Executive of Jisc, and Douglas Blackstock, Chief Executive of QAA.
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