Staff review: evidence gathering survey

Overview

The launch of this major review allows us to take stock of the changes which have occurred in the decade since the last major review of the Staff record, to assess their impact, and to determine the extent to which the Staff record as it now stands meets the needs of our users.

Since the last major review, the funding and regulatory environment in the UK nations has changed substantially. Notably, following the implementation of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, the administration of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) passed from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to Research England, which continues to administer the REF on behalf of the four UK nations. Data used in the REF has been collected in the Staff record since 2018, and Jisc aims to work with Research England to ensure that the Staff record remains fit for use in subsequent rounds of the REF.

Areas of higher education (HE) policy interest relevant to the Staff record have also shifted over the past decade. An emerging policy focus on regional development – most noticeably as part of the 'levelling up' agenda – has highlighted the role of HE providers in their local areas. Related to this has been a growing interest in providers – and their staff – as participants in various knowledge exchange and innovation activities. Over the same time period, successive rounds of industrial action have drawn attention to employment conditions in the HE sector, particularly in terms of contracts and workloads, but also in terms of the sometimes divergent experiences of staff with different personal characteristics.

The changing policy context of recent years is likely to have affected user needs for data concerning HE staff. Through this evidence gathering exercise, we therefore aim to identify user needs related to some of the key concepts and themes underpinning the Staff record. At this stage, we will be collecting evidence regarding four main themes:

1. Coverage of the Staff record
2. Staff activities and employment functions
3. Careers in higher education
4. Staff demographics

For each of these four themes, we will supply some contextual information, laying out the issues that have emerged in our preliminary research. We will then pose a series of questions relating to each theme. Respondents will also be invited to include any additional comments about their needs for data regarding HE staff in the section titled 'Closing feedback'.

At this stage, statutory customers have not yet specified their requirements for the Staff record, and we will not be making detailed proposals for changes to the Staff record at this time. Instead, we are seeking views from the sector concerning their aspirations for and uses of data on HE staff. We will use the evidence gathered in this exercise to inform the development of a proposed specification for a revised Staff record. We will then consult on this proposed specification at a later date, currently planned for spring 2024.

What is the overall plan for this review?

This first consultation will focus on gathering evidence from the sector about what changes we should be looking to make in the Staff record review, drawing on preliminary evidence already gathered by Jisc. These responses will then be looked at, in conjunction with requirements from our statutory customers, to produce a proposed data specification for consideration in a second consultation.

Responses from the second consultation will be considered by a review group (comprising Jisc, statutory customers and sector experts) to form the final recommendations for change to the Staff record for 2025/26. These recommendations will be considered by our statutory customers and any resulting changes will be announced to the sector in autumn 2024.

Who should respond to this consultation?

We welcome responses from all stakeholders with an interest in the collection, use and dissemination of information about staff in UK higher education. We particularly welcome responses from operational contacts who submit data to the current Staff record.

Data processing notice

Responses to this survey will be used to support the review of the Staff record, and will be used in analysis, documentation, and communications in connection with that activity.

We may share your survey responses with statutory customers, sector bodies or other organisations involved within the consultation. We will share your response together with the name of your organisation however we will not disclose your name or email address to organisations we share responses with.

Privacy Information <*http://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/website/privacy#016*> .

Introductory text

To enable cross-organisational response, the consultation is grouped into subjects for different audiences to engage with. When you click 'next step' under each section, you will be returned to the contents page, which tracks your progress through the questions in each section.

The 'save later' option also allows multiple users from one organisation to engage with the consultation. Once you click the 'save later' option you will receive a unique link.

Please ensure that you read all of the information supplied in each section before answering the questions.

Once the required questions have been completed, a 'Finish' button will appear at the bottom of the consultation. Pressing this will complete the consultation and send your responses for analysis. Please do not click through to finish until you are satisfied with all of your answers.

On completion, a copy of your responses will be generated as a PDF and sent to the email address you entered at the beginning of the consultation.

Introduction

To ensure that we collect and publish data which meets the needs of our users, we periodically review and update our data collections. We run different types of review processes at different stages in the lifecycle of our data collections:

An annual update process enabling us to implement year-on-year changes to our records to meet changing user needs.
Post-implementation reviews of new or substantially updated collections.
Major reviews of established collections.
Major reviews, which can be called whenever the evidence shows there is a need, are substantial investigatory projects which create a business case for change to a record.

The HESA Staff record was last subject to a major review in 2012/13. Since that time, however, there have been changes not only to certain aspects of the Staff record, but also to the Higher Education (HE) policy environment. We are therefore launching a major review of the Staff record in order to make sure that the data collected in the Staff record is fit for purpose, given the changing needs of our customers and the wider HE sector.

1 What is your name?

Name

2 What is your email address?

Email *(Required)*

3 What is your organisation?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ English provider
◯ Scottish provider
◯ Welsh provider
◯ Northern Irish provider
◯ Sector group/body
◯ Other organisation
◯ Not applicable

4 What is your organisation name?

Organisation

5 What is your job role within the organisation?

[   ]

6 In what capacity are you responding to the survey?

Please select only one item

○ To provide an official response on behalf of a higher education provider, organisation or representative group

○ In an individual capacity as an associate or employee of a higher education provider, organisation or representative group

○ As a current, recent or prospective student at higher education provider

○ In any other individual capacity

○ Prefer not to say

Coverage: non-academic staff data

Since the last major review of the Staff record in 2012/13, we have implemented various changes to the record through the annual update process. Some of the most significant changes in that period have related to the coverage of the record; in 2015, atypical non-academic staff were removed from the record, while in 2017, following consultation, coverage was updated to remove members of staff working for a provider through an intermediary, where the provider would be liable for secondary Class 1 national insurance contributions. In 2019, coverage was further updated to reflect the return of non-academic staff as optional for English providers on the register in the Approved (fee cap) category with the OfS.

We have traditionally used the term 'non-academic staff' to refer to staff who do not have an academic employment function, and this term will be used throughout this consultation for the sake of consistency. It is understood, however, that the term can be contentious, inasmuch as referring to staff in terms of what they do not do can be seen to diminish the value of their work. Some stakeholder groups choose to refer to staff without an academic employment function either as 'professional services staff' or as 'professional, technical, and operational staff'.

In the preliminary conversations with stakeholders which have informed this evidence gathering exercise, questions about the coverage of the Staff record were a recurring theme. Many users of the Staff record expressed concern about the incomplete availability of data on non-academic staff; within this group, a substantial subgroup were particularly interested in the availability of data on staff in technical roles. Some users were also concerned about the lack of data on other categories of staff not currently covered in the Staff record.

The following sections of this consultation will cover some of the issues surrounding the coverage of the Staff record. Each section will conclude with a series of questions regarding your views on these issues.

Non-academic staff data

The decision to make non-academic staff data optional for English providers in the Approved (fee cap) registration category was taken as part of an ongoing effort on the part of the Office for Students (OfS) to **reduce data burden** *<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/reducing-regulatory-burden/how-we-have-minimised-unnecessary-burden/>* on providers, in line with **the expectations of the Department for Education** *<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/ff210430-510a-4224-8b5b-6b1f74635860/ofs-strategic-guidance-14092020.pdf>* . Nevertheless, data on non-academic staff is widely considered useful outside the English regulatory sphere. **In response to a 2019 consultation on HESA collections** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/files/HESA_Consultation_report_June_2019.pdf>* , 87% of all respondents and 88% of providers said that they used non-academic staff data; in the same consultation, 78% of English higher education providers said that they would continue to subscribe to an optional staff record. The 78% of English providers who said they would continue to subscribe on an optional basis is more than the roughly 55% of English providers who have continued to opt-in to providing non-academic staff since 2019/20; this may reflect the fact that the consultation responses were given before providers had full details regarding the cost of optional subscription.

More recently, conversations with a wide variety of stakeholders have highlighted both the potential uses of non-academic staff data and the difficulties of using data which is not supplied consistently on a UK-wide basis.

Stakeholders suggested a range of different use cases for data on non-academic staff, from financial planning to assessing the role of HE providers as local employers to understanding the importance of non-academic staff to the student experience to equalities monitoring. Each of these use cases comes with particular data needs.

Financial planning – both at the institutional and at the sector level – depends in part on an understanding of the entirety of the higher education workforce. Although academic staff may be the most visible part of the higher education workforce, non-academic staff also need to be accounted for in financial plans. Up until the return of non-academic staff data became optional for English and Northern Irish providers, the Staff record shows that, although the proportion of academic staff had been increasing year on year, **non-academic staff across the sector** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/chart-1>* consistently outnumbered their academic counterparts.

Sector-level calculations about the affordability of pay and pension schemes require an understanding of the number of staff members in the sector currently employed at each pay spine point. Since many staff working in professional services are employed at lower points on the pay spine, a lack of data on non-academic staff may introduce bias. Without full data on non-academic staff, calculations must be estimated, either on the basis of the last year for which full data was collected or on the assumption that the partial data which we hold on non-academic staff for more recent years is representative of the actual sector. It has therefore been argued that reliable sector-level calculations of pension costs depend on comprehensive data on staff pay, covering both academic and non-academic staff.

Stakeholders also noted that higher education providers are often major local employers, who may play an important role in attracting and retaining potential workers in a local area. While some of these workers are academic staff, higher education providers also employ non-academic staff in a wide variety of roles. Data on these roles and who fills them can contribute to an understanding both of local skills needs and of how higher education providers contribute to the economy as significant local employers.

Although academic teaching staff are the staff most obviously linked to the student experience – as such, most references to staff in the **National Student Survey** *<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/c2ddb4c1-34cf-4df4-8c26-b6469412768f/nss-2023-questionnaire.pdf>* refer explicitly to teaching staff, who are the subject of four core questions and one optional question – non-academic staff can also have an important impact on the student experience. In fact, many providers include a range of non-academic staff on their designated 'student experience' teams. Examples include the **range of non-academic staff involved in the Student Experience division at the University of Sussex** *<http://staff.sussex.ac.uk/us/services/student-experience>* , and **a case study on the Student Experience Network at the University of Warwick** *<http://warwick.ac.uk/about/strategy/education/detail/case-studies/senet/>* .

Anecdotal evidence from the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) suggests that, when asked about their higher education experience, students often refer specifically to the non-academic staff who supported them along the way, from staff with pastoral responsibilities to librarians and departmental administrators.

Understanding the range of staff employed by providers in non-academic roles can therefore play an important part in understanding the range of support available to help students make the most of their higher education experience.

Data on non-academic staff can also help with monitoring equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues in the sector. For one thing, if the lack of complete data on non-academic staff implies a lack of complete data on staff on lower spine points, as discussed above, it becomes difficult to investigate potential demographic disparities in pay. Similarly, fuller data on non-academic staff could allow for a fuller understanding of the demographic characteristics of people employed in different types of roles in the sector. For this reason, both the **Race Equality Charter** *<https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/AdvHE_Race%20Equality%20Charter%20Review_1615534497.pdf>* , established in 2016, and the **revised Athena Swan Charter** *<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/transformed-uk-athena-swan-charter#guidance>* , which came into effect in 2021, require **data on professional and support staff**

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/transformed-uk-athena-swan-charter/transformed-uk-athena-swan-charter-faqs-data-related> as part of their efforts to promote understanding of equalities issues. Including data on non-academic staff in the Staff record could make it easier for the two equalities charters to draw upon HESA data, thus potentially reducing data burden as well as enabling better EDI monitoring.

7 What use do you or your organisation make of data on non-academic staff?

[ ]

8 Would you support the reintroduction of non-academic staff data as a mandatory element of the Staff record?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ Yes
◯ No
◯ Unsure/not applicable

9 If we were to collect a reduced set of data on non-academic staff, which categories of data on non-academic staff would be essential?

[ ]

10 If you have any other comments on non-academic staff, please provide them below

[ ]

Coverage: technicians and technologists

In addition to broader questions about the inclusion of non-academic staff in the Staff record, some stakeholders have expressed a particular interest in data on technicians. While a distinction is sometimes drawn between technicians and technologists, the two terms are often used interchangeably, and this consultation will use the term 'technician' (or sometimes 'technical staff') to encompass both technicians and technologists.

Technicians are a particular category of non-academic staff who have been the subject of increasing interest in recent years. In 2017, a group of universities and research institutions, with support from the Science Council and the Gatsby Foundation, launched the **Technician Commitment** *<https://www.techniciancommitment.org.uk/>* , an initiative aimed at promoting the visibility, recognition, career development, and long-term sustainability of technical roles in the higher education and research sectors. In the same year, the **National Technician Development Centre (NTDC)** *<https://www.ntdc.ac.uk/home>* was established in order to develop tools and resources to support career development pathways for technical staff. In 2020, the **TALENT Commission** *<https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/theTALENTCommission>* was launched as part of Midlands Innovation's TALENT project as a means to address gaps in the sector's understanding of technical roles; the Commission published a report of its findings and key recommendations in February 2022.

While a wide range of stakeholders agree that technical staff are vital to the smooth functioning of the higher education and research sectors, defining technical staff is not entirely straightforward. The **TALENT Commission report** *<https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/CoreCode/Modules/Content/ResourceLibrary/AjaxHandlers/ResourceAccessHandler.aspx/e85f7b36-c487-4f50-8760-6b36d27bf723>* cites a range of different definitions, typically focusing on skills held by technicians and the practical elements of what technicians do in their institutions. In their **Technician Commitment Action Plan** *<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/UKRI-040221-TechnicianCommitmentActionPlan.pdf>* , for example, UK Research and Innovation state that 'technicians use their technical expertise and knowledge and their practical, analytical and management skills to make a range of vital contributions to research and innovation', some examples of which are listed subsequently. While these functional definitions can help us to understand the importance of technical roles, they can also vary between institutions, and they do not always allow technical staff to be easily identified. In seeking to count the technicians in the HE workforce, the **TALENT Commission** *<https://www.mitalent.ac.uk/CoreCode/Modules/Content/ResourceLibrary/AjaxHandlers/ResourceAccessHandler.aspx/e85f7b36-c487-4f50-8760-6b36d27bf723>* therefore use a definition based on **Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)** *<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc>* codes, identifying technicians as those who fall into one of twelve different three-digit SOC minor groups (311, 312, 313, 321, 342, 355, 521, 522, 541, 542, 544, and 613).

As attempts to define 'technician' suggest, one of the key themes emerging from recent investigations into technicians and their place in the sector is the wide range of roles played by technical staff. Although technicians are not employed on academic contracts, they often play important roles in supporting both teaching and research activities at higher education providers. Technicians often instruct students in the use of specialised equipment or techniques; they can also provide feedback and support for students. In their contributions to research, technicians can, among other things, be responsible for preparing resources, operating equipment, carrying out experimental procedures, and analysing data. Recently announced plans to **allow for the submission of research outputs by any member of staff** *<https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9148/1/research-excellence-framework-2028-initial-decisions-report.pdf>* , including those on non-academic contracts, in REF 2028 are in part a recognition of the contributions to research made by non-academic staff, including those in technical roles.

Alongside the focus on the roles played by technicians has been a parallel interest in the demographics and employment conditions of those working in technical roles. Both the Technician Commitment and the work of the NTDC grew in part out of a growing awareness that, despite the crucial work done by technicians, their opportunities for career progression were often more limited than those available to academic staff. The **NTDC Technician Survey** *<https://www.ntdc.ac.uk/the-survey>* collects a wide range of information on the personal characteristics, employment conditions, skills, and professional responsibilities of HE staff working in technical roles, but, as a voluntary survey administered at a limited number of providers, the Technician Survey cannot at this time provide a comprehensive view of the technical workforce. The consistent inclusion of technicians in the Staff record could supplement the Technician Survey, helping to improve understanding not just of the characteristics of the technical workforce but also of how their characteristics compare to those of academic staff.

11 How do you or your organisation define technicians?

12 Would adopting the SOC-based definition of technicians used in the TALENT Commission report (described above) meet your needs?

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

13 If you answered no, what difficulties do you see with the adoption of that definition?

14 What use do you or your organisation make of data on technicians?

15 Would you support the mandatory inclusion of technicians in the Staff record?

(Required)

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

16 If technicians were included, would you need to be able to identify them separately?

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

17 If you have any other comments on technicians, please provide them below

Coverage: staff not directly employed by providers

Staff – whether academic or non-academic – can carry out work for HE providers under different arrangements. To be included in **the coverage of the Staff record** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/coverage>* , a staff member must have one or more contracts of employment with the provider, and the provider must be liable to pay Class 1 National Insurance contributions for that individual. Other staff, however, have different working arrangements, on the basis of which they may not be included in the Staff record. Agency staff, self-employed staff, staff not employed by the provider but by a company consolidated into the provider's accounts, and staff working for a provider through an intermediary (such as a professional services company), where the provider is liable for secondary Class 1 National Insurance contributions, are all excluded from the coverage of the Staff record. While limiting the coverage of any record can have practical benefits as well as increasing clarity about which data should be collected, there may also be trade-offs involved in the decision to exclude certain categories of staff from the record.

Some providers employ certain categories of non-academic staff through wholly-owned subsidiary companies as a way of managing pension liability. Since these staff members are not directly employed by the provider, they are not included in the Staff record (and would not be even if the collection of non-academic staff were mandatory). Like the optional return of non-academic staff, this can complicate the estimation of sector-level pension costs. More generally, if different providers rely on different employment arrangements for staff in what would otherwise be considered equivalent roles, that can make accurate comparisons between providers difficult.

Without data on staff who are not employed directly by providers, it is also possible that we may miss changes over time in sector employment practices. It is possible, for instance, that certain roles are increasingly being outsourced to agencies where they previously would have been employed directly by providers, but without data on agency staff we cannot tell if their numbers are changing. Similarly, it is possible that certain providers – or types of providers – are more reliant than others on staff employed through different arrangements, but this is impossible to assess on the basis of the data which is currently collected.

18 What use do you or your organisation make of data on staff employed through subsidiary companies or otherwise not directly employed by providers?

19 Would you like to see staff not directly employed by providers brought into the Staff record?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

20 If we were to collect a reduced set of data on staff not directly employed by providers, which categories of data on such staff would be essential?

21 If you have any other comments on staff not directly employed by providers, please provide them below

Staff activities and employment functions

Along with giving us information about the number of people working in higher education, the terms under which they are employed, and their personal characteristics, the Staff record is designed to provide us with information about what HE staff do. At the most basic level, this involves sorting non-academic from academic staff and sorting academic staff according to their primary employment function or functions. The Staff record identifies employment functions using the **Academic Employment Function (ACEMPFUN)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/acempfun>* variable. In its current form, ACEMPFUN allows for five possible employment functions:

An academic contract that is teaching only
An academic contract that is research only
An academic contract that is both research and teaching
An academic contract that is neither teaching nor research
A non-academic contract.
Although ACEMPFUN covers a range of employment functions, particularly for academic staff, there are growing concerns about how well it reflects the totality of employment in HE. On the one hand, it may be the case that the distinctions drawn by ACEMPFUN are not consistently reflected in employment contracts. Moreover, it is becoming clear that the teaching, research, and teaching and research categories may not adequately describe the responsibilities of all academic staff. At the same time, it is clear that the activities described here as academic employment functions may also be carried out by non-academic staff. Given the interest in non-academic staff described earlier in this consultation, it may be desirable to collect further information about their employment functions as well as those of academic staff.

The amount of detail about staff employment functions included in formal contracts of employment can vary from one provider to another. While some providers specify teaching and research responsibilities in their employment contracts, others use a generic academic employment contract and specify particular responsibilities either in a job description or in the description of the relevant career pathway. Some providers, in fact, may not distinguish at the contract level between academic and non-academic staff and may instead issue staff in both categories with a standard contract of employment. Depending on the amount of detail included in employment contracts, providers must rely on their own judgement as to how best to return the ACEMPFUN variable, raising the risk the variable will be coded inconsistently between one provider and another.

Teaching and research are traditionally the backbone of academic work, and this is reflected in the way that the Staff record currently categorises academic contracts. It is nevertheless true that many academic staff engage in activities other than teaching and research. These activities, moreover, are often formally recognized as employment functions, either at the contract level or in the career frameworks or pathways to which academic staff are assigned, and against which their performance may be assessed. In some providers, for example, academic staff can be assigned to career pathways not only in teaching and research (or both), but also in knowledge exchange, public engagement, or impact. Although staff on these pathways can currently be identified as on academic contracts that are neither teaching nor research, as these alternative career pathways grow increasingly common, there may be a need to split this 'other' category in order to include more useful information about what staff do besides teaching and research.

The ACEMPFUN variable refers to teaching and research as activities associated with academic contracts. Not all staff engaged in teaching and research activities, however, are on academic contracts. As described earlier in this consultation, technicians can play an important role in both teaching and research activities.

Other staff typically employed on non-academic contracts, such as archivists and librarians, often have responsibilities that include instructing students and helping them develop their research skills; at the same time, staff in these roles are often engaged in their own research activities. It is therefore not possible to identify all staff engaged in teaching and research on the basis of ACEMPFUN.

The number of staff engaged in different activities can be an important point of comparison between providers. Staff engaged in teaching or both teaching and research are included in calculations of institutional **student:staff ratios** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/technical#studentstaff-ratios-ssr>* , while the number of staff with research responsibilities is used to calculate the volume measure for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In outlining the initial decisions about the shape of REF 2028, the four UK HE funding bodies note that **they considered including all research-active staff in the volume measure for REF 2028** *<http://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9148/1/research-excellence-framework-2028-initial-decisions-report.pdf>* . Given discrepancies in the data which is currently recorded about non-academic staff, however, they concluded that 'it would be extremely challenging and burdensome to determine accurately which non-academic staff contribute to producing or enabling research' on the basis of the Staff record. Including information on the employment functions carried out by non-academic staff – whether these functions relate to teaching, research, or something else altogether – could therefore give us important information about the shape of different higher education providers.

22 Does your organisation distinguish between academic and non-academic staff in its contracts of employment?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

23 For academic staff, does your organisation distinguish between staff with responsibilities for teaching, research, or both teaching and research in its contracts of employment?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

24 If your organisation employs academic staff on pathways other than teaching, research, or both teaching and research, what other pathways are available at your organisation?

25 What data on the involvement of non-academic staff in teaching and research activities would be useful to you or your organisation?

26 What data on other employment functions of non-academic staff would be useful to you or your organisation?

27 If you have any other comments on employment functions, please provide them below

Careers in higher education

In the preliminary conversations with stakeholders which preceded this evidence gathering exercise, users of the Staff record frequently reported an interest in the career stages and employment conditions of those working in higher education. A range of different stakeholder groups are interested in these issues, and they approach them from different – although sometimes overlapping – perspectives. Some groups approach questions about employment conditions and progression opportunities with a view towards advocating for improved terms of employment, while others approach the same questions with a view towards promoting the recruitment and retention of staff. Groups with a focus on promoting the academic mission of higher education providers, on the other hand, are particularly interested in the careers and career development of researchers.

The stakeholder groups mentioned above are interested in a series of questions which are, on the face of it, relatively straightforward: What are the stages of a career in higher education? What are the options for career progression? What are the employment conditions of staff working in higher education? Beneath these relatively simple questions, however, lie a number of more complicated questions relating to the definitions and availability of data. The following sections of this consultation will therefore be concerned with identifying the gaps in our knowledge and with considering what kinds of data improvements might help us to fill those gaps. Each section will conclude with a series of questions regarding your views on these issues.

Career stages in higher education

Career stage is an important part of how we think about work in higher education. For one thing, staff members at different stages of their careers may be subject to different pressures and may work under different conditions. For another, career stage often plays a role in determining the opportunities that are available for staff members; some jobs are advertised as 'career development posts' aimed at staff members at a certain stage, for example, and some funding streams are similarly targeted by career stage. Finally, understanding the personal characteristics of staff at different career stages can improve our understanding of the higher education workforce from an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) perspective.

A range of different terms are used to refer to different stages of an academic career. Some terms which are frequently used are postgraduate teaching assistant, postdoctoral fellow or researcher, early career researcher (ECR), mid-career researcher, or senior researcher. Some of these terms can overlap – a postdoctoral researcher, for example, is a particular type of ECR – and the terms may or may not be linked to official job titles – someone whose job title is 'Lecturer', for example, may be eligible to apply for research grants as a mid-career researcher.

In addition to being described with different terminology, career stages can be defined according to different criteria. Although there is often a correlation between age and career stage, age fails to take into account career breaks, career changes, or non-traditional paths into academic work; HE staff who entered HE as mature students, for example, are likely to be older than colleagues at similar career stages. Some early career opportunities are limited to those within a certain number of years of completing their doctorate; although this solves the problem of non-traditional routes into academia, it can still be problematic for those who have needed to take career breaks. The volume of publications or other research outputs produced by a staff member can also be an indication of where that staff member is in their career – and can be used to assess applications for posts at a given level – but expectations concerning the number and type of outputs may vary depending on academic discipline or institutional priorities.

Career stage is also sometimes defined in part by the presence or absence of a permanent contract. Although it is true that many ECRs are on fixed-term contracts, it is also true that not all academics on fixed-term contracts are early in their careers, and that some permanent appointments are made to academics who would by other measures count as ECRs. Some ECRs, moreover, are on contracts which, while nominally open-ended, depend on the ongoing availability of funding and may end at the conclusion of a grant.

Depending on how we choose to define different career stages, the Staff record contains different fields which may be relevant. The Staff record includes dates of birth for staff, which can be used to calculate age; as discussed above, however, while it can help us understand the demographic characteristics of staff at different career stages, age is not itself an indicator of career stage. If research outputs are seen as an important criterion, the **Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/orcid>* field may be of use; ORCID is currently an optional field, and not all staff will have an ORCID identifier to include in the Staff record, but, for those who do, ORCID makes it possible to link a staff member's HESA record with a record of their research outputs. The ACEMPFUN field allows us to identify staff with research responsibilities, which can help with identifying researchers at different career stages, but, as discussed above, ACEMPFUN is currently limited insofar as it only identifies research-active academic staff. Of those academic staff engaged in research, the **Significant responsibility (SIGRES)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/SIGRES>* and **Research assistant (RESAST)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/RESAST>* fields allow us to identify, on the one hand, staff with responsibility for engaging in their own independent research and, on the other, staff who are research assistants working on another staff member's research programme. Finally, there is data on **Terms of employment (TERMS)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/terms>* , which makes it possible to see which staff are on permanent and fixed-term contracts.

While the variables listed above give us information about some of the possible criteria for determining career stage, there are other criteria which cannot be assessed on the basis of data in the Staff record. Although we can identify those staff who hold doctoral qualifications using the **Highest qualification held (HQHELD)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/hqheld>* variable, we cannot tell how long ago those staff members completed their doctorates, nor can we identify those staff members who are currently working towards a doctoral qualification, which could help us to identify graduate teaching assistants. Both identifying those staff members currently in postgraduate study and identifying how long ago those with doctorates completed their qualifications would require some information about doctoral study, whether collected directly or through linking with student data. While linking with the HESA Student record could in theory provide this information for staff members who studied in the UK, doing so would require the collection of additional fields in the Staff record, such as personal names, and would in any case be subject to some degree of uncertainty in cases where identifying characteristics change over time.

Conversations with stakeholders about how they understand career stages in higher education have suggested that there is no single variable which, on its own, allows us to pinpoint the career stage of a staff member. ECRs in particular, may be best identified by the intersection of a number of different criteria: they are typically PhD qualified, in an academic post that is focused on research, and employed on a fixed-term contract (or an open-ended contract which is tied to the availability of funding). Within this broad group of ECRs, we can then distinguish between those working as research assistants and those carrying out their own independent research.

28 What use would you or your organisation make of information on career stages?

29 Which career stages would you like to be able to identify from the Staff record?

30 If you or your organisation have criteria for defining early career researchers, what are those criteria?

31 Would expanding coverage of the ORCID variable help your understanding of staff careers?

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

32 If it were available, what use might you or your organisation make of linked Staff and Student data?

33 If members of staff who are currently enrolled in study could be identified, what use would you or your organisation make of this information?

34 If you have any other comments on career stages in HE, please provide them below

Career progression and what happens when staff leave the HE sector

Looking at career stages leads naturally to questions about how staff move between those career stages. Career progression is an important issue not only for individual staff members, but also for stakeholders with an interest in employment conditions, recruitment, and the retention of talent in the HE sector. These stakeholders are interested in the routes available for progression, which staff members are most likely to progress, and what causes staff members to leave the HE sector. For those staff members who leave the HE sector, there is further interest in who leaves at which career stage and where they go next.

In order to look at career progression, we must necessarily look not just at a staff member's current employment, but also at the post or posts they held before beginning their current job. Progression can occur within a provider, or by means of a staff member moving from one provider to another; depending on which of these progression routes occur, the data which is available to us can vary.

For those whose previous role was not with the provider with which they are currently employed, the **Previous employment (PREVEMP)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/prevemp>* variable provides a range of different options for describing the nature of the staff member's employment before they started to work for their current employer. The PREVEMP field is useful insofar as it gives us insights into movements into higher education from different types of work. In addition to letting us know if staff members have previously been employed by another publicly funded higher education provider, either in the UK or overseas, PREVEMP shows which staff members have previously been employed elsewhere in education or in other sectors and which staff members were students before taking up their current employment. For those staff members who have moved to their current employer after working at another higher education provider, however, PREVEMP gives us limited detail; from this variable, we are unable to determine, for example, whether the move between providers coincided with a move between career stages.

More detail about a staff member's previous role or roles is in theory available through the **Staff identifier (STAFFID)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/staffid>* variable. When a member of staff is first entered in the Staff record, they are allocated a unique code, which should remain the same throughout their career in higher education; when a member of staff moves from one provider to another, the new provider can request that staff member's STAFFID from the previous provider to ensure that the STAFFID follows the staff member into their new role.

At the present time, STAFFID codes are very helpful for tracking the movement of staff between roles at the same provider. Where staff remain at the same provider, that is, the STAFFID field can help us to see how staff progress in their academic careers, including how long staff typically stay on fixed-term contracts before progressing to permanent employment, and whether there are any patterns in the demographic characteristics or employment experience of those who progress. For staff members who move between providers, however, STAFFID is a less reliable source of information, as it does not always travel across providers. In order to meet user needs for data on career progression between different HE providers, an improved capability to track staff between years of the Staff record will be necessary, whether through improving quality of the data in the STAFFID field, or through the provision of additional identifying information, such as personal names. For staff members with an ORCID identifier, it provides an alternative way to track progression between roles and providers, but, as discussed above, not all staff have an ORCID and, even for those who have one, the ORCID field is currently optional.

In addition to an interest in how members of staff progress through their careers in higher education, users have also expressed an interest in what causes staff to leave higher education, at what career stages staff leave, and where they go subsequently. Understanding both the pressures that cause staff to leave and the industries and occupations that offer appealing alternatives to work in the higher education sector, it is suggested, may help with efforts to increase retention of staff. For staff whose contracts have ended within the reporting year, there are two variables which can help us to understand their circumstances. The first, **Reason for end of contract (RESCON)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/rescon>* allows for a number of possible reasons for the end of a contract, including, among others, a change to a new contract, the end of a fixed-term contract, different categories of redundancy, and retirement. The second, **Activity after leaving (ACTLEAVE)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/actleave>* records the activity of staff after leaving the employment of the reporting provider.

Although RESCON and ACTLEAVE can together provide us with a wealth of information about why staff leave providers and what happens to them next, their usefulness is limited by the quality of the data. Both fields suffer from high levels of missing data, suggesting that providers may have difficulty obtaining information about future plans from outgoing staff. Reasons for this may vary; in some cases, missing data may reflect a lack of an exit interview process, while in others, outgoing staff may be unable or unwilling to tell their previous employer about the next steps in their careers. Without more complete data on why contracts end and where staff members go subsequently, our understanding of movements out of the HE sector goes no further than a basic knowledge of when staff leave and the characteristics of leavers.

35 What use do you or your organisation currently make of data on career progression?

36 What use do you or your organisation currently make of data on staff members who leave the HE sector?

37 What use would you or your organisation make of data on career progression and movement out of HE if it were more readily available?

38 If your provider submits data to the Staff record, what are the difficulties in returning complete data on staff progression routes (STAFFID, RESCON, ACTLEAVE)?

39 Would you support the inclusion of personal identifiers, e.g. names, in the Staff record in order to enable more reliable longitudinal tracking?

(Required)
Please select only one item

○ Yes

○ No

○ Unsure/not applicable

40 If you have any other comments on career progression or staff members who leave the HE sector, please provide them below

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Employment conditions, including precarious employment

Closely linked to questions about career pathways are a series of questions about the conditions under which staff are employed, particularly at early stages in their careers. Discussions of academic employment often refer to the number of staff who are employed on fixed-term, hourly paid, or zero hours contracts. Such staff are often described as 'precariously employed'. Beyond counting the number of staff employed under such terms, however, our understanding of precarity in the HE sector is limited. In order to gain a more complete picture of the effect of precarious employment on individuals and the sector as a whole, we need a more complete picture of the circumstances under which staff are employed on these terms.

Many staff employed on a part-time or fixed-term basis are at relatively early stages in their careers. In many cases, part-time or fixed-term work is – implicitly or explicitly – presented as a step on the way to full-time, permanent employment. Thus postgraduate students and recent PhDs hoping for permanent jobs in academia often take on teaching roles – sometimes part-time, or sometimes on a fixed-term basis to cover a temporary vacancy – as a means to gain experience and bolster their CVs for future applications. In this vein, some short-term academic posts, whether in research or teaching, are advertised as 'career development roles' suitable for someone at an early career stage.

What is less clear, however, is how reliably this system of fixed-term and part-time posts leading to permanent full-time employment works as planned. Of the 233,930 academic staff recorded in the Staff record for the 2021/22 academic year, **33% were on fixed-term contracts; a further 17% were on open-ended contracts, but working on a part-time basis** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/employment-conditions>* . While, as discussed in 'Career progression and what happens when staff leave the HE sector', fixed-term employment is often considered a standard feature of the ECR career stage, anecdotal evidence suggests that many ECRs go through a succession of fixed-term contracts, and that some leave academic employment before obtaining a permanent job. Of the 77,475 fixed-term staff recorded in 2021/22, we have no further information about how long individuals have been in fixed-term employment or how many successive fixed-term contracts they may have had. Of the part-time staff, we have no information about the percentage who may be doing other work – in or out of the HE sector – in addition to their part-time academic work.

As with career progression more generally, a fuller understanding of the role of precarious employment in higher education depends on looking not just at the terms of an individual contract. Using STAFFID, it should be possible to identify whether a staff member has had successive contracts at the same provider and then to identify the terms of those contracts. The PREVEMP field can provide information about whether a staff member was previously employed at another HE provider, and, for those that were, the **Previous higher education institution (PREVHEI)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/prevhei>* and STAFFID fields can make it possible to know where and under what terms that staff member was previously employed, although, as discussed above, there are concerns about the completeness and quality of the data which might link successive years of the record.

Once we understand more about how staff move between successive fixed-term contracts, this information can be combined with other fields in the Staff record, including those relating to personal characteristics and academic discipline, to give us a contextualised view of precarious employment. Only then will we be in a position to understand who tends to be employed on precarious terms, which academic disciplines are most reliant on precarious staff, how long most ECRs remain in precarious employment, and what kinds of routes out of precarious employment exist for most staff.

41 What kinds of information about staff members on fixed-term or part-time contracts would be helpful to you or your organisation?

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42 If we were to draw a distinction in the Staff record between shorter and longer fixed-term contracts, where should we draw the line between shorter and longer contracts?

43 What use would you or your organisation make of data about staff members' previous terms of employment?

44 What use would you or your organisation make of data about whether staff who are working part-time are also employed elsewhere?

45 If your provider submits data to the Staff record, what are the difficulties in returning staff identifiers for those who are or have already been employed at a HE provider?

46 If you have any other comments on employment conditions including precarious employment and precarity, please provide them below

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Staff demographics

Underlying many of the topics discussed in this consultation have been questions about staff demographics. When we consider the potential need for fuller data on non-academic staff, for example, one of the questions in which stakeholders have expressed an interest is that of how the demographic characteristics of non-academic staff compare to those of staff on academic contracts. There is also a concern that certain areas of employment, such as technical staff and staff engaged in knowledge exchange, may be dominated by staff with certain demographic characteristics, and that understanding the demographic profiles of such areas will help to support equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. Similarly, alongside questions about the employment terms and conditions of the HE workforce as a whole are further questions about whether staff with certain demographic characteristics are particularly likely to work under certain conditions.

The final sections of this consultation will therefore be concerned with the demographic data we currently hold on higher education staff, areas where we might improve the coverage and consistency of that data, and types of demographic data which we do not currently hold, but which might be valuable to users of the Staff record. Each section will conclude with a series of questions regarding your views on these issues.

Demographic data, consistency, and alignment

The Staff record currently contains a wide range of demographic information about staff in higher education. In March 2021, HESA opened a consultation into harmonising personal characteristics and equality data across a number of HESA data streams, including ITT (Initial Teacher Training), Student (legacy Student and Student Alternative and also Data Futures), and Staff. The consultation stemmed in part from the **efforts of the Global Statistical Service to promote data harmonisation** *<https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/blog/harmonisation-an-opportunity-to-build-inclusive-foundations/>* in time for the 2021 Census; we also hoped to take into account **proposed guidance from Advance HE** *<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/guidance-collection-diversity-monitoring-data>* around equalities data. The consultation ran for three months, and HESA published the results of the consultation as well as a set of recommendations in September 2021.

Respondents to the consultation *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/consultation-outcomes-personal-characteristics-equality-data#Personal%20characteristics%20and%20equality%20data>* were generally of the view that, where possible, it was desirable both to align similar categories of data across HESA records and for HESA to follow Advance HE's guidance on the collection of equality data. On the basis of the 2021 consultation, HESA issued a **notification of changes** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/staff-2022-23>* regarding a number of changes in the collection of personal characteristics data to be implemented for the 2022/23 Staff data collection. For most categories of personal characteristics data, the recommended changes took the form of amending the list of valid entries in order to align the data collected across different HESA data streams. In addition, the previous **Gender reassignment (GENREASSIGN)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c21025/a/genreassign>* field was renamed **Gender identity (GENDERID)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/GENDERID>* for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and removed for Scotland, where a separate **Transgender (TRANS)** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/TRANS>* field was added to reflect the different wording of the relevant question in the Scottish census. A new field recording **Marital Status** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/MARSTAT>* was added for providers in Wales.

While the outcomes of the consultation generally led to increased consistency in the data which HESA collects about the personal characteristics of higher education staff, some issues remain. The divergence between UK nations in terms of which personal characteristics and equality data is collected on a mandatory basis may cause difficulties in sector-wide comparisons; while some fields such as age, sex, disability status, and ethnicity, are collected UK-wide, others, including gender identity and sexual orientation, are mandatory in some nations but optional in others. There are also some inconsistencies between different HESA records in terms of what is collected. While the **Gender identity field in the Staff record** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/GENDERID>* is mandatory in England and Wales but optional in Northern Ireland, the **equivalent Student field** *<https://codingmanual.hesa.ac.uk/22056/Student/field/GENDERID>* is mandatory across all three nations (the Transgender field for Scottish providers is optional in both the **Staff** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c22025/a/trans>* and **Student** *<https://codingmanual.hesa.ac.uk/22056/Student/field/TRANS>* records). Similarly, the **Sexual orientation field in Staff** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/C22025/a/SEXORT>* is mandatory in England and Wales but optional in Northern Ireland and Scotland, while **the equivalent Student field** *<https://codingmanual.hesa.ac.uk/22056/Student/field/SEXORT>* is mandatory in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

A proposal to collect data on pregnancy – which is a protected characteristic under **Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010** *<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4>* – for providers in England and Wales was not adopted due to concerns from consultation respondents that collecting such data would be too intrusive and that many staff members would refuse to answer a question about pregnancy. Preliminary conversations with stakeholders prior to this current consultation, however, have suggested that issues surrounding family structures, pregnancy and maternity, and staff with dependents or other caring responsibilities are likely to be important contextual factors in thinking about employment conditions and career progression. It may therefore be worth considering user needs for this data and the sector appetite for collecting it.

47 Would you support collecting data on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Staff record on the same basis on which it is currently collected in the Student record?

(Required)

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

48 Would you support the collection of data on marital status across the whole of the UK?

(Required)

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

49 What use would you or your organisation make of information on staff members with dependents and caring responsibilities?

50 What other information about the personal characteristics of staff would be valuable to you or your organisation, and what use would you or your organisation make of such information?

51 Do you have other concerns about the personal characteristics data which is currently collected?

Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

52 If you answered yes, please explain

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[ empty text box ]
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53 If you have any other comments on demographic data, please provide
them below

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[ empty text box ]
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Nationality and visa status

UK HE is an international sector, with UK universities participating in transnational education overseas and hundreds of thousands of international students coming to the UK to study each year. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that HE staff are also an international group. In the 2021/22 academic year, there were **more than 74,000 international academic staff** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/location#nationality>* at UK HE providers, representing nearly 32% of the academic workforce.

HESA collects data on the legal nationality of HE staff. Data on nationality plays an important role in our understanding of higher education providers as international institutions, places where staff members from all over the world can work together and engage in informal cultural exchange with their colleagues. Some international staff may be former international students, some may previously have engaged in **collaborative research with UK-based colleagues** *<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/international-facts-and-figures-2023#international-research>* , and some may have been attracted by the strong reputation of the UK HE sector; others will have immigrated to the UK for other reasons and subsequently taken up work in HE.

Data on nationality also goes some way towards demonstrating the extent to which UK HE providers depend on an international workforce to fulfil their core teaching and research missions. Data on nationality does not, however, allow us to understand the routes into the UK taken by international staff, nor does it allow us to understand the extent to which the HE sector is reliant on work visas.

As employers, HE providers are obligated to ascertain that their staff have the right to work in the UK. Where international staff do not have the right to work on other grounds – because, for example, they hold a family or graduate route visa, or have settled status in the UK – HE providers can sponsor work visas for employees in certain roles. **Eligibility for a Skilled Worker visa** *<https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/your-job>* depends on the 4-digit **Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code** *<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc>* of the role and its rate of pay; if a job is on **the shortage occupation list** *<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations/skilled-worker-visa-shortage-occupations>* , employers can pay 80% of the going rate and still sponsor a Skilled Worker visa. Since Brexit, the number of staff potentially in need of visa sponsorship has increased. Slightly **over half of the international academic staff employed during the 2021/22 academic year were from the EU** *<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/location#nationality>* ; since EU nationals no longer have automatic right to work in the UK post-Brexit, some proportion of these staff will need visa sponsorship.

Although nationality is currently used as a proxy to determine the sector's dependence on immigration, some stakeholders have suggested that information on staff visa status could be valuable. Identifying areas in which the sector is particularly dependent on staff in need of sponsorship could help with planning and could also encourage resilience in the face of a changing geopolitical landscape.

54 What use do you or your organisation currently make of data on staff
nationality?

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[ empty text box ]
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55 What use would you or your organisation make of information on the visa status of HE staff if this were collected?

[ ]

56 Do you have any concerns about the potential inclusion of visa data in the Staff record?

[ ]

57 Would you support the collection of 4-digit (as opposed to 3-digit) SOC codes to promote understanding of which roles in the HE sector are eligible for visa sponsorship?

(Required)
Please select only one item

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Unsure/not applicable

58 What use would you or your organisation make of information on staff roles on the shortage occupation list if this information were available?

[ ]

59 If you have any other comments on nationality or visa status, please provide them below

[ ]

60 Do you have any other comments on the data collected in the Staff record?

61 Do you have any other comments about this consultation?