



SUPPORTING THE ADVANCEMENT
OF UK HIGHER EDUCATION
THROUGH DATA AND ANALYSIS

IMPACT REPORT
JULY 2016

HESA



INTRODUCTION

Data is fast becoming a vital part of the higher education (HE) sector. Providers use data to enhance the student experience and drive their business goals; regulators and policy makers use it to evaluate the sector's performance; and a wide cross-section of the public use it to undertake academic and commercial research, and to make informed decisions about HE study.

OUR MISSION

HESA contributes to the advancement of higher education in the UK by collecting and processing data that is robust and relevant, and providing analysis and information that promotes public trust in the sector; increases efficiency, and enables strategic decision making in HE providers, governments and businesses.

OUR FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY

As the sector around us is changing, so we are changing. We aim to become the HE sector's analytical powerhouse. To achieve this aim, we are developing a range of initiatives to upgrade and improve the data infrastructure that serves the UK. Our corporate strategy, launched this year, established our key aims for the next five years:

Upgrade the
UK HE data
infrastructure

Increase the
usefulness of the
data we collect

Enhance insight
through analysis
and dissemination

Operate
efficiently



A set of enduring core principles underpins the changes we seek to make and has informed everything we have done since we began collecting data in 1993.

- ▶ We are **owned by the HE sector** and operate as an independent service organisation. Our members are GuildHE and Universities UK.
- ▶ We operate under a **statutory framework** on behalf of all four funding councils and the relevant government departments of the UK.
- ▶ We are a part of the UK's **'statistics family'**. We produce Official Statistics, a sign that a number of our statistical outputs have met a stringent quality threshold. We are regulated in this respect by the UK Statistics Authority

which has a direct line of accountability to Parliament, **independent** of any specific government department.

- ▶ We are part-funded by subscriptions from higher education providers, and are dedicated to ensuring that we deliver **value for money**. Our subscription rates are kept low due to the commercial activities we undertake.
- ▶ In addition to our work with HE providers and sector bodies, we are driven by a wider **public purpose**: to support and enhance the competitive strength of HE in the UK.

ENHANCING EFFICIENCY AND DATA EXPERTISE IN PROVIDERS



In the last year, we processed more than 107 million records to arrive at complete and quality checked data concerning over 3.2 million students and graduates from across 227 higher education providers.

As the sector's data and analysis service, we are committed to assisting these higher education providers fulfil their statutory reporting requirements in an efficient and cost effective manner.

ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING AND DATA MATURITY IN PROVIDERS

Last year, we delivered 130 training courses to a total of 2,400 delegates. Through these courses, we engaged with 97% of all UK HE providers with the aim of improving understanding and enhancing efficiency.

Across 24,981 email conversations, our Liaison team has assisted 3,360 different stakeholders in submitting data. We have

also played an integral role in supporting the ever-growing number of new, specialist HE providers who are unfamiliar with the HESA data submission process. We have made 180 visits across the entire country to induct 97 new providers.

93% of new providers found the induction meeting helpful

These inductions are highly valued by the providers, who typically lack local expertise in submitting HESA data. Collecting accurate data from these Alternative Providers is also crucial in ensuring that the information we publish captures the full picture of how recent government reforms have altered the HE landscape.

SUPPORTING EFFICIENT SUBMISSION PROCESSES

Our software development team is committed to creating sophisticated, but user-friendly, software to support providers throughout the data collection process.

As part of our work to upgrade our data collection system over the last year, we launched a new user interface, a streamlined submission process and new style reports.

The changes to the system allow providers to manage their workflow more intuitively, by placing a greater focus on current activity and providing visual representation of progress to date. Providers also benefit from the greater functionality offered by new web-based credibility reports which help with manual quality assurance procedures.

These developments are on-going, with further new features planned for the near future to continue to enhance providers' interactions with our software infrastructure.

"Definitely a huge improvement to the process - streamlining data validation and submission (with associated reports) saved us a lot of time and effort, and provides a clear audit trail."

SUPPORTING STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE HE SECTOR AND BEYOND

In an increasingly competitive sector, higher education providers require meaningful insights into social and sectoral trends in order to promote strategic planning.

Policy makers and sector bodies also require timely, high-quality data to support better decision making within a regulatory system that is evolving to be more data-driven.

Our data and analysis underpins providers' business intelligence systems and benchmarking abilities. We also undertake regular reviews of our data streams to ensure we are collecting information which will be of most value to governments, sector bodies and the wider community.

ENHANCING BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

Heidi Plus is our new, next-generation analytics service which gives providers access to HESA's data streams. Heidi Plus offers providers a wealth of information about their own organisation and about wider sector trends. Heidi Plus is freely available to all providers with a full HESA subscription; non-profit HE sector bodies can also subscribe.



Heidi Plus
Next Generation Education Analytics

We launched Heidi Plus in November 2015, and it is currently used by 86 different organisations, a figure which includes 57% of all UK HE providers. Unique users of the Heidi Plus service have grown from 39 in December 2015 to 295 in May 2016.

SHAPING THE DATA WE COLLECT

Part of our public purpose is to understand and communicate the impact that HE study has on graduates, on society and on the economy.

We have been surveying graduate destinations since 1994, initially via the First Destination Survey and latterly via the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) and Longitudinal DLHE surveys. Through these surveys, we have provided information on over 5.5 million people after they left higher education courses. These surveys provide vital insight into graduate prospects and the graduate jobs market – insights that are valued by local government, business organisations and senior managers in higher education providers.

We are responding to the evolving graduate jobs market by reviewing what information we need to gather about post-study outcomes. Our #NewDLHE review aims to create a replacement for DLHE which is future-proof, efficient, fit for purpose and compatible with recent legislation. This new survey will replace DLHE in shaping our collective understanding of graduate prospects.

We launched the review in May 2016, and have so far engaged with providers, government departments, funding councils and business groups. Our initial consultation attracted 200 responses, with over 150 people attending a dedicated conference.

DEVELOPING LOCAL DATA CAPABILITIES

Recent developments in technology and data management provide an unprecedented opportunity for HE providers to enhance their strategic insights and to unlock value and efficiencies. However, there is a risk that not all providers can keep up with the pace of recent change.

In June 2015, HEDIIP launched a data capability toolkit designed to help providers determine their current capabilities and identify priorities and opportunities for improvement.

Responses to the toolkit – along with extensive feedback from the sector – informed our report, published in January: 'Data Capability: A call to action'. The report isolates problems with the sector's relationship with data. Data is frequently analysed and used in specific, narrow contexts, while the most trusted data is not always used to underpin business intelligence systems.

The report calls for the development within the sector of holistic and integrated approaches to data, driven by business needs, with clearly defined governance and controls in place. Through our Data Futures project – and other projects – we continue to play a key role in supporting this development.



INFORMING PUBLIC
POLICY AND
ADVANCING RESEARCH

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRENDS



HESA data informs social and economic research on a wide range of topics, while also fuelling debate about the future of the higher education sector.

In the last year, we have produced eight statistical publications, which have sold 624 copies. Our free online stats have also been viewed over 50,000 times.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

In the last year, our team of analysts fulfilled 634 requests for bespoke data extracts. The information we provided contributed to a range of academic and public policy research, including studies about:

- ▶ The impact of gender, institution, subject and socioeconomic background on graduate earnings ([Institute of Fiscal Studies](#), April 2016)
- ▶ The gender, ethnicity, disability and age breakdowns of staff and students in HE ([ECU: Equality Challenge Unit](#), November 2015)
- ▶ How the performance of students with International Baccalaureate qualifications compares to students with A Levels ([International Baccalaureate Organisation](#), February 2016)
- ▶ The characteristics of high-performing research units ([King's College London](#) and [RAND Europe](#), November 2015)
- ▶ How graduate outcomes are impacted by equality and diversity characteristics ([HEFCE](#), September 2015)
- ▶ The disadvantages ethnic minority British graduates face in the labour market ([Institute for Social and Economic Research](#), January 2016)
- ▶ The progression of college students into higher education ([BIS](#), September 2015)
- ▶ The Alternative Provider market ([BIS](#), May 2016)

DATA SHARING AND PROMOTING STUDENT CHOICE

HESA is already engaged in a number of projects that seek to derive policy making benefit from sharing data. We are working at the cutting edge of developments in 'big data' to ensure the value that our data offers is recognised and exploited.

PIONEERING RESEARCH THROUGH SHARED DATA

We are currently working closely with BIS, HMRC, DWP and the DfE on developing the 'all-education dataset'. This dataset will allow people to track progression through the education system into the labour market.

Our data was also recently used in a ground-breaking study carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. This study, which also drew on data from HMRC and the Student Loans Company, analysed the impact that course of study and institution had on individual graduate outcomes. This study has had a considerable impact, with substantial media coverage, and responses issued by the NUS, social mobility charities, university associations, and business groups.

There is significant future potential for developing this kind of analysis, particularly through linking higher education sector data and HMRC data. [Our blog](#), with further analysis of the report and its implications – both for the HE sector and the big data landscape – has been viewed nearly 350 times

SUPPORTING DECISION MAKING

Our data plays a significant role in helping prospective students decide where they want to study.

Our data about students, staff, graduates and providers is used by the government's Unistats service, and it also underpins the influential university guides:



INFORMING DEBATE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Debates continue about the role and development of higher education in the UK. Formally, these debates are held in the UK and devolved parliaments; informally, they happen in TV, print and online media. Our data and analysis – by virtue of its impartiality – is especially valued in these debates.

STEERING THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Our data, and HESA as an organisation, is regularly cited in the Houses of Parliament. The principles and methodologies involved in creating useful, standardised higher education information have been of particular currency in the last year in the run up to the government's higher education White Paper. The paper, 'Success as a Knowledge Economy', is concerned with the value of data (mentioned 68 times), and is informed by information from HESA. In parliamentary debates around HE, we were cited 49 times in the House of Commons and 14 times in the House of Lords.

UNDERPINNING MEDIA COMMENTARY

Each year, HESA supports public debate about higher education by supplying statistics and information to journalists in the UK and overseas. In the last year, we have informed media articles reaching a wide audience, including items in the leading broadsheets, in *Times Higher Education*, on BBC Radio 4, and across online channels.

Our statistics are trusted by journalists because the only agenda they come with is accuracy.

Our data has informed commentary on:

- ▶ The EU referendum ([Times Higher Education](#))
- ▶ The 2015 General Election ([The Conversation](#))
- ▶ The campaign against precarious staff contracts ([UCU](#))
- ▶ The gender pay gap in HE ([BBC](#))
- ▶ The HE financial climate ([The Conversation](#))
- ▶ The gender gap in university admissions ([Guardian](#))
- ▶ The salaries of senior management ([Times Higher Education](#))
- ▶ Widening participation and social mobility ([Independent](#))
- ▶ The degree classification system ([Telegraph](#))

SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our impact in the policy sphere stretches beyond the UK. We are recognised as being a world-leader in the collection and dissemination of higher education data. We regularly receive visits and enquiries from foreign governments and regional agencies, and have provided training and consultancy advice to a number of government departments.

Recent examples of countries with which we have engaged include: China, Japan, South Korea, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Oman, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Serbia and Romania.



As a journalist writing on higher education matters, the value of HESA's authoritative and impartial data cannot be underestimated.

For instance, in the past fortnight, I was able to use data obtained from HESA to examine the issue of the gender pay gap – a story that was picked up by all the national newspapers, as well as the BBC, making its primetime news (Radio 4's Six O'Clock News) and discussion programmes (The World at One, The World Tonight). Thanks to HESA's data, a nationwide debate over the issue of women's careers in academia, equal pay and family-friendly working practices was sparked both within institutions but more widely – while the topic was a central theme of discussion at the University College Union congress held in early June.

Other data on student numbers, qualifications, degree classifications, provided by HESA also set the agenda for the political debate around HE.

Getting hold of such comparable sector-level data would be impossible without HESA – with many press offices and data teams being reluctant to release such data (some claiming commercial confidentiality), while HESA expertise makes otherwise unwieldy and complex data comprehensible to non-statisticians.

JACK GROVE, THE ◀

THE YEAR AHEAD

In the coming year, we will continue to enhance our data collection processes and will make further improvements to the submission interface. We will also work to ensure that the data we publish is made available to the audiences who need it most – both within and outside of HE providers.

We will also continue to ensure we are operating as efficiently as we can, and offering outstanding value for money for our subscribers.

OPEN DATA STRATEGY

We value transparency and accessibility in data handling, and strongly believe that our data has a positive impact on the HE sector and wider society. Despite our belief in accessibility, the majority of the data we currently disseminate is not published 'openly'.

Our aim over the next five years is to redress this by publishing as open data as much of our non-personal and non-commercially sensitive data as possible.

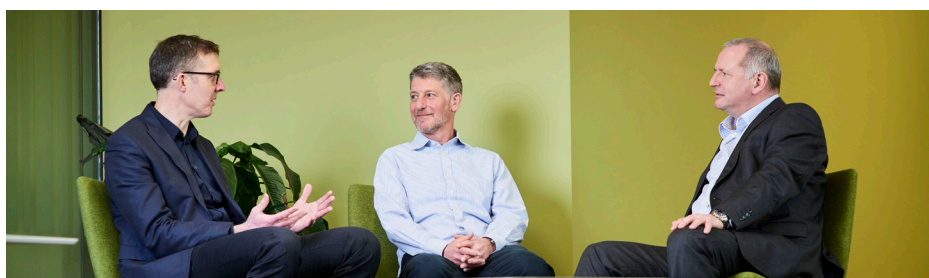
In June 2016, we launched our Open Data Consultation to gather input from the wider community on the ambition and practicalities of our open data plans. The responses to this consultation will feed into our wider open data plans that will be formalised in the next year.

We will also be publishing further publications – as well as associated metadata – as open data this year.

M5 GROUP

In March 2016, we joined with Jisc and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to form the M5 Group. Through collaboration and the pooling of resources, the three agencies aim to promote efficient and cost effective solutions to some of the long-term issues facing the UK HE sector.

Since forming, the group has isolated three thematic areas for further collaboration in the coming year: computing infrastructure; data warehousing; and customer relationship management. We are also carrying out due diligence on the possibilities for sharing back-office services.



▲ Paul Clark, Paul Feldman, Chief Executive of Jisc, and Douglas Blackstock, Chief Executive of QAA.
Photo credit: Matt Lincoln

DATA FUTURES

Data Futures is our ambitious programme of change that will help to deliver a new higher education information landscape.

The project – which responds to recent developments in the HE sector and the 'big data' landscape – seeks to revolutionise how we collect, process and disseminate student data. The project aims to:

- ▶ Enable timely data collection and reporting
- ▶ Reduce the burden on data providers
- ▶ Drive improved value for money
- ▶ Deliver data that is fit for purpose
- ▶ Support changes to data governance across the sector (HEDIIP)

In the coming year we will appoint a Prime Contractor to support the delivery of this programme of change. A key priority will be preparing for our Data Futures pilot run in 2017/18. This initial pilot will allow us to engage with providers and software suppliers, and begin the process of co-designing solutions with the sector.

The Data Futures project will also expand upon HEDIIP's recent work on the Data Language Project, with the aim of finalising a new model Student collection. Through updating the way that student information is defined, we aim to standardise the data that we and other organisations collect, and improve data governance and capabilities across the HE sector. This will increase both efficiency and utility of data collection.

STAY IN TOUCH

To keep up-to-date with news
from HESA please visit us at

www.hesa.ac.uk

 **@ukhesa**

HESA
95 Promenade
Cheltenham
GL50 1HZ
+44 (0)1242 255577

Date published: July 2016

Higher Education Statistics Agency Ltd (HESA) is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England at 95 Promenade, Cheltenham, GL50 1HZ. Registered No. 2766993. Registered Charity No. 1039709. Certified to ISO 9001 and ISO 27001. The members are Universities UK and GuildHE.

